

LESSONS FROM A DETERMINED INFLUENCER: THE RISE, FALL—AND EVENTUAL RESURRECTION OF MONICA ASHLEY, REVOLUTIONARY PRODUCT MANAGER

This complicated example reveals many layers of challenges over several years and demonstrates how a project management job calls for the ability to determine key players, figure out what is important to them, and utilize a full palette of influence skills to bring a major strategic project to fruition. This gives us an opportunity to use all of the concepts introduced in the *Influence without Authority* revised edition to understand what Monica Ashley did well, and what she missed as she tried to implement a controversial product development project. The information was provided by Monica and her boss, Dan Stella, about a year after the events described, so we have the benefit of their hindsight, along with new comments from Monica several years later in her successful career. Though the names and industry details are disguised, the facts as they saw them are unchanged. If your job brings you into contact with multiple stakeholders who must be won over in order to be successful, you will find the attention required to be well worth your time.

INFLUENCE IN IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC CHANGE: THE MONICA ASHLEY EXPERIENCE

Monica Ashley was stunned. Just as she was successfully completing a complex, two-year project that could be a major contributor to the future growth of Health Equipment and Laboratories, Inc. (HEAL-INC), her boss, Dan Stella, removed her as program manager.

Although Dan, vice-president for design and manufacture of one of the top lines of HEAL-INC machines, asked her to stay on in his division, Monica felt that personal defeat had been snatched from the jaws of victory. The glory from her massive effort to enable HEAL-INC to adapt its hospital-oriented, technically-driven products and strategies to much wider usage would go elsewhere. It wasn't that she was hung up on glory, but it didn't seem fair to be pulled out of this incredible accomplishment just as it was finally about to overcome the ferocious opposition that had made it even more difficult than it naturally was. And she feared—correctly as it turned out—that over a year would be lost in replacing her and getting a replacement up to speed.

HEAL-INC was a rapidly growing company making a wide range of advanced diagnostic and treatment equipment. Utilizing many complex technologies, from lasers to powerful magnets to semiconductors and signal processors, the company had thrived on the enormous latitude given its very bright employees to take initiatives and pursue opportunities. Since its inception, HEAL-INC had found great success by creating equipment that appealed to the same kinds of technically sophisticated hospital researchers and technicians it employed. Early on, top management decided that creating an atmosphere of maximum freedom would be worth the waste and duplicated effort, since it would tap the creativity and energy of smart employees. The strategy had worked, and HEAL-INC's meteoric growth had been a source of pride to management and employees—and sometimes a source of puzzlement to those who had been taught to revere order and efficiency above all else. (See Figure 1 for Partial Organization Chart.)

MORE TECH, MORE TOUCH: NEW USERS AND THEIR NEEDS

In recent years, however, the market had begun to shift, along with the technology in the industry. The equipment was increasingly going to be used in doctors' offices, small clinics, and storefront test labs, rather than exclusively in teaching hospitals. New users of the equipment were less technical and more patient-oriented than the hospital staffers who had been the company's original customers.

Furthermore, in order to make the equipment easier for less sophisticated personnel to use, the technology had grown more complicated; thus, far greater coordination and teamwork in design and manufacture became necessary. Many different, but interrelated, components had to be designed by teams of contributors, rather than developed for special purposes by solo "geniuses." There were pressures for some key components to shift from analog to digital electronics. And purchasers were becoming more selective, so their interests had to be taken into account at an earlier stage of product design. Finally, it was increasingly difficult for any one company, no matter how big, to custom design all the components of the equipment. The industry leaders were beginning to form strategic alliances and purchase components from outside sources.

All of this caused considerable tension at HEAL-INC and entrepreneurial companies like it. The original ways of doing things had brought huge success, and the company was young enough so that many of those who had grown with it were still entrenched. They had a big stake in their hard-won lessons about growth, decentralization, encouragement of initiative, technical orientation, and the virtues of inventing everything within the company. The voices of those arguing the urgent strategic need for greater ease of operation, more coordination of previously autonomous units, and purchasing components and subsystems elsewhere were not readily heard.

THE PRESIDENT OF HEAL-INC RECRUITS MONICA FOR "PROJECT HIPPOCRATES"

Monica had been squarely in the middle of just such issues. She had taken on "Project Hippocrates" reluctantly, because, even though she was ready for a line job after many successful years in important staff positions, she knew there would be major opposition. Over her years at HEAL-INC, she had developed a special relationship with Gary Dorr, the president and founder, which began at a meeting early in her career when she caught his attention by challenging his conclusions. He liked her spirit and the hard work that had enabled her to back up her views with data when he asked why she disagreed. After that, Dorr had periodic long talks with Monica and once told her that he thought of her as his HEAL-INC daughter. So, before taking the assignment as program manager of Project Hippocrates, Monica went to see Dorr.

She explained to him her concerns, especially in relation to a key manager, Ralph Parker, the vice-president in charge of designing the key signal processor used in several lines of HEAL-INC equipment. Monica had heard through the grapevine that Parker, who was in a different division from hers, was politically aggressive and had not been helpful on another project that her boss, Dan Stella, had pioneered. A different approach to signal processing—from analog to digital—would likely be needed for Project Hippocrates; and, as the main designer of HEAL-INC's original analog signal processors, Parker could be a major roadblock.

So many people in her division had talked about Parker's legendary resistance to new approaches and to customer input that Monica took their views as fact and didn't bother to talk with Parker directly. She just decided that she wouldn't be another in the long line of people she knew complaining about their inability to move him; she would set out to demonstrate overwhelmingly the correctness of the need for a new signal processor design. Dorr told Monica that he knew about the problem with Parker, and that he was working on it. He told her not to take Parker on directly, but to accept the program manager role, since she "would be protected." Before Monica could reply with her continuing concerns, Dorr ended the meeting by saying, "Monica, congratulations to the new program manager."

A WHIRLWIND OF ACTIVITIES

Monica plunged in, tackling the project with the same focused intensity that she brought to everything she did. She first interviewed the new kinds of purchasers to understand their very different needs; created a task force; recruited members from other parts of HEAL-INC; introduced to HEAL-INC for the first time to the Taguchi method, a highly disciplined product design process she had learned in Japan; and initiated a series of studies on just what would be needed to alter HEAL-INC's equipment to make it more viable for new applications. All of this activity made people uncomfortable, because the structured Taguchi process was far more rigorous than anyone was used to; and it led to something that had never been done before at HEAL-INC: a total system outline for the product revisions, including all the elements and how they would have to fit together. She created a cross-department signal-processor study group to investigate whether the existing component could handle the redesigned equipment. As Monica had intuited, the study group determined that no in-house analog product could do the job and recommended the purchase from an outside vendor of the necessary digital signal processor.

JUST ONE MORE STUDY: DIFFICULTIES WITH OUTSIDE PURCHASE OF SIGNAL PROCESSORS

This recommendation set off many months of problems. The decision was made, restudied, made again, restudied, and remade four times. Twice Monica gave presentations before the senior management staff, with competing presentations given by the signal-processor design group under Parker. Parker was nasty to her and made numerous accusations, including one that the technical people she had used in her study group were not competent (even though some had come from lower levels of Parker's organization, and two had been loaned by Phil Edison, the most respected technical person in the company). Parker had publicly declared that any kind of signal processor would be purchased outside only "over my dead body." And even after the senior management staff gave the go-ahead, Parker accused Monica of proceeding without permission. So, still another independent task force was created to evaluate the decision; once again, the outcome was in Monica's favor.

At the first senior management staff meeting, Gary Dorr surprised Monica by being more critical and less friendly than Monica had ever experienced. He had often complained in the past about the need at HEAL-INC to define measures that would spell out the performance of an entire diagnostic and treatment system, not just its components. Worried about the common HEAL-INC problem of components being optimized but the complete system ending up sub-optimized (the whole being less than the sum of its parts), Monica had developed detailed, integrated plans,

but Dorr seemed annoyed rather than pleased. At the meeting, he criticized Monica for the comprehensive approach.

