FACTOR V: ORGANIZATIONAL POSITIONING SKILLS

CLUSTER K: BEING ORGANIZATIONALLY SAVVY

38 Organizational Agility

More business decisions occur over lunch and dinner than at any other time, yet no MBA courses are given on the subject. Peter Drucker – Austrian-born American writer and management consultant

Section 1: Your Development Need(s)

Unskilled

☐ Doesn’t get things done in organizations beyond his/her area
☐ May lack the interpersonal skills to get things done across boundaries
☐ May not negotiate well within organizations
☐ May be too timid and laid back to maneuver through organizations
☑ May reject the complexity of organizations
☐ May lack the experience or simply not know who and where to go
☐ May be too impatient to learn
☐ May neither know nor care to know the origins of how things work around the organization

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to use as a substitute for this competency if you decide not to work on it directly.

Substitutes: 5,8,32,39,48,52,59,64

Skilled

☐ Knowledgeable about how organizations work
☐ Knows how to get things done both through formal channels and the informal network
☐ Understands the origin and reasoning behind key policies, practices, and procedures
☐ Understands the cultures of organizations

Overused Skill

☐ May spend too much time maneuvering for advantage
☐ May spend too much time and energy working on issues that lack substance
☐ May be seen as too political

Select one to three of the competencies listed below to work on to compensate for an overuse of this skill.

Compensators: 4,5,8,12,17,22,27,29,51,52,53,57,63

Some Causes

☐ Don’t see things in systems
☐ Impatient
☐ Inexperienced
☐ Poor interpersonal skills
Resist the reality of complexity
Weak negotiator

Leadership Architect® Factors and Clusters
This competency is in the Organizational Positioning Skills Factor (V). This competency is in the Being Organizationally Savvy Cluster (K) with: 48. You may want to check other competencies in the same Factor/Cluster for related tips.

The Map
Organizations can be complex mazes with many turns, dead ends, quick routes and choices. In most organizations, the best path to get somewhere is almost never a straight line. There is a formal organization—the one on the organization chart—where the path may look straight, and then there is the informal organization where all paths are zigzagged. Since organizations are staffed with people, they become all the more complex. There are gatekeepers, expediters, stoppers, resisters, guides, Good Samaritans and influencers. All of these types live in the organizational maze. The key to being successful in maneuvering through complex organizations is to find your way through the maze to your goal in the least amount of time while making the least noise. The best way to do that is to accept the complexity of organizations rather than fighting it and learn to be a maze-bright person.

Section 2: Learning on Your Own
These self-development remedies will help you build your skill(s).

Some Remedies

☐ 1. Not sure why you’re having difficulty? Get an assessment. Try to do the most honest self-assessment you can on why you aren’t skilled at getting things done smoothly and effectively in the organization. Ask at least one person from each group you work with for feedback. More help? – See #55 Self-Knowledge.

☐ 2. Old approaches not working? Shake things up. What you are doing now apparently isn’t working. Do something different. Try things you generally don’t do. Look to what others do who are more effective than you. Keep a log on what worked and what didn’t.

☐ 3. Getting a poor response from others? Try to make a positive impression. Personal style can get in the way. People differ in the impression they leave. Those who leave positive impressions get more things done through the organization than those who leave a negative impression. Positive impressions include
listening. More help? – See #3 Approachability, #31 Interpersonally Savvy, #33 Listening, #37 Negotiating, #39 Organizing and #42 Peer Relationships.

☐ 4. Taking more than you’re giving? Think equity. Relationships that work are built on equity and considering the impact on others. Don’t just ask for things; find some common ground where you can provide help, not just ask for it. What does the unit you’re contacting need in the way of problem solving or information? Do you really know how they see the issue? Is it even important to them? How does what you’re working on affect them? If it affects them negatively and they are balky, can you trade something, appeal to the common good, figure out some way to minimize the work or other impact (volunteering staff help, for example)? More help? – See #42 Peer Relationships.


☐ 6. Frustrated? Consider the nature of the organization. Sometimes the problem is underestimating the complexity of organizations. Some people always want to think things are simpler than they are. While it’s possible some organizations are simple, most are not. More help? – See #48 Political Savvy and #59 Managing Through Systems.


☐ 8. Lost in the maze? Go with the flow. Some people know the steps necessary to get things done but are too impatient to follow the process. Maneuvering through the maze includes stopping once in a while to let things run their course. It may mean waiting until a major gatekeeper has the time to pay attention to your needs. More help? – See #41 Patience. One additional problem might be in diagnosing the paths, turns, dead ends and zags. More help? – See #32 Learning on the Fly, #48 Political Savvy and #51 Problem Solving.

☐ 9. Getting rattled when what you try fails or gets rejected? Expect the unexpected. If you tend to lose your cool and get frustrated, practice responses before the fact. What’s the worst that could happen and
what will you do? You can pause, count to 10, or ask why it can't be done. You can take in information and develop counter moves. So don't react, learn. More help? – See #11 Composure.

