

Building Influence

A Practical and Proven Framework for
Stakeholder Management

Helping you to identify WHO you need to build influence
with and practical steps on HOW to do it



Nkuzi
CHANGE

Building Influence to support your career success

The world of work has changed. Organisations are getting flatter, access to information is greater and the potential for influence is becoming more accessible to everyone within a business.

So why does building influence matter to your big company career?

You are the boss of your career and there are some specific things you can do to ensure you get the chance to step into your full potential in a large organisation. And this is very different to working in a small or even medium sized organisation, where there are other powers at play that influence careers in a specific way.

So, what are the factors at play in large organisations which can often stymie the career aspirations of even the most talented people? Essentially, what's so different about working in and for big organisations?

Well, here's the obvious - they're big and complex

This complexity can be confusing and convoluted to navigate and causes a number of challenges.

In a medium-sized business you may have sales and marketing operating out of a single department. In a big business all departments get split into many more specialised functions. For example, in the sales function there is usually a Head of Sales, Head of Inside Sales, Head of Sales Enablement, Head of Solution Sales and so on ...

There will be teams at each turn in these big organisations that are highly specialised in particular areas such as digital sales or direct sales, who play very different roles to that of a generalised salesperson at a medium-sized business.

So, with more and more players, the organisation gets very complex, very quickly.

AND THEN THEY GET DUPLICATED.

In a global business many of these structures are duplicated by territory - so the complication multiplies across each geographical region. This means there are many more stakeholders to engage with across the 'Matrix' that could have a huge impact on your success.

Significant hires are made by committee

Often in a small organisation your Line Manager will have a lot of power over your internal career. It's just not that simple in a big organisation. Your boss will often have limited input and significant hires will often be made by committee.

Discussions about 'talent' are a regular agenda item on senior leadership meetings and this provides a forum for your Line Manager to 'put your name forward' as someone with high potential. But this will 'just' spark a discussion. It's then down to the reputation you've created with the other leaders around the table to either underline or contradict your Line Manager's endorsement.

Investment in individuals is subject to greater and wider scrutiny

In a smaller organisation your boss will probably make the decision about what funding they can offer you in terms of paying for development or training.

It's just not that straightforward in a big business as there are many other factors at play.

Budgets are often held locally and centrally and it's not always clear what they can cover and who can authorise them. With so many other competing requests your Line Manager may actually have very little input if the budget doesn't sit directly with them.

More informal opportunities are offered quickly and 'under the radar'

This internal competition for resources drives opportunities underground as managers avoid going through complex internal processes by creating informal opportunities that 'fly under the radar'. I've seen this in the creation of secondments, interim roles and other changes which often pre-empt an outcome for an individual, without the transparency of the opportunity that would attract other applicants and the scrutiny of central talent teams.

There are two aspects to being successful in a big business that can have an exponential impact on your career. These two things are often overlooked but are critically important as they combat the impact of the things that might otherwise derail your career - no matter how stellar your performance might be.

These areas are **Your Reputation** and **Your Influence** and along with your performance they are likely to be the most important things to accelerate your career in a large organisation.

We have [an article](#) and supporting Guides on how to build your Reputation. This guide is dedicated to helping you take practical steps in building your Influence.

So, what is influence?

The dictionary helps us by saying 'The definition of **influential** is someone or something that has an impact on, or shapes, how people act or how things occur. A person who convinces others to listen and do what she suggests is an **example** of an **influential** person.'

To influence, we need to have something to say and to convince someone to listen and take action. I characterise influence as the ability to have someone to 'tune in' to your message in a way that impacts what they do, when they've heard it. Influence is the hallmark of a leader and as such might be the most important skill to cultivate.

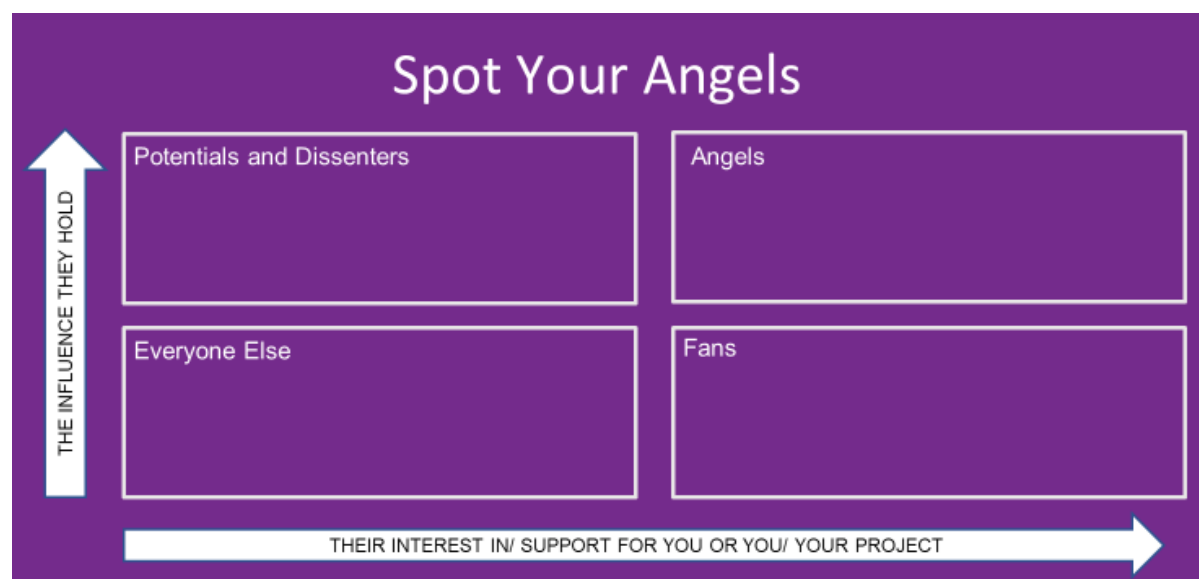
The good news is that anyone can increase their influence, it's not dependent upon hierarchy, experience or seniority, it's a skill and like any skill you need to intentionally practice it. It also helps to have a framework to get you started and to guide your actions and that's where this guide comes in.

