The keys to **lateral leadership**

Get support from others without hierarchical authority

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Our sources

This synopsis is based on the publications presented below and on the back page.

Managing
Henry Mintzberg, FT Prentice Hall, 2009.

Influence Without Authority
Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford,
Wiley, 2005.

Lateral Leadership
Roger Fisher, Alan Sharp,
Profile Books, 2004.

Much managerial thinking focuses on ways to help managers work more effectively with their subordinates. However, both senior executives and middle managers must regularly obtain support from individuals over whom they have no formal authority. Indeed, a study by Henry Mintzberg shows that leaders devote more than half of their time to managing relationships outside their direct line of responsibility. Of course, this includes time spent with customers and suppliers, but also negotiating and coordinating with peers, staff from other units and functions, as well as their contact networks. Even with their own subordinates, managers soon discover that formal authority has its limits, hence the rising popularity of participative approaches which involve getting employees on board to improve performance. What is more, the younger generations are decreasingly willing to subscribe to authority's point of view for its own sake.

Therefore, **the ability to mobilize people outside of one's formal scope of authority has become a critical success factor**. And even if direct authority is seldom enough to compel others to conform to your wishes, the lack thereof deprives you of key levers, such as the power to command attention, allocate resources, sanction performance, etc. Indeed, lateral leadership is exercised in a very different context from that of traditional top-down management. The experts say **the secret is to think like a partner**, a mindset not frequently observed. How many project leaders rely on a mandate from the top to get other units to collaborate? How many functional managers act as if every part of the business must automatically bow to policies decreed by headquarters?

Creating equitable arrangements in which the benefits are shared by the various constituents is much more effective in today's business context than trying to force people to obey orders. So, how to accomplish this?

In this synopsis…

Develop your **lateral authority**

The stakes

In today's business context, managers can rarely complete projects or assignments without at some point requiring the support of their peers and/or staff from other units or functions. Even when there is a clear mandate from the top, the various constituents must be willing to cooperate. So, to get the support they need, managers are strongly advised to cultivate their credibility with the rest of the organization.
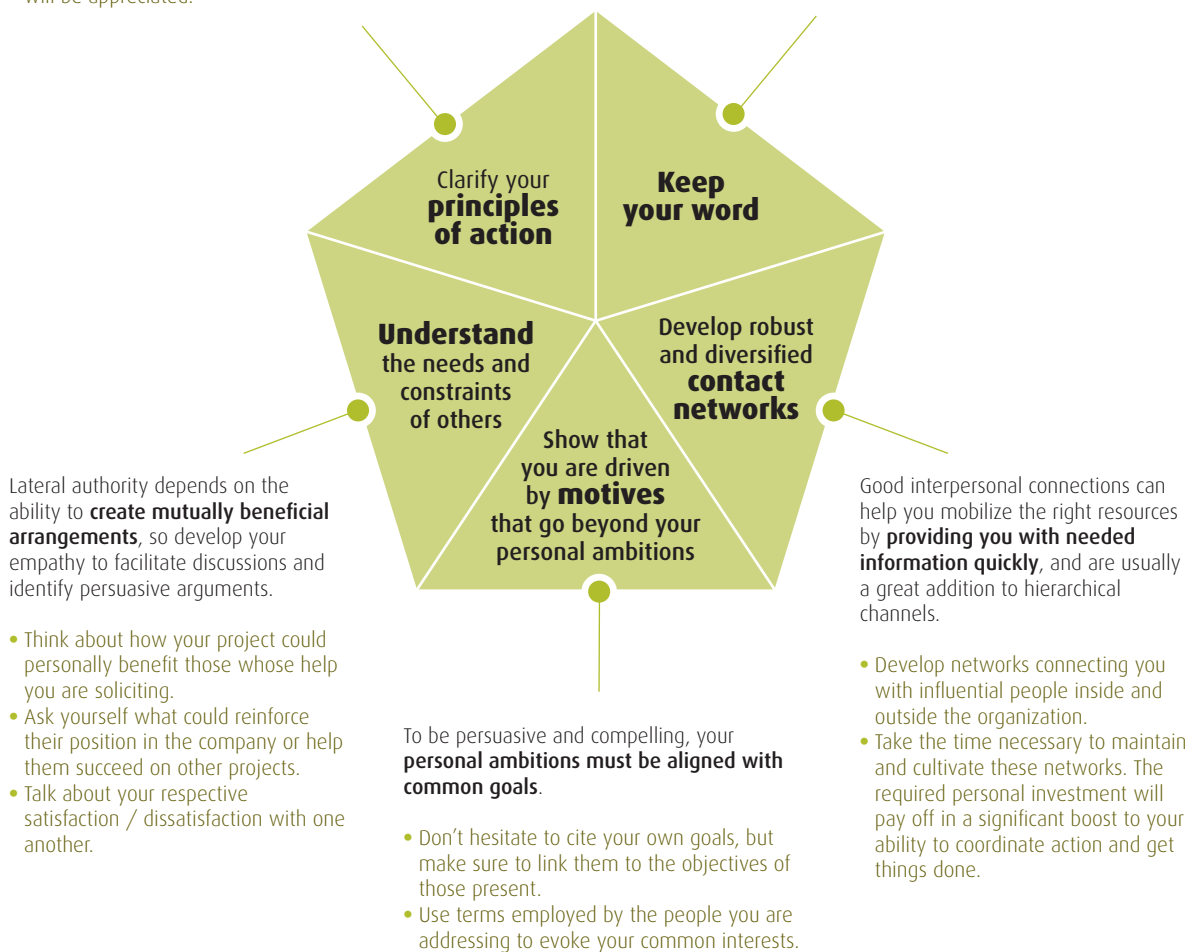
Drivers of lateral authority