10. Don't know who are the movers and shakers in the organization? Identify the key players and their roles. How do they get things done? Who do they rely on for expediting things through the maze? How do you compare to them? Who are the major gatekeepers who control the flow of resources, information and decisions? Who are the guides and the helpers? Get to know them better. Who are the major resisters and stoppers? Try to avoid or go around them.

Section 3: Learning from Feedback

These sources would give you the most accurate and detailed feedback on your skill(s).

1. Boss's Boss(es)
   From a process standpoint, your boss's boss probably has the most influence and control over your progress. He/she has a broader perspective, has more access to data, and stands at the center of decisions about you. To know what he/she thinks, without having to violate the canons of corporate due process to get that information, would be quite useful.

2. Natural Mentors
   Natural mentors have a special relationship with you and are interested in your success and your future. Since they are usually not in your direct chain of command, you can have more open, relaxed, and fruitful discussions about yourself and your career prospects. They can be a very important source for candid or critical feedback others may not give you.

3. Past Associates/Constituencies
   When confronted with a present performance problem, some claim, “I wasn't like that before; it must be the current situation.” When feedback is available from former associates, about 50% support that claim. In the other half of the cases, the people were like that before and probably didn't know it. It sometimes makes sense to access the past to clearly see the present.

Section 4: Learning from Develop-in-Place Assignments

These part-time develop-in-place assignments will help you build your skill(s).

Integrate diverse systems, processes, or procedures across decentralized and/or dispersed units.

Manage the renovation of an office, floor, building, meeting room, warehouse, etc.

Plan a new site for a building (plant, field office, headquarters, etc.).
Plan for and start up something small (secretarial pool, athletic program, suggestion system, program, etc.).
Launch a new product, service, or process.
Be a change agent; create a symbol for change; lead the rallying cry; champion a significant change and implementation.
Relaunch an existing product or service that’s not doing well.
Help shut down a plant, regional office, product line, business, operation, etc.
Manage the assigning/allocating of office space in a contested situation.
Work on a team looking at a reorganization plan where there will be more people than positions.

Section 5: Learning from Full-Time Jobs

These full-time jobs offer the opportunity to build your skill(s).

1. Chair of Projects/Task Forces
The core demands for qualifying as Chair of a Project/Task Force assignment are: (1) Leader of a group with an important and specific goal. (2) Tight deadline. (3) Success or failure will be evident. (4) High-visibility sponsor. (5) Learning something on the fly. (6) Must get others to cooperate. (7) Usually six months or more. Three types of Projects/Task Forces: (1) New ideas, products, services, or systems (e.g., product/service/program research and development, creation/installation/launch of a new system, programs like TQM, ISO and Six Sigma, positive discipline). (2) Formal negotiations and relationships (e.g., acquisitions; divestitures; agreements; joint ventures; licensing arrangements; franchising; dealing with unions, governments, communities, charities, customers, and relocations). (3) Big one-time events (e.g., working on a major presentation for the board; organizing significant meetings or conferences; reorganizations, mergers, acquisitions, or relocations; working on visions, charters, strategies, other time-urgent issues and problems).

2. Fix-Its/Turnarounds
The core demands to qualify as a Fix-it or Turnaround assignment are: (1) Cleaning up a mess. (2) Serious people issues/problems like credibility/performance/morale. (3) Tight deadline. (4) Serious business performance failure. (5) Last chance to fix. Four types of Fix-its/Turnarounds: (1) Fixing a failed business/unit involving taking control, stopping losses, managing damage, planning the turnaround, dealing with people problems, installing new processes and systems, and rebuilding the spirit and performance of the unit. (2) Managing sizable disasters like mishandled labor negotiations and strikes, thefts, history of significant business losses, poor staff, failed leadership, hidden problems, fraud, public relations nightmares, etc. (3) Significant reorganization and restructuring (e.g., stabilizing the business, re-forming unit, introducing new systems, making people changes, resetting strategy and tactics). (4) Significant
system/process breakdown (e.g., MIS, financial coordination processes, audits, standards, etc.) across units requiring working from a distant position to change something, providing advice and counsel, and installing or implementing a major process improvement or system change outside your own unit and/or with customers outside the organization.

□ 3. Scope Assignments
The core demands for a Scope (complexity) assignment are: (1) Significant in-crease in both internal and external scope or complexity. (2) Significant increase in visibility and/or bottom-line responsibility. (3) Unfamiliar area, business, technol-ogy, or territory. Examples of Scope assignments involving shifts: (1) Switching to new function/technology/business. (2) Moving to new organization. (3) Moving to overseas assignment. (4) Moving to new location. (5) Adding new products/services. (6) Moving between headquarters/field. (7) Switches in ownership/top management of the unit/organization. Examples of Scope assignments involving “firsts”: (1) First-time manager. (2) First-time managing managers. (3) First-time executive. (4) First-time overseas. (5) First-time headquarters/field. (6) First-time team leader. (7) First-time new technology/business/function. Scope assignments involving increased complexity: (1) Managing a significant expansion of an existing product or service. (2) Managing adding new products/services into an existing unit. (3) Managing a reorganized and more diverse unit. (4) Managing explosive growth. (5) Adding new technologies.

