Winning People Over:

Persuasion Skills for the Enterprising Person

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ABSTRACT

Persuasion is arguably the most important competency for enterprising individuals to master. A new idea, project, or venture needs to find supporters, who need to be convinced to commit and then convinced to contribute. This paper contains a necessarily brief overview of the main factors involved in winning people over. These include knowledge and understanding of the person to be persuaded and the setting; the enterprising person's characteristics, social skills, social capital, perseverance, and strategy; the past relationship of the parties involved; and characteristics of the persuasive message.

Keywords: persuasion, compliance, social skills, perspective-taking, adaptability, expressiveness, impression-management, Ethos, Pathos, Logos, Theory-of-Planned-Behavior, heuristics, peripheral-processing.

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INTRODUCTION

Persuasion is the process of trying to move one or more people to a new or changed belief, attitude, value, or behavior. The focus of this article is on behavior; that is, getting people to commit to an action or course of action. It is about convincing people to say ‘yes’ to a request, but it often goes further than that: Persuasion is about winning people over so that they lend their support to the new venture, whether as a customer, investor, worker, supplier, or any other role.

In this article, the person who does the persuading is referred to as the enterprising person (EP), and the person who is being persuaded is referred to as the persuaded person (PP). As with the other articles in this program, the default context is that of a novice enterprising person who pursues a new venture, whether it is a commercial product or service, a one-off event, or a social enterprise. Enterprising means the pro-active pursuit of a novel venture that entails risk and uncertainty (it might fail), which involves other people. These other people will need to be convinced to take part. This article is about influencing in direct personal contact (face-to-face, phone, email), rather than persuasion attempts by means of advertising or branding.

As stated above, enterprising behavior is a social process; it involves other people and is ultimately about relationship management. The enterprising person works with a number of stakeholders. Although the enterprising person may feel central to the project, all of these stakeholders see themselves as being at the center. From a relationship perspective, the enterprising person is not at the center, but rather at the edges, running around the circle, being involved with the stakeholders and managing the relationships in such a way that the venture is furthered. As any enterprising venture is ultimately about satisfying the needs of stakeholders, it is imperative for the EP to have a deep understanding of who he or she is trying to persuade. They can be users, buyers, clients, suppliers, financers, workers, or business partners. Respectively, these are asked to use, buy, and stay with the product, to provide supplies, to invest, to supply their labor to the venture, and to become part of the new venture team. In the case of new ventures, these stakeholders must be won over to the new idea (if the venture is in the opportunity stage), product or service, and organization. Still other stakeholders are in the EP's personal network (for example, a spouse who needs to be convinced that the new venture is worth giving up quality time together) and business network (who may be asked to do favors or jobs for the new venture).

The relationship management perspective also implies that persuasion often takes place in an ongoing context, rather than being a one-off event. This applies just as much to customers or clients. In many cases, the sale will be part of an ongoing relationship and is therefore less about 'the sale to be made' and more about 'the person to be served'. Even if the sale is a one-off event, it is important for the new venture to further its positive word-of-mouth and reputation. Persuasion in the context of enterprising behavior is more about winning people over than about defeating them.

New ventures often suffer from liabilities that come with being new (Stinchcombe, 1965). New ventures have no track record, are unfamiliar, and their fate is often shrouded in uncertainty. New and emerging offerings may require the development of new levels of expectation, changes of habits, establishment of new standards, the building of desire for products or services, and even the creation of new markets (Ahearne, Manning, and Reece, 2012). This applies to customers as much as to other stakeholders. PPs are asked to commit resources to the venture such as money, time, and energy, which may currently be allocated elsewhere, in return for promised but uncertain benefits. Thus, persuasion is arguably the most important skill for enterprising people to possess.

The term persuasion applies to settings where the PP has at least some level of free choice. There must be a level of discretion for persuasion to exist. A police officer telling a bystander to step back, or a boss ordering an employee to take on a particular task are not examples of persuasion. A robber who puts a gun one someone’s head and demands his wallet is also not persuading. The term persuasion does not apply to contexts where influence is exerted on the basis of authority, hierarchy, or physical force. Persuasion also does not refer to offering money. Paying a landscaper to tend your garden is not persuasion; it is buying a service. However, in many contexts, hierarchical and economic incentives are intertwined with persuasion practices. In the default situation from which this article proceeds, however, the EP is not in a position to order anyone around or to buy her way in. She will need to make clear what she wants, and especially why the PP wants it too.

For enterprising people, having to convince stakeholders to commit is not the only reason why it is important to know about persuasion. Obviously, the better a case is made and presented, the higher its chances of success. If the EP has weak persuasion skills, stakeholders are more likely to refuse a request, and may even go with the proposal of a competitor. One other reason to learn about persuasion is that it is a two-way process. For example, it is not just that an EP persuades an investor to commit money, knowledge, and networks; the investor will persuade the EP just as much in order to arrive at favorable terms. All stakeholders have their own aims and agendas, which they will further using persuasion. Thus, the better the EP understands persuasion processes, the better he or she understands how others attempt to persuade him or her.

Furthermore, EPs often work under conditions of uncertainty, information scarcity or overload, time pressure, and fatigue (Baron, 1998; Gibb, 1993). Typically, in these situations there will be an increased reliance on gut feeling and rules of thumb, as these conditions make it impossible to exhaustively study and analyze the situation. The application of rules of thumb has been studied in persuasion science under the heading of heuristics (Cialdini, 1984/2007). Heuristics are generally efficient and effective, but they also have a long history of use in persuasion, and stakeholders may attempt to influence by means of these heuristics to further their own aims. Enterprising individuals who operate under the conditions outlined above are especially susceptible to these practices. Therefore, the EP needs knowledge about persuasion for 'defensive' purposes as much as for achieving what she has set out to achieve. Heuristics will be discussed at length in a later section of this article.

