

# Career Tactics

A decorative graphic element consisting of a grid of squares in various shades of blue and grey, arranged in a pattern that tapers to the right. The squares are of different sizes and colors, creating a modern, geometric look.

## Overview

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

**General George Patton**

# Career

## Tactics: overview

Career Tactics was first developed in 2001 to complement competency-based approaches to assessment. It measures those self management, organisational and political stratagems that help individuals advance in the world of career realities.

Career Tactics grew out of the realisation that talented individuals were often being overlooked by organisations. Highly capable individuals who were making a significant impact on organisational performance, were being out-maneuvred by their more savvy peers - those individuals with a shrewd sense of how life is, and how organisations operate.

Since its launch, Career Tactics has been widely used across a range of sectors and applications, most notably in high potential programmes, career workshops and executive coaching.

This overview summarises the rationale, framework and applications of Career Tactics and highlights key findings from our research.

*“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”*

Sun Tzu

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## Tactics: context

Organisations are directing increasing attention to the identification, development and deployment of their management and professional talent to strengthen their 'pipeline' of future leadership capability.

Competency frameworks, fast track programmes, succession plans, and associated resourcing and development policies and practices are designed to achieve this in a fair, coordinated and objective manner. In theory at least.

But:

- why do some talented individuals fail to make the impact their skills and energies might suggest?
- why do some outstandingly capable individuals "fall by the wayside", their careers ending in derailment and failure
- why do some less talented individuals make an "unexpected contribution" and advance their careers to assume positions of leadership?

*"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

### Theories of Success

Reviewing the range and diversity of the "secrets of success" identifies a set of dominant themes:

#### Luck

*"I've been very lucky."* Bill Gates

For some, luck and responses to the vagaries and uncertainties of life is key. Whatever success is achieved, however much we would prefer to attribute it to ourselves and our own brilliance, the underlying cause of success is the good fortune of history and geography – finding oneself in an advantageous position at the right time and right place.

#### Talent

*"Life was something you dominated if you were any good."* F. Scott Fitzgerald

Here success is the result of a mix of cognitive and temperamental attributes – the outcome of any mix of genetic inheritance and a favourable environment. Talent and the possession of exceptional skills make their impact and are rewarded by success.



# Career

## Tactics: a dynamic of success

### Motivation

*“Press on; nothing in the world can take the place of perseverance. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”* [Calvin Coolidge](#)

This “theory” emphasises the role of purpose, commitment, perseverance and grit in determining success. Success results from ‘hard work’. Successful people simply work harder than others.

*“It’s tough trying to keep your feet on the ground, your head above the clouds, your nose to the grindstone, your shoulder to the wheel, your finger on the pulse, your eye on the ball and your ear to the ground.”*

[Unknown](#)

### Experience

*There is no such thing as a natural born pilot. Whatever my aptitudes or talents, becoming a proficient pilot was a life-time’s learning experience. The best pilots fly more than others; that’s why they are best.* [Chuck Yeager](#)

For others, experience - exposure to the critical ‘learning lessons’ of life or the application of the “10,000 Hours Rule” - is seen as the critical element in success. Specifically it is those individuals with greater experience – who have seized the opportunities and challenges which life throws up - who are more likely to attain success.

Clearly any coherent “success model” needs to accommodate all these factors.

However we would add a further dimension:  
[Career Tactics](#).

# Career

## Tactics: a dynamic of success

### Success and Effectiveness: a case study

Is there a close relationship between success and effectiveness?

In an analysis<sup>1</sup> of 457 mainstream managers, the managers were rated against **success** - measured by an index of speed or progression – and **effectiveness** - assessed by a combination of unit performance and measures of team member satisfaction and commitment.

Of the sample of the 60 most successful managers, only 15 were highly effective.

This case study highlights that successful managers are not necessarily effective managers, and that effectiveness does not equate to success. Why not?

	Successful	Effective	Successful & effective	All managers
Traditional management	13	19	34	32
Routine communication	28	44	31	29
Human resource management	11	26	15	20
Networking	48	11	20	19

Source: Adapted from Luthans, Hodgett and Rosenkrantz (1988)

### The Organisational Shadow Side

Beneath the surface - not represented in corporate brochures, organisational charts or operating manuals - is the reality of how organisations work. This has been described as the “shadow Side”<sup>2</sup>, the important activities and arrangements which are rarely mentioned and discussed openly, or at least not in any formal decision making forum.

