

2017

Managing myself

Managing Upwards



ICG Consortium
eu management training

Managing Upwards

Overview

Welcome to the programme Managing upwards.

Managing upwards is one of a cluster of training programmes related to the theme "Managing myself". The objective of this cluster of programmes is to support managers of the EU institutions enhance their self-awareness, develop their leadership role and style and achieve a work-life balance.

Other programmes in this cluster are:

Boost your energy

In this 1-day workshop participants assess their energy level and understand how their "internal fitness" (physical, emotional, mental) affects their work. They will also start to establish personal routines and practices to increase and renew their personal energy as managers in order to work at their best during the day.

Leadership Lab

This programme comprises 3 workshops each of one day's duration. The objective of the programme is to enable participants to:

- reach their best in their manager role by learning and practice different activities
- deliver better results by applying different leadership styles in various management situations
- have a stronger impact on their organisation, by understanding themselves better and foreseeing the outcomes of their actions

The core challenges

In pursuit of their mandates and goals, most organisations structure the respective contributions of their members according to the nature and level of their responsibilities and power. Under one form or another, this contributes to creating the hierarchical line.

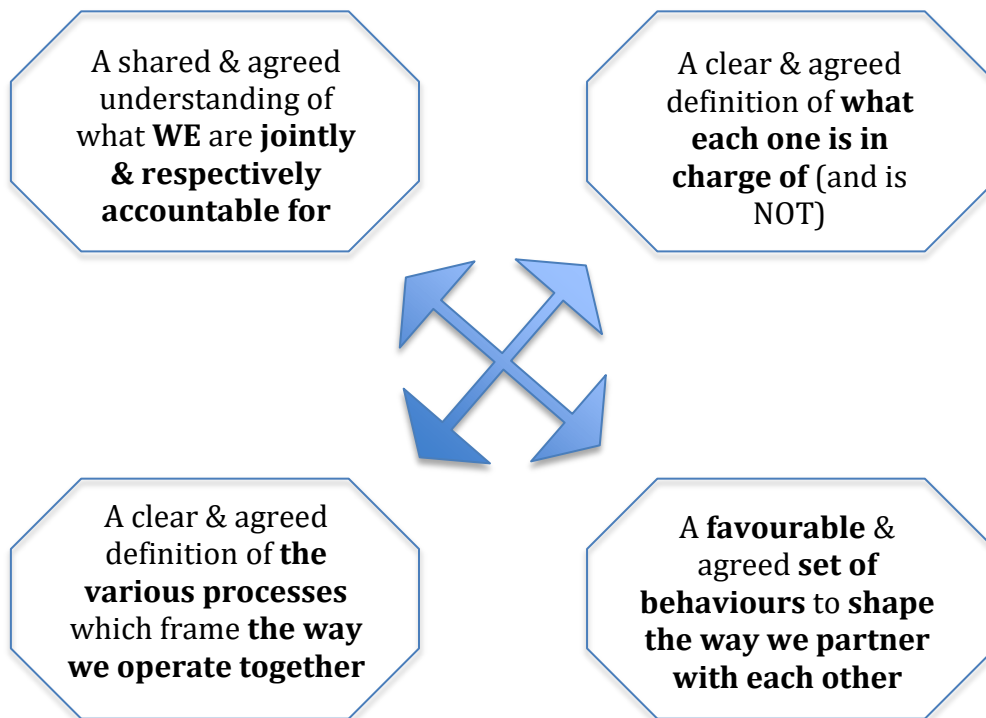
As with many other features in the organisation, this line is meant to be a valuable resource, in particular through generating **the optimal synergies for maximum complementary added-values**. And this is all the more desirable in a context where resources are ever scarcer.

A cell within the organizational system, the relation between a manager and their own manager is an interdependent system itself. However the interdependence does not mean that the two elements are equal – statutory power as well as levels and natures of responsibility, possibilities of financial engagement or stakeholder network differ.

Consequently, working efficiently with one’s manager involves managing the necessary interdependence towards **a deliberately chosen partnership**.