Various professions involve persuasion as a daily task, including politicians, diplomats, lobbyists, advertisers, sales people, proselytizers, and recruiters. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a vast body of research has emerged that studies the influence processes and tactics that these persuasion professionals employ. Although some people appear to be born persuaders, persuasion is not only an art, but is also a science. Persuasion is a complex process in which many factors play a role. Persuasion skills can be improved through study, practice, and reflection. It is important to be aware of one's own preferences for certain persuasion styles and tactics, their strengths and weaknesses, and to be able to employ a diversity of approaches. Various overviews of the persuasion literature have been written and enterprising individuals are well advised to study these sources (see O'Keefe, 2002; Perlman, 2010; Rogers, 2007). This article provides a brief overview of this literature in the context of the novice EP setting out to realize his or her aims.

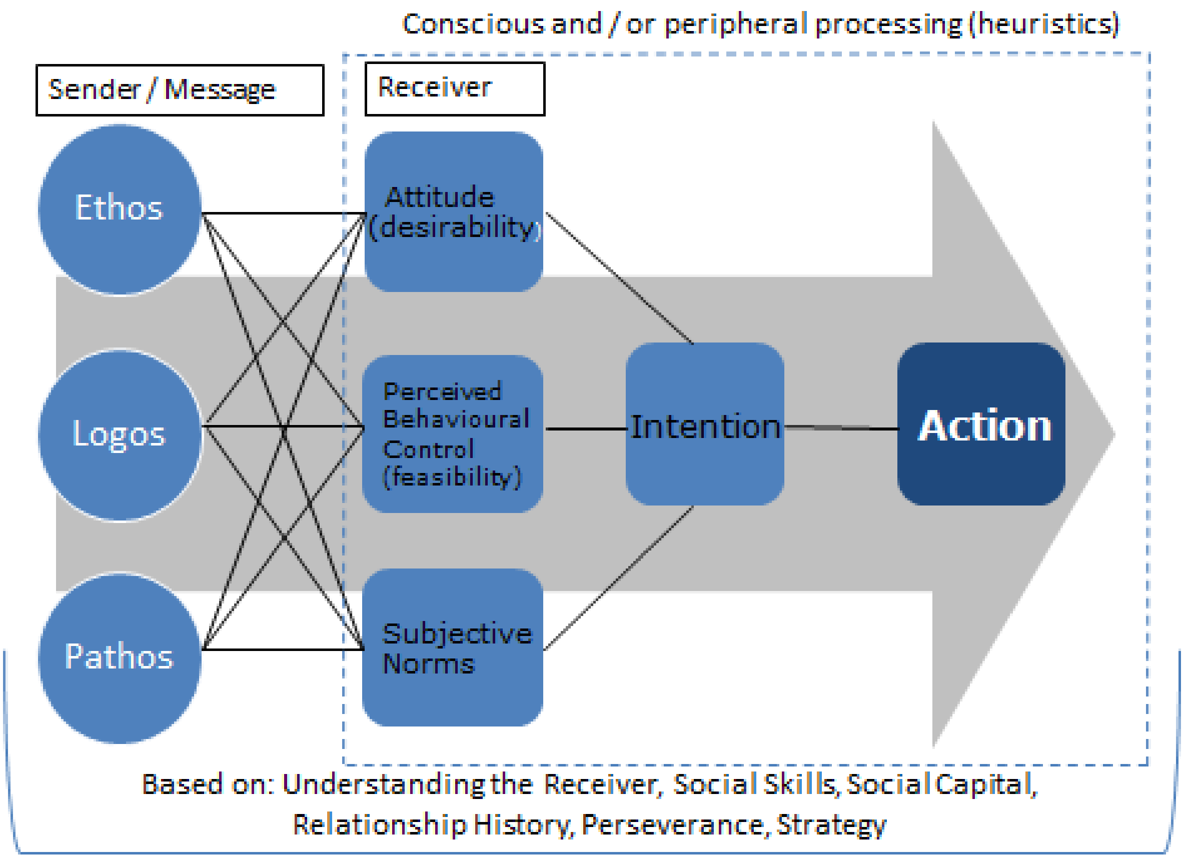
The professions mentioned above all suffer from a poor reputation. They are believed to be sacrificing the truth to further their own interests. They suffer from a low level of trust and must therefore take several extra measures in order to be persuasive. However, persuasion processes are not ethically suspect in and of themselves. Convincing a child to come to the grocery store by telling him that he will receive candy sold at the counter (or given out for free by some clever retail operators) is a way of highlighting the benefits of the proposition. But persuasion can easily become manipulative (Johannesen, 2001). In fact, several people who worked as professional persuaders became so sick of themselves that they stepped out of their industries and wrote books exposing the dubious practices involved (some of these cases are discussed by Levine (2003)). Luckily, as a class, start-up entrepreneurs do not have this tarnished reputation. For EPs, it is very important to build a reputation of honesty and reliability. It is one of the most important factors that people consider when deciding whether they want to have anything to do with the venture.

Suppose that two enterprising individuals have a case to make to a potential participant in a venture (such as a potential investor, client, supplier, or business partner). Only one of them can be rewarded. Even in the simplified case of two competing enterprising people, there is usually a third competitive force at work: the vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Incumbent organizations will try to defend their positions. Which factors will tilt the balance? The remainder of this article provides an overview of these factors. Because a great many elements play a role in persuasion processes, this overview is necessarily brief.

ELEMENTS IN PERSUASION

Figure 1 provides a graphical depiction of the factors that determine outcomes in persuasion processes. All of these will be discussed in more detail in the remainder of this paper. The left-hand side of the figure shows the PP and what he or she communicates (the sender and the message). These factors will be discussed under the heading of the theory of Aristotle (384—322 BC) of rhetorical modes (*ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*) (Aristotélēs, 1954). On the right-hand side is the world of the PP and his/her beliefs, intentions, and actions, which will be discussed under the heading of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). PPs can process influence attempts centrally or peripherally, which will be discussed in the section on heuristics (Cialdini, 1984/2007). The outcomes of the persuasion process further depends on the knowledge and understanding of the PP and the setting; the past relationship of the EP and the PP; as well as the social skills, social capital, perseverance, and strategy of the EP. Although the model does not show loops, it should be noted that persuasion attempts are often ongoing processes rather than one-off events. Therefore, the model applies to events as well as to sequences of events.

