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Subject: Written assignment: Top twenty principles and analysis of persuasion

- **Top Twenty Principles:**

1.-**Social Conformity (social proof)**: the correct behavior is the general behavior. A tendency to determine whether an action is appropriate or not, by seeing other people's actions. It usually works better when there are uncertainty (the absence of the real-corresponding appreciation of a given fact) and similarity (by observing the behavior of people "like us"). ***I think it is the most effective weapon of persuasion if someone gets to know how to manage it and how to induce it, in order to create an opinion matrix or a landslide. However, the use of this weapon without an adequate scale of values should become dangerous*** ¹ _Finally, urban environments are the best screenplay for this principle.

2.-**The Werther's Effect**: It is a tendency to copycat extreme actions, like suicide. Then, the example itself is an incentive to many subsequent and similar actions . ***For instance, there is a neighborhood in Punto Fijo, Venezuela, where suicides in a row are motivated by an initial and successful one. The pattern (age, cause and mechanism) is copycated by subsequent behaviors and the row stops when an action does not meet the original pattern. The Central University's School of Psychology has been studying the case for scientific purposes.***

3.-The symbols of authority: those by which authority becomes reinforced (dress, titles and trappings) and obedience becomes easier.

4.-Reciprocity: A tendency to make someone feel a correlative obligation by doing him a favor in advance. It works even with unwanted favors.

5.-Consistency: Coherence and uniformity of thoughts are associated with personal and intellectual capacity and it reinforces the ability to persuade.

6.-**Commitment**: A mechanism to engage someone, to create a corresponding obligation and to invoke consistent actions as natural responses. ***This a relevant one, specially for politicians.*** In my country, as a measure to create some kind of commitment, during the campaigns ***every party member must fill out a "compromise card", by which the person states his obligation to attend any***

¹ Goebbels, the great and evil publicist of the Third Reich, used to say..."Inducing someone is much easier with examples and symbols".

upcoming meeting. The result: 95 % of partisans attends the meeting regardless the weather or transportation.

7.-Scarcity: the attraction of banned elements with general or specific manifestations (curiosity, desires,etc). In Venezuela, in the 70s, *the exhibition of the film "Last Tango in Paris" was prohibited by Ministerial Decree*. Then,private exhibitions were planned by people who bought the film in a particular Black Market. They made a lot of money. *This a very tricky way to persuade.*²

8.-Conversion: the process to change one attitude by substituting it for a new one. It might be dangerous when becomes radical.

9.-Reinforcement: the process to back up an existing attitude.

10.-Activation: the creation of a first attitude toward something.

11.-Deactivation: the elimination of the first attitude by defusing it.

12.-An attitude might become a social norm very resistant to change by its general approval.

13.-Catch-22 is a vicious cycle created by an implicit contradiction.

14.-The message relevance is the key to break predisposition.

15.-Capturing attention is an essential element of any change of a given predisposition.

16.-Repetition: a safe way to create a permanent and endurance idea in someone's mind and it helps to break predispositions.

17.-The simplicity and clarity of the message are the relevant elements to ensure its comprehension.

18.- Behaviors are much easier to change than attitudes. The problem is to differentiate one from the other.

19.-When looking for help, in case of an emergency, we must reduce uncertainties.

20.-The nature of the message must be reinforced by some sense of similarity.

- **Analysis:** *I had decided to drop the "leadership" course three weeks ago, but Professor Ronald Heifetz persuaded me, indirectly, to stay in his class. Let's approach to the analysis of this episode by using the concepts and principles we have learned.*

² In Venezuela, during the guerrillas (early 1960s) according to women's opinions, heads of this prohibited movement became the most desired men. Carlos "The Jackal",-famous terrorist- admitted that the secret of his success with women was that he used to say to them.."I can not tell you my most important secret: my personal activity is banned

- The speaker, the initiator of persuasion:** Professor Ronald Heifetz is that kind of man you can not remain indifferent about. His controversial methods and his profound analysis are very famous. However, a love-and-hate relationship is the dynamic itself of the class and, in some way, his way of enjoying teaching by challenging us constantly. ***Persuasive qualities:***

