



## The Influential Mind: What the Brain Reveals About Our Power to Change Others

### A Mente Influyente

Year of publication: 2018

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384 pages

Link for purchase: <https://amzn.to/2rlk1mL>

Released in Brazil as part of the Origem Collection, "The Influential Mind" dissects the phenomenon of influence in an interdisciplinary manner. With a solid scientific basis, the work brings the results of recent studies - many conducted by the author herself - real stories and cases that illustrate the power of this aspect of human relations.

Over nine chapters, the author tells personal experiences that triggered her scientific curiosity about how we influence each other and how this ability can be optimized. Scientific studies are described in a playful way and exemplified.

The result is an easily readable book in which the reader can associate facts, concepts, and strategies with life situations. The application of influence methods can be done immediately, at the end of each chapter reading.

The original edition of the book, "The Influential Mind", was selected as the best work of 2017 by media outlets with the impact of "Forbes", "The Times", "Huffington Post", "Bloomberg", among others. It also won, in 2018, the literary prize of the British Society of Psychology.

### Score

# 8

8 Aplicability  
9 Inspiration  
8 Innovation  
8 Impact on results  
9 Structure

### Main ideias of the book

- Regardless of what occupation and social position people hold, they all have one task in common: influencing other people;
- To influence behaviors and beliefs, it is necessary to understand how the human brain works;
- Focusing on a point where there is agreement or common motivation and intensifying efforts to emphasize the same goal is more effective than confronting each other's vision and end up increasing the other's resistance;
- Emotion is one of the main vehicles for the transmission of ideas from one mind to another - and therefore of influence;
- The reward-punishment binomial plays an important role in the mechanisms of influence. It is natural for humans to seek good experiences and to avoid pain and punishment;
- Knowing when to give up control and giving someone else a choice - recognizing their instrumentality - is an effective exercise of influence, perhaps the one that brings the most results;

- Communicating and informing are ways to exert influence;
- Reported information should bring hope, not fear. Fear brings inaction while hope motivates;
- The relationship of social learning to influence is that only one person can have a significant impact on the decisions of thousands of others. Just as others influence us, we influence others;
- Wisdom is shrouded by crowds, but often belonging to a small number of people.

## For whom is this book suitable?

The book is indicated for professionals, undergraduate and postgraduate students from business, society and psychology, scientists, specialists, managers and executives who are looking for instrumentalizing their human capabilities - including influence - to achieve better results in all aspects of life.

It is also recommended for opinion makers, social media influencers and media professionals, as their careers are based on their ability to influence. Despite being accessible to everyone, its content can be better used by those who already have a professional or academic background.

## Overview of the book

### Prologue

Influence in our society is seen as a sophisticated and innate skill. Great leaders and statesmen seem to have a supernatural ability to influence millions of people, guide them in their decisions, and win their support on a variety of issues - for better or worse.

However, influencing others is something we do naturally. A parent who raises his child according to his culture and precepts knows exactly how to do so by setting rewards and punishments. In the workplace, where relationships are more delicate, a good leader knows how to get the best out of his team.

The problem is that in certain situations we use flawed strategies. We confront beliefs, point out moral defects, leave other people at bay and unresponsive, and we don't know when to give up control and recognize their abilities. The good news is that a change of approach is enough to get others to do what you ask.

There are seven factors that determine our thinking:

- Previous beliefs
- Emotion;
- Incentives;
- Instrumentality;
- Curiosity;
- Social learning and;
- State of mind.

Each one is dissected throughout the following chapters.



*The number of people who suffer from hole phobia apparently trumps the number who suffer from cancer phobia, which is number 11 on the list, while the fear of death itself sits at number 12*

## The Power of Confirmation and Data Weakness

Instinctively, during a discussion or debate, we attack the other side trying to prove why the other is wrong and we are right. This attack on idiosyncrasy is made with passion, but often properly grounded in logical arguments and data that support our beliefs.

