

## Individual Paper: A Case Study of Social Influence

- 12 to 15 pages double-spaced
- 1-page proposal to TA due at the end of Week 2 including a paragraph on the proposed exercise and a paragraph on the Cialdini concepts and why they apply; TA must approve **BEFORE** you attempt the influence exercise.
- The final paper is due at the end of Week 6

Understanding and applying concepts of influence is a critical leadership skill greatly valued in organizations. It is also a microcosm of change, which is a major topic of our course. The goal of this assignment is to write about a particular problem of influence and a recommended solution. The purpose of this assignment is to develop:

- an understanding the social psychological principles that underlie the processes of interpersonal influence;
- an awareness of the tactics used to influence behavior;
- the ability to analyze real situations and take action to bring about desired results; and,
- the ability to apply and think critically about influence tactics.

Identify a situation or problem that you have had or are having where someone (usually another individual, but possibly a group) is not doing what you want them to do. Your goal is to use one or more concepts from Cialdini's Influence to identify a way for you to exercise influence and change the situation. Cialdini's book is organized by chapter, with one concept per chapter (not including the introductory Ch. 1 or the concluding Ch. 8, so there are six to choose from). Chapter 2, Reciprocity, is probably the most useful, but you are free to skim through all the chapters to find the ones that you can apply to your problem. Draw on a current situation in which you would like to be able to influence outcomes. *Do not use a past situation or write retrospectively.* Then, use your chosen concepts to imagine something practical and immediate that you can do to exercise influence. Next, either try it and report results, or role play your actions with a friend and discuss the results of the role play. Finally, analyze the Cialdini's concepts you used, drawing on thinking stimulated by the exercise you designed and carried out.

Your paper should contain the following sections:

### 1. Introduction

Highlight the paper's focus and purpose. Then describe:

- The situation or problem on which you will focus: What is going on, who is involved, what is bothering you about the situation, and what do you wish was different and better? Describe the situation in a concrete but concise manner. Note that you do NOT have to figure out WHY this is happening.
- The influence concepts you will use: What concepts from Cialdini are you going to use? Do not just refer to the concepts, e.g., "Appeal to authority." Explain the concepts in your own words. If you want to give an example, do not use examples from Cialdini's book. Draw on examples from your own experience or reading.

- Why does this influence concept seem applicable here? Take your time “unpacking” the elements of the problem you have described and showing the reader how they link to Cialdini’s concepts.

## 2. The Exercise

Try it out in real life, i.e., try to exercise influence. Do this in an ethical way (consult GREENBERG, pp. 46-55). If you cannot try it out in reality (or ethically), get a friend (preferably someone not in 15.301) to help you role-play the situation. Write out for your friend a brief description of their role, and then act out what you plan to do one step at a time and have them react as if they are in their role. A role-play is not imaginary; it is a planned and possibly somewhat scripted dialogue. In either case, describe what happened.

- What you will say or do, in detail. Give the timing, the words you will use or the actions you will take. How is this based on the concepts from Cialdini, i.e., why do you expect that it will work?
- Outline what effect you intend to have and what indicators you will use to determine whether you exerted influence.

## 3. Analysis

- Did your attempt work? Did it produce the expected results? If not, what went wrong?
- Did the party you were trying to influence invoke the defense mechanisms discussed by Cialdini or other defense mechanisms? How did or could you have neutralized these defensive actions?
- If applicable, explain how other influence tactics described by Cialdini may have been useful or have come into play?
- In your discussion, also critically analyze Cialdini’s ideas about influence in personal situations. Are these concepts applicable, ethical, and useful? How did you have to modify or adapt them? In which cultures, situations, or groups would they be more or less practical?

## 4. Conclusion

- Draw some conclusions regarding what you have learned about influence. You may wish to very briefly summarize your exercise and expectations, but spend most of your conclusion on what you’ve learned (which may include new questions you have!)

### *Format*

- A cover page, providing the student’s name, the date, the name of the TA, and a descriptive title
- Pages are numbered (except the title page, which is not counted!)
- The paper is double-spaced, 12-point type in a standard style such as Times Roman, with 1-inch margins top and bottom and 1-1/4-inch margins left and right
- APA style is used to cite sources within text and for your list of References at the end. Follow the links available from the MIT Online Writing and Communication Center home page: <http://web.mit.edu/writing/>

### ***Organization and logic***

- Are all the expected parts of the paper present and in order?
- Can the reader see clearly how your situation and recommended action strategies relate to the concepts from Cialdini that you are using?
- Does the writer explain key terms? For example, can the reader easily understand how the writer defines “success” or “change”? Are Cialdini’s concepts explained sufficiently?
- Does the writer provide clear indicators by which to evaluate the exercise?
- Are the action steps described in detail?
- Are the results of your exercise presented in a clear and detailed way?
- Is your analysis honest, relevant, and intellectually engaged?
- Can the reader see clear topic sentences and clear transitions between ideas?
- Does the conclusion generalize on what the writer has learned, and possibly offer suggestions or ask pertinent questions?

### ***Use of Language***

- Does the writer use vocabulary that is appropriate for an audience of businesspeople or managers? Is the paper free from slang or overly-specialized jargon?
- Is language concise, precise, and engaging?

### ***Mechanics***

- Are grammar, syntax (sentence structure), and spelling standard written English?
- In particular, are verb tenses used correctly and consistently? Is active voice favored?
- Is the punctuation (including capitalization) correct and consistent?
- Has the writer spell-checked AND proofread the draft?