The Four Stages® of Contribution

Participant name:
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The Four Stages® of Contribution

We all know the definition of “career” today is very different than 30 years ago. There more options than ever, and also more uncertainty than ever before. How we define a successful career can look very different from person to person, and can change as we gain experience and deal with the realities of a global economy. However, one thing common to just about everyone is a desire to make a difference, be valued, or excel in some way. No one sets out on their career path with a desire to be mediocre.

Too often, however, something unexpected happens to us as we progress along our career journey. We wake up one morning and realize we’re not quite where we wanted to be. Our employer doesn’t seem to value us as highly as we’d like, and we wonder why.

This “moment of truth” may come early or late, or it may not come at all. In fact, many people remain highly valued and deeply satisfied throughout their working lives. How? They understand their employer’s expectations, those unwritten rules of the game that define what high performance looks like over the course of a career.

For 30 years, we’ve been studying the relationship between organizational expectations and individual performance. Our findings are unequivocal: If you want to remain a top contributor, you’ve got to change the way you contribute. The same skills and approaches that make you a star early in your career won’t guarantee you continued fame and fortune as the years pass.

Korn Ferry’s research has consistently found that the “one-size-fits-all” definition of high performance is a myth. Instead, the organization’s expectations of you—the templates against which your contributions are compared—change over time. These changes are most succinctly described by the Four Stages® of Contribution. During your career you can, and often do, move between stages. We call this movement a “novation.” Each stage is determined by role and contribution, not by title.
Let’s examine each of these Four Stages in greater detail:

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Contributing dependently</td>
<td>Contributing independently</td>
<td>Contributing through others</td>
<td>Contributing strategically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Willingly accepts supervision</td>
<td>• Assumes responsibility for definable projects</td>
<td>• Increases in technical breadth</td>
<td>• Provides direction to the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrates success on a portion of larger project or task</td>
<td>• Relies less on supervision; works independently and produces significant results</td>
<td>• Develops broad business perspective</td>
<td>• Defines/drives critical business opportunities and needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Masters basic and routine tasks</td>
<td>• Increases technical expertise and ability</td>
<td>• Stimulates others through ideas and knowledge</td>
<td>• Exercises power responsibly</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Shows “directed” creativity and initiative</td>
<td>• Develops credibility and reputation</td>
<td>• Becomes a manager, mentor, or idea leader in developing others</td>
<td>• Obtains essential resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Performs well under time and budget pressure</td>
<td>• Builds a strong internal network of relationships</td>
<td>• Represents the organization effectively to clients and external groups</td>
<td>• Sponsors promising individuals to prepare them for leadership roles</td>
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<td>• Learns how “we” do things</td>
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• Builds strong internal and external networks
The Four Stages® of Contribution

Stage 1: Contributing dependently

Picture yourself as a new graduate, entering the workforce full of energy and big ideas. All that enthusiasm is great—and you need to channel it into learning the ropes, showing your stuff, and absorbing the company culture. Your skills are strong but untested; your intelligence has been sharpened, but not applied. You need to take the raw materials you’ve got and start building a foundation.

Learning how to follow comes before learning how to lead. That’s the essence of Stage 1. Characteristics of Stage 1 include:

- the work is never entirely your own.
- your assignment is part of a larger effort or activity.
- you are expected to do much of the detailed and routine work on your part of the combined effort.

In Stage 1, you are expected to accept supervision and direction willingly and to exercise initiative and creativity within a well-defined area. Ideally, you’ll work with a mentor to learn the approaches, the organizational savvy, and the judgment not found in textbooks. If you learn quickly and well, you will be given increasing responsibility.

One of the major problems in Stage 1 is adjusting to the idea of “taking orders.” Like it or not, you’re the new kid on the block. You don’t know the ins and outs of the job yet. You need to earn the trust of others. A new employee described his feelings during his first year on the job:

> My first year here was hell. I was ready to go to work and make a contribution. But for a year, no one paid much attention to my suggestions. I almost left. It took me a year to realize that I didn’t yet understand the complexity of the problems we were working on. Now I try to take enough time with new people to help them understand the dilemma of those early years.