In the absence of formal authority, **providing a clear picture straightaway of the facts driving your actions** enables you to legitimize your requests.

- Systematically evoke the broader vision supporting your initiatives.
- Keep your messages consistent over time to provide a clear sense of direction.
- Be transparent about your objectives. Everyone might not agree with you, but your frankness will be appreciated.

If you promise more than you can deliver, you won't be trusted and people won't be willing to help you out the next time. On the other hand, you will **build lasting credibility** if you are frank about your limitations and keep your word.

- Promise only what you are sure to deliver, even if this means promising less.
- Ensure that you have the required resources before making commitments.

Clarify your **principles of action**

Keep your word

Understand the needs and constraints of others

Develop robust and diversified **contact networks**

Show that you are driven by **motives** that go beyond your personal ambitions

Lateral authority depends on the ability to **create mutually beneficial arrangements**, so develop your empathy to facilitate discussions and identify persuasive arguments.

- Think about how your project could personally benefit those whose help you are soliciting.
- Ask yourself what could reinforce their position in the company or help them succeed on other projects.
- Talk about your respective satisfaction / dissatisfaction with one another.

To be persuasive and compelling, your **personal ambitions must be aligned with common goals**.

- Don't hesitate to cite your own goals, but make sure to link them to the objectives of those present.
- Use terms employed by the people you are addressing to evoke your common interests.

Good interpersonal connections can help you mobilize the right resources by **providing you with needed information quickly**, and are usually a great addition to hierarchical channels.

- Develop networks connecting you with influential people inside and outside the organization.
- Take the time necessary to maintain and cultivate these networks. The required personal investment will pay off in a significant boost to your ability to coordinate action and get things done.

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Obtain cooperation
without using authority

Let's break down organizational silos! Reinforce lateral collaboration! Treat our suppliers like partners! These are common watchwords today as companies seek ways to improve their performance and responsiveness. Those furthest along this path have taken proactive measures to create a favorable environment by establishing a shared vision and common objectives, creating mutual dependency across business units and promoting lateral career moves, etc.

