Performance and Perception

Just the Facts

A performance review reflects the reviewer's perception of your performance. Therefore, you must consider the factors that contribute to the perception of your performance.

The four main drivers of perceived performance are actual performance, working on the "right" things, visibility and style.

To ensure a positive performance review in addition to improving your measurable performance, identify ways to improve how your work is perceived.

How to ensure your work is valued across the organization | **by Peter E. Pylipow**

Have you ever received a performance appraisal that didn't adequately reflect your performance? Did you feel undervalued, like your work wasn't fully appreciated?

Hopefully you are among the few people who can answer "No" to these questions, but most people probably have had this experience at least once. Let's explore what might have happened and what can be done going forward.

Drivers of perceived performance

The key concept at the heart of the matter is perception. The people who provided input into your performance appraisal didn't perceive the value of your work as highly as

you did. It can be so disheartening—how do you recover from that? The first step is to understand the drivers of perceived performance so you can target where the greatest opportunities lie for you.

Figure 1 (p. 26) is an influence diagram that shows the factors that contribute to the perception of your performance by your boss and others in the organization. The arrows point up from each box to indicate what concepts or actions the factor influences, building to the top box labeled "perceived performance."

There are four main drivers of perceived performance:

1. **Actual performance.** This is the first and most obvious driver—what you delivered that can be measured or objectively assessed. How much money did you save the organization? How much did you improve the outgoing quality level? The metrics used in your organization and how you clearly contributed to their improvement is your

measurable performance. We'll dig deeper into this driver later.

2. **Working on the "right" things.** Let's say, for example, that as part of your actual performance, you significantly improved some organizational metrics. But perhaps those weren't the most important metrics on your organization's scorecard. So, going forward, you must ask yourself: What is being stressed by the organization right now? What are the current strategic thrusts and the big projects supporting them?

   If you just keep your nose to the grindstone in your little corner of the organization, you're missing opportunities to be seen working on the right things. Get hold of your organization's and department's strategic plans for the year and make sure you're spending time on what they say matters.

   Engage your boss in this discussion as well as other stakeholders in the organization. You may need to work on changing some of your assignments or routine duties, but management will be pleased that you're willing to help. Shed mundane tasks and jump into something hot!

   Another factor is going above and beyond. You likely see issues around your organization all the time that need improvement, but you're too busy doing your own job to fix what someone else should be fixing. Occasionally, step up and take on one of those issues. Going above and beyond your normal job duties looks good on your year-end accomplishments summary.

3. **Visibility.** Even if you are working on the right things, how much do people know about what you're doing? Do you present your work at management meetings or periodically send emails summarizing results? Do you have hallway or lunchroom conversations with key people to keep them informed of your work?

   Some people might call this tooting your own horn, but it's a necessary part of the ballgame. Your supervisor can help with this aspect of perceived performance by sending you to certain meetings or to talk to certain people, but don't wait for

FIGURE 1

Perceived performance factors
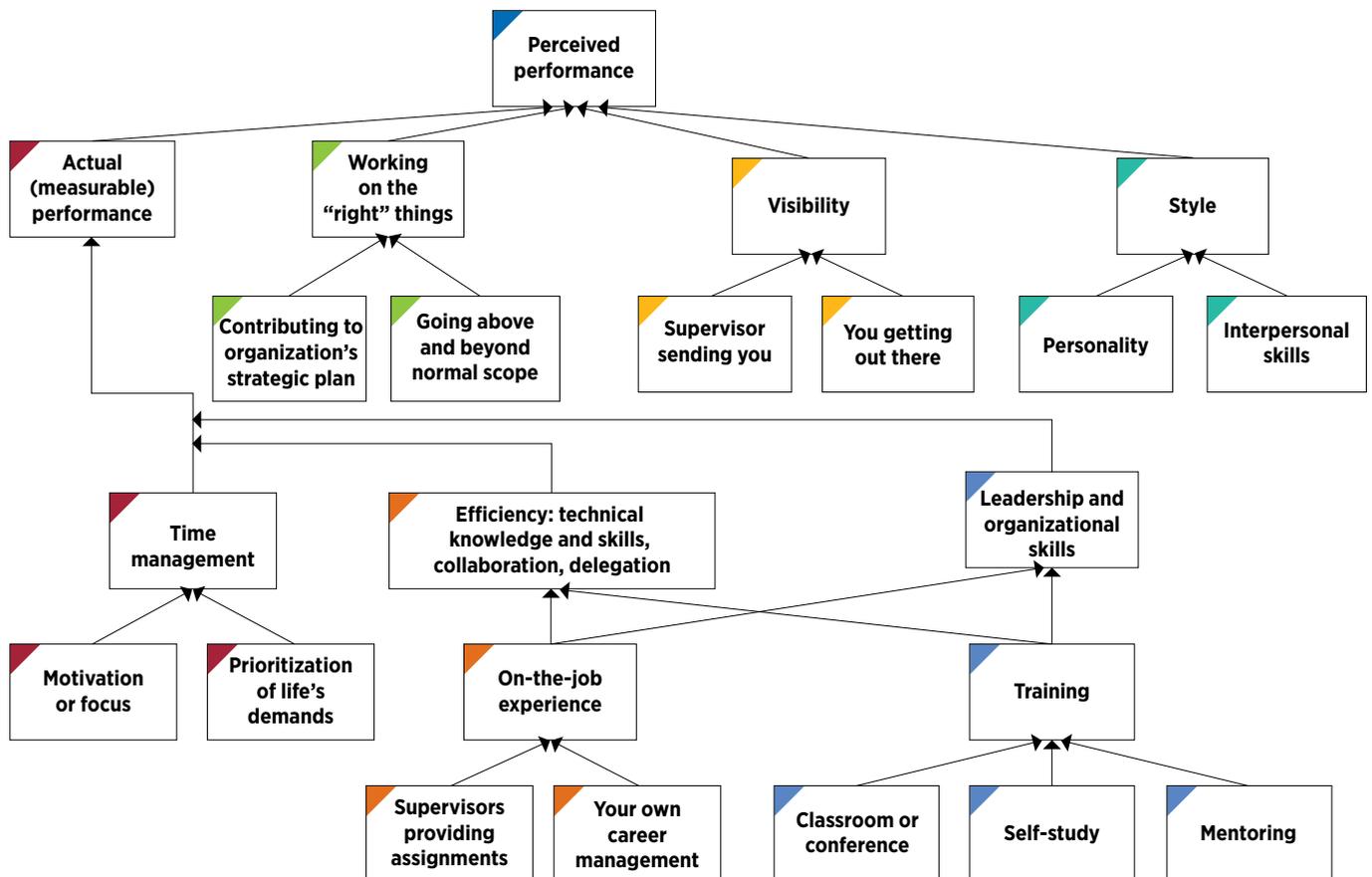
that—do it on your own.