The requisites

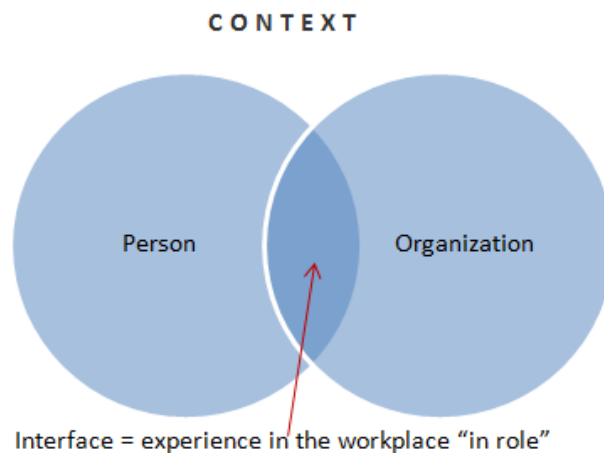
Every successful partnership calls for the optimal management of four major building-blocks, as illustrated in the figure below.



When attempting to work efficiently with their hierarchy, managers should also concentrate on 2 complementary dimensions, which stem from what constitutes their respective roles in the organization.

- a. Everyone’s role in the organization is determined by what the organization prescribes through a number of processes, systems and instruments. At the

same time each person will actually perform identical roles in different ways, on account of their 'Person' factors, as the figure below illustrates.



- b. As part of the 'Person' aspect of the role, each partner fuels the hierarchical relation with a range of factors, all of which may not naturally lead to cooperation and synergies – different cultural backgrounds, different professional histories, sometimes incompatible preferences, values or traits, possibly differing interests or personal objectives, etc.

As a consequence, working efficiently with their hierarchy also means that managers develop themselves in a way which:

- does not ignore these aspects, AND
- succeeds in constructively managing them.

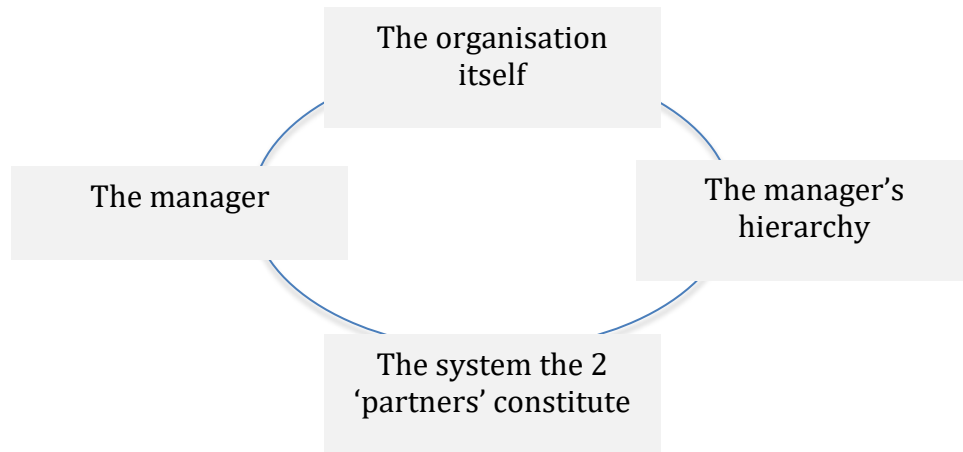
In particular, this requires managers to **go beyond what is implicit**, whether this has been generated:

- by routines,
- by not devoting sufficient time to necessary clarifications and to challenging assumptions, or
- by the comfort brought about by avoiding a few uneasy confrontations.

This is why particular attention should be paid to some crucial conversations between managers and their superiors (cf. below, Practical tips for managing typical situations effectively).

