

# Examples of Social Influence Theories as Applied to Academic Pharmacy

Supplement to “Report of the 2020-2021 AACP Faculty Affairs Standing Committee: Best Practices for Faculty Self-Advocacy”

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## Compliance

Compliance occurs when individuals change behavior in acquiescence to a request, which can be explicit or insidious.<sup>5</sup> This theory posits that emotions associated with the ask and request outcome have an effect. For example, a department chair or administrator may ask a faculty member to take on a new lecture, serve on a committee, or precept additional students as a direct request. On the other hand, certain requests may seemingly be presented as optional, but are not necessarily perceived as voluntary (ie, the “voluntold” phenomenon). Guilt associated with declining the request influences the decision as does the notion that the request would require a greater time commitment (ie, outcome). Faculty are expected to respond to requests quickly; this does not provide an opportunity to use rational decision-making or to fully evaluate the request implications. Moreover, faculty become targets of the *That’s-not-all* technique, where an initial request is made, followed by a “sweetening of the deal” by increasing benefits of having faculty comply.<sup>5</sup> In the example above, a department chair may ask the faculty member to take on additional workload in one category (such as lecturing) and reduce workload in another area (such as service), and this perceived generosity may lead the faculty to comply without regard to the requests ultimate effect on career advancement.

## Conformity

Conformity occurs when individuals change their beliefs, behaviors, and actions to match others and be greeted with acceptance.<sup>5</sup> Take an example of a junior faculty member joining a college or school of pharmacy. The faculty member may have little experience in certain areas, such as the art of employing an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) within a curriculum. Despite this assessment modality having been overwhelmingly researched in academic pharmacy, numerous variations in methodology exist. Under the conformity lens of social influence, the faculty member may internally question the methods and structure of the assessment, but will still adopt the college's OSCE practice to gain favor with senior faculty at the institution. The desire for the junior faculty member to be correct in their approach to OSCE development and implementation also surfaces here. Research has shown that individuals primed with motivation to make accurate decisions and be held accountable for their judgments, can resist pressures to conform to current, but flawed, practices.<sup>5</sup> However, this rarely occurs without proper leadership and self-advocacy training. Ultimately, the lack of leadership and training perpetuates the junior faculty's conformity to original practices leading to missed opportunities for improving the assessment, creating novel and more sound methodologies, researching new assessment strategies to produce scholarly work, and further strengthening faculty skills and building their scholarship portfolio.

Theory of conformity examines how individuals react to others' beliefs based on how they perceive others' consensus of those beliefs.<sup>5</sup> When one perceives the audience to be strongly opposed to a belief, they are more likely to avoid deviance and will converge their beliefs without truly processing the message. However, when recipients hold only moderately opposing attitudes, they are more willing to comprehensively process messages and be receptive to the consensus position. For example, assume a college is positioned to deliver a continuing education program during the weekend to pharmacists in the community and faculty are used to deliver the content. If a single faculty member believes that the other faculty are strongly opposed to working on the weekend, they will quickly conform their belief to be in agreement that faculty should not be required to deliver the program. However, if the faculty member perceives that the group is only somewhat opposed to the idea, then they are more likely to process the advantages (revenue generation for the college, advertisement for the pharmacy program, and networking opportunities) alongside the disadvantages (time) to be more receptive to the idea. Thus, Cultures in an institution are influenced by conformity.

## Determinants of Influence

While compliance and conformity are two overarching concepts of peoples' behaviors and actions, many factors can serve as catalysts for influence. Often, change is credited to leadership traits and characteristics. However, research supports that followers play an integral role in leadership and can influence leader behavior.<sup>6</sup> For example, upwards feedback is the mechanism by which individuals lower in an institutions' organizational hierarchy offer feedback to those higher up such as administrative leaders. Receptive leaders who actively listen to feedback are confronted with both strengths and limitations of their acts, forcing leaders to change behaviors accordingly based on their followership's remarks. The followership literature posits that there are three main drivers of influence: 1. Strength; 2. Immediacy; and 3. Number.<sup>6</sup>

## Impression Management

Self-promotion is highlighting one's accomplishments, skills or abilities to be perceived by others as a competent employee. Individuals who are successful in self-promoting may experience increased self-assurance while also capturing their supervisors' attention.<sup>9</sup> Ingratiation is an attempt to influence another person, through flattery and other means, to become more likeable. For example, giving your supervisor a compliment on a recent presentation they delivered is ingratiation. Research has shown that newcomers to an organization can successfully employ both self-promotion and ingratiation to benefit their socialization with their supervisors.<sup>10</sup> This, in turn, fosters a greater commitment to the job and higher supervisor ratings of performance and promotability.