I once had a coworker who, 20 minutes before the end of every day, would saunter into our boss's office and regale him with tales of all the work he had done that day. My coworker made it sound like he was pioneering breakthrough after breakthrough when, in reality, he didn't do any more than the rest of us—but he made sure the boss knew what he was doing.

Another avenue of visibility is the work you do in the professional or broader communities. Are you involved with your local ASQ section or other professional organization? You can attend meetings, network, give a talk or perhaps even arrange a tour of your facility. You also can participate in or—even better—lead volunteer activities.

4. **Style.** As you are out there doing your thing and making yourself visible, how you present yourself becomes important. Personality and interpersonal skills play a role in your style.

There are many dimensions to your style, such as how people see you, what impression you leave and whether you do things the right way.

For example, do you treat people fairly and respectfully? Are you a team player? Are you adaptable to change? Do people see you as positive or as a naysayer? Are you extroverted with the gift of gab or introverted? Are you able to really listen to people and engage in a genuine two-way exchange, or do you get consumed by your own point of view and talk at them? Are you articulate, or do you have trouble getting to the point? Are you humorous? Humble? Argumentative? Arrogant? This is a tough topic because it's hard to change your personality, but you can work on skills that affect how you present yourself. Try to get some honest feedback in this area. Perhaps

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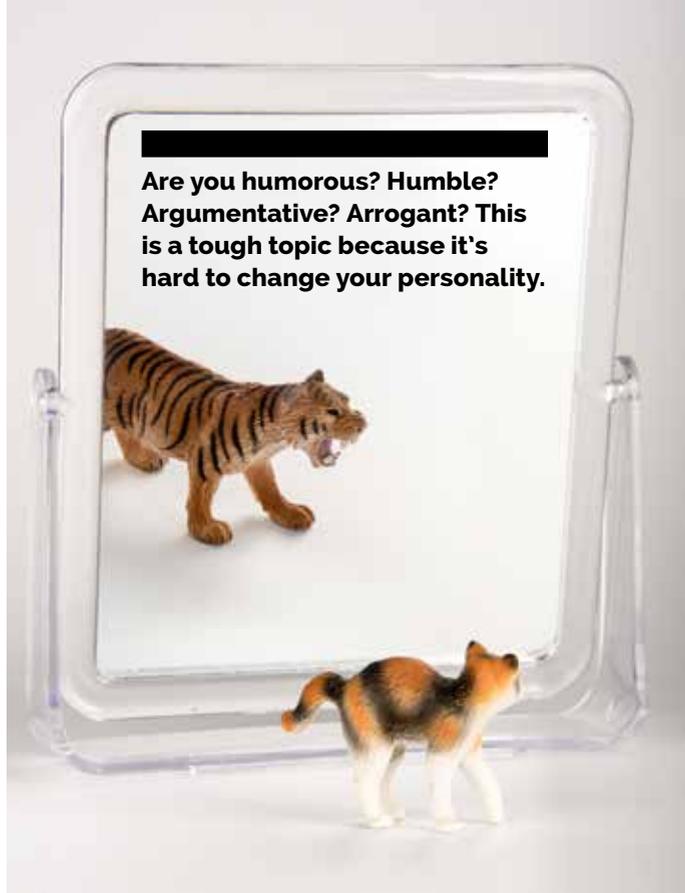
your organization's HR department offers a 360-degree survey tool that you can send to coworkers for their anonymous input. Think about your style thoroughly—real gains can be made if you can identify some weaknesses. Here's a freebie: Smile a lot.