The possible areas of focus

In attempting to optimize the partnership with their hierarchy, managers may be constrained by a number of limiting forces. Those can have four combining (and potentially reinforcing) origins:



1. The organization itself, through:
 - ✓ insufficiently defined scopes of responsibilities (f.i. possible loopholes or discrepancies in the way the formal descriptions of the respective positions are laid out), thus creating blurred responsibility areas and misunderstandings, or illegitimate expectations
 - ✓ command structures and lines which may involve managers having more than one hierarchy
 - ✓ management and/or leadership cultures which may not be conducive to partnership within the hierarchical line
 - ✓ instruments and practices which may play against cooperation and synergies (f.i., the possibility *de facto* given to superiors to not support their reporting managers on performance assessment/management or promotion/mobility suggestions)
2. The manager, through:
 - ✓ their own relation with power and authority in general
 - ✓ their previous 'histories' with superiors
 - ✓ their challenges in self-positioning
 - ✓ where they are in the build-up of their own professional identity, in particular from the point of view of their self-confidence
3. The manager's hierarchy, through:
 - ✓ their relation with power and authority
 - ✓ their expectations vis-à-vis direct reports
 - ✓ their previous histories with direct reports
 - ✓ their own challenges and constraints as managers and leaders
4. The system created by both the manager and their hierarchy, through:
 - ✓ the track-record of cooperation between those two particular partners
 - ✓ the degree of intentions to cooperate, connect and synergise
 - ✓ the common determination (or not) to develop the practical collaborative skills and behaviours.

However, it is their responsibility to focus as appropriate on the areas which they can directly influence – namely **themselves** and **the system they create with their hierarchy**, keeping aware that such an involvement is their best chance of positively influencing the other 2 more distant origins.

Developing myself as a constructive partner

My own relation with power and authority

It is generally determined by a number of factors, among which:







- how I related with authority and power figures in my early years – have I been made comfortable with my own power and authority? Did I have to manage very strong orders or instructions which I did not feel able to challenge or escape? The Drivers model of Transactional Analysis can help identify such instructions or orders as well as their potential impacts (cf. http://changingminds.org/explanations/motivation/kahler_drivers/kahlers_drivers.htm)
- how power and authority are managed in the culture(s) which have shaped me along my life (cf. the Index of Hierarchical Distance in G Hofstede's typology)
- the various power and authority relations I have had to manage as part of my previous work history. What type of superior did I have previously? Were they rather of the empowering type? Did I have to overcome the effects of a very directive leadership and the very limited scope of responsibility I was thus entrusted with?

My own confidence level

The above contribute to shaping it and particularly 3 core components, which have been set to light by W Schutz (cf. The Human Element) through 3 fundamental questions:

- How **significant** do I feel in the eyes of others?
- How **competent** do I feel in the eyes of others?
- How much do I feel the others like me (**likeable**)?

FIRO Theory

All people want to feel:	Significant	Competent	Likable
?			
To some extent all people are afraid of being:	Ignored	Humiliated	Rejected
?			
These feelings and fears affect the way people behave.	Inclusion	Control	Openness

The way I answer each of these questions will have an impact on the way I behave regarding:

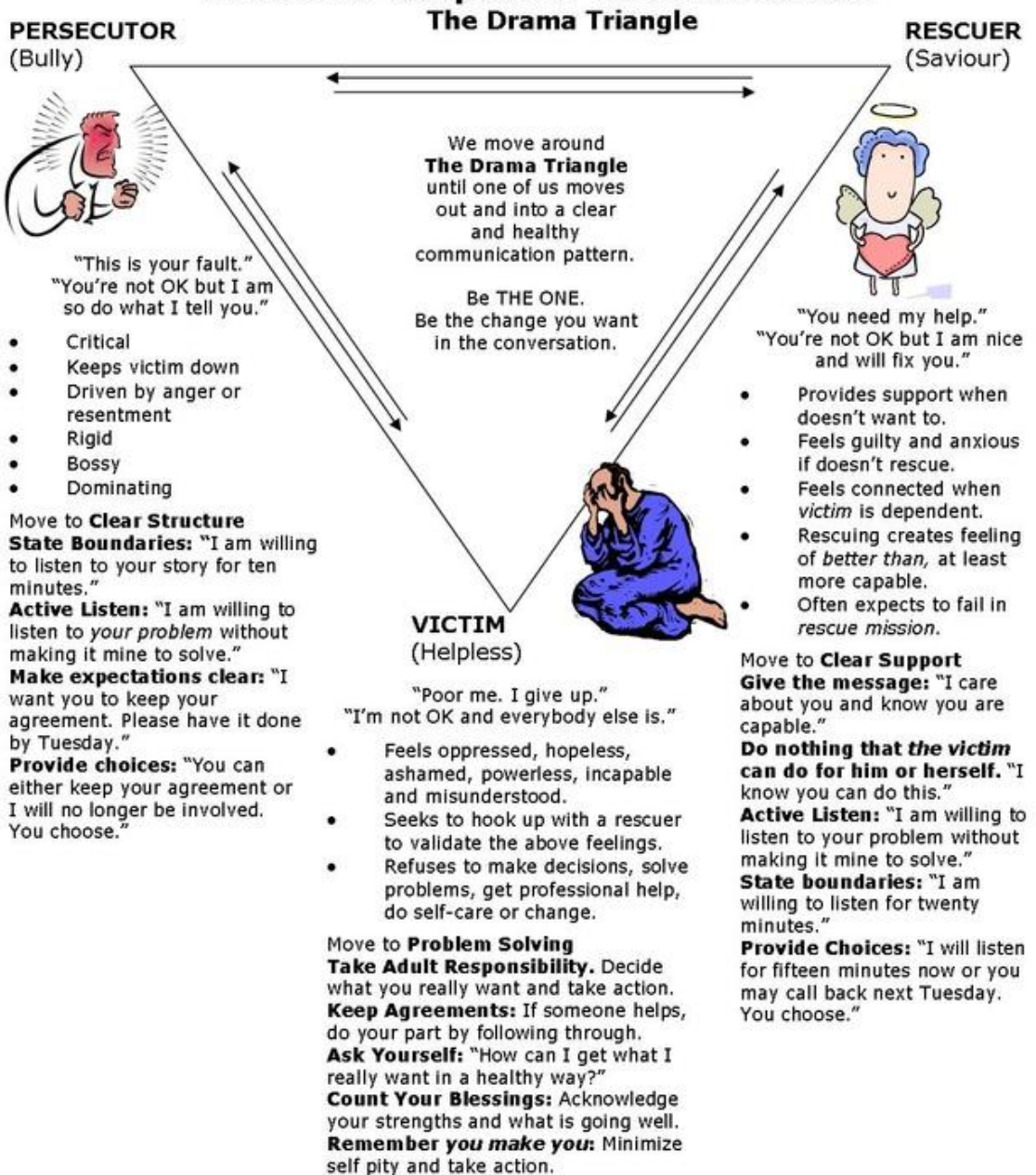
- Inclusion: how much I include others and want to be included by others
- Control: how much I want to control others and be controlled
- Openness: how open I want to be with others and want others to be to me

This will also frame expectations towards my superior. As a 'construct', those expectations can bias my perception, understanding and evaluation of what kind of manager my superior is, which in turn may create frustration, resentment, mistrust or anger. And it has been demonstrated how these mechanisms and emotions can contribute to making us defensive, thus making connection and cooperative dynamics quite unlikely (cf. J. Tamm, <https://youtu.be/vjSTNv4gyMM>).

Such biases are a powerful source of the 'games' we may play with our superior – whether we are aware of them or not. Karpman's Drama Triangle helps understand the various mechanisms at play (cf. <http://fr.slideshare.net/manumjoy/drama-triangle-34210538>). Do I feel victimized by a superior who I feel systematically turns my suggestions down, who uses their power in a non-cooperative way or who bypasses me and relates directly with my team? And do I try to circumvent this state of facts by being harsh with those team members who may respond to the superior's direct solicitations? The figure below displays the basic relations within the Drama Triangle as well as options to turn that triangle into a 'virtuous' one.

Post where you can see!