Figure 1 Elements in persuasion



KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE PP AND THE SETTING

A good place to start is the EP's understanding of the aims, needs, wants, expectations, circumstances, and agenda of the PP. It is important to have a good understanding of those who need to be won over because, in persuasion, the PP's decision making cannot be overruled through hierarchy, physical force, or monetary incentives (although these may supplement persuasion processes in order to move the PP in the intended direction). What will the PP consider when taking the EP's request into account? How does the request fit with the aims and purposes of the person to whom the request is made? The study of motivation is part of the study of persuasion: in order to motivate the PP to comply with a request, it is necessary to understand what motivates the PP and to develop an appreciation of contextual elements.

SOCIAL SKILLS

A range of social skills are involved in persuasion, particularly on behalf of the persuader (although also for the PP). Baron and Markman (2003, 2008) included perspective taking, adaptability, expressiveness, and impression management amongst the skills that make up social competence. Their research shows that all of these skills contribute positively to gathering information and other resources, and therefore to financial success.

Perspective Taking

Accuracy in perceiving others underlies the ability to know and understand the PP. For this, cognitive perspective taking (being able to think from the other person's point of view) is required, as is empathy (being able to feel what the other person experiences). Although it is sometimes clear which mutual benefits exist, it usually takes preparation and inquiry to be attuned to the PP. The assumption that the other's perspective is known and understood needs to be proven and verified. This requires the ability to step out of one's own frame of reference (hence the saying, "first seek to understand, then to be understood"). The issues that matter to the PP need to be closely studied.

Perspective taking requires the ability to ask questions. Questions get people talking and let them reveal information. But questions do more than just uncovering information; they can also be used to plant ideas, move the discussion, and control the direction of the conversation. Whereas offering reasons will often only convert those who are already positively inclined, asking questions allows others to take ownership.

Effective listening skills are also needed in order to perceive others accurately. An EP might ask questions, but if the EP does not listen to the answers, little is gained. Effective listening is thwarted by barriers (the other's message is processed incompletely) and filters (the message of the other has become distorted). One barrier is thinking of one's own response when the other person is talking. In such a case, attention is directed to one's own thoughts, and to cues that the other is about to pause. What the other person has actually said is not taken in at a deep level. An example of a filter is confirmation bias: to interpret the other's message as being in favor with one's own position. Both barriers and filters can be overcome by practicing reflective listening. This is a technique in which the listener merely mirrors what the other person has said by means of paraphrasing the content of what someone said, reflections of expressed feelings, and reinforcers (such as "uh-uh" or an encouraging smile).

Perceiving others accurately can be difficult in settings where the PP is very different from the EP. PPs may come from another culture, region, social class, or age group. EPs who are able to deal with diverse sets of people have a strong advantage here (see Van Gelderen, 2017d).

One outcome of accurately perceiving others may be the realization that the PP does not really mind and is therefore quite willing to comply with requests. This happens in particular when the request is minor and comes with little cost. Many people also acquiesce easily to minor requests because they like to be amenable and prefer to avoid confrontation. Unfortunately, requests are sometimes not made because an EP censors himself or herself (see Van Gelderen 2017b).

Adaptability

A second social skill that plays an essential role in persuasion processes is social adaptability. This refers to the ability to operate effectively in a wide range of social situations or contexts and interact with individuals from varying backgrounds. EPs will have their own individual preferences for particular approaches to persuasion. Some EPs may prefer logic, others emotion, and others will find personal relationships to be key. In order to meet the changing requirements of various settings involved, however, it is important that the EP is capable of using approaches other than the one that he or she is used to or feels most comfortable with. Conversely, it is important to adapt one's style to the preferences of the PP, as they too will individually differ in how they respond to various forms of persuasion. Adaptability also refers to the ability to be flexible; that is, to change approach if needed. Flexibility is needed when a first approach falls flat. Effective persuaders have a Plan B and are able to resort to other methods.

The EP must be able to adapt his or her approach according to the position of the audience. Audiences vary in terms of whether they are hostile, neutral, uninterested, uninformed, or supportive of a request (or a mixture of those). Each group or subgroup needs to be appealed to in a different ways. Adaptability also refers to finding win–win situations and creative solutions.

Expressiveness and Impression Management

Expressiveness is the ability to express one's identity, emotions and feelings. Expressiveness plays a large part in impression management: the management of the impressions experienced by others. Baron and Tang (2008) viewed impression management as involving *ingratiation* – efforts to induce high degrees of liking in acceptance in others – and *self-promotion* – presenting one's skills and past accomplishments in a positive light. Expressiveness and impression management include the purposeful use of body language, dress, and voice control. Body language is important because it is the first thing that people notice when they meet face-to-face. The typical sequence moves from eyes/face, body posture, clothes, tone of voice, handshake, to words. Obviously, the sequence of how an impression is made is different for other communication channels such as telephone or email. Of all settings, face-to-face has the widest bandwidth: it allows for non-verbal and verbal impressions, and provides immediate feedback. It therefore allows the broadest use of persuasion tools.

In terms of non-verbal cues, the EP typically wants to convey confidence and strength. A famous example is the American president, Franklin Roosevelt. Although in later life he was unable to walk because of polio, only two out of 36,000 pictures taken of the president show him in a wheelchair. Vocal delivery is an important persuasion tool. Skilled persuaders vary their voice in pace and volume; they articulate every word and use pauses before important words. A slight downward inflection is used at the end of a sentence to sound authoritative. Dress is judged on the basis of appropriateness and quality, and needs to be varied according to the occasion, depending on what the EP wants to convey and what the PP wants to see. Non-verbal cues are important because they tend to override words when the two give conflicting signals.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE HISTORY OF THE EP–PP RELATIONSHIP

Social skills are also helpful for building up social capital, another major influence on outcomes in persuasion situations. In the hypothetical case that two EPs would compete for a commitment by a stakeholder, social capital can help in three ways. First, it helps if the EP has social capital with the PP. The history and relationship of the parties involved can be a major influence on the investment decision. This is the case, for example, if the investor is in the network of the EP or, even better, if there are some outstanding favors that still need to be returned (see Van Gelderen 2017d). Secondly, social capital can help to give the EP or the new venture a positive reputation. People in the EP's network may lend their credibility to the venture, increasing the ethos of the EP by lending out their own ethos. Finally, social networks can be helpful for forming coalitions; that is, partnering with another person or organization to make a more persuasive case.