Monica was confused, then flabbergasted at Dorr's continued critical tone. At first she couldn't say anything, she was so taken aback. Then as the meeting went on, she realized that Dan Stella, her boss, wasn't speaking up and defending the massive amount of work she had done to insure that components would not be sub-optimized at the expense of the total equipment systems. Assuming that her past relationship with Dorr legitimized disagreement with him, she defended the decisions. She knew that customers used different criteria for measuring overall equipment performance than the designers of each component, and she wanted that recognized.

Parker had attended the meetings of the Project Hippocrates group, during which he challenged Monica constantly and, in her view, tried to provoke her. Because Dan Stella had advised Monica to keep cool, she avoided taking Parker's bait. Then, during one meeting at which Monica asked Parker a question, he accused her of being angry. She coolly replied, "It seems to me that you're the one who is angry." Parker exploded. Monica just let him yell, and then proceeded with the meeting.

After the meeting, all who attended, including Dan, congratulated Monica for "humiliating Parker," which had not been her intent at all. She was just trying to head off a fight, as she had been advised. But the battle lines hardened further. From then on, Parker assigned one of his managers, Ed Kane, to attend Project Hippocrates task force meetings on his behalf.

At one of the subsequent meetings, Kane heatedly accused Monica of not listening and of excluding signal processor people. She was embarrassed by the attack and unhappy about being falsely accused; but, as was her custom, she handled the unjust attacks by providing more accurate information. Thinking, "If he knows the truth, he'll cool off," she told Kane the history of how the original cross-functional design team, including people from his own organization, had agreed unanimously on the need for a switch to digital signal processing, and the requisite acquisition of an outside product.

There was so much conflict at that meeting that, as it broke up, Monica's boss, Dan Stella, called a spontaneous meeting of his own managers in a nearby conference room. Because Kane was standing outside the room and he was available to attend, Stella invited him "to c'mon in and help us plan."

Once inside, an obviously outraged Kane shouted, "Who the hell do you think you are, going to an outside vendor!" and called Stella a "traitor and a renegade." Stella retorted that if anyone was a traitor it was Kane, because the signal processor department of which Kane was a member had said to go ahead, and now he was trying to subvert their decision. In Monica's eyes, the confrontation was particularly brutal ("like dinosaurs slugging it out"), especially since she knew that Stella did not particularly like conflict.

Soon after, friends of Monica began to tell her that Kane was spreading nasty personal rumors about her, including innuendoes that she was having an affair with Stella. Stunned and hurt, she

decided there was nothing she could do about it. Her friends would know how absurd the rumors were, and she believed that telling others she was innocent would only help dignify the rumors. She persevered in the project.

A month later, Parker once again challenged the outside purchase decision. Monica was called to an extended senior management staff meeting where she was given one day to make a presentation of the complete program; Parker was given the next day for his rebuttal.

TWISTING IN THE WIND: ABANDONED BY THE PRESIDENT

Monica was shocked by what happened at the meeting. She had barely started her presentation when Gary Dorr began to attack her. He said that no one person was going to be in control, that Monica in particular was trying to over-control things—“like an Imperial Chinese Emperor” was how he phrased it -- and that central control was totally inappropriate for the company. Seeing Parker smirking in the background and feeling extraordinarily jittery after the attack by the president, Monica mustered her courage and told Dorr that she was only giving the complete system overview he had asked for. Every time she tried to give a detailed calculation, Dorr broke in again with criticism. Monica and her group were devastated; they were certain that Dorr had been totally prejudiced by Parker.

When Parker made his presentation the following day, Dorr was very receptive to him. In Monica’s eyes, however, Parker had no solid data, and his presentation was devoid of content and filled with glib assertions and pronouncements. The main theme of his argument was, “Haven’t we always met hospital needs? Just look at our original analog signal processor: it’s the best in the business, and it can be adapted to any need our customers have.”

As she sat there in disbelief, Monica recalled a comment Dorr had once made to her privately. He had told her that there was no way the company could do without Parker because of his signal processor contributions. After Parker finished, the people in his group were slapping each other on the back; and Kane walked over to sneer, “Ha, ha, you lose!” at Monica. She was upset that Parker and his supporters had done so much behind-closed-doors political maneuvering and it absolutely infuriated her that “politics could beat out substance” in the company. Only Dorr’s earlier warning about not confronting Parker kept her from retaliating.

Sticking the knife in was not enough for Parker. He had to twist it. At the end of the meeting, Parker again brought up Monica’s negotiation for the digital processor with an outside company. Dorr exploded, and yelled at Monica, “How dare you negotiate on behalf of the company? You are a renegade and an empire-builder!”

Although by this point Monica was down for the count, she defended what had happened, explaining that she acted upon a decision that had been cleared by many groups. But then, when Dorr turned to Edison, the most respected technical expert, and asked him if it had gone through the review committee he headed, Edison claimed he did not remember. Monica was amazed and

shocked, since the technical guru had always been friendly to her, and he certainly was present when his review committee had made the decision.

Dorr then said that he was going to go around the room and take a vote on going outside. He said that he personally would vote if there were a tie. As fate would have it, there was a tie Dorr turned to Monica and asked her how she would interpret the tie.

Monica had been sitting near Dorr at the meeting. After his attack, he acted conciliatory, and they even exchanged whispered comments several times, so Monica was feeling a bit restored in relationship with him. Although she was scared of how it would be taken, she summoned up a sense of humor that she was rarely able to use when tense and deadpanned, “I would say that there was an overwhelming sentiment for going ahead with the outside negotiations.” Dorr laughed and agreed. Monica was enormously relieved.

At the next senior management staff meeting, Dorr wanted one more vote on the issue of negotiating with an outside vendor. When the results were in, only one person had voted against the outside purchase: Parker. One of the executive vice-presidents then turned to Parker and said, “You will have to speak now or forever hold your peace.” Parker finally retorted that the move was against his better judgment and that, when it proved to be a giant mistake, it would be on the heads of Monica and her boss, Dan Stella.

HEAT IN THE KITCHEN: PUT OUT THE FIRE

Monica felt herself constantly being drawn into conflict even though she had wanted to accomplish the whole project by building consensus. In part, she had been driven by her assumptions about her relationship with Dorr. She had assumed that he still wanted her to stand up for what she believed in.

Upset, she went to talk to him about what had happened at various meetings. He told her that she was no longer behaving appropriately; because she was acting like a “hot competitor” when she came to the senior management staff, she was disturbing the company’s once-peaceful and productive environment.

In her defense, she tried to explain that it was not she who was causing the problems but Kane and Parker. She reminded Dorr that he himself had said Parker was a problem, but Dorr replied, “That is none of your business.” She knew that Dorr admired her for having the drive to complete her advanced studies and other complex company assignments, and that he counted on her as somebody who could carry things through, but she had overestimated the amount of support she would get from him in Project Hippocrates.

Throughout Monica’s career at HEAL-INC, Dan Stella had phoned her on Sunday evenings to review the previous week and discuss what was coming up. As the infighting increased at the senior staff meetings, Stella told Monica in one of these Sunday night phone conversations that she was going too fast and causing conflict. When things got very hot, he called her into his

office and tried to slow her down. She said, “Don’t these people understand we have all this work to do?”

Stella replied, “Don’t you understand you have to build all these relationships and deal with the politics at the top?”

Nevertheless, caught up in the need to master enormous numbers of interrelated issues, Monica pressed on. She had set a date for bringing Project Hippocrates to market, and she was determined to meet it. She knew the external competition was getting increasingly tougher, and that it would be a severe strategic blow to HEAL-INC if they missed the deadline.

Over the ensuing several months, a new team, which included many signal processor people, was formed to begin the technology transfer process and overcome all not-invented-here feelings in preparation for a contract with an outside vendor. Parker’s people chose not to help specify the features of the digital signal processor. Technical experts from Stella’s organization did the work, along with some people from sales and marketing. Exhaustive effort went into design and product specification documents to pave the way for a smoother-than-usual product introduction. During this period, there were vague promises from Parker’s organization about modifying the existing analog signal processor to meet the new demands, but nothing tangible happened.