> There is nothing natural about lateral collaboration. Creating a mutual sense of reciprocity takes effort.

But even in such contexts – which are rare – getting cooperation from peers or employees outside one's formal scope of authority is no piece of cake.

Indeed, even with the best intentions in the world, there are some objective obstacles to lateral collaboration:

Antagonistic objectives and constraints

Although the individual parts of a company may be well aware that they are ultimately working toward the same goal, they each have their own priorities and constraints. Customer service, for example, may set a rule to satisfy all customer requests within 48 hours, even if this means it must sometimes put off compiling statistical data requested by the marketing department in peak periods, while knowing that this data will help improve customer satisfaction. Indeed, collaborative arrangements go beyond the theoretical objectives of the concerned parties and **reconcile their immediate operational constraints**.

Unbalanced relationships

Collaboration is rarely a perfect balance in which all constituents contribute equally. In fact, the reverse is generally true, that is, one party needs another's resources to realize a given project without having anything to offer immediately in return. When this happens, collaborative goodwill is sorely put to the test. Indeed, if people suspect they are being taken for granted or exploited, as soon as a conflict of interest arises, they will put their own interests first or demand compensation for efforts hitherto given freely. To make lateral collaboration work, one must therefore **establish mutually supportive and trusting relationships**.

A complicated social legacy

Most requests for collaboration do not come out of the clear blue sky. They are part of a longstanding, complex legacy that frequently extends far beyond those directly concerned. For example, the marketing department at one company noticed that R&D refused to provide any support at all. It turned out that several years previously, the marketing department head had asked R&D to share ongoing developments, and then took advantage of this information to claim paternity of a particularly clever invention. Since then, R&D had refused to respond to any requests from marketing, even though the leadership had since changed! Having an objective interest in cooperating is not enough; one must also **remove relationship roadblocks that can stand in the way of addressing substantive issues**.

To get the collaboration they need, lateral leaders must...

1. Adopt a **partnership** mindset
2. Integrate the **objectives** of the other constituents
3. Identify **suitable** currencies of exchange
4. Manage the **perceived balance** of the relationship
5. Cultivate **quality** relationships

First key driver
Adopt a **partnership** mindset

To move fast or avoid haggling, managers often stress why their requests are legitimate, e.g. "This project was launched by the president, so please give me someone to help me with it." However, regardless of the weight of authority behind the request, **the quality of collaboration depends on large and small efforts made over time**. This takes more than just superficial agreement. It is consequently important not to force people's hands by insisting that your request is mandatory, but rather to **treat them as potential allies to be wooed and won**.

This approach is even more critical in contexts where relationships are

> In the absence of authority, collaboration requires voluntary consent on all sides.

tense, and where there may be a strong temptation to be authoritatively brusque. Under such conditions, the authors of *Influence Without Authority* point out the importance of moving away from the interpersonal sphere – e.g. asking a favor, asserting your rights, etc. – to **focus on the basic issues** at stake. Why is collaboration needed? What are the advantages for the respective parties? What might happen if collaboration fails? **Pragmatically and constructively** integrating the respective needs of those involved is the best way to build objective alliances and overcome interpersonal conflicts.

"You will have influence insofar as you can give people what they need."

Influence Without Authority, Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford, Wiley, 2005.

Second key driver
Integrate the objectives of the other constituents

Collaborative roadblocks are easily blamed on bad will or a lack of discernment or comprehension of the stakes. Things are often more complex in reality, however. Organizational sociology shows that seemingly absurd or capricious antagonism is often quite logical on an individual level. Even more than personality, the context in which people operate influences individual behavior. For example, a project director sitting in headquarters might consider that a regional manager has absolutely no good reason to refuse to carry out a given request. Yet, if the regional manager in question has doubts concerning the importance of this particular corporate initiative in the eyes of the local hierarchy, or is occupied with several other projects at the same time, his lukewarm response becomes very easy

> Before requesting help, put yourself in the other guy's shoes.

to understand. Trying to **consider requests from the other guy's perspective** is consequently a critical first step in understanding the situation.