ETHOS, LOGOS, AND PATHOS: ARISTOTLE'S THEORY

Three modes of influencing people were outlined by Aristotle (384BC–322BC) (1954), referred to as *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. Briefly stated, ethos refers to the trustworthiness and credibility of the persuader; logos appeals to conscious thought and refers to the use of arguments, claims, and logic supported by various forms of evidence; and persuasion based on pathos aims to bring out emotion in the PP(s). The three modes of persuasion, as distinguished by Aristotle, are often used concurrently. To give an example, warnings on cigarette packages may show statistics regarding the chances of getting cancer (logos), while citing a credible source such as the US surgeon-general (ethos), accompanied by a picture of a rotten lung (pathos).

Ethos

Ethos is an ancient Greek word for character that refers to the credibility and trustworthiness of the source of the request: the enterprising person and his/her venture. A third dimension might be dynamism: an energetic delivery appears to contribute to ethos. Ethos is of particular importance to enterprising individuals because of what is referred to as the liability of newness. In the default case used in this article, the new idea, product, or service must compete with existing offerings and the EP and his/her organization are not well established either. Therefore, existing offerings have the advantage of being tried and tested and being known and familiar. Even if the proposed idea, product, or service is superior to its competition, people may still question the person and the organization behind it. As Conger (1998) stated, being persuaded is risky, and whenever anything new or contrarian is offered, people will wonder what credibility this person or organization possesses.

Trust and credibility are a function of a range of factors. One is personal integrity, which relates to the immediate context of interacting with the PP, as well as, in a general sense, to having a reputation for behaving in accordance with high ethical standards. Ethos is enhanced if the persuader is perceived as being sincere (believes in what he/she says), authentic, and telling the truth. Weak points in a proposal can be helpful to build trust, as being upfront can be seen as apparently acting against one’s own self-interest, enhancing ethos. Being sincere and truthful will also help prevent painful revelations later on. If perceptions turn out not to match reality, ethos will be lost rather than gained. In the Internet age, reputations are easily damaged.

The importance of reputation relates to the importance of social capital (Van Gelderen, 2017d). Ethos is bestowed, it is a perception. What others say about the EP affects that perception. Similarly, enterprising people will make use of their networks to increase ethos by means of testimonials, referrals, and endorsements. On a more formal level, EPs can form advisory boards and alliances that grant them ethos by association. Social capital also allows for the formation of coalitions in order to increase influence.

Being likeable is another factor that drives trust. Making a pleasant impression, listening well, and being able to understand and adapt to others' points of view will help increase liking. There is such a thing as a 'power of nice', as business decisions often work in one person's favor based on feelings of comfort, connectedness, and trust, rather than a purely economic rationale. Having a 'presence' and 'charisma' also help a person become influential.

Credibility is another driver of ethos and an important factor therein is expertise. Expertise requires a deep knowledge of the venture idea, product or service, organization, market conditions, and competitors. Expertise has both informative and normative functions: it provides people with high-quality information, and makes people feel comfortable in trusting that information. Credentials such as college diplomas help to convey expertise. Similarly, although the venture may be new, the EP may have past experiences and successes that can serve as a track record. If expertise is still lacking, it can be hired, loaned, or learned. For investors, a business plan and putting up one's own money will serve as credibility signals. One advantage for EPs is that they are often able to make deals and decisions directly. This authority to make decisions adds to ethos in comparison with people who have to function in organizations with several layers of authority, and still need to get approval from a line manager.

Ethos is not a person's property – it is a perception that others have of that person. Therefore, all of the social skills mentioned in the previous section are important in establishing ethos. Perspective taking, social adaptability, expressiveness, and impression management are all required because what drives ethos will vary according to context. The task is to find out what constitutes ethos in the eyes of the PP and to act on that. Being flexible and receptive to the needs and views of the PP will increase ethos even further because it facilitates the perception that the EP is in tune with his or her audience. However, the need to manage impressions and to adapt to PPs may conflict with important drivers of ethos; namely, authenticity and sincerity. This raises the question how one can be credible yet adaptable. Here, the importance of integrity and high personal standards (or good acting skills) come to the fore.

Within the field of entrepreneurship studies, Ethos has been investigated under the heading of legitimacy. This term does not refer to being lawful (although that is part of it), but rather to whether the idea, person, or organization is seen as appropriate, acceptable, desirable, stable, and comprehensible (Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeits, 2002). Stinchcombe (1965) described legitimacy as a remedy for the liabilities of newness that come with new ventures: the absence of a track record, a lack of familiarity and reputation, a lack of being in accordance with established rules and customs, and information asymmetry (the EP knows more about the venture than the stakeholders (Akerlof, 1974)). If not only the venture, but also the industry itself is new, the legitimacy problem is even more severe (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Legitimacy can take several forms: how taken-for-granted is a new form (cognitive legitimacy); the extent to which a new form conforms to recognized principles or accepted rules and standards (socio-political legitimacy); whether the new form has positive benefits for the stakeholders (pragmatic legitimacy); and how morally acceptable the new venture is (normative legitimacy) (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeits, 2002).

Enterprising individuals can take various actions to build legitimacy. These actions can be substantial. For example, new ventures can acquire socio-political legitimacy by visibly conforming to regulations, rules, standards, and expectations created by governments, credentialing associations, or professional bodies. Actions can also be symbolic. A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something else; it conveys meanings beyond its intrinsic content or obvious functional use. For example, an office serves the intrinsic purpose of being a place where people work, but a prestigious office address symbolically suggests prosperity and high status. EPs can use cultural symbols strategically to deal with low levels of legitimacy (Zott & Huy, 2007). Gardner and Avolio (1998) identified the development and manipulation of symbols as a particular subset of impression management, which they call “staging.”