ONE MORE TIME: HARD DECISIONS ABOUT THE SIGNAL PROCESSOR

While plans to educate the sales force went forward, Parker stirred up a great deal of tension around the decision to purchase signal processors. He used every meeting he attended to say negative things about Project Hippocrates. Several important customers even told Monica that Parker and his people had visited them to say that their analog signal processor was being enhanced to adapt to new uses, and that the digital processor that HEAL-INC was thinking of purchasing outside was “a pile of crap.”

This immobilized Monica at first, because she couldn’t understand how top management could allow this malicious behavior to go on. She got Stella to talk to Dorr about it, but she saw nothing happen to stop it. Eventually, it just spurred her into redoubling efforts and pushing her project group to work harder. “I’d have gone crazy if I had paid attention to all that nasty political stuff, so I just poured more energy into the project,” she reported later.

As a result of Parker’s continued complaining, Dorr formed another committee chaired by a new engineering manager, who, because he had recently been hired away from a competitor, was assumed to be unbiased. Unbeknownst to Monica, the new manager began a series of secret meetings involving most of the same people who had been part of Monica’s original task force to work on what the criteria should be for making the decision.

Within the next month, the company signed a contract with an outside vendor. Shortly thereafter, Monica learned of the secret study committee and found out it was still evaluating outside

purchase. She warned that the company now had a legal obligation and could be sued if it did not go ahead with the new contract.

In spite of her troubles, Monica was proud of the negotiation and the amount of continuing vendor support that she had managed to get the vendor to include in the contract. In fact, her negotiation eventually became a model for the company to purchase components from outside.

Three months after the contract was signed, the “secret” committee announced that it was ready to hear a debate on the merits of the outside digital signal processor versus the existing HEAL-INC analog product. Kane and Monica made presentations.

Another three months went by before the committee announced its decision, which was to go ahead with the outside purchase. Meanwhile, people working on the project were completely confused; they didn’t know which side to support. Monica told them to forget politics because there was work to do, but she had to keep encouraging people to get them to do what was needed.

SUDDEN DEATH: MONICA LOSES HER POSITION

Two days before a major national meeting, which Monica had organized for HEAL-INC people from around the country to finalize the support strategy for implementing Project Hippocrates, she was called to a meeting with Dan Stella and anew personnel manager. There she was told that she would no longer be managing the program.

Crushed, Monica asked why. Stella told her that the secret committee had recommended that a more technical person replace her, but that he had removed her because he thought she might have a nervous breakdown as a result of all the intensity of her involvement. He believed that she had failed to read the signals he had sent her to slow down, build relationships more, hold back her angry opinions in meetings, and, in general, learn to act “more like a top executive.” To him that meant fighting battles off-line rather than in public, and learning to sit quietly through public attacks, even when they were wrong. He told her that as long as she did not understand all of that, there was no place for her in Project Hippocrates. He told her, however, he wanted to keep her on and he gave her some time to think about what her new job might be. For almost a year after that, Monica worked on minor projects as part of Stella’s group.

Subsequent events made Monica feel simultaneously vindicated and regretful. Following another eight months of study, the new program manager concluded that Monica’s plans were correct; and he proceeded with Project Hippocrates using the innovative strategy Monica had developed for HEAL-INC. Kane was removed from Parker’s staff and was having trouble getting anyone in the company to take him on in anew position. The scope of Parker’s job was eventually reduced considerably, and he lost control of the most important part of the signal processor design area. And, after a year in limbo, Monica began to acquire significant assignments again. Yet, the way

in which the project had lived but the leader of it had been killed off -- or at least buried alive for a year -- left wounds that still ached; and Monica was determined to learn from her experiences.

MONICA REFLECTS ON HER EXPERIENCES

In retrospect, and with a year to contemplate what had happened, Monica analyzed her own problems as follows:

“I was very data-oriented in my approach to the project, which carried the day; but I didn’t develop the interpersonal contacts to solidify my influence. Not being from the signal processor department, I was out of the design mainstream, yet there were many complex issues to deal with. I still haven’t figured out why they allowed a female—especially one without an engineering background—to manage the project and whether they were setting me up for a big fall.

“I know I could have had Parker’s support if I hadn’t challenged the sacred cow of their analog signal processor product, but I didn’t see how to avoid that once we determined that the technology was too limited. When I invited the signal processor people in early in the process, they were surprised because, in their own organization, they couldn’t get heard if they were not part of the original analog cult. Most of them had been trying to get the company to consider a move to digital technology for some time, but they were shot down from within their own organization.

“I had heard that Parker was an authoritarian who could not be influenced and that no one dared challenge him, and I guess I was scared. There was so much work to be done and so much market opportunity that I focused on achieving the goals without trying to directly influence Parker. He had a much higher power position in the organization and was a formidable player, so I was afraid to challenge him.

“I wanted Parker’s people to recognize on their own that project Hippocrates needed new signal processing capacity, but I see now that I should have dealt with Parker directly if I wanted to be treated as a senior executive.

“Furthermore, I have to build my confidence; I still feel like a little kid from the sticks, despite all my success. Others see me as over-confident and aggressive, but I probably act that way to overcome my own fears of somehow being ‘found out.’ My peers tell me that they are afraid of me and don’t argue with me because they know I would bowl them over with my arguments or my intensity. They see me as angry; but I feel that I am just intense. It surprises me when they act laid back even when they have intense feelings about something; when I feel intensely, I show it.

“I now see that the content of what I was doing—the plans, strategies, decisions—was the least important part. The most important is mobilizing support and resources. If the content is wrong, you can always change it; but if there is no support, you don’t have a foundation. I was trying to work without a foundation under me.”

“Ironically, I’m getting *more* done now without having to push so hard. In the past, I thought I had to speak up and give lots of facts to prove I was credible and confident, but I no longer think that way. I don’t want to be so personally exposed and vulnerable that I overreact to attacks or assume I’m being attacked when I’m not. When Dan pushed me to do some relationship building, I made excuses for why I couldn’t take the time to do it. I see now that was wrong.

“I did ask Phil Edison for his help on technical issues; and as evidence of his support and confidence, he gave me two key people early on. It is easier for me to ask for help when I feel that the person is supportive. Because Edison is calm and laid back, I was too. I felt I had to stay low-key or I would lose him. I didn’t see how that same approach might have worked with others. Even when Edison and I disagreed, I would try to be calm and talk slowly, which is very hard for me. I would try not to fight too hard; instead I would go away and come back to him when I had the data.

“Edison likes being ‘stroked,’ which was easy to do because his early support made me feel very positive toward him. It wasn’t artificial at all. The two people he gave me were reputed to be very tough and ready to eat alive anyone who made a technical mistake. When they joined me, I went to them and told them I was not a technical expert and would need their help. They were great after that.

“Even when Edison challenged my ideas, I would never feel personally attacked. I would just want to figure out what the right answer was. When Kane attacked me, however, he would intimidate me both verbally and physically. He would even stand much too close, and when I tried to back off, he would follow me around, trying to dominate, to win, both organizationally and technically. As an engineer, Kane had no sense of how to work through a problem taking many views and business needs into account. With him it was all or nothing: if I didn’t accept his position immediately, he would fight until I did. There was no sense of compromise or mutual learning. I got the impression that he would accept nothing short of complete acquiescence on my part, which I couldn’t do, because the data I had simply didn’t support his position. I also felt that I had to protect those people who had come to me from his organization. They appreciated my protecting them, of course; but he didn’t.

“He spent lots of time building interpersonal bridges. For example, he worked hard to influence Todd Benson, my division’s senior vice-president, who was a long-time supporter of mine. Although I knew what Kane was doing, I didn’t bother to go talk to Todd. I figured that we had data on our side, so why spend time with somebody I already knew. And he had plenty else on his plate.

“In the long run, Kane’s position and strategy didn’t help him any more than mine helped me. He lost his job, too. We were opposite sides of the coin—he had relationships and I had data; but we both lost. Both data and relationships, together, were necessary for success.

“I never lobbied anyone, even when I knew the person that Kane had gone to. For example an outside member of our board of directors went out of his way to congratulate me every time I

made any kind of presentation on Project Hippocrates. Although, in retrospect, it is clear that he could have been a strong ally, I never followed up with him.