Then, based on this understanding, adapt your request to the needs and constraints of the other person. For example, you could **ask a third party for assistance**, e.g. by having the local hierarchy make the request or get support from other influential players. Another option would be to **adapt the content of your request**. For instance, you could ask an overworked colleague to provide feedback on a few key points rather than participating fully in a work group. In lateral management situations, adapting your requests to suit the needs and constraints of others will dramatically increase your chances of getting what you need.

Third key driver
Identify suitable **currencies of exchange**

Lasting collaboration depends on finding suitable arrangements. To influence people effectively, not only must you understand what they value, but also **what resources you possess that could serve as a suitable currency of exchange**.

Some such currencies come easily to mind, such as access to financial, human or material resources. Another classic move is to offer your official support for a decision. However, the leverage that can be gained from small initiatives is often underestimated.

> There are often more ways to influence people than you think.

Be aware that some **measures which may seem trivial at first glance – because easy to provide – may actually be highly valued by others**. For example, an offer to provide timely market intelligence or facilitate introductions to carefully chosen connections may be highly appreciated.

You should also ask yourself what negative currencies you possess, provided that you are careful not to undermine the relationship with perceived threats. For example, to obtain support from a manager who fears that his unit will be forced to contribute to a pilot project with no added value, argue that you will weigh the pros and cons carefully and objectively before including his department in your proposal to the steering committee.

When you don't have a direct currency of exchange or are reluctant to use the ones you do have, another solution is to **leverage support from third parties**. Who has resources or political clout that matter to the other person? Could you use your connections to intercede on the other person's behalf? You will have many more options if you attempt to balance the sum total of your exchanges with others over time, rather than trying in vain to balance each individual arrangement.

Remember

To identify your currencies of exchange:
- Consider not only material resources, but also social and psychological dimensions that may be valued by the other person.
- Play simultaneously on what the other person wants to obtain – i.e. positive currencies – and wants to avoid – i.e. negative currencies.
- Think beyond the individual to integrate what the person's team, boss, or department wants, etc.

Multiple drivers of influence
Allan R. Cohen and David L. Bradford distinguish five main types of currency that can be used to encourage lateral collaboration.

WHAT THE OTHER PERSON WANTS	CORRESPONDING DRIVERS OF INFLUENCE
Professional achievement	e.g.: Give the other person an opportunity to achieve something that appeals to his or her professional pride or ethical values; propose to have him or her join teams assigned to think about topics important to him or her.
Greater efficiency	e.g.: Provide access to scarce resources (money, equipment, skills, time); share certain types of information with him or her first; support his or her decisions to top management.
Professional advancement	e.g.: Give him or her a chance to learn, get to know key decision makers better, forge a reputation, make more connections, etc.
Better interpersonal relationships	e.g.: Provide signs of recognition; publicly thank and congratulate the person; facilitate the person's integration in teams and networks.
Organizational flexibility	e.g.: Facilitate personal arrangements like telecommuting; help a creative individual or a researcher avoid red tape; etc.

Based on **Influence Without Authority**, Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford, Wiley, 2005.

Fourth key driver
Manage the **perceived balance** of the relationship

To collaborate effectively, people must feel that their respective efforts will be fairly rewarded. In the absence of this perceived balance, people may lose the motivation to continue engaging as soon as problems arise. However, this equilibrium is difficult to manage. First, because people naturally tend to see the efforts they themselves are making more easily than the efforts made by the other side. Second, because a fair balance can never be struck precisely, due to natural disparities among the respective contributions. The point is thus to **ensure that the parties to the relationship have the impression that they are getting their fair share**, despite the inevitable asymmetry.