Zott and Huy (2007) identified four symbolic action categories that facilitate resource acquisition: conveying the entrepreneur’s personal credibility (capability and commitment); professional organizing (professional structures and processes); organizational achievement (the venture’s age, size, or performance, a (partially) working product or technology); and the quality of stakeholder relationships. Zott and Huy (2007) noted that symbolic management is more effective or relevant under certain conditions. A low amount of similarity in, for instance, values, norms, expectations, or status can weaken any symbolic effort that the entrepreneur is making. Second, if the venture’s intrinsic quality is highly visible, and there is little uncertainty in the marketplace about a venture’s offering, then symbolic actions are less relevant and have little effect.

Logos

Logos refers to appeals to rationality through the use of arguments, claims, and logic. It is supported by proof such as facts, figures, statistics, testimonials, experiments, pilots, trials, and demonstrations.

Logos is not necessarily dry and boring. On the contrary, the persuasion literature recommends making facts and arguments vivid whenever possible (Mills, 2000), and making positions come alive by using case studies rather than just statistics, although some statistics have sufficient impact by themselves (as in “African Americans make up 15 percent of the US population, but 45 percent of its prison population”). Statistics can be presented in a variety of forms and can often be shown in pictorial form rather than just numbers. Also, logos does not mean drowning people in information. Because people have selective attention and memory, it pays to make only three to five points. Repetition is a useful strategy, as not all people will absorb the point the first time.

With logos, it is important to have a strategy for arranging arguments and proof. One consideration is the state of the PP. More one-sided arguments can be given to believers, but multiple sides need to be presented when confronting a disagreeing audience. The more knowledgeable the audience, the more multi-faceted the arguments need to be. If presenting two sides, the unwanted position should be refuted. There are various ways to organize facts and arguments, depending on the purpose and setting: well-known formats are the problem-solution, refutation, cause-and-effect, and the so-called motivated sequence (attention-need-satisfaction-visualization-action) presentation sequences (Manning, Ahearne, and Reece, 2012). Another consideration is whether a small or a large commitment is being asked for.

When deciding on how to present arguments (for instance, whether the best arguments should come first or last), primacy and recency effects must be considered. People tend to remember the opening and the closing of a presentation, so presentations should preferably have a strong openings and endings. Primacy and recency also need to be considered when other presentations are being given; it is best to present first or last. Another consideration in the logos strategy is likely attacks by competitors or concerns of the PP. Concerns can be pre-empted by inoculating PPs against them. Acknowledging and discussing anticipated critique can also help to build trust.

Effective logos enhances ethos as trust and credibility are increased when the persuading EP comes across as knowledgeable. Conversely, logos can be enhanced when evidence is cited from credible sources.

Pathos

Pathos is about bringing the audience into a particular state or mood. This can be done by appealing to emotions, such as hope, anger, joy, fear, or disgust. Pathos can also include references to loss and discomfort, framing requests in what the PP stands to lose if he or she does not comply. Calling on ideals and virtues (courage, excellence, generosity, fairness) is pathos-based persuasion, as are calls on vices. Feelings of justice or injustice can be invoked to influence decisions. Appeals to needs such as security, power and sex are also part of pathos. Yet another pathos tactic is to play on people's need to feel important (ego-needs). PPs can also be brought into more susceptible states through the use of stories, metaphors, analogies, and vivid examples (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens, Jennings & Devereaux Jennings, 2007; Ruebottom, 2013). Whereas Logos is usually based on words, pathos is often invoked by means of images (Rogers, 2007). Images have stronger personal connotations than words. A passionate delivery helps to induce pathos.

Pathos-based persuasion is not necessarily about exerting influence by making people emotionally susceptible. Rather, feelings provide the validation for logos; whether an argument or consideration is persuasive can be determined based on the emotions that they invoke. Emotions can serve as personal proof, as they reflect underlying values or needs. Emotions have a number of advantages over logic as they cause people to drop their defenses, distract from the EP's intention to persuade, require less cognitive effort than logic, are more interesting and easier to recall than logic, and lead more quickly to behavior change. Emotions are often action tendencies that propel people into action.

As with ethos and logos, the underlying social skills (understand, adapt, express, impress) determine the effectiveness of pathos. As Conger (1998) stated, effective persuaders understand the emotional state of their audience; sometimes strong, forceful points are needed, and sometimes only a whisper is required. Mood has an influence on the decisions that people make; people who are in a positive mood tend to be more prone to persuasion than people in a negative mood. Hence, advertisers aim to put their targets in a positive mood by means of carefully selected music, humor, or glamour models with the aim of connecting positive emotions to their brands and symbols.

The use of language needs to be considered when aiming for pathos. Mills noted that it makes a difference whether a car contacted, touched, hit, or smashed into another car; and that even though there are typically two sides in a war, all countries have a Ministry of Defense, not a Ministry of Attack. Research on psycholinguistics (Mills, 2000) shows that particular words have great appeal, particularly *new* and *free*. Other examples include money, save, proven, safe, now, guarantee, you, your, and fun. Personalizing helps generate emotions: rather than announcing 4 percent inflation, more interest is generated by saying that ‘inflation is robbing us of our savings’. The use of metaphors (such as the iron curtain, the domino theory, the iron lady) generate emotion, as do organizing metaphors (like referring to the world as a stage, a jungle, or a school).

A good strategy when aiming for pathos can be to ask questions, particularly questions that generate emotion. Open questions are useful for drawing out information, but they do not disturb. Implication questions generate emotion when asking about negative impacts or effects. For instance, when selling liability insurance, a question could be: ‘What would happen to your family if your child would knock over a 1,000,000 dollar vase?’ The thinking that this question generates allows people to own a problem.