The tool we use in this Guide is Spot Your Angels. This framework helps you identify which stakeholders to target and what to do with them depending on the category they fit into on the framework. It broadens your horizons to ensure you're not focusing too narrowly, and it helps you prioritise individuals based on their relationship with you and the impact they can have on what you're trying to achieve.

This isn't an academic or theoretical model. It's a practical tool to help you identify important stakeholders and create a plan of engagement to maximise your ability to influence them. And this is important, because if you work in a large organisation the number of people you could include in your network of influence can be overwhelming and it can be easier to focus on the 'usual suspects', those people you already know and like to work with. But this can have a very detrimental effect on your career and your success – by not engaging the right people, you will miss opportunities and some doors will remain closed.

As usual, the magic happens when you do the work. This is easier when you're supported by a mentor or coach, but you can do this work alone using this guide.

Let's start ... at the end of this guide you will find a blank version you can start to complete for yourself.



On the vertical axis, we are measuring the influence an individual can have on your career. On the horizontal axis, we are measuring their interest and support in you, and your career.

We can position people we know into 4 categories:

- Everyone Else
- Fans
- Potentials and Dissenters
- Angels

Everyone Else

These are people who do not know your work and do not have authority to influence it. For example, they might be your peers on the same level in other parts of the organisation. You can still support these individuals and build a relationship with them, but they are not your primary focus to be your influence.

Fans

Fans are peers, friends, colleagues, maybe even your Mum! They love you and believe in you. They love your work but do not have the authority or ability to influence your career. You can leverage fans for morale, emotional support, maybe even shared learning but they should not be a priority focus.

We recommend you spend most of your time and energy in these next two groups as they can have significant impact on your career success including the opportunities that are available to you and the people you are yet to meet.

Potentials and Dissenter's

Potentials have influence on your career because of their position and where they sit in the organisation. For example, a new Line Manager would sit here as a Potential. A senior colleague in Human Resources or Talent would sit in this box because of their position. You may also have customers, stakeholders, industry influencers or other external people in this box because of their access to other influential people – and their access to information and opportunities that you do not currently see.

Potentials have influence but either do not know about your work, or do not support it. In either case, if the people in this box do not know, like or trust you, then that's an opportunity! YOU have an opportunity to connect with them and build a relationship. For those who just don't know about your work, the goal would be to increase contact and connection over time so they can learn about you.

But what about dissenters? Those people of influence who may already know about your work but don't support you. It's really tempting to shy away, ignore, avoid or even block those people.

Let's be honest - not everyone knows, likes and trusts everyone else! We will all have dissenters in our world. BUT we ignore them at our peril. People who have a significant influence over our careers and don't currently know, like or maybe trust us, also need to be nurtured in the same way that people we don't currently know - and I would argue that we need to pay more attention to these people than those who are neutral about us because they simply don't know us.

With dissenters we have to work harder to build a connection and mutual understanding because right now they might hold a negative point of view about us because of something that has happened in the past.

Whether these people in this top left hand box don't know you at all, or know something of

you that might mean they are dissenters, the goal is the same. Your goal with potentials and dissenters is to nurture them into angels. This is a relationship that needs to be nurtured over time. And the way you can do that is to provide them with value. It's your responsibility to learn more about their needs and create and suggest ways that you can help either take work off their plate or help them achieve their goals. You must think first about what you can offer them.

So start with your potentials. Take a good look at them. Get clear on how you could help them first, and how you can provide value. Also clarify what you would like to learn from them. Then simply ask them! Ask them for some time to meet with you

Over time, you can nurture your relationship with potentials so that eventually you turn your potentials into angels...

... which brings us to the last box on the chart – Angels.

Angels

Angels are your most powerful connections. These are people who know and are interested in your work and have authority and power to make things happen for you.

You will likely be in one of two places around angels: either you have them already or you don't.

- if you don't have any angels now that's ok. Think about your potentials and how you can nurture them into a stronger relationship.
- If you already have angels in your corner, be bold and ask them for time and use the same approach in offering value before expecting something in return.



So let's give this a go.

Take a look at the blank chart below. Start with the Angels category. Do you already have Angels in this box? People of influence who know your work, support it and have influence? If so, write their names down here. Just start to identify them for now. Then take time actively thinking of ways that you can maintain, grow or nurture this relationship. Next, spend some time thinking about how you can improve or build your relationship with your Potentials to nurture them into Angels.

Your picture of influence will change over time as your knowledge of the organisation deepens and your career progresses. To be effective you need to update your framework and use it regularly to inform your plan for stakeholder engagement to help accelerate your career.

I hope this guide is useful to you as you think about building your own sphere of influence.

If you would like to pick up this conversation reach us on email at [Kate Franklin](#) or [Elise Finn](#)

And connect with us on LinkedIn: [Kate Franklin](#) and [Elise Finn](#)

At Nkuzi Change our mission is to help organisations unlock the full potential of their people so they can deliver the change the business needs and the culture to support it. We specialise in helping Middle Leaders successfully navigate periods of change and challenge and bring their teams to successful outcomes.

Spot Your Angels

Potentials and Dissenters - NURTURE	Angels - EMBRACE
Everyone Else - ACKNOWLEDGE	Fans - ENGAGE

THE INFLUENCE THEY HOLD

THEIR INTEREST IN/ SUPPORT FOR YOU OR YOU/ YOUR PROJECT