“I had nothing to offer Kane to get him to back off, except to voluntarily disappear into the woodwork. Although people had told me he was a bad apple and I should leave him alone, Dan Stella had said that I shouldn’t get down to Kane’s level of behavior, so I didn’t know how exactly to respond when he attacked me in meetings.

“I suppose that I could have gone to Kane directly after his first nasty attack and warned him that if he didn’t cut it out I would expose his behavior publicly. Then, when he acted up in a meeting, I could have said something like, ‘You’re doing it again, Kane; you’re being personal about the issues instead of using data. That’s just what you do when you spread rumors about me instead of dealing with the issues. Let’s deal with the issues here.’ If I had said it calmly, I probably wouldn’t have been seen as descending to his level, and that might have stopped him.

“I wish I could learn to use humor instead of just being a fighter. But if someone like Kane says (and he did), ‘You’ll do this over my dead body,’ should I say, ‘Lay down?’ I suppose if I had said something like, ‘Anybody here know where I can find a gun to give Mr. Kane?’ I might have broken the tension. When I am not feeling uptight and tense, I can inject humor. I see now that it works very well on senior executives here, but I haven’t been able to joke when I am tense.

“I could have stayed quiet when Dorr attacked me; maybe it was immature to take him on in front of witnesses. I could have done it later in private; but I don’t like seeing my people attacked, and I think it is my role to publicly defend them.

“I’ve seen Dorr get furious with his people, and they just seem to take it. I thought I could get away with challenging him not only because of the old relationship, but also because he expected that of me.

“Maybe when he attacked me, I could have replied quietly, ‘That’s not how I see it,’ or, ‘We have to talk; I have a different view of the facts.’ That might have been a more mature way to do it.

“I forget to take the long-term view because I feel I have to win every battle. I need to learn to roll with the punches. I haven’t been savvy about when to speak and when to be quiet. It looks as if laying low is more effective.

“I guess it never occurred to me that putting a senior executive in a bad light in front of others is not such a great idea. Dorr might have liked me for challenging him when I was junior, but I guess what I didn’t realize was that, as you get nearer the top, you have to play by different rules.

“Dan Stella didn’t support me as much as I wanted him to. He claimed that he did, but I didn’t see it. And sometimes he thinks he is helpful when he is not. For example, after I complained that my ideas weren’t being listened to at his management committee meetings, he would make a

special point of acknowledging my contribution after I said something. But, since he didn't do that for others, it was seen as an unfair advantage. So he thought he was helping when he wasn't. Similarly, he thought that removing me from Project Hippocrates was the best thing "for my health." I needed his support, not his protection. I'm not a delicate flower. He could have handled the whole conversation much better.

"At the senior management staff meeting at which Dorr attacked me, Dan said nothing. He believes in working the tough issues in private. I know now that he was trying to work behind the scenes to back Parker and Kane off, but I would have appreciated something more visible. I got the program through for him and then got shit for it. He avoids conflict until there is a major explosion.

"I believe Dan changed as he got to the vice-president level. He used to welcome and solicit direct feedback, but now he doesn't. He tells us, 'Be senior managers; that is, be quiet and circumspect and don't engage in direct confrontation.' In the old days, there was healthy disagreement, but now it is hard to get people stirred at his meetings.

"I find Dan and I can no longer have the kind of conversations we used to have when he was more congenial and collegial. Now I have to agree wholeheartedly or disagree very gently and tentatively. When I perceived that Dan was threatened by my conversations with Dorr, I learned not to tell anybody about them. But now that Dan has his own conversations with the president, I don't think he is threatened by my closeness to Dorr.

"I guess I must have given Dan fits because, in his eyes, I became unpredictable and seemingly uncontrollable, and therefore potentially embarrassing. I guess that doesn't help him look good when he wants to win the respect of the senior managers. I don't want to embarrass him; I want to learn how to function in a better way.

"Dan has been pushing me to work more with other members of his management committee and not rely on him as my sole contact. I have been doing that, and I find that I now do feel more effective and comfortable with them.

"One of HEAL-INC's senior executives kept telling me in regards to Project Hippocrates that I didn't have to own it all. He said that the more you give away, the more will be given to you; and I'm starting to understand that. Dan tells me the same thing. Before, I was volunteering for everything. Had I volunteered for less, I would have had time for more activities, including more relationship building.

"It's a curse to see the big picture and have a strict, self-imposed deadline, because you know how much has to be done. Dan and Dorr would tell me that they knew I was right but they couldn't handle everything I was throwing at them in the moment. When they didn't know the overall strategic plan, how could they worry about one subsidiary issue that I was pushing at them? I made people feel overwhelmed early on, which wasn't useful, nor intended. I felt my team was being clever and comprehensive to think of all the angles; but Dan and Dorr—most of

the senior staff, in fact -- just felt that I was throwing too much at them. I needed to show them an overview rather than a step-by-step plan laid out in the minutest detail.

“I guess what I really need to do is persuade myself that I am bright enough so that I can focus on what is important to others rather than on proving that I am really smart. I don’t know what has to happen for me to finally accept that I am. Because I was taught to be self-critical and humble, it’s been difficult for me to accept this positive view of myself; although deep down I know it’s true.”

STELLA LOOKS BACK

Dan Stella had his own views of what had happened, and the lessons for Monica:

“Monica took Kane’s attacks on her too personally. She should have stepped back and let him hang himself. Furthermore, when he was out doing counter-marketing to the ideas of Project Hippocrates, Monica should have been selling the project; but she didn’t. We’re still repairing the damage.

“I agree that there was no way to deal with Parker. He does not and will not understand the needs of customers other than hospital technicians. Because he had position power, the only battle strategy to use with him was to go underground. All you can do is neutralize him, using other people. You need to practice ‘octopus management’: Get others to see that there’s a problem, and get them to raise the issue with top management. If it comes from many sides, it can be effective eventually. But you have to be cautious how you word your concerns. The trick is to get marketing to do a full court press, since they won’t be able to sell machines that are not suited to other kinds of customers.

“If Monica had been patient, others would have blocked Parker, but I couldn’t back her off. She set a launch date and wouldn’t budge. I kept trying to slow her down, but she wasn’t having that. I was angry with Parker and Kane too, but I didn’t want to add to Monica’s boiling. Remember the old saying: In war, if there is no chance that you will lose your life waiting, patience wins.

“I gave Monica a card that says: ‘Listen; Remove the Urgency; Trust’; but it didn’t get through to her at the time. That’s the hardest thing for a data-driven person to do! I know, because that’s the way I am too; neither of us suffers fools gladly. We just want to pile more data on.

“She became a bulldozer, which got her in trouble with Dorr. He wasn’t comfortable with a woman being so aggressive and tenacious, refusing to grovel. Although I think he learned from that experience, he was not happy at the time. That hurt me a lot. I’ve had a 10-year relationship as Monica’s boss and sponsor, and I wanted to help, but I couldn’t. She’s rarely wrong about data, so it was extremely frustrating. I keep telling her, ‘Give it away; it’ll come back with interest.’”

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME—AND MAY NOT BE SELFLESS

“Give it away so it can come back with interest” is not a bad theme for discussing influence and exchange. The notion of investment in others, and getting repaid with interest, is helpful to anyone wanting influence, as we have tried to show. Dan Stella was trying to coach Monica to be more influential; but, ironically, he too had a problem with influence: He couldn’t get Monica to listen to his advice. Even being the boss does not guarantee the requisite influence in every case.

GIVE MONICA CREDIT

Although Monica had many people and groups to influence in order to make Project Hippocrates a success, we will focus on her difficulties with four key players; Dorr, Parker, Kane, and Stella. Her ability to push the project as far as she did, through an organization that was inherently so hard to move in such a fundamentally different direction, is a tribute to her intelligence, mastery of complex data, energy, and persistence. Though being technically or strategically “right” never guarantees that you will be listened to, it is possible to go a long way when you have the data on your side. On the whole, that strategy, though incomplete, is a lot better than trying to be influential through use of interpersonal techniques when you are demonstrably wrong or unprepared. The first is all steak and no sizzle; the second, all sizzle and no steak.