The concept of data is quite recent, it came with the rise of computers and intelligent machines. Our brain has already undergone adaptations over thousands of years and has become accustomed to responding to primitive survival situations; therefore, it is not used to favoring decisions guided by data logic.

Simply accessing information can, instead of helping to influence and change thinking, serve as fuel for the confirmation of previous beliefs and hence polarize the debate.

Presenting information that contradicts one's beliefs leads one to seek arguments that reinforce one's original thinking, a phenomenon called the "boomerang effect."

In other words, the availability of information and easy access to it makes people more resilient to change, not the other way around, as might be expected.

Social networks and internet search engines have algorithms to filter information according to our profile. That is, we have easy access to information that confirms our beliefs and difficult to information that contradicts us.

When we form a new belief, there are four ingredients that go into the mix:

- The old belief, called by the author as "prior";
- The confidence we have in this ancient belief;
- The new proof;
- The confidence we have in the new proof.

Debating is ineffective as the only method of influence because it attacks only one of the four pillars in forming a new belief, which is the presentation of the new evidence.

The way out, according to the author, is to focus on a point where there is common agreement or common motivations and to intensify efforts to emphasize the same goal. With this confirmation, the caller tends to be disarmed and to accept the new information better. Confronting your vision, on the other hand, will lead you to increase your stamina.

## The Incredible Influence of Emotion

According to the author, emotion is the main vehicle for transmitting ideas from one mind to another - and thus an effective way to exert influence. This can be proved by an experiment with spectators during a lecture.

As the audience listened attentively to the words and watched the speaker's gestures, people's brains functioned as one; brain activity increased and decreased in perfect sync.

The author explains that synchronization happened not only in brain regions where language and hearing are processed - which would be expected - but also in the areas responsible for creating associations, emotions, and empathy. A speech can align reactions from an entire audience even if people don't even know each other, which the author calls fuzzy sync.

This is because the brains of all human beings react in much the same way to stimuli associated with emotions, says the author.

In a state of emotional alignment with the speaker, the listener tends to process information the same way the speaker does, as well as seeing facts how he does. This is what makes emotion a strong ally in the transmission of ideas and influence.



*The physiology of people's brains is similar, although we seek to highlight individual differences during a discussion. This similarity facilitates the exchange of ideas and information and provides a means of influence, in the author's view.*

Finally, emotions are contagious. According to the author, the human brain has been programmed to transmit and receive information quickly as a strategy for environmental recognition and ultimately survival. And emotion, which is nothing more than a set of signals emitted by the body, is the ideal vehicle of information.

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### **Motivating for pleasure and paralyzing due to fear**

The reward-punishment binomial plays an important role in the mechanisms of influence. According to the author, it is natural for humans to seek good experiences and avoid pain and punishment.

The type of reinforcement you usually provide will determine your degree of influence.

Sharot points out that the use of threats or negative reinforcements for people to engage in certain behavior has limited effect. Studies show that positive feedback - moral rewards such as praise and suggestions for improvement - ensures better alignment and a longer lasting effect of the message.

The law of approach and deviance provides that we tend to approach facts, people, and items with which we are familiar, while we seek to move away and avoid those that seem strange or harmful to us. Similarly, the expectation of a reward stimulates action; fear, instead, incites inaction. This is the natural order.

According to the researcher, the best strategy to encourage someone to take immediate action is to generate an expectation of reward. The threat or expectation of punishment naturally causes the other person to withdraw and refrain from acting, undermining their proactivity.

On the other hand, the author reinforces, if the intention is to discourage another person from doing something, warning about unintended consequences can bring more results than offering rewards. Fear and anxiety have a paralyzing effect.

### **The Joy of Instrumentality and the Fear of Losing Control**

Sharot explains that control relates to influence. When one person lets himself be influenced, he is giving control to another. And usually, loss of control in any situation causes anxiety and discomfort.

Understanding control and instrumentality as fundamental to human relations helps to understand the mechanisms of influence.

