CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

Estimated time: 20 minutes

This Learning Activity will increase your understanding of what you can influence and what is out of your control. By doing so you can put more efforts and energy into things where you can actually make a difference!

GOALS

After completing Circle of Influence, you should:

- Know what of your tasks at work that are inside your Circle of Influence
- Know what of your tasks at work that are outside of your Circle of Influence
- Know how you can expand your Circle of Influence

HOW

Read the following pages and do the exercises in the end. You can do them individually or together with your colleagues, perhaps as a common activity in a team meeting.

CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

As a human being, you have the capacity to be proactive. You can focus on the things that you can actually do something about, or you can add to the stress in your life by worrying over the things you have no control over. In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey introduces the concept of Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence.

The Circle of Concern is the area that you have no control over. The Circle of Influence is the area that you do have control over.

Covey tells us that in life, our Circle of Influence is often smaller than the Circle of Concern. There are more things we cannot control, like the economy, natural disasters or a company merger, yet we tend to put a lot of energy on them which depletes our energy.
If you continuously put your energy into things you cannot change in the Circle of Concern, it will become larger and your negative energy will increase, adding feelings of stress and helplessness.

**Proactive** people accept the things they cannot change and focus on the Circle of Influence; the area they have control over and can do something about. When they do this they get more positive energy and their Circle of Influence becomes bigger.

**Reactive** people tend to neglect those issues that are under their control and influence. Instead they put their focus on their Circle of Concern which only gets bigger. As a result their Circle of Influence shrinks.

By starting to be aware of your worries within your Circle of Concern it becomes apparent that there are some things you have no real control over and others you can do something about. As a result you can see where you put your energy and make a choice to become more proactive and focus on what you can more easily impact. When you act on your Circle of Influence you are better equipped to reduce stress levels and increase happiness, because you feel that you can initiate and influence change. By being aware of the two circles you have a great tool and opportunity to consciously focus your energy and actions in meaningful ways.

**Three kinds of control**

There are three kinds of control according to Stephen Covey.

**Direct control:** problems involving our own behavior – solved by working with our habits. For example smoking or always being late.

**Indirect control:** problems involving other people’s behavior – solved by changing our methods of influencing others. For example when someone is rude or angry
with you, you can listen to them and try to understand instead of becoming defensive and argumentative.

**No control:** accept and learn to live with the aspects of life that we cannot control, even if we do not like them. For example the weather or the economy.

It is inspiring to realize that in choosing your response to circumstances – you powerfully affect your circumstances. When you change one part of the formula, you change the nature of the results.

**Exercises**

These exercises can be done individually or together in your team, or in another context together with others.

**Exercise 1)**

1. Make a Circle of Concern and a Circle of Influence on a paper, as the picture shows above.
2. Write a list of all your issues of concern that you face at work at the moment.
3. Now, have a look at each concern and distinguish whether your can influence it or not. Write the concerns you can influence in the inner circle and the concerns you cannot influence in the outer circle.
4. Share your findings with your manager, and maybe with your colleagues as well. Have a discussion around what happens to a person who focuses on: - what he/she can influence (empowered, feeling of control, growth) - what he/she cannot influence (feeling powerless, loss of energy)
Exercise 2)

A useful way of determining which Circle your concerns are in is by listening to the language you use. You can distinguish between the use of the words “have” and “be”. Circles of Concern are full of “have’s” while Circles of Influence are full of “be’s”.

The table below provides some examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have’s (Reactive)</th>
<th>Be’s (Proactive)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If only I had a manager who wasn’t...</td>
<td>I’ll be happy when I have completed my task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had respect from...</td>
<td>I can be a better role model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If only I had a less demanding job...</td>
<td>I can be more organised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had more motivation....</td>
<td>I can be more loving / understanding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercise 3)

What can you do today to expand your Circle of Influence to build more positive energy in your life and at work? Write down your answers:

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

LEARN MORE

If you would like to find other Learning Activities that will help you become more self-aware and increase your self-leadership, visit our Leadership Home on IKEA Inside and search for Learning Activities.

Please note that all material in our Leadership Home is in English. If you want to do translated Learning Activities, ask your manager.

Source:
Covey, S.R. (2013). The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. Simon & Schuster Ltd.