1.- ***His character:*** Well determine character which *becomes attractive to explore as long as he tries to appear mysterious*. He shows us how much he knows about leadership at the time he challenges us to discuss with him *vis a vis*. His complex personality reveals some kind of internal conflicts which make him try to overcome some evident limitations. Every movement he makes *is calculated in order to appear mysterious and attractive*. 2.- His **ability to address the problem itself**. In fact, he tries *to get straight to the point before we realize what the point is*. Also, he has a *tremendous ability to get to the point in any context* (political, medical, economic, social). *Later on, we noticed in him some kind of “snakes’ enchanter” imitation and a strong political ability*. 3.- His **experience** as a psychiatrist makes him **know exactly when to play the role of a trustworthy therapist**. He appears as a good listener whose credibility is out of question. 4.- **Sincerity:** we feel him sincere because *he rather hurt than lie*. He tries to prove it since the very beginning of the sessions. 5.- **Conviction:** we know that he believes in his own theories and principles not only because he admitted it but because he acts as a *person who really knows what he stands for*. 6.- **Knowledge:** he is a well-known specialist in the field of leadership studies and he constantly reminds it to us, indirectly. 7.- **The management of the performance:** I think *he is a performer* who has studied persuasion rules and who has adapted them to every action of his life. So, he is trying to persuade all time and his *manners and movements are to be made in order to keep an on-going-and-endless persuasion process*. We noticed it after a while³ The performance is prepared *to defuse predispositions or prejudices by the correct use of the opportunity* (he takes his time to act in a sorpresive way at the right moment)⁴. Prof. Heifetz knows that everyone of us has his own *prejudice or predispositions about him and he likes that fact*. ***Least persuasive characteristics:*** He is neither a charming guy nor a charismatic speaker that everybody could like. His personality leads to an instant division of the audience: being a controversial person is a disadvantage to overcome.
- The audience:** *One hundred people is the target of the persuasion*. Is not a broad audience but a very critical one. Characteristics: 1.- **We all have our own predisposition and attitude toward Heifetz**, but, at the same time, we are curious. We all heard that professor Heifetz is

³ This is not unusual. President DeGaulle used to prepare every detail of his public appearances. Just as a movie scene.

⁴ Fidel Castro usually prepares his public appearances and private meetings as real performances. That is the reason why some people who do not like him at all become shocked when they first meet him. **Knowing that fact in advance and using it to take real advantage, is a powerful quality itself**

an arrogant man with a great ability to beat the opponent., therefore,being in his class is a challenge itself. Also extreme criticisms give us a sense of the real magnitude of Heifetz controversial aspects. Then, *we are a cautious audience with preconceived ideas.* 2.- Tension: Since some people in previous years have got hurt in this course, *everybody is concerned about it* and ready to react immediately.3.-Expectations: the most diverse expectations have come out. *But all those who are enrolled in this course have strong and positive expectations and desires related to have a more profound knowledge of leadership.* However, many people took the course to learn how to become leaders instead of studying more profoundly the concept of leadership itself.4.- The diversity of backgrounds represents a heterogeneous group in which people want to compete rather than reflect.

- **The message**: Is quite simple:..” those of you who want to learn about leadership and who want to take chances are challenged to survive along this course..Those of you who feel that are not capable of being analyzed by your own classmates had better to quit.....those of you who want to run away from a hard experience, this is the time to drop the course”. Then, is something like: *leadership is important but being a leader implies many things: values, suffering, courage and effort.* The message is absolutely logical: *he wants the elite to attend his course, so he is trying to challenge everyone since the very beginning in order to downsize the course and in order to make it more maneuverable. The elite is composed by those who ignore fear, threats,danger and suspense and by those who are potential leaders capable of learning from suffering itself. This is a tactical message because is just a part of a broader strategy:* the severe selection and reduction which enable him to work with a small group composed by the best people,” *only those who appreciate the real sense of grandness are to be recruited “.* Therefore: *“He wants to downsize the course preserving his reputation, which is the most important component of his attraction and, then, he will start teaching what he knows“.*
- **Weapons**: 1.-Reciprocity: *The admittance process is sold as a gracious concession.*”Those of you who want to stay in this class must know that many people want to attend it. Then, you must answer some questions. This is not a random process. I do decide whether you stay or not. For those who are going to be accepted, congratulations, this is a unique opportunity”. *Therefore, being in class itself is a favor we owe, a favor we must pay.* Maybe that is the reason why once he published the list , nobody wants to drop the course later on, and if that idea comes out, in any way, *a terrible remorse and a sense of ingratitude appear in our minds.* As an example, the few people who finally dropped the course have been embarrassed for days and they usually give many explanations in order to diminish their remorse and ingratitude feelings.2.-Consistency: Heifetz tries to be not contradictable. *That is*

the reason why he deliberately uses long breaks and spaces between words. He examines every word he says. At the same time, he doesn't take chances. He imposed himself some room for maneuvers by not using the blackboard. Then, catching him making mistakes or being incoherent becomes more difficult due to the fact that there is no written prove to invoke.