Instrumentality refers to the capacity for individual action and decision. When a person notices that they have lost instrumentality, they tend to resist. When they believe they are more useful than before, they become more cooperative.

For Sharot, an effective way to influence collective and individual attitudes is to give people a greater sense of performance in outcomes. It is making them feel useful and participating in important decisions. Thus, they have a greater perception of control, and control motivates them.

Research shows that environments in which the individual has the greatest ability to exercise control are most rewarding to him. The researcher explains that freedom of choice is a reward in itself, even if the choice doesn't significantly change the results. This need is linked to biology.

The professor points out that the sense of control and instrumentality provenly makes people happier and healthier. To use this feature to increase your influence, she points out, simply give people a greater sense of responsibility, power of control. This goes for any aspect of life, whether family or professional.

The author explains that the human brain has developed to control the body so that the body can proactively interfere with the environment. When we are in control, the brain rewards it with a sense of fullness and satisfaction; when we lose control, we are punished with anxiety.

On the other hand, Sharot emphasizes that, as any rewarding action, control can be addictive. As a result, people who have difficulty relinquishing control, even in matters beyond their domain, can accumulate negative practical results and diminish their power of influence, while still satisfying their need.

## **The Value of Information and the Burden of Knowledge**

For the author, people have a natural interest in obtaining information, even if it's not useful to them or serves as a basis for a possible choice at any given time. The absence of information causes discomfort while providing information ensures satisfaction.

Sharot explains that informational need is as a primitive instinct as the search for water, food, and sex. This is because information is also necessary for survival as it helps us make better decisions.

The researcher brings important information obtained from scientific studies to show the importance of information on influence. For people to be motivated, it's not just about getting rewards or avoiding pain. It is enough for them to believe that they will get the reward or avoid the pain.

According to the scholar, people tend to accept and seek information that will make them feel good. That is why they have a natural difficulty in seeking the contradictory.

Sharot explains that within the scope of influence the practical effect is when the expectation is for a positive message, people tend to listen. On the other hand, if they sense unpleasant information on the way, they are more likely to ignore the information.

A good influence strategy highlighted by the researcher is: "If you have knowledge that can fill the information gap of others, highlight the gap; if you can help people improve their world, clarify how. Finally, rephrase the message so that the information you give raises hope, not fear".

All of this is true when the caller is in a stable emotional state. Under stress and intimidation, the brain behaves differently in acquiring information.

## **The Influence of Stress and Overcoming Capacity**

Under threat, people suffer a natural reaction from the body, stress, says the author. It is a survival strategy of the organism. The stress generated by the threatening climate makes people more susceptible to assimilating danger signals and thus negative news.

Despite being a response to a wild environment, stress can turn into collective hysteria, impacting finances, the social environment, and business.

Stressed people focus on how things can go wrong and take a conservative stance, often with extra caution. This vulnerability is used by people who want to exert a negative influence. However, decisions made under stress may not be the best, remembering that fear, stress, and anxiety lead to paralysis.

To escape the influence of stress, the author recommends that the individual consciously work on his or her attention and direct it to other aspects of the situation. When we go through stress it doesn't mean that we have turned on the "autopilot", you can redirect focus and find a way out.

### **The power of social learning and the pursuit of uniqueness**

No matter how hard people try to reinforce and reaffirm their individuality, they are the product of social learning to which they are subjected from the moment of birth, says the researcher.

Each one is dissected throughout the following chapters.

While this dependence is often seen as a weakness, social learning can be a valuable tool of influence, a way of positively introducing a message or behavior to people.

The writer states that other people's choices often influence our own choices decisively. This is because the brain interprets the decision of others as a good model to follow; if it's good for the other, it's good for me. This information is stored and retrieved when the time comes for us to decide.

In the early world, the needs of every human being were basically the same and involved survival. Therefore, decisions that guaranteed the desired result were copied by others of the same kind. Today, Sharot says, the spectrum of choice is much broader and not just about survival.

