



Paul Thomas

Unlocking the secrets to better performance

HOW well do you actively manage your workplace performance? Do you track your progress regularly or do you passively rely on your organisation's annual performance development process? The pace of daily workplace requirements often result in personal development assuming a much lower priority. For many it is managed inconsistently, often with high reliance on existing employer performance management frameworks.

Relying solely on your corporate performance development frameworks can be problematic. While many organisations have mature systems, many others are poorly formulated, haphazardly applied, or subject to a degree of non-compliance that renders the outcomes moot.

How then do you take control of your development? There are a multitude of self-help courses, management texts and gurus preaching a variety of methods to enhance your personal brand. However, a number of simple activities can be undertaken and applied as first principles. These principles are predicated on the notion that focused self analysis will allow you to optimise the way you operate on a daily basis and serves as a basis for managing performance throughout your career. These principles include: understanding your strengths and positioning yourself to best leverage them; being aware of your preferred cognitive processes and working styles; always being able to articulate your role and contribution; and better managing relationships in the workplace.

The critical success factor is ensuring you actively apply the principles regularly on a weekly, monthly and annual basis.

First you must understand what you do well. Knowing your strengths allows you to actively seek opportunities and situations that enable you to leverage those strengths – an optimum outcome for you and your employer.

The next principle requires developing an awareness of your cognitive process and preferred working styles. Often our work is scheduled in a way that conflicts with our preferred style, or worse we don't understand how we process information. By understanding our default preferences we can make adjustments that allow us to ensure as much as possible we operate in our preferred mode, increasing our effectiveness. Examples of questions you should ask yourself include: do I work best alone or in a team; do I require structure or am I comfortable with an amorphous environment; and do I get bored easily and therefore require variety?

Seeking feedback from your trusted mentors or role models is an excellent method to inform your analysis and often provides valuable perspectives.

Once you are aware of your strengths and your preferred work styles, this information can be used to agree your specific contribution in your role or current project. This can assist in alleviating disconnects between employer expectations and your abilities.

The final principle and a critical success factor is management of workplace relationships. If you have undertaken the steps outlined in this article you will have a better understanding of the specific and unique set of parameters that define your strengths, work preferences and ultimately your behaviours. This concept of uniqueness extends to your colleagues who also have their own particular preferences, which may conflict with your own. Recognising these differences is empowering and can inform so many daily interactions in the workplace. Often these differences are the root cause of many workplace conflicts. Recognising different preferences in others can do much to depersonalise conflict and transition to resolutions.

How then do you understand the preferences of others? This can be accomplished by taking the time to observe your interactions with others, and certainly in many situations simply asking can test this. Recognising the difference in others can lead to authentic relationships that will significantly enhance your performance.

A detailed self-analysis can and should cover many additional areas, including reviewing your values and their alignment with your current work environment. However, the suggestions provided should serve as excellent first steps. The subtext of this approach is that accountability for your own development rests with you. Don't rely on the efficacy of your organisation's performance management system. Embracing a lifelong process of regular workplace self-analysis will provide an excellent basis to develop and actualise your short- and long-term career aspirations.

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