□ 4. Staff Leadership (Influencing Without Authority)
The core demands to qualify as Staff Leadership are: (1) Significant challenge (e.g., start-up, fix-it, scope and/or scale assignment, strategic planning project, changes in management practices/systems). (2) Insufficient direct authority to make it happen. (3) Tight deadlines. (4) Visible to significant others. (5) Sensitive politics. Examples of Staff Leadership (Influencing Without Authority) jobs would be: (1) Leading a support function without P&L responsibilities. (2) Managing an internal consulting function for the organization (e.g., OD or HR consultant). (3) Project manager of a cross-functional or cross-departmental initiative. (4) Managing a cross-functional, matrixed team.

□ 5. Start-Ups
The core demands to qualify as a start from scratch are: (1) Starting something new for you and/or for the organization. (2) Forging a new team. (3) Creating new systems/facilities/staffs/programs/procedures. (4) Contextual adversity (e.g., uncertainty, government regulation, unions, difficult environment). Seven types of start from scratches: (1) Planning, building, hiring, and managing (e.g., building a new facility, opening up a new location, moving a unit or company). (2) Heading something new (e.g., new product, new service, new line of business, new department/function, major new program). (3) Taking over a group/product/service/program that had existed for less than a year and was off to a fast start. (4)
Establishing overseas operations. (5) Implementing major new designs for existing systems. (6) Moving a successful program from one unit to another. (7) Installing a new organization-wide process as a full-time job like Total Work Systems (e.g., TQM/ISO/Six Sigma).

Section 6: Learning from Your Plan

*These additional remedies will help make this development plan more effective for you.*

**Learning to Learn Better**

- 1. Monitor Yourself More Closely and Get off Your Autopilot
  
  Past habits are a mixed blessing, sometimes helping, sometimes not. To avoid putting yourself on “autopilot,” think afresh about each situation before acting. Consistently monitor yourself with questions. Is this task different? Ask why you would repeat a past action. Are you avoiding anything, like taking a chance? Is there something new you might try?

- 2. Be Alert to Learnings When Faced with Transitions
  
  To avoid applying rigid habits, be alert to situations that require a transition to a new set of conditions and reactions; check what’s similar and what’s different; think out which past lessons and rules apply and which need to be changed. Don’t apply old solutions because you have missed subtle differences.

- 3. Pre-Sell an Idea to a Key Stakeholder
  
  Identify the key stakeholders—those who will be the most affected by your actions or the most resistant, or whose support you will most need. Collect the information each will find persuasive; marshal your arguments and try to pre-sell your conclusions, recommendations, and solutions.

- 4. Sell Something to a Tough Group/Audience
  
  Think of the person or group who will be the toughest to sell, the most critical, skeptical, or resistant, and sell that person or group first. Take time to understand the opposing viewpoints. Find common ground and leverage points; line up your best data and arguments and go for it.

**Learning from Experience, Feedback, and Other People**

- 5. Learning from Bosses
  
  Bosses can be an excellent and ready source for learning. All bosses do some things exceptionally well and other things poorly. Distance your feelings from the boss/direct report relationship and study things that work and things that don’t work for your boss. What would you have done? What could you use and what should you avoid?
6. Learning from Interviewing Others
Interview others. Ask not only what they do, but how and why they do it. What do they think are the rules of thumb they are following? Where did they learn the behaviors? How do they keep them current? How do they monitor the effect they have on others?

7. Learning from Observing Others
Observe others. Find opportunities to observe without interacting with your model. This enables you to objectively study the person, note what he/she is doing or not doing, and compare that with what you would typically do in similar situations. Many times you can learn more by watching than asking. Your model may not be able to explain what he/she does or may be an unwilling teacher.

8. Getting Feedback from Peers/Colleagues
Your peers and colleagues may not be candid if they are in competition with you. Some may not be willing to be open with you out of fear of giving you an advantage. Some may give you exaggerated feedback to deliberately cause you undue concern. You have to set the tone and gauge the trust level of the relationship and the quality of the feedback.

9. Feedback in Unusual Contexts/Situations
Temporary and extreme conditions and contexts may shade interpretations of your behavior and intentions. Demands of the job may drive you outside your normal mode of operating. Hence, feedback you receive may be inaccurate during those times. However, unusual contexts affect our behavior less than most assume. It’s usually a weak excuse.

Learning from Courses

10. Orientation Events
Most organizations offer a variety of orientation events. They are designed to communicate strategies, charters, missions, goals, and general information and offer an opportunity for people to meet each other. They are short in duration and offer limited opportunities for learning anything beyond general context and background.

Every company has two organizational structures: The formal one is written on the charts; the other is the everyday relationship of the men and women in the organization. Harold S. Geneen – American businessman
Suggested Readings