According to the researcher, the mirroring of decisions, opinions, and evaluations has a strong impact on society. The social networking referral system, reviews on sales sites like Amazon, and the rating system for destination and hosting on tourist sites are just a few examples of how social learning is an entrenched custom.

On the other hand, social learning can be used as a method of mass manipulation, inducing people to adopt behaviors and attitudes aimed at the benefit of only one individual or group of individuals. Even people's memories can be altered, as researches showed by Sharot point out.

According to her, another important factor is that people observe both the decisions of others and the consequences of those decisions. Thus, rewarding behaviors considered good and punishing undesirable behaviors have an effect not only on one individual but on all who observe.

Social learning is useful for us to learn from the experiences of others. However, caution is required when using the decisions of others as the basis for our own.

Sharot points out that the relationship of social learning to influence is that one person's decisions can have a significant impact on the decisions of thousands of others.

### **Finding Answers in Foolish Masses**

Sharot points out that unanimity has a powerful effect on people. But an observant observer must gauge whether the unanimous group is truly independent or has had the opportunity to interact and deliberate before learning of a particular fact.



*No matter how hard people try to reinforce and reaffirm their individuality, they are the product of social learning to which they are subjected from the moment of birth, says the researcher.*



The interaction itself plays a role in collective decisions, even before each person has an opinion on a particular event, the scholar says.

In our society, she says, individuals are naturally interdependent, so individual decisions always have a social component. However, it is possible to reduce this interdependence to avoid making the same mistake that many people unanimously made.

In order to arrive at a more independent decision of passions and biases, it is important to analyze the same fact, or offer, days or even weeks before making the final decision, to observe several times, and to decide by averaging one's own analyzes. If time is not available, Sharot points out, one can analyze the situation twice in a shorter time frame, combine them, and close the issue.

When we make a decision too quickly, we don't use all the available information and fall into the unanimity trap.

For the author, there are two phenomena in the human brain that result in mistaken unanimity. The first is the tendency of the brain itself to produce unconscious biases; the second is the aforementioned social learning.

Basically, this means that a majority forms around an irrational premise and the intuition of others causes them to follow the majority, undermining the contradictory. Many ideas once common and accepted in the past are widely rejected today.

Wisdom is shrouded by crowds, but often in the possession of a small number of people. This shows how important it is for wise people, experts and scholars to be influential. Without this feature, the average opinion tends to be more skewed by the majority, while a small niche of people holds more sensible answers.

## What other authors say about it?

According to Dr. Robert, in his book "Influence: Science and Practice", everyone uses influence and is a target for it. He explains that persuasion practitioners know exactly what they want and where to go, so they use six psychological principles in their book to achieve their goals.

While in the book "How to Win Friends and Influence People", Dale Carnegie also talks about compliments as a way to influence: One of the strongest characteristics of human behavior is the desire to be valued by others; We all enjoy receiving compliments and hearing that we are doing a good job.

Finally, Ricardo Ventura's "Como Manipular & Persuadir Milhares de Pessoas", "How to Manipulate & Persuade Thousands of People" in free translation, provides some tips on mental triggers that can be used in persuasion, such as:

- Authority;
- Urgency;
- Common Enemy;
- Scarcity;
- Relationship Pain x Pleasure;
- Simplicity;
- The paradox of choice.

## Okay, but how can I apply this in my life?

Here are some tips for you to apply these teachings in your life:

- Understand how the most primitive part of the human brain works. Everyone has very similar reflexes and responses at this level;
- Highlight common motivations and goals and avoid direct argumentative confrontation with your interlocutor;
- Use your own emotional reactions to communicate ideas and convey information to others;
- Make use of a reward system if you want to stimulate someone's action; use alerts to prevent a certain behavior from another individual;
- Delegate power. The sense of control and instrumentality activates the reward mechanism in the human brain;
- Format the transmission of information according to the interest of the public or individual to hear it;
- For a positive influence, avoid causing fear, stress, and anxiety;
- Make your own decisions an example to others through social learning;
- Never give up your power to exert influence or others may fill that void.



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