Career Tactics

Good tactics can save even the worst strategy. Bad tactics will destroy even the best strategy.

General George Patton

surviving and thriving in a difficult and uncertain world
Overview

Career progression, impact and success are not simply the result of talent and hard work, important as they are.

Results do not always speak for themselves. And the cream of organisational talent doesn’t always get to the top.

In a world of complex uncertainty, competition and conflict, Career Tactics - self management skills, an insight into organisational realities and political savvy - are important to success.

We summarise the world of Career Tactics and describe a practical tool to help ensure that individuals of capability and character are not out-maneuvered by their more ambitious and manipulative peers.
Applications of Career Tactics

Career Tactics provides a better understanding of individuals and how they can maximise their current effectiveness and plan their future development.

Career workshops and development centres
Which tactical assets and liabilities are highlighted? How does this stack up against assessment data and with individual aspirations? Which tactics can be deployed now? Which could be developed relatively easily in future? And which tactics may be more difficult to draw on?

Talent programmes and high potential programmes
Which individuals have lots of “career runway”, the personal resources - cognitive, motivational and emotional - that provide the full repertoire of Career Tactics? Which individuals might be tactically exposed in different and more demanding roles?

Executive coaching
From the profile of Career Tactics, why has an individual’s career stalled? Which tactics are being over used and are becoming counter-productive? Which tactics need to deployed to a greater extent in future?

Outplacement
An insight into what has and hasn’t worked in past career development and the implications for future advancement and the potential opportunities and risks of different options.
Career trajectories, success and failure

- why do some succeed and others fail?
- why do some successful people go on to fail?
- why do some apparent ‘failures’ go on to outperform their peers?
No shortage of advice on career success

Shopping lists that are a mix of:

- eminently sensible principles
- shrewd insights
- platitudes and tired clichés
- conflicting messages
- generalisations that lack relevance to the specifics of context
Is success the outcome of:

- **luck** and life as a lottery and the roll of the dice
- **talent and brilliance** and the cream rising to the top
- **motivation** and the power of persistence, perseverance and positive thinking
- **experience** through the university of life and the “hard school of knocks”
- **proactivity** and personal responsibility
- **big dreams** and goal setting
- **a “secret formula”** that can be bought on-line in a five DVD set

Jim Carey, the out of work actor, is sitting on Mulholland Drive, Hollywood, writing himself a cheque for $10 million. He was penniless and out of work at the time. A few years later he cashes the cheque. Jim Carey is a success and he knows the “secret”.
Enduring principles

Thinking strategically about the game
- what game is being played?
- what is “winning”?
- what are the rules of the game?

Avoiding the stupid stuff
- knowing the obvious reasons for failure and the predictable hazards of success
- the “boring disciplines” of the practical measures to minimise the obvious stupidities

Recognising the different routes to success
- applying the law of “if-then” to select different means for different ends
- the only “one thing” is that there is no one thing

Knowing the hand to play the cards well
- self insight about strengths and shortcomings
- awareness of the dynamics of context to know what to do when
The dynamics of sustainable success

- Talent
  - Fundamental traits, attributes

- Experience
  - Exposure to new and different challenges

- Motivation
  - Aspirations and ambitions

- Tactics
  - Deployment of career time and energy

SUCCESS

"The game of life is not so much in holding a good hand as playing a poor hand well."

H.T. Leslie
John McEnroe’s Nightmare

“Gilbert, you don’t deserve to be on the same court with me! You are the worst. The ******** worst!”

“I’ve used whatever talents and skills I do have in a calculated way that maximises their potential; that gives me my best chance to win. It’s why I’ve been able to beat players who are “better” than me. Make the most of what you’ve got.”

Brad Gilbert
Success as defensive tactics

- a recognition of our own personal constraints and limitations
- a shrewdness in recognising the nature of competitive life and identifying others’ strengths and shortcomings
- working to a game plan that manages around personal limitations and minimises the strengths of rivals
Success as proactive tactics

- optimising talent through a commitment to self improvement and personal development
- spotting emerging trends and possibilities
- the willingness to take risks to embark on new challenges

“Carnegie’s genius was an ability to foresee how things were going to change. Once he saw something was of potential benefit he was willing to invest enormously in it.”
Success as a shift in tactics

- doing something different to everyone else
- the willingness to experiment and find new solutions to problems

“I was told over and over again that I would never be successful, that I was not going to be competitive and the technique was simply not going to work. All I could do was shrug and say “we'll just have to see.”

Dick Fosbury
Career Tactics: another perspective on career success

Career Tactics was developed to complement competency-based approaches to assessment, talent management and leadership development. Its focus is to measure those self management, organisational and political stratagems that help individuals advance in the world of career realities.

Career Tactics grew out of our realisation in facilitating succession reviews that talented individuals were often being overlooked by organisations. Highly capable individuals who were making a significant impact on organisational performance, were being out-gunned by their more savvy peers - those individuals with a shrewd sense of how life is, and how organisations operate.
We conducted a comprehensive desk top review, incorporating thinking and research from career management, self improvement, organisational theory, and biographical, historical and political literature.

The aim was to develop a first cut conceptual model to balance credible and comprehensive coverage of the tactical arena with simplicity of questionnaire design and report output.

After piloting a range of different questionnaire formats and response tasks, we developed a working version for extended trialling across a variety of different sectors and industries. As part of this we reviewed the relationship between Career Tactics and outcomes of performance and progression.