THE PERSUASION PROCESS

Moving to the persuasion process, and therefore to the world of the PP, we enter the realm of beliefs and opinions that people hold, and that the EP may wish to influence. In this program (Van Gelderen, 2014), the focus is on behavior; that is, getting people to act or to commit to a course of action (as opposed to merely achieving a change in how people think or feel). Still, in most cases an inner change precedes outward behavior (the exception is the operation of heuristics, discussed in the next section, which allows people to be persuaded without even being aware of it).

In Van Gelderen (2017b), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was used to analyze how EPs can take action. The TPB is invoked again here, this time in the context of getting stakeholders to take action. The TPB is a theory of intentional behavior and states that people’s intentions are a function of attitude (desirability: do I like it?), perceived behavioral control (feasibility: can I do it?), and subjective norms (am I allowed to do it?). Attitude, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms are theorized to be made up by beliefs and their weights (levels of relevance or importance).

For example, in the context of starting a business, an attitude is be made up of beliefs (if I have my own business I will have more freedom, have to work harder, have more financial insecurity) and the evaluation of those beliefs (I find freedom very important, and I don’t mind working hard or facing financial insecurity). The same applies to perceived behavioral control (finding qualified employees will be difficult, and having qualified employees will be instrumental to the success of the firm); and for subjective norms (my spouse will not like it if I give up my job and start a business, and I care a lot about what my spouse thinks). Together, each of these determine whether a (strong) intention is formed.

Thus, persuasion attempts can target beliefs, as well as the importance of those beliefs. They can put forward new beliefs and their evaluations, modify existing ones, or highlight the salience of some at the expense of others. Another route to persuasion is showing the consistency (or inconsistency) between concurrently held beliefs and evaluations (Festinger, 1954), as people generally feel a need to be consistent in their beliefs and actions. People will feel cognitive dissonance especially if the degree of inconsistency is large and the issue is seen as important. There are several defense strategies that PPs can use to maintain inconsistent belief and action systems, such as selectivity (selective attention, exposure, perception, recall), rationalization, denial, suppression, and compartmentalization. EPs can bring inconsistencies to the fore, although this can backfire if the PP regains consistency by embracing the opposite of what the EP wanted to bring about (O'Keefe, 2002; Perlman, 2010; Rogers, 2007).

Attitude beliefs concern the benefits and disadvantages of the proposed course of action, and their perceived importance and relevance. Attitude beliefs can be factual (*beliefs about*) or argument- or value-based (*beliefs in*) (as in 'I feel that we should help') (Rogers, 2007). In many cases, the PP will have concerns and will form objections to what is being proposed, for example questioning the need for the idea, product, or service (in terms of desirability), the timing, or the price. The PP may claim that the course of action will not make a difference, or is taking too much effort. Sales textbooks such as Manning, Ahearne, and Rees (2012) offer various methods to deal with PP concerns and objections, such as direct denial, indirect denial, feel-felt-found formulas, need-satisfaction questions, superior benefits, demonstrations, and third-party testimonies.

Similarly, PPs are likely to raise perceived behavioral control- (control or difficulty) related concerns; that is, whether the requested action is feasible (rather than desirable). It is also possible that PPs cite a control belief for the sake of good relationships, when in reality they do not like a course of action. The task of the persuader is to convert, within bounds of integrity, 'I cannot do it' into 'I can do it'; 'others didn't think it was a good idea' into 'others found it to be a good idea'; 'I have no resources available' into 'resources are available', or 'not that many resources are needed'; or 'I don't have time' into 'I do have time'. Control beliefs cannot just be targeted at the belief level; it is also often possible to make changes in the external world that create the opportunity, remove the obstacle, or show a role model.

Subjective norms can relate to juridical norms as well as to personal values. Here, the EP can target beliefs ('my friend will not like it') and the importance attached ('it's important to me what my friend thinks'). Another norm-related concern is loyalty to an existing arrangement, such as a buyer feeling committed to an existing supplier. One strategy for dealing with hostile belief systems (whether attitude, perceived behavioral control, or subjective norm-related) is to pitch the request as being commensurate with more important considerations. People tend to defend their views and feel the need to be consistent. Therefore, finding higher common ground is an important way to resolve differences. For example, in the case of loyalty to the existing supplier, where the EP has a cheaper offering, reference can be made to the overriding objective of making a profit, perhaps in conjunction with scaling down the request to a product trial, rather than sale, thus offering a minor concession that is deemed acceptable.

This raises the point that, in the persuasion process, it is not necessarily only the PP who needs changing – it can also be that the request is modified to fit the PP's intentions, attitude, control beliefs, and subjective norms. People pay more attention to and favor arguments that support their own needs. Mills (2002) recounted a story of Dale Carnegie, who, as an 11-year-old, asked the children in his street to feed his rabbits on a daily basis; they initially refused, but then complied later on the basis of the promise that the baby rabbits would be named after them. Especially in the context of novel products or services, there is room to maneuver, as people often may not know what they want. In the context of sales, attention to people's needs and circumstances may also result in different offerings, whether full line selling, cross-selling, upselling, or down-selling. In the context of an investor who claims to have no money available but does have time, the request could be changed to asking for advice.

In the persuasion process of EPs, influence is exerted to get people to comply with requests. Merely changing one's beliefs or intentions (promises) does not guarantee that action will be taken. EPs must ensure that people fulfill their promises. In some cases, it may help to make commitments in writing, or in public. In some situations, people give generic consent (for example, an investor agrees to invest), after which the persuasion processes end with negotiations. Another example is persuading someone to come and work for the venture, after which the conditions need to be negotiated. In this case, negotiation is part of persuasion, but in a far more narrowly defined context.

