Objectives At Work

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Time is hard to account for — it's easily consumed, squandered, and lost. But it receives far less attention than money does. [1]

Remove Objectives that kill motivation and initiative in peoples work.

Supercharge productivity through using the right objectives

[1] *Time for Happiness* Ashley Whillans, Harvard Business Review, January 2019

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Organising our Ourselves and our Work

Ourselves

Many of us in our lives, our personal and working existence, have aspirations for how the future should look for us.

Long term could look like being financially independent before retiring, in the medium term to travel parts of the world.

Short term, can be like new year resolutions, to build new positive habits, complete a short course or move to a new home.

Often our objectives can be ad hoc – stuff that we take on because we have a sense of responsibility. In one organisation that I worked with, there was a mantra of if you need something done, give it to the busiest person in the room.

Job descriptions, can be long and ambiguous, especially in larger organisations where they are most prevalent. JDs can be helpful to give members and managers alike an agreed set of responsibilities.

Our Work

For those of us that own, lead, or contribute to a business that has goals for growth, expansion, efficiency, or profitability. Better still to create a plan outlining the investment in new initiatives, the how to grow, the cost and the expected benefits.

As a part of the plan using clear targets and timing for what you hope to achieve over the next year. It can be challenging to work through how the targets are shared around. How long each initiative will take to be effective.

Work to be done, does not only come from the top of the Org Chart. Our team members or direct reports can delegate activities, especially if we ask them. When organising people, a lack of their input can be a missed opportunity.

During what has been declared as the decade of disruption, self-management, organisation and objectives are essential for us and everyone we mix with.

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Impact of Objectives

Objectives are usually set at work, however, can be set for a holiday, an exercise regime or indeed writing a book. Done the right way, working through what we want out of a day, a week or a month. Tracking our progress can greatly assist focus and impact of deliberately working to these of objectives.

Objective setting at its worst can be meaningless and demotivating, perhaps confusing and conflicting. Worst of all we become automated, thoughtless as we plod through the day, not thinking about what we are doing.

At its best, organising our goals and purpose into achievable prioritised chunks can spur us on. Not only that, make us successful as we channel our energies thoughtfully into the most important and rewarding areas.

My worry was that it is easy for people to just turn up and be reactive to what is going on around them. Run with the inbound requests, the meetings and emails and not assert themselves on their working day.

My worst fear was that we would travel to work and not be sure what we were going to achieve that day. Sitting in the car, train or bus just thinking about the urgent, but not important stuff.

Professional and capable people though we may be, when was the last time that we looked at their job description and our annual objectives? Have we been tracking our progress methodically, each day making steps towards this multitude of requirements placed on us?

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Types of Objectives

The Job, Position or Role - what is required of the person in the role for the year, quarter or month?

To learn the people in our team, our peers and those that we report to.

Part of this is usually to meet and understand people in other functions that we would potentially need assistance from or at least get to know, to interact with.

Business - learning and working with the strategy of the greater organization – the culture, values, systems, processes, procedures, goals and initiatives. Learning the industry sector, the technical and commercial, the composition of the sector.

Sometimes thought of as being a team player. To participate in group activities, such as contribute to meetings, give ideas and feedback. Prepare work and communicate with the group.

Developmental – especially considering the lifecycle of the role, or a change relating to the role, there is often a developmental requirement of the role. Upon entering a role there often a need for knowledge and skills to be developed for their particular role.

'Most job descriptions do not list checking email and social networking site as a core part of anyone's daily responsibilities.'
Tom Rath

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Setting Objectives

Beyond the recruitment phase, there can be little thought given to our skills, abilities and strengths to our objectives. Through trial and error, in addition to support and guidance there is a zone where objectives work well and outside of that we may struggle.

It can be easy to take on too many initiatives, some roles may not have enough objectives, making work boring. For others too many objectives can be hard to juggle, making work stressful and seemingly set up to fail.

Not being involved in setting our objectives, unable to negotiate or craft them can mean our ownership is diminished. They just don't seem that important. Often if we could balance our desired challenge – having enough variety and stretch to maintain our attention, without boredom.

Safety to attempt to stretch without sandbagging – a tempting thing to do when asked to write our own objectives. Setting targets that are foolproof to achieve – so easy that we have moved us into boredom. This is often to de-risk incentives and can make a mockery of the process. The reverse are uniform increases, regardless of performance, always received an annual 30% increase on revenue targets without logic attached to the objective.