The finalised version is based on a forced choice format, designed around the selection of those activities that have helped most or least in the respondent’s career.
The “Is - Is Not” of Career Tactics

**It is:**

- exploring one theme in management success, failure and derailment
- a description of what may have helped and hindered career success
- a tool to gain an insight to identify potential opportunities and risk for career development

**It isn’t:**

- a comprehensive diagnostic tool of the full range of success factors
- a psychological profile of deep-seated personality or motivational patterns
- a psychometric test with ‘pass-fail’ judgements
Career Tactics: some key findings

Although patterns vary across organisations reflecting how the “rules of the game” are played out within different cultural dynamics, general findings include:

- **speed of progression**: individuals deploying Career Tactics (and specific tactics in particular) reach higher organisational levels and attain higher salaries than their age cohort peers.

- **management impact and performance appraisal**: tactics are associated with more favourable evaluations of effectiveness by line managers, peers and team members (although the pattern shifts across the different stakeholder groups; the Career Tactics endorsed by line managers are different to those endorsed by peers and team members).

- **career satisfaction**: Career Tactics, contrary to the popular myth of the self-seeking but unhappy Machiavellian, support positive attitudes towards careers.

- identifying the **psychology of Career Tactics** through the analysis of the relationship with measures of cognitive, personality, emotional aptitude and operating style, indicates that tactics can be used defensively or proactively within career development.

> He had every quality - passion, sincerity, unstinted devotion, personal charm, a power of oratory - every quality save one - the gift of knowing how to succeed.

AJP Taylor of James Maxton
Career Tactics: reporting

A report output that:

- summarises the overall dynamic of the Career Tactics profile and identifies the specific patterns that represent potential opportunities and risks

- provides a detailed analysis of each tactical theme to highlight the constraints if low, the gains if high, as well as the risks of over-deployment

- incorporates a work-book format to encourage users to review each tactic, the possible underlying factors, and suggested prompts for development planning
Career Tactics: analysis of eight pressure points

An extended section that:

- highlights eight career situations with the potential to boost or undermine career progress
- identifies specific opportunities and risks for each pressure point from the respondent’s Career Tactics profile

Countering “dirty tricks”

Competition is an inevitable feature of the career landscape. Your success may be someone else’s failure, and vice versa. For you and your colleagues to play fair, dirty tricks is both a feature of interplay, from the strategizing and trash-talking to the downward Chapman, all of which is intended to weaken your position. Many dirty tricks can be turned into an opportunity to improve your situation. Outsmarting other dubious tactics will only create personal success by leveraging your energies from more productive avenues to career advancement.

Managing High Tactics

- Recognize that a performance-based approach can be a powerful tool to attain and maintain a career position. Your colleague’s attempts to undermine your “position” are actually in your favor—an opportunity to reframe the situation.
- Your colleagues are more likely to be effective when they are aware of the strategies that you are using to advance your career. By anticipating the move, you can counteract their efforts.
- Look for the colleagues who provide you with continuous feedback. Their comments will help you avoid being blindsided by potential challenges.
- Identify and “hit weak spots,” continuously improving your skills and strategies to ensure you are well-prepared for any situation. Your colleagues may be taken by surprise if you are prepared.

Managing Low Tactics

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Being sidelined or missing out on promotion

Career progression is not always a smooth and easy path. With setbacks and disappointments along the way, there may be times when you feel your career stall. Although unusually difficult in the short term, this may be a time to re-evaluate your career options, rebalance your approach and plan out a shift in tactics.

Managing Low Tactics

- Have you already invested in any potential winning strategies that may help you get noticed? Take a look at your career profile, and consider how you can make an impact.
- Do you regularly monitor your organization’s performance? This will help you stay informed of potential opportunities.
- Are you aware of your competencies and their potential impact? Focus on your strengths, and consider how you can use them to advantage.
- Are you prepared for new opportunities? This will help you stay ahead of your competition.

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- Are you prepared for new opportunities? This will help you stay ahead of your competition.
Career Tactics is not the Way of the Rat

Career Tactics is not the endorsement of “The Way of the Rat” and other exercises in the expanding market of techniques of cynical exploitation to push ahead of others. The Way of the Rat is a career outlook of:

- do what is best for me
- spot others’ weaknesses and organisational failings to optimise my position
- look after my own interests

Career Tactics represents a perspective to conduct a mature debate with professionals and managers about life as is, and how to operate with talent and character in surviving and thriving in the real world.

“If you treat the people around you with love and respect, they will never guess that you're trying to get them sacked.”

David Brent
Conclusions

The world of talent management has been dominated by competency frameworks, the listing of the skills and qualities of effective professionals, managers and leaders. And of course this has provided an important map to guide assessment and development design and implementation.

These maps however have not given sufficient attention to the world through “the eyes of the individual”. We know that some individuals progress and succeed with a relatively limited “hand” of talent and skill. And others have failed or gone on to derail despite their intellectual, interpersonal or motivational brilliance. And some simply become unstuck through a failure to appreciate the “rules of the game” and difficulty in deploying the repertoire of tactical responses required at different points in career progression.

Career Tactics is a powerful tool to help the “innocent doves become as wise as serpents”.

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About Us:

Established in 1994, AM Azure Consulting works with a broad portfolio of clients – in the UK and internationally - in the design and implementation of online services in recruitment and selection; management assessment, development and career management; online leadership tool kits, 360° feedback; performance management and talent and succession management.

If you are interested in our approach to talent management, our consulting expertise, assessment tools and talent planning software:

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We:

- summarise complexity to provide solutions that are pragmatic and build and maintain momentum for our clients.

- help trouble-shoot the messy organisational problems to see the key issues, identify options and put in place actionable plans that make progress.

- cut to the chase to focus on the distinctive challenges of our clients. We enjoy the innovation that results from our clients with ideas and we help translate them into practical applications.

- draw on an extensive research base, library of resource and range of tool kits, and up-to-date thinking to help design and implement practical solutions quickly.