## Heuristic/Systematic Model (HSM)

The HSM model suggests that individuals receive and process messages to make judgements in two different modes – systematic and heuristic. Systematic processing involves systematic analysis and scrutiny of the message and significant cognitive effort from the recipient. The model assumes that the recipient must be highly motivated (feel a personal connection to the message) to engage in systematic processing. Decisions are based on the receiver's evaluation of the message. Factors suggested to increase systematic processing include framing persuasive messages in an unexpected manner, message self-relevance, and using token phrases that signal broader values.<sup>11</sup> For example, assume a faculty member would like to attend an upcoming professional meeting and needs approval and funding support. The faculty member e-mails the department chair with a detailed description of the meeting and how attendance at this meeting relates to the mission and vision of the department and the faculty member's professional goals. In addition, the faculty member asks to schedule a meeting to provide the department chair with additional information about the request. By providing details of the request, relating meeting attendance to department goals, and allowing time for the request to be considered, the faculty member is providing the department chair with the opportunity and motivation to systematically consider the request.

Heuristic processing, on the other hand, requires minimal cognitive effort by the receiver. When heuristic processing is used, the receiver is likely to agree with experts and/or the majority without fully processing message content. Message recipients are more likely to use heuristic processing when the message has little personal importance or minimal impact. Message recipients using heuristic processing may accept the message conclusions or make decisions they would have rejected if more systematic thought went into the decision.<sup>11</sup> Take the example of a faculty member who is presenting an elective syllabus to the curriculum committee for approval. Three other committee members speak positively of this elective opportunity. One of the faculty members has no knowledge or interest in the topic but finds the title of the course attractive and therefore votes in favor of approving the syllabus. In this scenario, the faculty member used heuristic processing - making a decision based on the opinions of others or interest in the title and without carefully evaluating the contents of the proposal. It is important to note that heuristic and systematic processes may occur independent or in conjunction with another.

## Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Similar to HSM, the ELM suggests that message recipients process information based on their motivation (message connection) and ability (having knowledge of content and time to process). The model proposes that there are two major routes to persuasion: central route (high elaboration) and peripheral route (low elaboration).<sup>12</sup> High elaboration route requires considerable thought to assess true merits of the message, including learning message content, generation of cognitive responses, and dissonance-induced reasoning.<sup>11,12</sup> Like systematic processing, high elaboration processing occurs when the receiver is motivated and has ability and time to consider the message content. Accordingly, persuasive message communication should include strong arguments and supporting evidence. Conversely, low elaboration (peripheral) processing is a result of the receiver's attitudes or beliefs and involves making simple, superficial inferences about the merits of the message. Decisions are based on the credibility of the sender or attractiveness of the message and do not involve significant thought. In such cases, persuasive messages should be directly relevant to the receiver and easy to understand.<sup>11,12</sup>

For example, a faculty member is applying for internal funding. The proposal is supported by sufficient evidence, but written using very technical language. Several members of the review committee practice in the same discipline as the applicant and therefore are able to use high-elaboration processing to thoroughly evaluate the proposal, as they understand what is being presented and are able to relate to the topic. If the composition of the review committee was different and that same proposal was being reviewed by those who do not fully understand the faculty discipline, they are more likely to evaluate the proposal using peripheral (low elaboration) processes as they would lack the ability to thoroughly understand such a proposal. The decision of such a group may be based on superficial factors and perceived credibility of the faculty. In order for this group to engage in high elaboration processes, the faculty would need to modify the proposal to include less technical language and the proposal should be written in a manner that is easy for reviewers to understand. Thus, understanding the audience and adapting communication to it is crucial in successful application of ELM model.

## Classic Linear Model

Under the Classic Linear Model, leadership is the intentional creation of messages with particular influence outcome(s) as intended goal(s). This model suggests that individuals will create and send purposefully crafted messages to accomplish particular goal(s) or to communicate specific messages. For example, a faculty member may compose and send out a mass email message to others within the department or school with the intent to self-promote their accomplishments and/or skills. The intent of the message would be to bring awareness of their skills that align with opportunities for advancement within the department/school (i.e., funding opportunities, service, committee or teaching assignments). There would be no need for email replies as the intent of the message was unidirectional. With Classic Linear Model, communication processes are conceptualized as linear and predictable.