3.-Conformity: Like preachers, Heifetz tries to engage the audience and rule its feelings invoking some kind of uniformity caused by induced individual reactions. Then, someone's reaction becomes the correct behavior .Also, he implements collateral measures, just for sure: at the time he is arguing with someone,he looks for his approval and spends a lot of time with him. Later on, he induces that person to clap. Suddenly, everybody is clapping. Then he makes someone laugh and ,Trist!, everybody is laughing. Then, he makes someone express an AAh!!!, and all the people say AAh!!. Then he explains something nobody understands but he looks at one classmate's eyes at the time he asks: do you get it?. Immediately, the classmate answers :YES !. And everybody ,who doesn't understand even a word says .." YES", OF COURSE!.He makes this kind of things by using the principle of social proof, I mean, he induces the concrete verification of this process. And two important conditions make it work easier: similarity (we all are students) and uncertainty (nobody knows where we are going, even the direction). He reinforces the notion of similarity in order to be included" remember that I am a Harvard Alumni, remember that I was in this classroom just like you are now. Remember that I'm just like you guys, and you may be like me". At the end of every session there is an intense applause. I found some classmates who confessed that they don't like Heifetz at all but they found themselves clapping enthusiastically at the end of every session.

4.-The proper use of authority: Heifetz usually tries to make you feel that he doesn't exercise his authority at all.But that is not true. The class is messy, sometimes, just because he wants to challenge us ,deliberately, to stop the mess by ourselves. The he speaks again when everybody knows the discussion is out of control, but it became out of control because he wanted it.Also he reinforces this pattern by wearing tie (I have seen him wearing jeans minutes before class and suddenly he appeared formally dressed in class ten minutes later), by repeating his titles (musician, physician,professor) and by pointing out his reputation ".I have a reputation to preserve....people look for me and I have to meet their expectations"). Finally, he does not like to be explicit at the time to exercise authority but he really exercises it in the right opportunity. So it is a vicious cycle: in building his own myth he exercises authority just when he really wants to, and in building authority he tacitly uses the idea that he is already a myth.

5.-Commitment:...."those of you who happen to be admitted to this course must work in small groups everyweek. You must sign a sheet and we will assigned you to a certain group. You will have a teaching fellow who will assist you but he won't be in the sessions. In the small groups meetings you are going to

be by your own so is your responsibility whether to attend or not...". *We signed a card* and we were assigned to a group. Nobody ever misses the class. Why? *Just because the commitment to attend the small group meetings was properly reinforced*. Also, sometimes, the student rather miss the general class than miss the small group session.

- **Successful?** Yes it has been a successful attempt of persuasion. Nobody wants to quit and those who dropped it are absolutely embarrassed. In the first session the classroom was full. In the second there were some seats left. After the said announcements, is not easy to find available seats. I think it might be better if Mr. Heifetz would be a nice man or a charismatic lecturer with a permanent good mood. But he is neither a cool person nor a charming individual, and, evidently, he is not interested in being it. Anyway, his system works but his personality does not allow him to employ ***the liking principle***. Also, ***scarcity*** is not well adapted (some characteristics of the admittance process do not meet the notion). *Finally, his strategy is right but his tactics became a little bit rude affecting some people's self-esteem.*
- **To continue in the future:** I would *recommend him to review his procedures and tactical approaches to make him more effective and less repulsive*, specially at the beginning. But, anyway, I think his strategy is the only one a person with those characteristics and his tasks could employ. As an example of the tactical changes: 1.-I think he might be more explicit in some lectures: 2.-Maybe he needs to find a better way to connect to students' minds: 3.-He must stop wearing tie as a measure to facilitate interpersonal communication. 4.-For those who love order he should elaborate a proper response to their expectations.
- **I think it was ethically sound** because his main goal is to share a profound knowledge and in doing it *he dances in the very edge of the tiny border line between positive therapy led by a strong moral system and aggression itself*. Also, he gives a tremendous importance to values in his theory of leadership. That is a real relief.⁵ Since I think this way, no amendment, related to ethics, is required.

⁵ Relief in the sense that those powerful weapons used by a person with no ethical values would be extremely dangerous. as Simon Bolivar, the great liberator said....."talent with no morality is a whip".