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Performance vs Objective Setting

Performance	Clarity Focus	Challenge & Safety	In the Zone
*****	Laser	Leading	Accomplished
****	In Range	Extended	Extended
***	Broad	Following	BAU
**	Basic	Restricted	Delayed
*	Confused	Threatened	Directionless

Performance can be closely aligned with clarity – understanding and focus. Great objectives can gamify our intentions, like important objectives – ones that relate to our mission and purpose. A smart watch tracks achievement against my daily, weekly and monthly objectives. Every day as I progress, I attempt to exceed my activity goals over longer periods.

Considering the chart with Challenge and Safety, many of us appreciate challenge, however, are unlikely to take risks if that threatens us. Our review against our objectives at work have consequences.   On one hand accolades, eligibility for advancement, financial bonuses and gifts like trips. The flipside can mean our role is threatened, indeed our ongoing employment, potentially micromanagement and penalties.

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The Deadly Sins of Objective Setting

Missing the Why? ‣ Failing to discuss the reasons, importance, the intent, the context, otherwise seeming transactional.

Too Many Goals ‣ When giving or receiving goals and objectives, too many can feel like a grab bag of stuff that should be shared/improved, rather than lumped on a person.

No plan requested ‣ Sometimes there is a lack of commitment when goals are being set, failing to discuss approach and timing. This can make it vague and seem unimportant.

Failing to Push ‣ Problems can happen when we spend more time negotiating the goal downward instead of figuring out how to achieve it.

No one person responsible ‣ On making a request, everyone shrugs their shoulders and goes back to what they were doing once we leave.

If you can fit it in ‣ when given objectives, some can be an after thought, as though we are not that serious about it and will probably let it go after a while.

Trades ‣ being pushed back when giving initiatives to members, switching one for another, ignoring improvements and development in their work.

Ambiguous ‣ setting objectives that can't be explained to others easily and are neither definable or measurable.

Lack of Understanding ‣ Not considering their personality, communication or learning style and information needs. In terms of how we work, the difference can be great.

Treating others as followers ‣ Micromanaging and failing to let them figure out better ways to do things.

Failing to begin with the end in mind ‣ As Dr Covey recommends for us do things twice, to imagine first and then practically, avoiding finding ourselves where we had not intended.

> *'People are working harder than ever, but because they lack clarity and vision, they aren't getting very far. They, in essence, are pushing a rope with all of their might.'*
> **DR. STEPHEN R. COVEY**

Is it in the Zone?

Purpose and Mission

How does our chosen work fit in with what we set out to achieve? Then trying to understand where should we apply ourselves? What is the right fit for us in terms of role, culture, collaboration and purpose or mission.
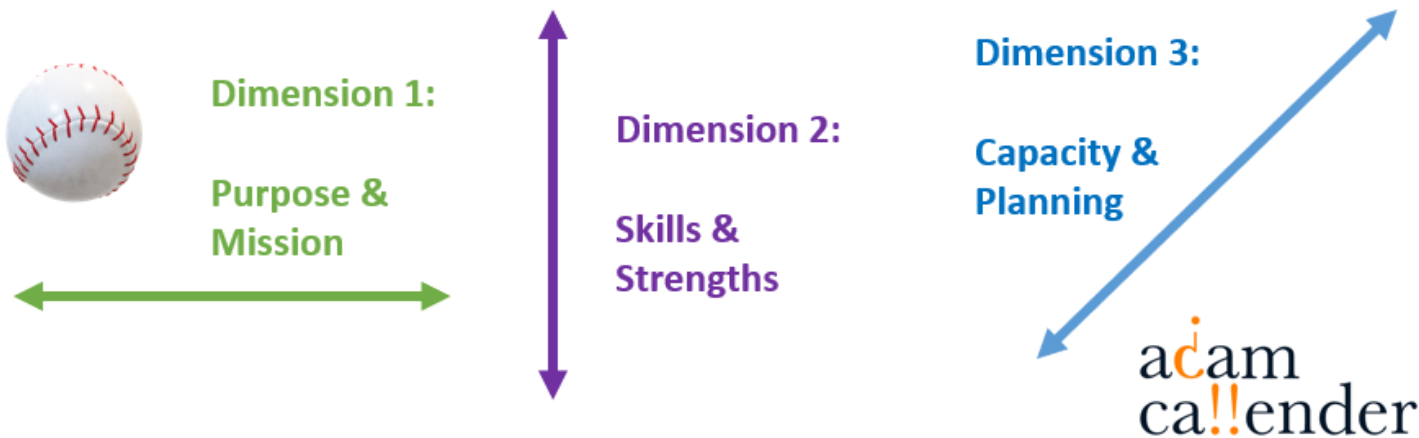
Skills & Strengths

'What great leaders have in common is that each truly knows his or her strengths – and can call on the right strength at the right time.' Tom Rath

No matter our age, we have developed skills through our education and vocation. Perhaps our interests and hobbies.