## Interactional Model

Whereas Classic Linear Model portrays communication in a single direction, Interactional Model represents communication as complex, bidirectional processes. Under this model, message meaning is not easily controlled by the sender; instead, meaning is attributed to interaction results between sender and receiver(s). Going back to our email example, a faculty member can only control what information they include in an email message, whereas the recipient(s) of the email will be the individual(s) to determine its meaning. In our previous example, the faculty member sent the carefully crafted email to highlight their alignment with opportunities at the department or school level in an effort to be considered for one or more of these advancements. However, such a message may be interpreted by the recipient(s) as stating all the reasons why the faculty member cannot participate in these other opportunities (i.e., funding opportunities, service, committee or teaching assignments), thus freeing oneself of departmental/school obligations; this interpretation could be based on previous conversations, impressions, and/or familiarity with the sender, etc. Receiver interpretation determines the overall meaning of the information being conveyed. Based on an interactional view, only a portion of the influence that occurs in communication results directly from purposive and intentional actions.

## Systems Model

The Systems Model approach to communication emphasizes the manner in which individuals create, convey, select, and interpret messages that inform and shape their lives.<sup>13</sup> Individuals bring unique experiences, backgrounds, needs, values, and goals into their communication with others. In addition, this approach may take into consideration sender and receiver characteristics, context/environment in which the message is being conveyed and political influences at departmental, school, or university levels. Under this model, some messages are intentionally created to achieve a specific influence, goal, purpose, or intention, while other messages are created accidentally.<sup>13</sup> For example, a faculty member may initiate a discussion with their supervisor that focuses on the faculty member's desire to teach a new course. The supervisor may (erroneously) perceive that the faculty member is wanting to add a new course to their current teaching load, whereas the intent of the discussion was to switch teaching responsibilities from one course to another. Message miscommunication and misinterpretation can result from personal bias, duration of communication, and/or incongruity between verbal and nonverbal communication. Social influence and communication are parts of a continual process through which messages are received and interpreted by receivers. Communication can help shape the receivers' attitudes and perceptions; however, one-time, individual messages are seen as highly unlikely to be as effective as messages that are reiterated frequently and over time.

## Surprise Effect

An interesting approach to social influence is “Surprise Effect.” Literature proposes that surprise has the potential to grab attention, provide emotional arousal, open up new perspectives, and lead to engagement.<sup>15</sup> Surprise is a phenomenon that violates our expectations and presents incongruity. “The result is that a positive event is felt to be more positive and a negative event is felt to be more negative the more of a surprise each is experienced to be”.<sup>16</sup> The authors present that a \$20 bill you find on the sidewalk is more exciting due to its unexpectedness than a \$20 bill as a birthday gift.

The sheer novelty of items lends itself to reflection on the ideas presented, which may influence change in our beliefs and also lead to retention in memory of the idea. For example, if our baseline is that we believe someone who is very productive and successful will stay on in an academic position until they retire. If this individual decides they are resigning or retiring at the top of their productivity, there is an element of surprise that shakes our belief, and we discuss it with others and hold on to that in our memory. The next time such an event happens, we may be surprised but we can assume such a pattern is not impossible and similar patterns make us shrug and accept it easier with experience.

## Reactance Decoy Effect

Reactance Decoy Effect is a final strategy to consider. Using this strategy, persuasiveness of target messages can be increased when preceded by a reactance decoy.<sup>19</sup> Reactance decoy is another persuasive message that induces reactance, but where opportunities exist for recipients to express their attitude (i.e., vent). This allows the persons to reassert their freedom. This is intended to reduce reactance toward target messages, which consequentially should increase persuasiveness. Consider the following example. A college introduces a proposed concept that faculty members use all multiple-choice questions for assessments. This creates a frenzy amongst the faculty who argue the advantages of other assessment modalities and engage in dialogue that showcases their frustration over the potential loss of their academic freedom. This initial proposal serves as the reactance decoy. Subsequently, a second message is relayed to faculty that proposes the use of a 50/50 split of open-ended and multiple-choice questions on assessments. Because faculty had the opportunity to “vent” their frustrations with the initial proposal, the second message is more warmly received as it perceived as better than the alternative.

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Note: Citation numbers throughout this supplement correspond to the citations in the parent document named above. Please refer to the parent document for a full bibliography.

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