It is in the “shadow side”, the behind the scenes activities where “deals are cut, reputations are ruined, money disappears, rules are not enforced while unwritten rules are, innocent people are blamed, the guilty are promoted”. This is to recognise the dynamics of:

**Organisational Culture:** the unwritten norms, assumptions, expectations which reflect how life really is

**Organisational Politics:** the dominance of self interest and the corrosive impact of political tensions

**Social systems:** in groups, outgroups, cliques and factions

**Personal Styles and Behaviours:** the impact of dysfunctional and deflective personal styles, and the darker side of human nature

**The Hidden Organisation;** real life reporting relationships, job descriptions, communication flows, budget procedures

Career management needs to address and come to terms with this dimension of corporate life.



# Career

## Tactics: a working definition

“The stratagems to advance one’s aims in a busy and competitive world in which human nature is “flawed” and organisations are less than perfect.”

*“Be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”*

**Matthew 10:16**

In a perfect world, the most talented and motivated prove themselves through their achievements, progressing to assume positions of greater responsibility and corporate leadership.

But organisations don’t operate in a completely rational manner; and neither do individuals.

Confronted with an imperfect world, what should an individual do to advance (or protect) their career?

Career Tactics represents a response to the realism of human nature and organisational life.

# Career

## Tactics: applications

### Career workshops and development centres

When the agenda is on career realities rather than speculative career planning exercises.

Which tactical assets and liabilities are highlighted? 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

When programmes need to go beyond competency to identify another driver of progression.

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

When coaching is about more than organisational contribution and addresses the personal agenda and individuals’ career aims

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

*“If A equal success, then the formula is A equals X plus Y and Z, with X being work, Y play, and Z keeping your mouth shut. ”*

**Albert Einstein**

# Career

## Tactics: framework

Career Tactics is a forced-choice questionnaire incorporating 48 trios of statements. Respondents are asked to identify the statement that has helped most and least in their career.

The report output:

- 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 of the twelve tactical themes 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
- applies an expert system to highlight the distinctive opportunities and risks against eight career “pressure points”.

- 1 Choosing the right job in the right organisation
- 2 Managing your first team
- 3 Managing your boss
- 4 Attending meetings
- 5 Dealing with conflict
- 6 Countering “Dirty Tricks”
- 7 Introducing and implementing change
- 8 Being sidelined or missing out on promotion

Building a Reputation

- Projecting a Confident Image
- Gravitating Towards Success

Managing Complex Relationships

- Balancing Stakeholder Groups
- Building Broad Based Commitment

Optimising Personal Energy

- Focus on Priorities
- Controlled Delegation

Recognising Organisational Realities

- Managing Corporate Politics
- Mastering the Art of Timing

Strategic Self Management

- Playing to Strengths
- Managing Ego Emotions

Maximising Learning Potential

- Flexible Curiosity
- Using New Challenges to Develop Quickly



# Career

## Tactics: development

In 2000 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.

Technically, the forced choice format does not lend itself to conventional measurement analysis<sup>3</sup>, but given the widespread deployment of reliability estimates within ipsative assessment, scale reliabilities were calculated for Career Tactics. These range from .491 to .741.

Despite substantially fewer items, the rating format displayed higher reliability estimates - a not infrequent finding.

Career Tactics	Forced Choice Format (12 items)	Rating Format (6 items)
Projecting Confidence	.625	.557
Gravitating Towards Success	.525	.615
Balancing Stakeholder Groups	.508	.577
Building Broad Based Commitment	.534	.604
Focus on Priorities	.544	.703
Controlled Delegation	.741	.710
Controlled Delegation	.504	.762
Mastering the Art of Timing	.513	.663
Playing to Strengths	.491	.487
Managing Ego Emotions	.547	.529
Flexible Curiosity	.537	.598
Using New Challenges to Develop Quickly	.625	.736

# Career

## Tactics: key research themes

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

### Management impact and performance appraisal

Career Tactics is associated with more favourable evaluations of effectiveness by line managers, peers and team members.

### 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.

**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.

*“Success...is the ability to reach your personal objectives in the shortest time, with the least effort and with the fewest mistakes. The goals you set for yourself and the strategies you choose become your blueprint or plan. Strategies are like recipes: choose the right ingredients, mix them in the correct proportions.”*

**Charles J Givens**

# Career

## Tactics and performance appraisal

Performance appraisal data, as is recognised in the research literature, can be problematic. Evaluations hinge on a range of factors, not least cultural assumptions of performance expectations, and line management maturity to be objective in identifying and discerning different levels of contribution and impact.

In one study, performance data was available for a group of 150 middle-senior managers in a financial services firm. Assessments from the BarOn EQ – I measure of emotional intelligence, Cognadev's Cognitive Process Profile were accessed as well as Career Tactics.