Painful to Respectful Communication



Notes:

- 1) Adapted from *The Drama Triangle* by Stephen Karpman
- 2) For more details read:
Relationship Drama Part 1 & Relationship Drama Part 2 at <http://SolutionsForResilience.com/blog/>



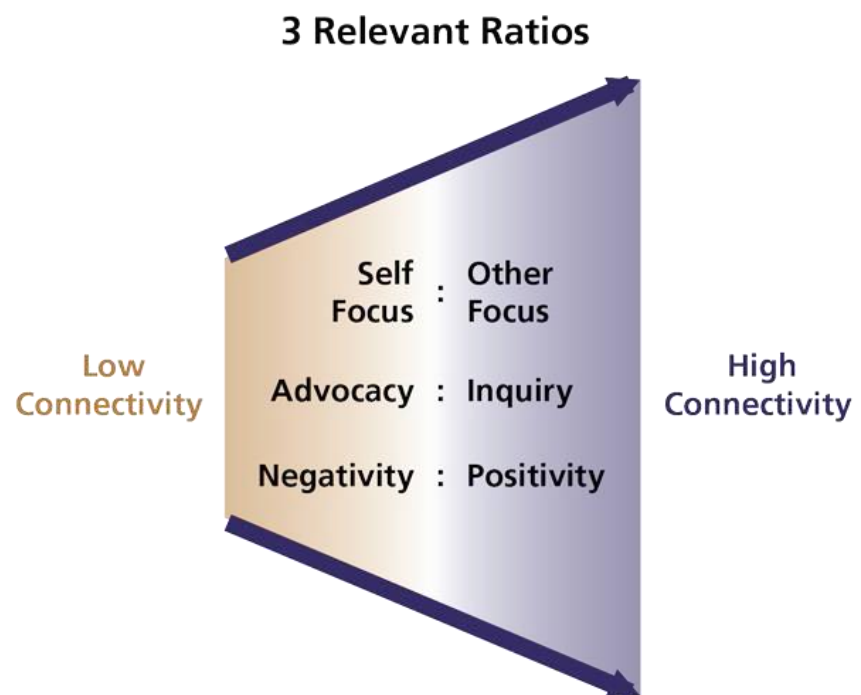
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Key partnership behaviours

So what are those key behaviours which I can fuel our 'partnership system' with?

- Consciously and explicitly embracing a positive dynamics 'no matter what' – having the courage of confronting the situations which could result in misunderstandings, mutual blame, uselessly waiting for the other party to make the first move, keeping silent and brooding over frustrations
- Displaying a genuine positive interest in the superior's point of view and needs (possibly in spite of disagreements) as an early signal of my partnering intention, fueled by significant exploring of where they come from. In this respect, Marcial Losada research provides useful material on the conditions for the high performance of any team (cf. *Breaking the Code on High Performing Teams*, March 12, 2015 By [Phil Sandahl, MCC.](#), @ <http://teamcoachinginternational.com/breaking-the-code-on-high-performing-teams/>)



- Positioning myself as a reliable partner, with a high degree of awareness about the realities of our system, a confident sense of my specific added-value as well as clear alignment with the organization, my superior and myself
- Displaying a balanced ability to express myself with Directness and Diplomacy as a way of keeping focused on efficiency (we should waste no undue time and energy when interacting together AND we should make a point of jeopardizing the relation by disrespectful or harsh words).

Practical tips for managing situations effectively

1) Discussing a particular issue

No matter whether the conversation was started by myself or my superior, and no matter what my own belief or preferred course of action are, I need to contribute to ensuring that:

- we share a common understanding of why the issue requires processing, what the high-level stakes are and what the stakeholder network looks like
- we agree the relevant set of criteria for later decision-making
- we consider a range of robust options (mutually challenging routine, or cheap and easy solutions), honestly setting to light the possible shortcomings they can have or constraints they may create
- we define precisely the respective levels and scopes for our specific interventions (Who informs whom, when and how? Who takes in charge this or that part of the action plan? Etc.)