It may be reassuring that we all have talents and strengths, they are often our lens that we use to view the world. In managing ourselves, awareness of what we are and are not good at is important. What we enjoy, don't enjoy, focus on our strengths and understand how we work best.

In the Zone - Dimensions

Dimension 1:

Purpose & Mission

Dimension 2:

Skills & Strengths

Dimension 3:

Capacity & Planning

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Capacity & Planning

Some people are revered for their ability to get a lot of work done, through their personal organisation. Some are super organised, making sure that everything is listed and diarised.

Most people feel busy, overwhelmed at work, especially managers feeling like demand exceeds supply. Often struggling to keep up with requests, dealing with constant interruptions and distractions.

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Is it in the Zone?

The Zone in 3 Dimensions

Inspired by softball. Visualising the ball as the objective in the context of the three-dimensional grid. Do the objectives fit within the rectangular box? Do they fit the criteria?

Considering objectives that we can make time for, that we could fit it into our schedule. Ones that would satisfy our idea of an achievable list, even if it is a bit of a squeeze.

Those that meet our need for satisfying work, work that we are inspired by and are at ease with investing ourselves in. In other words, doing our best work.

Finally, it fits within our idea of activities that we feel that we are good at, perhaps excel in?

Ideal maybe, however if we were aware of the dimensions of what fits, these objectives that most would want to grab hold of and own them!

In the Zone the 3 dimensions

Capacity & Organisation

Skills & Strengths

Purpose & Mission
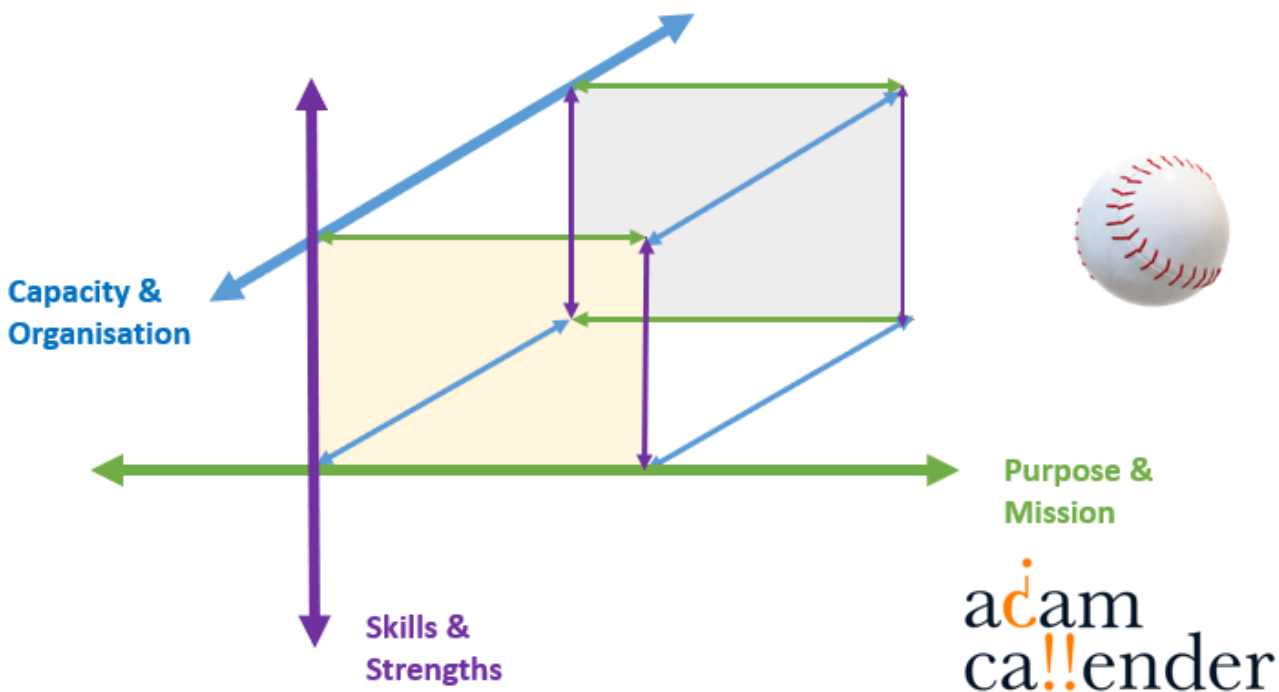
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★ TURN ★
IDEAS INTO
REALITY

Adam Callender

Executive Coach | Business Mentor | Facilitator

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