Correlations<sup>4</sup> with performance appraisal ratings:

### Career Tactics

Building Organisational Commitment (-.31)  
Managing Corporate Politics (.27)  
Using New Challenges to Speed Development (.18)

The pattern for the Career Tactics assessment is one in which individuals versatile in political management and who relish new opportunities fare better in appraisal than those whose tactical strengths lie in relationship management.

There is no doubt a cultural factor at work in which some operating styles are valued more than others in line managers' evaluations of effectiveness

### EQ

Assertiveness (.24)  
Stress Tolerance (.23)  
Problem Solving (.20)  
Independence (.19)  
Adaptability (.19)

The trends here indicate that assertive, independent and adaptable individuals who can tolerate stress receive more positive performance ratings. This is the profile of robust, self sufficient individuals being more positively regarded by line management.

### Cognitive Process Profile

Total CPP score (.18)  
Analytical (.22)  
Learning 1 (.21)  
Rule Orientated (.20)

Higher levels of cognitive skills are associated with superior performance ratings.

# Career

## Tactics and 360° feedback

Effectiveness within organisational life is a juggling act to negotiate the expectations of different working relationships.

Managing upwards to respond to the problems of line managers runs the risk of alienating other colleagues. Responding proactively to the pressures and priorities of peers can become tangled in issues that can't be resolved. Focusing on the interests of team members builds capability but can also become detached from wider organisational challenges.

Based on data from over 120 participants within a feedback exercise, unsurprisingly a different pattern of Career Tactics is associated with effectiveness "through the eyes" of different work groups.

Career Tactics and perceptions of "bottom line" effectiveness:

### Line Management

The tactics line managers "like":  
Managing Corporate Politics  
Flexible Curiosity

And the tactics they don't:  
Projecting Confidence,  
Gravitating Towards Success,  
Mastering the Art of Timing

When working with line management:

- The political dynamic is best not avoided.
- Be alert to wider trend and developments and be proactive in managing relationships across the organisation, particularly where there may be opposition and conflict.

- But don't overdo it by seeming too confident or successful. Line management might see this as arrogance and a threat to their own position.

### Peers

Peer evaluations of effectiveness are associated with the tactic of [Focus on Priorities](#). And peers rate as less effective those individuals displaying the tactic of [Gravitating Towards Success](#).

In conversations with peers:

- Keep it simple by summarising with confidence the focus of your efforts.
- Don't over-burden work colleagues with complications.
- And avoid the impression of "fair weather friendship". Be willing to take on the troublesome stuff, not just the high profile and organisational glamorous assignments.

### Team Members

Team members don't "like" [Using New Challenges to Speed Development](#).

With team members:

- Be careful about how career aspirations are discussed. Take on new challenges but don't talk about them too openly.
- Project confidence about current success within the work area rather than disturb your team with uncertainty about your future ambitions.

## Tactics and construct validity

What is the relationship between Career Tactics and other assessments? Although Career Tactics is not designed as a psychometric instrument, as a self assessment application it could be expected to show relationships with other measures of operating style and personality.

### Career Tactics and the Myers Briggs Type Indicator

Six of the Career Tactics dimensions show little relationship with MBTI: Gravitating Towards Success, Balancing Stakeholder Groups, Managing Corporate Politics, Mastering the Art of Timing, Playing to Strengths, and Flexible Curiosity.

And six dimensions did:

**Projecting Confidence:** Extraversion (.41), Judging (-.26)

**Building Broad Based Commitment:** Feeling (.20)

**Focus on Priorities:** Sensing (.33), Judging (.30)

**Controlled Delegation:** Judging(.29)

**Managing Ego Emotions:** Sensing(.23)

**Using New Challenges to Speed Development:** Sensing (-.37), Perceiving (.32) and Thinking (.21)

The pattern here is meaningful, reflecting those tactics that have less to do with fundamental personality traits as identified in the MBTI and more to do with past and present experience, and political alertness and shrewdness.

The significant correlation seem for the most part fairly intuitive in evaluating the impact of personality in career management.

For example, Extraversion is positively correlated with Projecting Confidence; Feeling is associated with Building Broad Based Commitment; Judging with Focus on Priorities and Controlled Delegation; and Perceiving with Using New Challenges to Speed Development.