As this case makes clear, attention only to getting it right is not enough to move doubters or powerful resisters. In retrospect, Monica saw that she had been too caught up in the complexities of the technical and marketing challenges to correctly assess the interests of key players, determine what she could offer them, and find ways to make satisfactory exchanges. As she put it, “I now see that ‘the content of what I was doing was the least important part. The most important is mobilizing support and resources. If the content is wrong, you can always change it; but if there is no support, you don’t have a foundation. I was trying to work without a foundation under me.”

INDIRECT INFLUENCE AS AN OPTION

It is important to note that there are other, less face-to-face influence techniques that Monica could also have used. For example, Dan Stella wanted her to get other affected departments such as marketing, to take on Parker and Kane by complaining to Gary Dorr, surrounding them in an “octopus-like” attack. She could have lined up high-level supporters, such as the complimentary outside board member, to help fight the battles, or mobilized customers to more directly make their desires and demands known. All useful and sometimes necessary, these influence techniques are once-removed from the potential ally. A full influence arsenal includes weapons that do not involve making a direct “target” of the person you want to influence. Mobilizing the populace to wage war from all directions at once can help overcome superior firepower. Nevertheless, even indirect weapons involve persuading other people to help fight the battles, which comes back to influence as a central instrument of “war.” We will continue our focus there.

MONICA’S SEARCH FOR POTENTIAL ALLIES

PARKER

One of the fundamental mistakes Monica made was to assume from the beginning that it was impossible to find anything in common with Parker around which to form any kind of alliance, and that Stella and Dorr would automatically be allied on everything she did. Stella, too, took it as fact that Parker was immovable (“will not understand customer needs”), which meant that he couldn’t think of how to help Monica figure out what she might do, short of mobilizing others against Parker, to at least neutralize him. Although we cannot know for certain how influenceable Parker was, we can be sure that labeling him politically aggressive and impervious to customer need will lead to treating him as an enemy to be avoided, and thereby harden his opposition.

Even if a person is too negative ever to become an ally, it is worth taking a positive stance and assuming the best, because that increases the chances of at least neutralizing him or her. The conversion to ally may not take place, but treating the person as if it could happen might do the trick if there is any hope at all.

POSITION POWER

It might well be that Parker was too invested in his own history with the analog signal processor to ever consider its limitations and the consequent need for going outside; but, if you were in his shoes, wouldn’t you expect to be treated with respect? Wouldn’t you want to be approached early for your views, given a chance to say how the problem could be studied, and be kept informed even when the data and decisions were going against you? Perhaps Parker was so irrational that no information would penetrate his negative views, and he would only use information that Monica gave him to try to sabotage her efforts; but, if she had been talking directly with him as if he were at least potentially an ally, then she would also have been free to talk to others, like Dorr, about her differences of opinion with Parker.

Since reasonable people can differ on complex technical/ strategic issues and can change their minds as data pile up, treating even a Parker as if he could become an ally, or could at least come to see that disagreement with him was not meant to be personal or undermining, would free Monica to disagree agreeably. If she then saw that Parker was attacking her publicly or behind the scenes, she could do a lot of ‘lobbying’ without being nasty. ‘I’ve talked with Parker and he sees the world differently from the way our task force sees it, so I’d like to let you know what we’re finding is a reasonable way to make her views known without being a shot competitor.’

KANE

Kane might have been a different story, partly because he was acting as an agent for Parker, and partly because he may have been gratuitously nasty. His subsequent difficulties in getting placed at HEAL-INC suggest that others saw him as personally offensive. If indeed he was no more than a gloating competitor, he probably wasn’t convertible to an ally. However, we can speculate about how he might have reacted if Monica had said to him, “You may win on this one, but don’t forget that we all work for HEAL-INC and will have to deal with each other in the future. Let’s keep the fight fair and forget the nasty personal stuff; you wouldn’t want your behavior in regards to Project Hippocrates to haunt you, would you?” It might have made him pause long enough to accept an olive branch for future possible alliance.

An alliance doesn't require that there be any great love between the parties, only some mutual interest on one or more issues. As another high-powered female manager in a different company said to a nervous male who was ambivalent about hiring her, 'Listen, you wouldn't marry someone like me, and I wouldn't choose you; but if you want someone to run your management information system really well, I'm your person.'

DORR

Monica erred in the opposite direction with Stella and Dorr. Her relationship to Dorr was a complex one. He had spotted her early in her career at HEAL-INC, spent an unusual amount of time talking with her (considering her junior status at the time), and took obvious pride in her accomplishments. Thus, Monica concluded that he would automatically understand the obstacles she was facing in Project Hippocrates and (as she assumed he had implied) protect her from Parker. What she failed to realize was that even good allies still pay attention to their own interests, and that if she crossed Dorr's interests and concerns, he wouldn't automatically deliver unconditional support.

She violated their connection in at least four ways:

1. Dorr told her he was dealing with Parker and not to fight with him publicly; she did, believing that it was Parker's fault and that she was not to blame;
2. She failed to recognize Parker's importance to Dorr, forcing Dorr to take sides when he did not want to;
3. She challenged Dorr in public, charming behavior when she was a junior manager, but disturbing coming from a more senior executive proposing a product revolution; and
4. In pursuit of a fully integrated project, she violated Dorr's beliefs about the virtues of decentralization and control. (As a woman, she also may have made him uncomfortable by her aggressiveness and ferocious determination, even though he may have simultaneously admired it.)

While all this was going on, she failed to spend time with Dorr, which would have allowed her to test his reactions, understand what he needed in this loaded situation, learn from him, and reaffirm the mutuality of their interests.

STELLA

With Stella, Monica also had a longstanding relationship, so she assumed that he would not only defend her but do it in the public way she sorely needed. When the public support was not forthcoming, she interpreted his lack of reaction as a dislike of conflict; and therefore, she ignored the advice he gave her about slowing down. Based on her competitive analysis, she had set a date for bringing the new product to market; and she was so caught up in that arbitrary, self-

imposed time bind that she couldn't hear his signals about losing the battle to win the war. Given Stella's concerns about being taken seriously as a senior executive, he couldn't be the kind of ally that Monica assumed he would be.

A part of Monica's problem with Stella and Dorr was that she was so determined to be independent and competent that she completely overlooked another key aspect of the ally/partner role: the possibility of learning from the ally. While many subordinates fail to be good partners because they are too dependent and can't push back, Monica was fiercely independent, and she failed to use the freely available knowledge of her allied bosses.

She had assumed that she was tapped for Project Hippocrates because she was expected to be aggressive, visionary, not bound by the blinders of the past, driving, and able to get things done; it never occurred to her that another aspect of this assignment was almost certainly the chance to learn more of the behavior expected of a senior executive. She didn't realize that learning was expected along with performance.

An important benefit of the partner-in-an-alliance role is the potential to give and take around the issues and to learn from the strengths of your partner. But Monica never went to Stella or Dorr to ask, "What do you expect me to learn in this assignment? What is different about this project that would help me grow in ways that you see as desirable?" She didn't see that the partner role freed her to be more of a real partner, who could both give and learn.

Monica had responded to the assignment like a modern-day Lancelot, charged by King Arthur (Dorr) to sally forth and slay dragons wherever she found them. She didn't see that he and Stella were offering her a partnership in which her talents could be combined with their wisdom. In an increasingly complex world, and certainly in HEAL-INC's changing world, dragon slaying requires more than one brave knight; there are too many dragons to go around! When we tried this idea out on Monica, she commented wryly, "Lots of times I did feel like a missionary; I forgot that fairly often they end up getting boiled alive in the pot!"

In general, we can conclude from Monica's experience that the beginnings of influence require the working assumption that anyone, no matter how difficult he or she is reputed to be, could be a potential ally; that assumption creates a mindset that reduces negative stereotyping and neutralizes hostility. At the same time, no alliance is permanent and unchanging; by their nature, alliances continue as long as some mutual interests are being fulfilled, but they can dissolve, despite general goodwill, if one side or the other does not continue to get its needs met. Furthermore, although it is hard to influence someone with whom there is a poor relationship; it is insufficient merely to rely on prior good feeling to preserve influence as conditions change. Alliances, like all relationships, require ongoing maintenance. Finally, the role of ally or partner has to be two-way; and partners, especially those working with their bosses, should look to learn as well as deliver.

