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Auditing your personal influence at work

1. Do you have goals and a clear, written plan of how you anticipate achieving them?
2. Are your efforts aligned with organisational strategy, your boss's deliverables and your own accountabilities? Do you prioritise your efforts toward the highest value deliverables?
3. Is your contribution valued and acknowledged? If it's not, what might you do differently to change that?
4. Do you make regular, confident contributions in meetings? Note the difference between sounding like an empty vessel and offering well-considered input.
5. Do you invest enough time and thought in positioning yourself for your next role? Do you actively seek out relevant development opportunities?
6. Are you in good shape to sustain performance over time? There's a close association between physical fitness, emotional balance and sense of meaning and purpose.

INFLUENCING TO GET AHEAD AT WORK

Exercising influence

After a brief break, the panel reconvened. The lengthy process to replace the departed team member was almost over. They'd agreed to put their final two candidates to a public vote after each summing up a key criterion for selection. "For me", said Cathy, "it comes down to contribution in meetings, like we're doing now. It's clear Megan does that regularly, at all levels".

"We should also focus on clear commitment to team goals", added Jeremy. "In my mind, I think Megan showed how she clarifies goals and then prioritises her efforts. We can't always do everything immediately – but it always feels like we need to."

Clint leant forward, "and remember, we should be thinking about readiness for the second role, also. Compared with James, Megan has taken on a wider range of assignments, and she's also just finishing off her MBA".

After completing her notes, panel convener Jane contributed her thoughts. "It's pretty tough because both James and Megan are equally competent. But it's also true that Megan has a higher profile with marketing – and manages to establish herself quickly because she's got 'presence'. In all the ways we've mentioned, she does stand out. It's unanimous then. Let's give her a call and congratulate her."

Influence in the workplace

UGM recently conducted a study on personal influence in the workplace, focusing on its role in career progression. The report is due out shortly, but we thought we'd share the six sources of personal influence we probed. These include own goals, alignment, contribution, expressiveness, positioning and maintenance.

The six sources of personal influence link closely with the ideas about organisational performance and organisational health we covered in a recent briefing. Own goals relates to achieving stated performance outcomes. Alignment parallels organisational alignment efforts. Contribution and expressiveness relate to organisational execution / implementation. And positioning and maintenance link with the idea of organisational renewal.

While you'll likely agree that all six of the sources of influence are important in the workplace, you may not always associate them directly with the exercise of influence. Others may not make those overt connections about your influence either. But, they do piece together all the fragments, perhaps only subconsciously, when deciding how well you exercise influence.

You may find it useful to audit how you use these six sources, so we'll unpack them a little more.

Own goals

Do you have personal short-term (1-year horizon) career goals and a clear, written plan to achieve them? We don't apologise for highlighting and repeating this every now and again. This study confirms that people with clear, written goals are more likely to achieve them. It also showed us that many people don't have the clarity or don't commit their goals to writing. Those using a mentor acknowledge their value in goal achievement.

Alignment

Since alignment is critical to using scarce resources effectively, we're always on about this too. Chances are your efforts align with the goals of your organisation, your boss (if you report to one) and your team (if you work in one). Most people say they do this well, but how do others know they're so well aligned? You may need to find ways of making this known, without seeming self-serving.

Contribution

The UGM contributing-belonging cycle emphasises that, when you make a valued contribution, your personal sense of belonging increases. The team perspective on this is that, when you make a valuable contribution, others feel you earn the right to belong (even progress). If others aren't aware of your contribution or its value, then it can't deliver you much influence. The research tells us many people fall into this category!

Expressiveness

Most contributions in knowledge economy contexts involve communication of some type. This may be in meetings, presentations and other interpersonal exchanges. People will notice your communication. Even if they're not consciously aware, people are also always assessing your 'presence' and 'visibility'. They're noting your clarity, confidence and participation. And when you hit roadblocks or speed bumps, they'll be watching to see how you handle those – possibly even as adversaries.

Positioning

Career progression implies that you'll be stepping up into bigger or more challenging roles. Those who need to be observing closely to see if you have the skills and experience needed. Showing that you've made this type of progress is a powerful signal of readiness for progression.

Maintenance

Finally, being able to sustain performance is essential. You need to show you're a fit and healthy corporate athlete. Your physical fitness and health, emotional balance and sense of meaning and purpose are influential signals that you radiate continuously.