

INFLUENCING IN ASIA by Elaine Rosenfeld, VP Business Solutions Group, Global Learning & Development at Merrill Lynch, previously Manager Training & Development North America, BOC Process Gas Solutions – Elaine has worked and lived for several years in Asia.

Off the top of your head what are the most notable differences between how people "typically" influence in Asia compared to the West?

In the "East" influencing situations tend to be more relationship and history based. For example, in the US, if I know I need to influence someone about something, I would simply plan my strategy. I might find out what motivates the other person and do a bit of research, but would tend to be more focused on myself - what am I going to say, how am I going to act, etc. I found in dealing with people in Asian cultures it was absolutely critical to understand the other person, their background, the situation, etc. A lot more research and preparation was needed before going into a situation. Understanding limitations as well. For example, does the person you are trying to influence have the power to assist you - while this is important in Western cultures as well, I found it even more critical in Eastern cultures.

Probably one of the most important concepts to understand is the concept of "face". In an influencing situation (just like a negotiation situation) it is critical to allow the other person to retain their dignity, respect, etc. A "win-lose" situation is a definite NO! More than just "losing" the current influencing situation, you can permanently damage the relationship if not handled with care. Taking the influencing situation in small doses would be a good way to work as well. It seemed to help, especially when I wanted something that was odd, different or unexpected. Spending more time up front to talk through things was helpful.

In the West, while position or status is important, there is more of an opportunity for someone in a "lower" position to influence someone in a "higher" position. In Asian cultures, organization (and the culture in general) is much more "vertical" or hierarchical

It is under the "do's and don'ts" below – but remember, "yes" doesn't necessarily mean "yes". In the West we tend to believe that if people respond with a "yes" that we have got what we wanted out of the situation. "Yes" in the East can take on a whole other meaning.

From your knowledge of the Cole-McKee Styles model are there any notable differences in how the different styles are used?

One of the things that Cole-McKee stresses (which I absolutely agree with) is that you have to move outside of your comfort zone. Taking the "big step" will seem awkward at first and so people tend to naturally to "slide back" a little. My experience showed me that it was even more uncomfortable for people to break free from the norm. Think about the culture and the importance of uniformity and "sameness" - now you are asking someone to try something very different.

The "I want" exercise would be quite challenging I believe. While in the West, some people might not be used to expressing their desires, my experience showed me that it was much less prevalent in Asia.

In the West, "Logical Persuasion" is a favourite style for influencing. I found "logic" to be not as prevalent in Asia. In fact a Chinese friend let me know that the Mandarin

word for logic was quite similar to the English word as it was a relatively newer concept. In the West, we tend to think and influence in a more linear "logical" way with facts and figures, etc. This was NOT my typical experience in Asia. Things were done, that to me didn't seem to make sense (or be logical). This wouldn't be the first or most critical style I would use.

Being more focused on the relationship, finding common ground on the other hand is critical!

On that key question of non-verbal behaviour have you observed any different patterns in Asia v. the West?

Typically the non-verbals that I witnessed were much more conservative...it was more difficult to "read" people. For example, it is quite easy to take the non-verbal cue of nodding to mean the person is in agreement with what we propose (which is a dangerous assumption).

Jay Conger's research on "persuasion" which we use for Strategic Influence was carried out in Western businesses. How does it play when you apply it to Asian organisations?

Quite similar I believe...again, the relationship is so critical.

For a European or American going to work for the first time in Asia what would be your top "Do" and "Don't"?

<u>Do</u> listen carefully	<u>Don't</u> assume you understand the situation or know all the answers
<u>Do</u> show respect to others at every opportunity	<u>Don't</u> take others being polite for acceptance of you or your ideas
<u>Do</u> carefully choose your words	<u>Don't</u> assume "yes" really means "yes" (I agree, I will do it, etc.)
<u>Do</u> remember that everything you say or do is watched (just as in the West)	<u>Refrain</u> from the "us" and "them" mentality - you may find after the experience your "us" and "them's" can change
<u>Do</u> enjoy the opportunity!	

By the way – this is just the tip of the iceberg!