

# Influence is a leadership tool

SAUMEN CHAKRABORTY

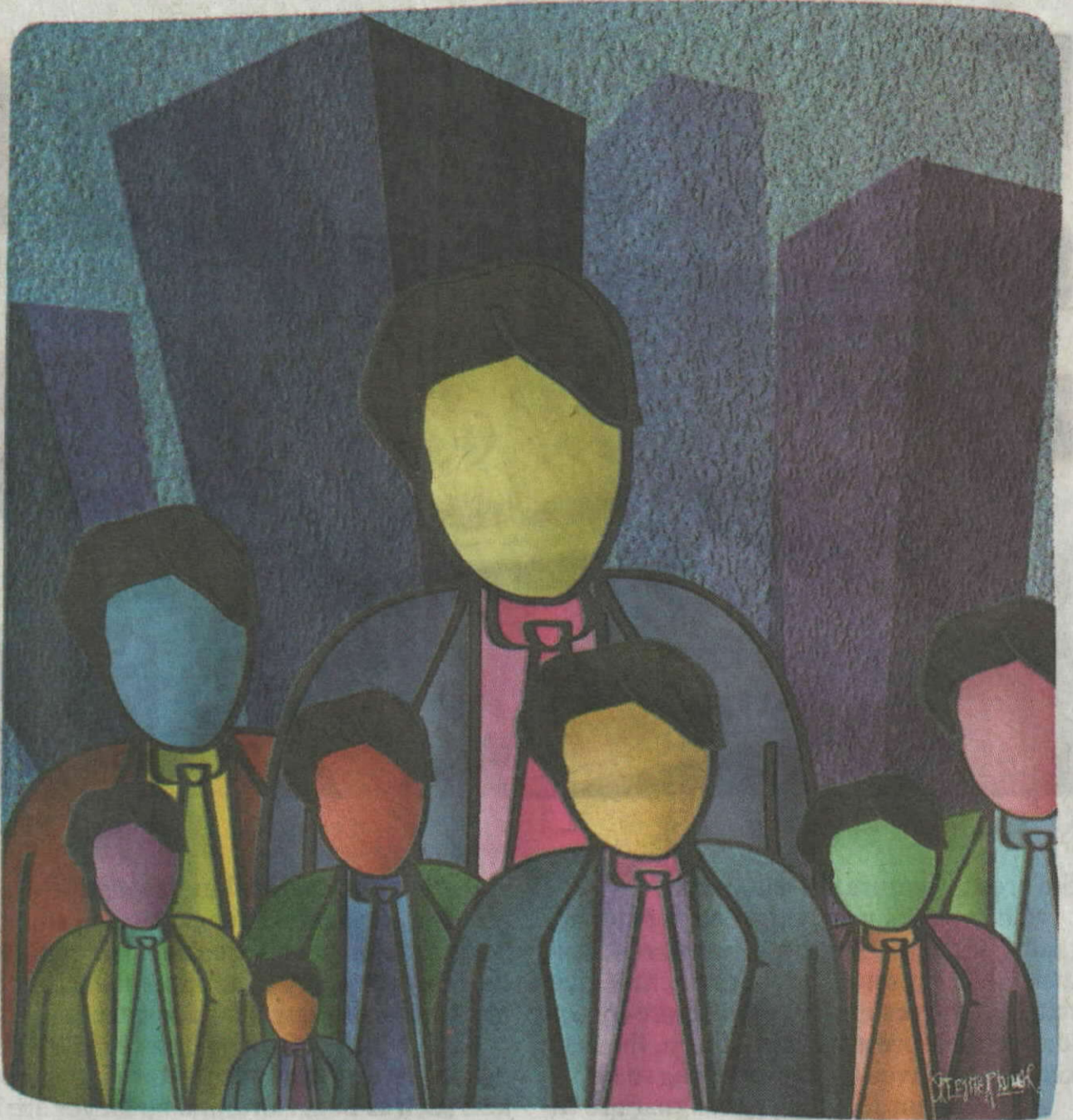
**T**he current generation of business leaders must learn to operate without the might of the hierarchy. The crutch of authority must be thrown away and replaced with the ability to build relationships, influence and work with others, to achieve results. Being able to influence others is an important leadership skill.

For the leader, the benefits of the skill of influencing others, include greater self-confidence, more respect from others, ability to manage change and involve others, ability to build and develop effective work teams and ultimately a greater chance of achieving targets by mobilising all the available resources. The leader's personal competence, knowledge, credibility, relationships and self-belief contribute immensely to his influencing skill. However, the above are necessary but not sufficient. A leader needs to continuously learn and update himself or herself with relevant and critical information. A leader needs to keep on challenging the comfort zone and take intelligent risks. A leader needs to draw enough power (without abusing them) from concerned stakeholders and organisational power map. However, a word of caution here — abuse of authority, power drawn from stakeholders and in particular, dropping names, actually reduces the span of influence over time.

Hence, the influencing style assumes critical significance. It is up to the leader to choose from various styles. It could be charismatic (using their aura), informative (by sharing knowledge) or participative (by involving others). One can reason out, negotiate or make an appropriate trade-off. One can resort to an emotional appeal, if that is most appropriate. The important decision that an effective leader takes is to decide on an appropriate influencing strategy by exploring various tactics, approaches and drawing from the three sources of power — personal, stakeholder and organisational.

Normally, the influencing strategy could be categorised into two — push and pull. The push strategy is not necessarily ineffective. It could be very effective in appropriate circumstances, provided the steps are followed properly. The steps consist of setting the scene, inviting reactions, summarising and dealing with objections and agreeing with outcomes. The critical success factor of the push strategy is, of course, the quality of the proposal and information given.

The pull strategy is effective in most cases.



Here, the leader sets the bar high and motivates people to achieve it and people get attracted towards it. The critical success factor is the ability to build upon ideas and proposals, as well as the quality of questions used to test understanding and to seek information. The pull strategy outcome always looks for a win-win situation.

In either one of the above strategies, influencing one-to-one is far easier than in a group. A leader needs to effectively deploy the power of 'priming' before he or she even takes up a proposal in meeting. Most consultants resort to one-to-one meeting for achieving this purpose before any important interventions are sought. It is very important to understand the possible sources of resistance and prepare for the right encounter. A leader will plan his or her encounter diligently with sensitivity to target, timing, relationships and harmony and would continuously ask these questions to himself or herself — how will I open up or set an

agenda? What unexpected reaction(s) may there be? How can I mess it up? How can I avoid messing it up? How will I close the meeting? What would I like other(s) to say?

Just like any other skill, influencing ability improves over time with practice, experience, analysis, introspection and, thereby, helps to continuously hone this skill. A great degree of learning comes from keenly watching and examining other successful leaders with great influencing skill. A leader needs to review his/her style and work with others. And last, but not the least, a leader needs to be ready to be influenced as well to improve his/her influencing skill.

Personal humility, positive mindset for both self and others, openness, trustworthiness and building relationships are all necessary ingredients for influencing skill.

[thenewmanager@thehindu.co.in](mailto:thenewmanager@thehindu.co.in)

The author is President and Global Chief of Quality, HR& IT, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.