WORLD TOUR: WHAT MONICA NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT POTENTIAL ALLIES

Since circumstances allowed us to interview only Dan Stella directly, we will have to make inferences about the worlds of the key potential allies Monica needed; but this is no different from what Monica had to do. We benefited from the passing of time, because Monica has since gone back to Dorr and Stella to talk about what happened; but it is impossible to be sure that your diagnosis is correct until it is tested in action. Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of data on which to base a diagnosis of the key players.

PARKER

It is not terribly hard to imagine what it feels like to be a pioneer in an organization, the inventor of a key component that has been central to the company's success, recognized over the years as vital to the company's outstanding record, and then suddenly to find that a group of upstarts are claiming that your baby is inherently inadequate for the future. The currencies of centrality and respect are certainly going to be crucial to you, especially if you suspect that the president is no longer treating you as the revered dominant gatekeeper of the company's future, despite his nice words in our presence.

If you ever had any doubts about your ability to continue your technical prowess, those doubts will be sorely plucked; and you will not be likely to welcome proposals that symbolically, if not literally, mark the end of your dominant influence. Or, you may be blind to your own limits, believe with all your conviction that you have the keys to the kingdom, and be furious that people without your track record and with little ability to really understand the brilliance of your contribution are challenging you. In either event, someone in Parker's position is unlikely to have the welcome mat out for an interloper like Monica.

Nevertheless, if the above analysis is at all correct, it suggests that Monica was not without potentially viable approaches. As suggested, it might have been possible to pay Parker in the currency of respect, demonstrated by early and frequent consultation, ample information flow, and a tone of appreciation for his considerable technical contributions. Making clear to him that her disagreement was respectful and based on a different reading of market opportunities rather than an indictment of his technical expertise probably wouldn't have transformed his response; but it might have taken some of the nasty anger out of it.

Admittedly, listening takes a lot of time. It can cause you to derail or lose your focus, and it usually creates the expectation that you will indeed respond to the potential ally's ideas and concerns. Since Monica was not going to be persuaded by Parker, nor could she win a technical debate with him—because she was not a technical expert and was only representing the work of her team members—this strategy might not have been worth the expense.

Another possibility might have been to invite Parker to meet some of the customers on whose opinions Monica and her team based their conclusions, and to manage those meetings. Direct, outside evidence (particularly from a customer group) can sometimes neutralize a resister in a way that filtered testimony from within the company cannot; although Parker—as narrow scientific whizzes are likely to do, and most unfortunately did in this case—could probably have claimed that the customers did not know what they really needed. In fact, when Parker did bother

to seek out customers, he did it to undermine the work of Monica's project group. That isn't exactly what we might call a customer-is-always-right focus. Nevertheless, repeated invitations to join her in meeting customers "so that your expertise can be brought to bear on these massive problems" could have been a way of showing appreciation for Parker's centrality and contributions in the past.

KANE

Both Monica and Dan Stella believe that Kane is an inherently nasty and divisive person who could not be influenced. If it is true he spread the rumors about Monica and Dan that were attributed to him, that might well be so. Nevertheless, even if it is only for practice, let's see what we can glean about Kane's world and his likely currencies.

The most obvious force at work on Kane is his position as Parker's subordinate. Even if Kane had been disposed toward the team's views about signal processors, Parker's strong feelings and over-my-dead-body attitude would shape Kane's reactions. He could hardly be a good subordinate and not carry Parker's views forward.

In addition, Kane gave off cues about the combative, win-lose atmosphere in the signal processor design department, whose members behaved as if beleaguered and under assault. Indeed, since we know that Dorr, the president, saw Parker as a problem in need of a long-term solution, it is probable that others in the company had complained that the signal processor department was resistant to new approaches. Thus, the department was entrenched and under the impression it was fighting a rear guard action, which shaped the way its members interpreted any idea from another group.

In addition, Stella and his area had been on the ascendancy, struggling (and winning) on previous projects with the signal processor people, which made initiatives from one of Stella's staff even less welcome. Finally, the increasing complexity of signal processor design—both analog and digital—demanded greater collaboration. Those who had been in the business from the beginning remembered the good old "solo genius/independent cowboy" days, when one person could pull it all together and shape the fortunes of whole companies; and they may not have been comfortable with the demands from new areas and people who did not have to be listened to in the past.

Thus, even if Kane were a gentle, generous person (which admitted he probably was not), he might have been glad to take Monica and her project on in public shootouts.

Just as Monica wanted to defend her people from attacks, Kane and Parker wanted to defend their designers—and preempt possible assaults—by attacking first. Their sense of having to fend off an attack also may have spurred them into taking the opposition to their ideas personally, and into assuming that the personal hostility or incompetence of their "enemies" had led them to disagree. Kane and Parker are prime examples of people who do not assume that dissident colleagues are potential allies; and so they stereotype in a way that may induce in their colleagues the attacking behavior they fear!

This way of viewing the pressures on Kane suggests two possible ways to pay in valued currencies. First, Monica could have tried to show sympathy for their feelings of being beleaguered, by saying to Kane something like, “it must be hard on you guys to have everyone coming at you about digital signal processors when you are so certain that analog equipment is flexible enough.” That kind of acknowledgment and sympathy could conceivably have been an opening to dissolve the barrier of personalized nastiness that had crystallized between them.

Another, somewhat opposite, possibility assumes that Kane values the currencies of power and clout and would only respect toughness. After one of Monica’s detailed and highly scrutinized presentations to the senior management staff, Kane had actually walked over to her and said, “Nice work.” His compliment may have clued Monica that Kane only respected her when he saw her toughness and competence under fire. If that were the case, she might have responded by bringing everything he was doing out into the open, countering all his ploys by making public what he was up to; or maybe just the threat of that possibility would have been sufficient to back him off. Looking back, Monica realized that it would have been worth a try, especially after attempting the more sympathetic approach first. It is certainly possible that neither Parker nor Kane could have been dealt with effectively with a direct approach, but it is hard to see how acting on the diagnosis we made here, would have made it worse.

STELLA’S WORLD

Dan Stella was on the rise in HEAL-INC, and he was working hard to be an increasingly influential executive. His admission that, like Monica, he suffers fools not at all gladly, coupled with his preoccupation about not fighting in public, suggests that he was working hard to gain credibility as a top executive. Learning to “take it” when publicly attacked was for him a sign of growing maturity; but it wasn’t easy when he was working on cutting-edge technologies and market opportunities that shook up established “truths” and entrenched positions. As was the case with Monica, Dan’s own impatience and his need to follow the hard evidence must have put him constantly on the verge of an explosion, which, with a president like Dorr who wanted things calm and collegial, could indeed be costly.

There was a great deal at stake for Stella, then, in Project Hippocrates. It had enormous potential for the company, and in turn, Stella’s division and his own position. He assigned as its leader a protégé whom he liked and admired. He planned to outlast the early and strong opposition from some company curmudgeons by keeping the project moving inexorably forward in this decentralized company.

In this context, Monica’s apparent inability to resist the public fights must have seemed to Stella a kind of intriguing danger. Her persistence was needed to make the project a success, but her unwillingness to tactically back off and slow down could have made the whole thing blow up. The currencies of patient persistence and control, then, were clearly very important to Stella.

Monica had to determine why she didn’t respond to Stella’s strong hints—and overt suggestions—about what he wanted. At the time, she felt so isolated and stretched that she failed to realize that he was giving her his own kind of support, which included coaching her about pace and self-control. She interpreted his messages as his fear of conflict and not as sage advice

for a real-world strategy. Once she decided that Stella had changed for the worse and was no longer the spontaneous person he had been, Monica no longer appreciated what he offered her. Making a negative attribution—(He’s a coward now)—rather than inquiring or trying to understand, masked his care and wisdom. In effect, she wasted a valuable alliance. Had she been able at the time, as she was later, to say to herself, “Dan is smart and a friend; if he’s telling me to slow down I should pay careful attention and be sure that he isn’t right before I charge ahead,” she could have had more influence with him, not less.