PERIPHERAL PROCESSING: HEURISTICS

Research in cognitive psychology has resulted in a few well-supported conclusions (Baron, 1998). Our capacity to consciously process new information is severely limited. Therefore, as human beings, we seek to minimize conscious cognitive effort by resorting to automatic processing of information whenever possible. This process of automatization itself is also automatic. Our capacity to experience and regulate cognition, emotion, motivation, and action on both unconscious and conscious levels allows for efficiency and effectiveness. The unconscious level processes information swiftly and immediately (peripheral processing), whereas conscious processing is slow and demanding. Therefore, only a very small percentage of decisions are processed consciously (a full consideration of pros and cons, and their weights). Many decisions are made based on peripheral cues. For example, when choosing a bottle of pinot noir out of a stack with 25 unknown brands, all in the same price range, a person may select the bottle with the nicest label. Even American presidents are often chosen on the basis of peripheral cues such as signs of vitality (Mills, 2000). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Theory, peripheral cues are often used in situations where the PP lacks motivation and is not involved (O'Keefe, 2002; Perlman, 2010; Rogers, 2007).

One way to reduce cognitive effort, using peripheral rather than conscious processing, is through the use of heuristics; that is, mental shortcuts or rules of thumb. They allow for efficient and effective decision making: rather than having to use scarce mental capacity, people are able to make swift and usually effective decisions, often without being aware that these heuristics are in operation. The operation of heuristics can be a major determinant of outcomes in persuasion attempts. According to Cialdini (1984/2007), when using heuristics, the PP typically processes decision triggers automatically, does not counter-argue, and does not use intellectual analysis. As is the case with peripheral cues, heuristics are often used in decisions where the PP is unmotivated or unable: the PP does not care much, lacks knowledge, or is distracted. Here, PPs may comply simply out of politeness or affiliation needs (Rogers, 2007). However, heuristics (and peripheral cues) also operate in situations where the PP is involved, but is not able to utilize his or her rational capacity because of uncertainty, information overload or scarcity, time pressure, fatigue, or novelty. These are conditions that are often encountered by EPs (Baron, 1998; Gibb, 1993).

It is important to be aware that all these principles work at both the conscious and unconscious levels. When just peripherally processed, the PP is often unaware that he or she is being influenced; Cialdini calls this *persuasion jiu-jitsu*. However, receivers use both conscious and peripheral processing, and it is difficult to predict which one will be used. For example, using a credible source to back up a claim can be an argument as well as a peripheral cue. It also influences the degree of elaboration: it may increase interest and therefore conscious processing, but it may also lead to peripheral processing (when people do not give the issue further consideration because they trust the expert).

The heuristics that we use are not irrational or unwise – in fact, the contrary is true. Cialdini's (1984/2007) research reports studied a number of heuristics that play a central role in human cognitive functioning. These have developed over thousands of years of human evolution and tend to be central both to a person's psychological organization as well as to the functioning of society. The relevance to the topic of persuasion is that these heuristics can be triggered in persuasion contexts. However, persuasion professionals play to these rules in order to gain an advantage. Heuristics can be used in ethical as well as in manipulative ways. Therefore, it is important to be aware of these heuristics, to use them properly, and to guard against improper use by others. Cialdini (1984/2007) discerned the following heuristics (see Rhoads and Cialdini, 2002, for a more recent overview): reciprocation, commitment and consistency, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity. These are discussed below.

Reciprocation is the societal rule whereby, if someone has done you a favor, you must return it. This is not just a societal rule that is externally enforced (if you don't buy a round of drinks when all others do, you're less likely to be invited back); it is also internalized in the sense that most people would feel uncomfortable denying the return of a favor when asked. Reciprocation is not just two-directional. It goes even further in the sense of 'generalized reciprocity' (Trivers, 1971), that you do not even need to return the favor to the same person. For example, you might help someone who fell down on the pavement and injured himself. Even though you wouldn't expect this particular person to help you if the same would happen to you, you would expect others to help you if you were in the same situation.

In the context of persuasion, this implies that EPs have a higher chance of succeeding if they have credits with the person or group they attempt to influence. Hence, the primary principle of networking is not to get things out of people for your own benefit, but rather to engage and participate with people to accrue credits (see Van Gelderen, 2017d). In persuasion contexts where no previous contact has taken place, and therefore no credits on either side are at play, persuaders can still attempt to build up pressure for reciprocation. For example, sales people may give their time, attention, and service. Charities sometimes include a small gift in their direct mail. Internet entrepreneurs offer a free version of their service, not just to let you experience its benefits, but also to build loyalty (Anderson, 2010). The reciprocation rule also operates in the context of concessions (reciprocal concessions). Here, a favor is asked and denied, after which a smaller request is made. Hence, the rule-of-thumb when having two legitimate but competing requests is to present the bigger one first. As stated above, the reciprocation rule works at both the conscious and the unconscious level. Rational consideration may also lead you to conclude that you want to return a favor. More often, favors are returned automatically.

Commitment and consistency. People like to act consistently. This has great value both psychologically and societally. It consumes cognitive capacity if beliefs and courses of action are continuously reconsidered, and others expect us to be consistent (whimsical people are not held in high regard). In the context of persuasion, one prescription is to try to get small commitments, as they may lead to bigger ones. This applies especially to beliefs and actions that people take and with which they have come to identify. For example, a person may be asked to perform a very minor action in order to live in a more environmentally friendly manner. If that action causes the person to start thinking of himself or herself as a person who cares for the environment, then larger commitments may be asked for at a later stage (however, there is also the risk that a person will feel that their minor action has been sufficient).

People are more likely to follow up on their commitments if they are made public (O’Keefe, 2002). Businesses apply foot-in-the-door techniques extensively in order to gain a small commitment in the hope of achieving bigger gains later. Many online businesses work on this principle by giving away a basic version of their service for free (the reciprocation principle is also at play here). An ethically inferior tactic is known as the ‘lowball’: something is sold or promised and, after the PP has accepted, one of the benefits is taken away. By this time, however, the target has identified with the new situation and will accept the reduced offer.

Social proof refers to the heuristic that if others are doing something, it must be good. As with the other rules-of-thumb, they greatly reduce cognitive pressure: by following the cues of others, demands on scarce cognitive capacity are reduced. From an evolutionary perspective, there are benefits for the group because paying attention to what others in the group are doing helps the group to survive.