The best way to do this is to **cultivate**

> The sense of mutual commitment is reinforced when all constituents feel they have something to gain.

long-term relationships to facilitate acceptance of temporary imbalances. To manage this equilibrium over time, **respective debits and credits must be clearly established**. The contributing parties must clarify their respective efforts, which may not be obvious from others' point of view. Saying something like, "If I put this topic on the agenda, I'll have to put off something else," will make the other person aware of an effort that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. By the same token, a statement like, "I know this report will take you three days," is equivalent to an admission of indebtedness, which is extremely helpful in conveying the message that the speaker intends to return the favor one day.

Some tips to manage the perceived fairness of the arrangement

1

Don't hesitate to "**think aloud**" to clarify the effort required.
e.g.: "To give you this data so far in advance, I'll have to make the analyses earlier and push back other commitments."

2

If the arrangement is imbalanced, show that you are **aware you are indebted** to the other side.
e.g.: "I know that what I'm asking represents a lot more work for you, but I won't forget it."

3

Don't forget to validate **what may or may not be explicitly stated** in your organization.
e.g.: If your organization values direct arrangements, use phrases like "in exchange"; otherwise, prefer less direct formulas.

Fifth key driver
Cultivate **quality relationships**

Although people must have an objective interest in wanting to collaborate, **the lasting success of the arrangement depends primarily on the quality of interpersonal relationships**. Open and transparent communication is the best way to find common ground, thanks to a good understanding of what the participants truly value. What is more, trusting relationships greatly accelerate the collaborative process, because each party expects the other will do the right thing despite residual areas of haziness. And this circle is virtuous, because lateral

> The interpersonal dimension plays a critical role in effective collaboration.

collaboration is an excellent opportunity to develop quality relationships and trust.

One highly effective way to build your store of credit with others is **to be proactive in cultivating their sense of indebtedness to you**. The most influential leaders are careful to extend their networks regularly, cultivate existing connections and do small favors for people whenever possible. Those who feel indebted to you are more likely to respond favorably when you ask them for help because they will want to "return the favor."

Develop **quality networks**
to extend your influence

The stakes

The ability to garner support for your initiatives depends notably on the density and the quality of your relationships with the various company stakeholders. A well-managed network will give you a broader base of support, greater personal legitimacy and increased access to resources. However, proactive and thoughtful effort must be devoted to cultivating and maintaining your networks over time.

Four recommendations to develop effective support networks

❶ Proactively develop your networks

Only a proactive effort can guarantee quality networks.

- **Seize every opportunity to form new connections.**
  e.g.: Participate in many internal projects, even to make periodic contributions; regularly attend meetings and conferences concerning your industry or domain of expertise.

- **Keep in regular touch with your connections to maintain your relationships.**
  e.g.: Find ways to keep in touch with people you meet; proactively manage contact frequency.

- **Identify people who are good sources of new contacts.**
  e.g.: Who has put you in contact with new people in the past six months?

❷ Position yourself strategically

The influence acquired through your networks depends largely on your own position within and contribution to them.

- **Define from the start how you would like to be seen by the members of each network and adapt your contribution in consequence.**
  e.g.: Do you want to be seen as an expert, as an old hand, or as a facilitator? Do you plan to give constructive criticism, share your experience, provide resources, etc.?

- **Play on your ability to interlink your different networks: being the bridge between networks often confers a special type of influence.**
  e.g.: Franklin D. Roosevelt expanded his influence by putting together networks developed at different periods of his life.

❸ Diversify your networks

Focusing exclusively on one type of network will limit your potential resources and influence and may make you too dependent.

- **Cultivate different types of networks.**
  e.g.: Mix industry and functional networks; develop close-knit networks of trusted advisors as well as looser networks to share information more broadly.