That doesn’t mean that Stella was totally correct in his concerns; Monica didn’t see herself as an unguided missile as he did, and he may have over-learned his lessons about being a calm, self-contained executive. It is possible that Stella’s willingness to slow the pace would make fewer internal enemies but foul up the timing for optimum market entry, allowing a competitor to get there first. As Monica’s boss and supporter, however, Stella needed to be taken seriously and enlisted by her, not written off; had she done that, she could have engaged with him on these issues, and they would have influenced each other toward more timely decisions.

DORR’S WORLD

Diagnosing the world of a company founder and president from several levels down, or from outside, is always problematic. In this case, however, we have Monica’s contacts over the years, Stella’s observations from up close, and Dorr’s public reactions to Monica and Project Hippocrates to work with. Certain currencies and preoccupations are relatively evident.

Dorr had told Monica that he knew Parker was a problem that he was working on it and she should not engage. She interpreted that comment as license to tackle Parker and Kane head on if they make trouble. But if we take the problem from Dorr’s point of view, it looks different. In Parker, he had a historically important, central company figure, one who had made enormous contributions in the past. This person may have been somewhat outmoded, but he was smart and persuasive. His well-cultivated world of followers was critical to the company’s continued success. As a long-time employee who had made major contributions, opinions and status were important; easing him aside fully was as important a challenge as was rushing to market an attractive but unproven new product line.

Into this intricate minuet, which in any company would usually take two to three years to finish without causing the senior executive to lose face, whirls one of your favorite young employees. You have been nurturing her for many years, ever since the time she took you on about an issue and turned out to have done the elaborate homework to back up her controversial views. You have high hopes for her, because she has a keen intelligence and a kind of drive you have seldom been exposed to in a woman at work. But her intensity makes you nervous, because it isn’t always tempered with the kind of patience that you have learned a top executive needs. Like many younger managers, she doesn’t see the many hidden constituencies and issues you have to juggle from your position of overall responsibility, and she doesn’t always understand why you can’t just charge ahead on her behalf when she has shown you the “truth.”

On the other hand, Project Hippocrates is the kind of complicated undertaking that needs her drive and energy to overcome the many factions, including Parker’s, that will try to keep it from

succeeding. If she can get them to agree with her plans, then you will know that Project Hippocrates is the good idea you suspect it is. Despite your own experience of leaving a large company to start your own because the giant couldn't buy into the new technology you pushed, over the years you have come to trust that solid innovations will eventually be supported by consensus, and that ideas which sound good but can't get support probably weren't so good after all.

This interlocking set of circumstances makes you all the more concerned about proceeding carefully. When Monica makes all hell break loose by trying to force many areas to work together, and sets off Parker in the process, you are furious. Now you have to publicly support Parker, and publicly condemn Monica for letting her damn~the~torpedoes~full-speed-ahead style start an all-out war in the organization. Why can't she understand that centralized control has never led to good decisions in any society and stop trying to impose her formidable, but tunnel-visioned, will on all those smart people in our organization?

If this analysis is even close to accurate, we can readily see how Monica missed the chance for support from Dorr by paying him in currencies he valued. Because she did not continue talking with him during the project, she did not fully recognize the subtle chess game that Dorr was playing with Parker; and that failure on her part repeatedly infuriated Dorr. She did too little discussing of Project Hippocrates with Dorr, which left her only the public presentations to the senior staff to get her views across, and made her vulnerable to Parker's attacks. And, she missed the more than obvious message from Dorr that signaled his discomfort with forcing the decision to buy signal processors outside. How many different studies did he have to authorize before she got the message? Because of her blinders, Monica treated the issue as a rational decision rather than a political one that required Dorr's support. Thus, she did not do the kind of lobbying, pre-selling, and working the corridors that Parker and Kane did, and that Stella did on her behalf.

As Monica came to realize, she was so focused on hitting the bull's-eye that she wasn't even aiming at the broad side of the barn it was painted on. The key decision of Project Hippocrates had profound effects on many constituents, especially signal processor design, and could not be treated as mere technical challenges to be overcome by discovering statistical truth. Any important decision in an organization involves bets on the future, and therefore considerable uncertainty, which can never be completely settled by data and analysis. While analysis is an important component, it seldom reveals the whole picture. Failure to recognize that fact about important decisions, and assuming that technical homework is the only kind necessary (or legitimate), is a major reason why otherwise brilliant technical/professional employees have influence problems.

MONICA ASHLEY'S WORLD: PRIORITIES AND RESOURCES

Monica deserves a great deal of credit for not focusing on grabbing her own glory at the expense of Project Hippocrates. She could have easily created even more opposition if she had been perceived as in it for her own career purposes rather than the enormous market potential. At the same time, her blindness on this issue was neither altogether beneficial to her nor, perhaps, the project. She may have so underplayed her own need for the kind of visibility that would have

made her positions more credible that she ended up with less clout than was needed for the project.

Monica's public protection of her team did not help her reputation with Dorr or Stella, for reasons already discussed. It made her appear combative despite her intentions to work collaboratively. Yet, when she could have been promoting the project with powerful individuals, she put her head down and continued to focus on the nitty-gritty of the project. Thus, people who would have been strong supporters were not enlisted by her, nor armed with the facts to realize all that was at stake in such decisions as the outside purchase of signal processors.

Even while she demonstrated unlimited ability to undertake massive amounts of work in the toughest territory, she didn't work on building relationships. Apparently, she was reluctant to do anything that might have been seen as pushing herself forward. When threatened, she doubled her intensity, which led others to see her as supremely confident, but inside she was not sure of her own strength. In retrospect, she realized this was a challenge for her to conquer in order to continue advancing into senior executive ranks.

That doesn't mean that she should start a self-promotion campaign, which would quickly get her written off as too self-interested. Paradoxically, her willingness to argue with Dorr in the senior staff meetings probably made it appear to others that she was only too willing to step into the spotlight. Yet she held back on lobbying and working her connections in private, almost as if that wouldn't be fair.

Monica realizes she must now come to grips with the odd demands on people in her position: Put the tasks first, but don't be afraid to sell what you believe in a way that fits the culture. Some work will have to be done behind the scenes, but that doesn't make it invisible; to those who are being approached one-on-one, you have very high visibility! It is that kind of exposure with which Monica has to learn to be comfortable; she is already too good at the exposure that comes from public confrontation.

URGENCY VERSUS SUCCESS

Monica chose to fix the target date and drive the project toward that; some of her difficulties were set into motion once that decision was made. With hindsight, we can see how that decision hurt Monica's effectiveness even while it helped lend a sense of urgency that probably kept things moving when they could easily have bogged down.

Some would-be influencers fail in the other direction, focusing so hard on the need to please many stakeholders that they never get the task done. They become known as "politicians," which is not a term of respect. Conversely, many otherwise competent organizational members, like Monica, shun the process of selling to, and winning over, key individuals and groups in

favor of more concentration on the task. In the worst cases, these workaholics dismiss all efforts to sell their ideas and act as if “truth” and good ideas will automatically win out—or should.

USING HER RESOURCES

Not everyone trying to create major changes in organizations goes into the fray with as many resources as Monica did. Not only was she very smart and able to work hard, but she had an unusual number of allies. The powerful president of the company knew and liked her, and she had easy access to him. Her boss was a rising star had long been a fan of hers, and tried to coach her and worked behind the scenes to help her. She had enjoyed positive exposure to the board of directors and knew someone there who went out of his way to be supportive. Her main opponent was someone that the president and others knew to be difficult. The company’s technical guru was helpful to her and generally supportive. Monica did not exactly start from a powerless position. With all this going for her, how could she possibly have ended up as she did?

Because Monica was unschooled in the ways of influence, she mobilized these resources far less effectively than she could have. As if she couldn’t quite believe that she was entitled to such good fortune, she held back from drawing on the resources. That leveled the playing field—and almost leveled her too. Instead of doing everything possible to insure that Project Hippocrates happened, and that she would be the manager to see it through, she tried to compensate in hard work for what she didn’t bother to do in relationship building and resource mobilization. One consequence of her misjudgment was that she never broke the project into the manageable chunks that would have let Dorr and others comprehend it. As a result they never got behind it—or her—in the way she needed them to.