It is of utmost importance that enough time is invested in clarifying the initial understanding of what the issue is exactly and of why and for whom it is an issue, going beyond assumptions or partial experience of the situation as it is.

2) Getting my superior's buy-in

As part of my responsibilities as a manager, I am expected to come up with suggestions or recommendations for optimizing a process or specific team's competences, for adjusting objectives or for improving the team organisation, for instance. Additionally, I may have to place a request with my superior. How successful I am in these circumstances will most of the time depend on my ability to:

- get their initial ok about the underlying expected outcomes (*'Given the recent shift in the DG's strategy, it has occurred to me that our team needs to be even more reactive when Unit X or Y place a request with us. Have I got that right?'*). Indeed, the suggestion or recommendation should appear as the surest way to ensure the outcome (*'In that case, I have invited the team to reflect upon ... and this is the ideas we could come up with.'*)
- be open and honest about what solution(s) has/ve been considered, what will be required to make it/them successful and what are the possible risks involved

- share what tentative action plan has already been considered
- explore whether the superior has reasons for arbitrating in one direction rather than another and whether they have any reservation about any element of the proposed action plan(s)
- clearly set to light what support might be required from the superior and whether this is manageable or not

How clear, brief and to the point I am will influence how successful I am in my attempts. Most superiors will equate information overload, lack of focus and confusion with the 'problem at hand' and/or danger.

And how much I can show that I have thought the matter through without giving my superior the feeling that I want to twist their arm or corner them will definitely play in my favour.

3) Seeking and providing feedback

Because the hierarchical relation generally develops over some time, there is need for constant adjustments.

On-going feedback is a key instrument for that purpose.

But true partnership means that feedback should be **given AND sought**. In addition, it should also be **taken** appropriately (cf. above, Defensiveness).

I should make it a habit of asking myself the following questions when contemplating asking for or giving feedback:

- what is the exact purpose of that piece of feedback and what will the benefits be (for the two partners, and possibly beyond)?
- what are the tangible changes that piece of feedback should contribute to?
- what should the feedback bear upon exactly, what is the specific scope (and what it should NOT be about)?
- what is the most appropriate setting for that conversation (time, place, environment)?
- how should the key messages be phrased and what body language should support them positively?
- how should the various pieces of information be structured?
- how should agreement and ownership manifest themselves?
- what commitments should be made and followed-up?

In addition effective feedback as part of a partnership:

- aims at improvement or optimisation
- is non-judgmental
- is based on tangible facts, events, behaviours, which the parties have a direct experience of
- involves no blame or guilt-generating statements (cf. the Drama Triangle)

4) Saying 'No'

As opposed to the previous situations, saying 'No' is probably the most confrontational one for many managers.

It may particularly be so because it is the one that may remind us of how we felt and acted as children when having to challenge authority. How did we react if and when we heard the '*Hurry up*', '*Make effort*', '*Be strong*' or '*Be nice*' instructions? How did we manage to get across to others that we either did not see the point in doing X or in doing it in such way, or that we thought there were more important things we should attend to? And how much energy and time may it have taken us to be able to try and make alternative points without resorting to sheer refusal?

And, again, partnering does not mean that every request, every suggestion or every instruction should be abided by.

However, in order for me to both offer a legitimate 'No' AND maintain a positive and constructive relation with my superior, I need to ground that 'No' in fully acceptable reasons while expressing it in a way that supports a positive relationship.

But how may I feel myself if a team member was answering me with a 'No'? I would probably want it to be:

- preceded by a clear and accurate rephrasing of my initial request – I want to make sure that if I get a 'No' it relates to my real request
- supported by the expression of a genuine desire to help and not create problems
- accounted for by legitimate alternative priorities (which I may myself have set) or constraints
- backed by possible ways out (partial 'Yes', someone else taking up the request, etc.)
- expressed in a way which would not make me feel looked down, bullied, or left with no choice – the two of us are not two kids on a playground.

LEARN TO SAY
'NO' TO THE
GOOD SO YOU
CAN SAY 'YES'
TO THE BEST

- John C. Maxwell