- **Keep a discerning eye on viewpoints supported by each network.**
  e.g.: A Stanford University study showed that networks can incite leaders to make bad decisions by giving them a false sense of consensus. Therefore, if all of your advice comes from a single network, ask yourself what someone in a competing network might think.

- **Regularly audit your networks.**
  e.g.: Which networks are active and which are in decline? What are their membership profiles? How are they evolving?

❹ Adapt your networks as you evolve

Your needs will change with shifts in the roles and responsibilities you take on. Remember to adapt your networks in consequence.

e.g.: You have just been appointed to a leadership position:

- **What influential people should be part of your networks from now on?**

- **To what extent should you reinforce some historical networks, such as people who can provide you with relevant information, for example?**

- **What currently dormant networks should be reactivated?**

- **Are you gravitating toward any new circles that could serve as springboards?**

Our selection

For the best ideas on this topic, we recommend the following publications:

Managing
Henry Mintzberg, FT Prentice Hall, 2009.

Based on numerous studies and years of research, Henry Mintzberg provides clear and pragmatic explanations on contemporary management practices. According to him, leadership literature has largely eclipsed what actually makes managers successful on a day-to-day basis, which is, in turn, far from the myth of the charismatic visionary conveyed by certain media. He revisits this topic while taking care not to draft yet another list of universal qualities of good managers. Based on concrete observations of eight managers in real-life situations, he describes how their everyday experience varies, requiring different skills in each instance. Although this book extends far beyond the basic framework of lateral management, the essential role of non-hierarchical leadership is nonetheless emphasized on several occasions, particularly in chapter 2. Chapter 4 also describes various management styles, including one qualified as "lateral," founded primarily on linking constituents together and obtaining their voluntary support by negotiating mutually beneficial arrangements. This book certainly does no harm to the author's already excellent reputation.

Influence Without Authority
Allan R. Cohen, David L. Bradford, Wiley, 2005.

How to influence people over whom you have no authority? This is the central question that Allan R. Cohen and David L. Bradford seek to answer. For them, the exercise is similar to negotiation. They thus methodically develop the various stages that make it possible to reach agreement, stressing that the key is to understand what the other party values in order to make an attractive offer in exchange for collaboration. This may sound simplistic, but it works. The authors clearly explain in the succeeding chapters how to view a situation from another person's perspective, how to grasp his or her needs and constraints, how to identify currencies of exchange, and how to reach mutually beneficial agreements. This effective book encourages managers to adopt a balanced attitude that is neither manipulative nor naïve.

Lateral Leadership
Roger Fisher, Alan Sharp, Profile Business, 2004.
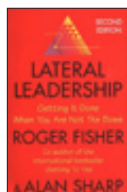
How move things forward when you are not the boss? Such is the topic of this enlightening book on lateral management. The authors thus study the non-hierarchical basis for authority. For example, how to define an objective that effectively engages people from different backgrounds and points of view? Or how to offer to each constituent a motivating role? The proposed ideas are not particularly earth shaking, but represent a good overview of the key drivers that can be used to persuade others to cooperate voluntarily without the force of authority.

And also…

We also relied on the following publications:

- *How to Have Influence*, MIT Sloan Management Review, Vol 50, Issue 1, Autumn 2008.
  The results of a study showing that the most influential leaders are those who can combine several sources of influence systematically.

- *Informal Networks: The Company Behind the Chart*, Harvard Business Review, 1993.
  Understand the different types of informal networks at work in business organizations.

- *How to Lead When You're Not the Boss*, Harvard Management Update, March 2009.
  Some brief advice on leadership without hierarchical authority.

Further readings

To explore this topic further:

- *Use your influence effectively*
  (Manageris synopsis 124a)
  Better understand the mechanisms of influence and power in the organization.

- *The keys to persuasion*
  (Manageris synopsis 171b)
  Adapt your strategy of persuasion to the decision-making style of the other person.

- *Leading cross-functional teams*
  (Manageris synopsis 135b)
  Five key points for lateral leaders.

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