EXCHANGE STRATEGY

Because Monica’s relationships with each of the four key players did not lead to mutually satisfying exchanges, it is difficult to discuss specific strategies beyond what has already been described. Instead, we can look at the exchange choices of openness and flexibility again.

Monica probably couldn’t dissemble if she wanted to. She has great integrity and a kind of straight-ahead style that doesn’t allow for pretense. That is a considerable virtue and advantage, except insofar as it may blind her to options in dealing with tough players such as Parker and Kane. Not that it would be smart for her to get nasty and deceptive with them; we have already shown that she could have been tough without being manipulative, by starting with a sympathetic approach and then going public if necessary. Telling Kane that she would not tolerate his running her down behind her back, but doing it in a way that is in itself above board, would enhance her influence and reputation for fair dealing.

The trick is to counter dirty play with directness and an offer to settle differences face-to-face; if that does not work, talking frankly in public about legitimate differences, and about your preference to fight openly about the issues rather than make personal attacks is more effective than underground retaliation.

In one sense, Monica's drive got in her own way when the situation called for flexibility. The most vivid example of this was when the decision to purchase digital signal processors outside kept being reopened. Instead of becoming more irritated and feeling betrayed, Monica should have asked herself why an apparently firm decision kept coming up again, and why Dorr allowed it to. If she couldn't immediately determine what was going on, she might have treated it as another puzzle to figure out, and done some exploration.

After the second senior staff meeting at which she encountered so little support, she might have gone to Dorr, for example, and said something like, "The decision to purchase outside keeps popping up and being re-evaluated. What's going on, and how do you want me to play it in relation to what I think is crucial for Project Hippocrates?" That simple question could have opened up all kinds of possibilities, not the least of which would have been a chance to find out where Dorr stood and what he wanted her to do. And asking him or Stella, or both, for advice would have demonstrated her reasonableness and willingness to bend when necessary. Without this information, she could only speculate about what was going on and attribute less than good motives to her bosses.

In the various meetings with Kane and Parker, Monica was receiving many not-very-subtle clues about what really mattered to them but instead of taking these as data about their concerns, she concluded that they were immovable and she could do nothing but trot out the same "here's-the-rational-reasons-in-a-comprehensive-report" response that already did not work. Like the American who asks a non-English speaker for directions, and when unable to get an answer asks again—in English—slowly and LOUDER, Monica became more and more determined when she was blocked; and she repeated behavior that had already proved unsuccessful. Her keen intelligence should have given her the ability to convert some of that driving energy into a sensitive receptor for the cues her opponents were sending, and change her tack if necessary.

Monica certainly made many successful exchanges with other departments, subordinates, and outside vendors. She traded in currencies of involvement, importance/centrality, vision, challenge, respect (for Edison and others), and her own ability to deliver to Stella and Dorr commitment, dependable task performance, and persistence. But she over-relied on using the currencies with which she was comfortable, and she wasn't flexible or varied enough.

UNREALIZED EXCHANGES

With Parker and Kane, for example, Monica could have tried to make exchanges in which she gave respect or appreciation for past accomplishments in return for less nastiness and greater willingness to at least explore their differences. She might have tried to slow down the task drive with them and work the relationship for a while. Rather than plunge ahead to prove to them with data that they were wrong, she might have gone in one-on-one and explored the sources of their strong attacks, emphasizing that she wanted either to learn from their experience and make it clear that she was not trying to embarrass them personally just because they disagreed.

With Dorr, she had a past relationship that should have made it clear that he was willing to be her confidante, mentor, or sponsor; her willingness to let him continue to advise her not only would have pleased him but also would have taught her valuable lessons. It isn't always easy for a

manager who has been guided by a senior manager over a long period of time to continue in the role of eager learner. Monica had a fierce desire to establish her competence and independence, which probably pulled her away from continuing to cultivate Dorr. But he was the president, and her failure to continue close contact cost her dearly in this instance. (Most people on the executive track would kill for the presidential privileges Monica enjoyed. She threw them away unnecessarily, and, as it turned out, unwisely.)

Finally, Monica could have made a useful exchange with Stella. She might have given him the promise of reliable, controlled behavior, which he very much wanted from her, in return for either more public support or advice on how to get his support where it would do her the most good. He was supporting her in private, but she wasn't aware of it; and, therefore, she felt more isolated than she actually was. Even if she had known, she might have been dissatisfied without more obvious gestures from him; but her willingness to revise her own driving behavior would have made the whole subject more amenable to him.

POSTSCRIPT BY MONICA

"I was recruited by Gary Dorr to start a new businesses unit after a year in the "penalty box." I had gotten several assignments not going anywhere, and was confused. (If you really screwed up, you're "exited"). I was "used" again. He asked me to study the problems of one of our businesses in trouble. It became clear that this business was out of touch with customer requirements. Gary knew, but he wanted someone else to present the data, rather than do it himself, and then he got rid of the head of that business. Next I was asked to start a new business. That business skyrocketed to \$250 Million in 2 years. During that period I introduced some techniques (QFD) that became standard in the company. I brought cross-functional teams together after that. Next I was asked to start a licensing business and became director of corporate licensing, making decisions about which technologies should be held proprietary. That went well.

"I had done a few contracts for HEAL-INC with Japan. While I was in the penalty box, a company lawyer saw my skill, said they could use it, and suggested me. Who knew it would become a critical skill for a new business? I spent a total of 20 years at HEAL-INC, and went on to others afterwards.

"Overall, Project Hippocrates was a positive experience. The company got the product. I learned a lot about the need for allies; I had thought that the brute force of data would do it. I was used, but on other hand, Gary liked to experiment. He once said he wanted to know if women could be used for anything "but making pin money," I was so offended. Yet he knew I would be logical, be outside of the normal chain and conventional assumptions, bringing a new approach to organizational problem solving. I was not invested in any particular structure or function.

"I was recruited away from HEAL-INC around when Gary was voted off the Board of Directors. The company was doing badly, didn't have enough capital to spread across all of its lines, and there were constant fights. I felt very duty bound to HEAL-INC, because of Gary's support and the education I gained, but he said to go, that I had more than paid the company back, so I went

to a non-competitor to start a licensing operation for them, and have done that for two more companies.

“Now I’m glad I took oddball assignments, since they prepared me for later, and I got recognized for being willing to do tough assignments. I figured if I were to make a name for myself, I should do what no one else wanted, and do it very well.”

CONCLUSIONS

Although many of the steps in Monica Ashley’s leadership of Project Hippocrates were condensed to keep the description less than full-book length, we have tried to include enough to let the reader see how the ideas in *Influence without Authority* work in a rich, difficult, and complex organizational setting.

If we have done our job, you can see the way the concepts interrelate and interweave with each other to create a dense, but usable, tapestry. Some of Monica Ashley’s difficulties were probably unavoidable, since the stakes were large; and other observers and participants agree that Parker and Kane were about as immovable as colleagues get. Dynamite may have been too gentle a prod. The problem, of course, is that the prescriptions we have offered to Monica can no longer be tested on those identical people. But her problems were part of a pattern that affected even sympathetic former allies. Monica’s intense belief that, if you have the data on your side, it isn’t necessary to spend time with someone you already know, led her to misdiagnose some of the currencies important to Stella and Dorr; as a result, she couldn’t hold their support. Although there are no guarantees that following the model of potential alliances, diagnosis of your own and the ally’s world, and finding currencies to exchange will work, we believe that it beats all the alternatives. In the process, you can avoid some of the mistakes that led Monica to experience the ashes of personal defeat while watching her project go on to success.

Monica’s experiences illuminated the multifaceted nature of influencing both peers and bosses. All of the book’s concepts are relevant to both directions. But we consistently find that after all has been said, organizational members sometimes complain, “This is all great, but my boss is *really* impossible.” For those readers, see the book’s chapter on the special problems of influencing difficult bosses.

Figure 11-1

PARTIAL ORGANIZATION CHART