# Career

## Tactics and construct validity

### Career Tactics and the Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI)

A questionnaire to explore thinking preferences based on Sperry's theory of left and right brain functionality, the HBDI<sup>5</sup> identifies four dominant styles:

**Quadrant A:** analytical and facts based thinking

**Quadrant B:** sequential and structured thinking

**Quadrant C:** interpersonal and emotional thinking

**Quadrant D:** imaginative and conceptual thinking

The analysis also generates scores on:

**Cerebral and Limbic:** organisation, control and emotions thinking

**Left (analysis) and Right Brain (holistic) Thinking**

In the data, the following correlations were observed:

**Quadrant A:** Focus on Priorities (.31), Balancing Stakeholder Groups (-.37)

**Quadrant B:** Focus on Priorities (.31)

**Quadrant C:** Building Broad Based Commitment (.37), Balancing Stakeholder Groups (.36), Projecting Confidence (.29)

**Quadrant D:** Focus on Priorities (-.38), Managing Ego Emotions (-.27)

**Cerebral:**

**Limbic:** Balancing Stakeholder Groups (.22)

**Left Brain:** Focus on Priorities (.43), Managing Ego Emotions (.22)

**Right Brain:** Balancing Stakeholder Groups (.35)

Different Career Tactics are associated with different thinking modes.

Quadrant C is associated with the interpersonal tactics of Projecting Confidence, Balancing Stakeholder Groups and Building Organisational Commitment, and Quadrant A with the task management tactics of Focus on Priorities and Controlled Delegation.

# Career

## Tactics: 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.

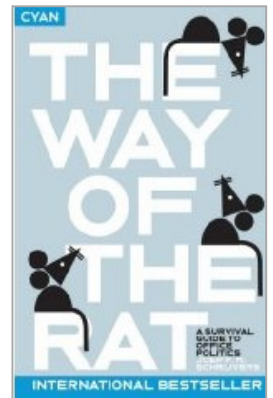
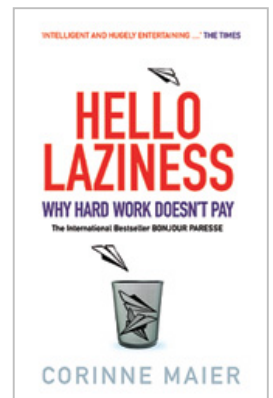
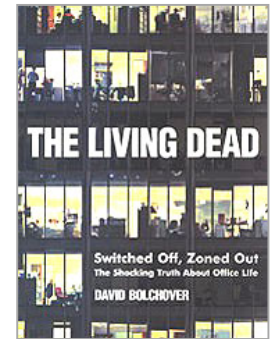
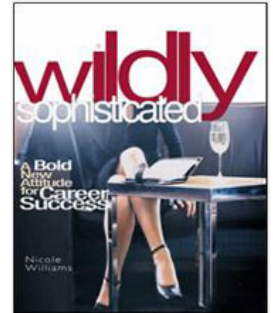
The repertoire of “rat tricks” includes:

- exploiting others’ vulnerabilities and weak spots
- psychological/practical bribery
- making life difficult for opponents
- building power by humiliating others
- undermining your boss
- getting others to do your dirty work
- finding a scapegoat
- leaking information and spreading gossip

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 to survive and thrive in the real world.

*“Has your success been attained with honour, or did you come by this apparent success dishonourably? If the latter is true, then however great your success may seem to others, there will surely come a moment when you will see your success as shoddy and tainted .”*

**Niccolo Machiavelli**



## Tactics: notes

1. Luthans, Fred. "Successful vs. effective real managers." The Academy of management EXECUTIVE 2.2 (1988)

2. Working the Shadow Side: A Guide to Positive Behind-the-Scenes Management, Gerard Egan

3. The debate about the relative pros and cons of ipsative measurement in assessment, has now run on for several debates between different academics, test publishers and practitioners. Example debates can be accessed at:

<https://www.prevuehr.com/resources/insights/ipsative-vs-normative/>

<https://oprablog.wordpress.com/tag/ipsative-testing/>

Forced choice measures do have their virtues in identifying relativities within an individual and highlighting the balance that shapes, in the case of Career Tactics, an individual's outlook.

But the ipsative format unfortunately is not without its vices. As the psychometrician Steve Blinkhorn points out, problems will be encountered in interpreting statistical analysis if the distinctive issues for ipsative measures are ignored.

4. Note that the correlational patterns reported are affected both by sample size and the distinctive statistical issues of ipsative measurement. The interpretation of correlations therefore is only indicative of trends.

5. The pattern of inter-correlations within the HBDI indicates that it is unlikely to measure four discrete thinking preferences. Quadrant A correlates highly negatively with Quadrant C (-.72) as does Quadrant B and Quadrant D (-.69). The combination of the number of constructs and forced choice nature of the questionnaire suggest it is in fact measuring two themes, a preference for facts and logic vs. a preference for feelings and emotions, and a preference for structure and detail vs. a preference for concepts and imaginative thought.