Managing time to improve performance

Actual measurable performance is the meat of an appraisal. But how do you improve it? An obvious factor is time management. How much real time do you spend cranking out the work? One influence of that is your underlying motivation or focus.

Do you work the standard number of hours? Most of us do, but the guy who sits next to you might be more motivated to get that next promotion, so he puts in more hours. Or maybe you both work the same amount of time from the start of the day to the end, but you take longer lunches or spend more time chatting with your coworkers. Think about how focused you are.

Another influence is how you prioritize and balance life's demands. Maybe you must leave work on time every day

because you have four kids to get to soccer and dance, but the woman in the next cubicle is single and can easily put in extra time to make her projects shine. There is nothing you can do to conjure up more hours in the day, so how do you compete?

One way related to time management is to enhance your efficiency and productivity, which are driven by your technical knowledge and skills. For every hour you're working, how much are you actually accomplishing? Somehow the guy in the next office seems to complete more projects than you. Why is he more efficient? Why can he crunch data faster or get his reports approved sooner?

Two drivers of efficiency are on-the-job experience and training. Having more on-the-job experience enables you to get good at certain aspects of the job and outperform others—you become a subject matter expert. Alternatively, you can seek out training to gain more knowledge or hone certain skills. You can take a class, attend a conference, do self-study or perhaps even ask a more experienced employee to train you or give you tips to make

you more efficient (and neutralize his or her advantage). Most people enjoy helping others, so don't hesitate to ask.

Another aspect of efficiency is how well you work with others. This is related to style, as discussed earlier. Are you able to collaborate with others and reach a quick consensus, or do you get stuck going around and around on an issue? If you have direct reports, can you delegate effectively so you can focus on work that is more pertinent to your job level?

Digging deeper into on-the-job experience, how do you obtain meaningful professional growth? First, recognize that you must take ownership of your own career. Nobody cares about you more than you.

While your supervisor may be evaluated on his or her people-development abilities, he or she has a staff of employees—your peers and competitors—to develop, so you won't necessarily get the best assignments. Nevertheless, engage your supervisor and ask for projects that will give you new experiences, either in your department or with different departments in the organization. These will enhance your perspective and broaden your sphere of influence, which is better than doing the same work over and over, year after year.

But as cautioned earlier, don't put it all on your boss—find your own opportunities and bring them to the discussion. Depending on what you find that looks interesting, you could even end up transferring to a different department on a temporary—or permanent—assignment.

Be a leader and a finisher
Leadership and organizational skills play a big role in driving actual performance. Are you a leader? Do you take the initiative to get the ball rolling? Can you identify a project, set direction, corral resources and get a team working for you? If not, there are countless resources on becoming a leader. Peruse what's out there and plan some self-study.

Of course, also discuss improving your leadership skills with your boss. In addition, schedule a meeting with someone else in your organization who is one or two steps above you and find out what leadership tips he or she might have.

Your organizational or management skills go hand-in-hand with your leadership skills. After you have been assigned a project, can you outline and detail what must be done and make it happen, fighting through obstacles along the way?

Lots of people have good ideas—you'll hear them all the time. Some people will even put those ideas into action, and sometimes they finish and sometimes they don't. The key to a successful performance appraisal is creating a complete project plan and driving it to a timely, profitable conclusion.

You want your year-end appraisal to list projects that have been completed with real measurable benefits to the organization, not just activities that you started or worked on. Demonstrate that you are a finisher—that's what will differentiate you from others in the eyes of your boss and will earn you a better evaluation.

Here is one last personal anecdote related to leadership and organizational skills: Leadership can be a simple thing that doesn't require a lot of training. I learned awhile back—from a boss who did not have a technical background but who was successful—that all you must do to solve a big problem is call a meeting and get the right people in the room. She didn't always know the solution to every crisis, but she knew we had resources in the building that could figure it out. It really doesn't take much to schedule a meeting and say, "What should we do about this?" Get the ball rolling, take notes and away you go. Email your notes to the meeting attendees and voila, you're seen as a leader!

Next steps
Now that you understand the drivers of perceived performance, you can identify what actions to take to boost how your work is perceived. Contrary to the popular expression, perception is not reality. The reality is that there are many ways to view the world and your contributions to it. Understand the drivers of perceived performance in the workplace and use them to your advantage. **QP**

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