This heuristic is applied in a wide range of persuasion settings. Book and music sellers publish sales rankings, bestseller lists, and popularity scores. Businesses promote products or services as ‘fastest-growing’ or ‘biggest-selling’. Beggars and café waiters put up coins for display to make it look as if others have given already. Charities publish lists of generous donors. Clubs organize waiting lines even though there is plenty of room inside. Theatres hire people who applaud. Businesses publish testimonials on their websites. Review websites are also forms of social proof, although there is increasing concern about review rigging. The prescription for persuasion settings is to show evidence that relevant others are also buying, investing, supplying, working, or whatever is the objective of the persuasive effort.

We particularly pay attention to what others are doing under conditions of ambiguity (or uncertainty) (Cialdini, 1984/2007). The problem is that, under these conditions, most of the others do not know either. We also pay more attention if many others are doing something, and pay attention to people who are similar to us. As with the other heuristics, the social proof heuristic generally makes sense and is a valid rational consideration. In many settings, however, it is unconsciously applied.

Liking. We are more easily persuaded by people whom we like. In many situations, PPs will make a decision based on whether a person or venture or brand gives them a good feeling. As with the other heuristics, using liking as a peripheral cue reduces cognitive effort. We can simply decide on the basis of feelings of sympathy or antipathy, rather than having to make a calculation. Social media sites have made 'friends' more important recently for influence purposes as they allow for the fast spread of trusted information and recommendations.

Being likeable is based on such things as being empathic, interested and interesting. Finding common ground is another route to liking as we tend to like people who are similar to as. In general, attractive people are more liked, unless they use their attractiveness for personal gain. The use of liking in sales settings can be seen in celebrities advertising a brand: the brand borrows the popularity of the celebrity to create a positive association with the product or service. Another example is the good guy–bad guy scenario played out by car salespeople. The script is that the salesperson makes a call to his or her boss on your behalf to fight for a better price. That same salesperson might also fake similar interests: If you carry golf clubs with you, he or she may also play golf; if you carry swimming gear, the salesperson will also be a swimming fan, etc. Salespeople in very expensive clothing stores or jewelry stores will give cues that they greatly admire you, especially if you buy. People value authenticity, so good salespeople have to love people or be great actors.

Heuristics are typically not applied in isolation, but are combined, which is why it is so hard to resist being persuaded when attending a Party Plan or Tupperware party. Here, one is invited by a friend to her or his home to buy products. There is reciprocity (the friend will hand out drinks and snacks), commitment, and consistency (why attend if one is not buying), social proof (the other attendees are also buying), and liking (after all, it's a friend).

Following **authority** figures is a good idea most of the time. As a toddler, it is generally a good idea to follow the guidance of one's parents. Later, parents are supplemented by school teachers. Government-appointed authority figures such as policemen are well-heeded. Experts have knowledge that one wants to utilize, the dentist advises which cavity to fill, and the mechanic says which part to replace. In sum, it saves a lot of mental energy to trust these authority figures. It also serves a societal function as it allows societies to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next, and to keep social order.

Again, trust in authority can be a rational consideration, but authority works on an unconscious level as well, and people often respond automatically to authority cues. For example, in one study reported by Cialdini (1984/2007), the same person gave one-minute presentations in five different large classes of university students. He was announced respectively as a tutor, lecturer, senior lecturer, professor, and famous overseas professor. Afterwards, the various classes ware asked to guess his height. With each rise in status, he was estimated to be 5 cm taller. Symbol and impression management conveying authority have already been discussed under *Ethos*.

In the course of human evolutionary history, **scarcity** has been a very important cue. When a source of water or food was found, it was important to utilize it, as it may not be there at a later stage. Generally speaking, people find something to be more attractive when it is scarce.

This concept has been applied in a wide range of sales settings, including right-here-right-now deals, exclusive outlets, and limited editions. The popular coupon websites play on this principle: not only are the deals good, they can only be had today (or only for the first 1000 customers). Fast-selling products may be kept at low or medium levels on display, even though plenty are in stock. Some hyped products are even planned to be sold out in order to make them appear more attractive.

People often believe that products and services that are difficult to obtain are more valuable, as the availability is connected to the quality. Moreover, as they become less available, potential buyers lose the freedom to decide whether or not, or at what moment they want to obtain the product or service. This can result in actions to obtain the product right away, to prevent a situation of not having the ability to buy the product (Cialdini, 1984/2007). People pay more attention to loss messages than to gain messages (Cialdini, 1984/2007; O'Keefe, 2002). Therefore, the prescription is that, in persuasion contexts, it should not only be emphasized what the PP stands to gain, but also what he or she stands to lose.

PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance (Van Gelderen 2017c) is an influential factor in ongoing persuasion processes. Joe Krauss, founder of Excite (Livingston, 2008, pp. 70), said:

> *I see way too many people give up in the startup world. They just give up too easily. Recruiting is a classic example. I don't even hear the first "no" that somebody says. When they say "No, I'm not interested" I think "Now it's a real challenge. Now's when the tough part begins. (…) You have to win them over".*

Rather than giving up after receiving a 'no', the persistent EP tries again, perhaps in a different way. Once again, social adaptability is called for. Not giving up can, by itself, add to ethos if it adds to the perception that the EP is highly committed (there is also the risk of being seen as pushy and unwilling to take no for an answer). Van Gelderen (2017c) listed a range of other strategy categories that can be brought to bear on the situation.

A CONCLUDING FACTOR: STRATEGY

A final factor that determines outcomes in competitive persuasion settings is having a strategy. Strategic thinking requires self-awareness (knowing one's own strengths, weaknesses, and preferences), knowing where to go and how to get there, and knowing the PP. Acting on instinct and intuition should be supplemented with conscious practice, in the sense of anticipating persuasion processes beforehand, or in the sense of reflecting on improvements afterwards. As this article has made clear, influence can be exerted in many ways and the strategy serves to optimize the mix of factors involved in order to maximize effectiveness.

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