While it is important to stay in Stage 1 long enough to build a solid foundation and to earn the trust of others, people who stay in Stage 1 indefinitely will, over time, become less and less valued in the organization. You can’t spend an entire career in Stage 1. You’d go crazy—if you weren’t fired first.
Stage 2: Contributing independently

Most individuals look forward to having their own projects or areas of responsibility. Earning this opportunity and taking advantage of it moves a person into Stage 2. People functioning in this stage:

- assume responsibility for a definable portion of a work effort or process.
- work independently and produce results that are recognized as their own.
- develop credibility and a reputation for competent work.
- manage more of their own time and are more accountable for outcomes.

Think of Stage 2 as your solid technical foundation, essential for building a long-term career. In this stage, your peer relationships take on greater importance, especially in a team context. People in Stage 2 are true team players, pulling their weight without the need for a lot of guidance, and willingly sharing information with their fellow team members.

Stage 2 individuals rely less on their supervisor or mentor for direction, and more on their fellow team members. In fact, they begin to resent being “micromanaged.” For example:

My first manager taught me a lot, but after a while I didn’t need all the hand-holding and direction. So I was happy to be transferred to a new area. The new project leader was a better manager. He helped me to expand my influence. He encouraged me to develop contacts with people in my field, both inside and outside the company. He showed me how to interact with these people as well as how to make presentations to management and to customers.

To move into Stage 2, individuals need to develop their own ideas and judgment. They need to cultivate their own standards of performance. Developing confidence in one’s own judgment is a difficult but necessary process. One person’s experience with this process may illustrate the point:

I had been working with my mentor on several projects for three years before I developed the necessary confidence to submit a proposal on my own. But I found that my confidence was short lived. I had been used to making decisions, but I had always checked them with my mentor. Now that I had my own project, I lacked the confidence to make any of the important decisions. He was unavailable for about six months, and I was almost paralyzed during that period. I made very little progress on the project. Eventually I discovered that I could get the opinions of other people in the department and then make a decision.
Stage 2 is an extremely important step in one’s development. Resist the temptation to rush through Stage 2. If you move too fast into a management or leadership role, you’ll never have the credibility necessary to make broader contributions. Pay your dues—make sure you first establish yourself as a competent professional specialist.

Stage 2 is a key decision point in your career. Many people find that they prefer a “leave me alone and let me do my work” type of role. Indeed, the most readily identifiable role in most organizations is the independent contributor—the expert, specialist, or “hired gun” working as a member of a team.

This hired gun philosophy is fraught with peril, however. Continued recognition and reward in Stage 2 requires (1) staying at the “cutting edge” of your discipline, and (2) continued strategic importance of that discipline to the organization. You may be able to control the former, but the latter is beyond your influence. You probably know someone who was extremely good at what he/she did, but is now a bystander because the world leap-frogged his/her chosen area of Stage 2 depth.

So if you decide to stay in Stage 2, don’t sit back and expect to be valued forever. In any stage, you need to actively expand your skills and build your contribution.
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Stage 3: Contributing through others

The key to Stage 3 is the ability to “contribute through others.” This doesn’t necessarily mean managing or supervising other people. Recent research from eighteen organizations shows that about one-third of those in Stage 3 are non-supervisors. In other words, there are a lot of people out there who have discovered how to have broader impact and influence without making the move into management.

The roles most often played by people in Stage 3 are:

1. **Coach.** A coach is someone who equips others with the tools, knowledge and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective. Coaches don’t develop people; they equip people to develop themselves.

2. **Informal mentor.** A mentor is an experienced, well-established employee who takes a personal interest in the careers of others and facilitates their development. He or she does this by providing crucial information, making important introductions, serving as a role model, providing support and guidance, encouraging the participation of younger people in making decisions, or in any other way making a significant contribution to their development.

3. **Project or team leader.** This is the person who heads up multi-person projects, teams, or task forces, but isn’t assigned people responsibility. This role may often be “formalized”—that is, it’s a specific job assignment given to a person by management. It requires broad perspective and the ability to accomplish tasks that are greater in scope than one person could accomplish alone. Good project leaders are always good coaches who know how to plan and organize the efforts of others.

4. **Idea leader.** Idea leaders are those to whom others look for help in solving problems and dealing with unexpected situations. Often very creative thinkers who are well networked, idea leaders bring crucial information into the work group and make sure that the information is broadly shared. They are often seen as wise, savvy “gurus” in their function or discipline.

5. **Internal consultant.** This is a common Stage 3 role. Internal consultants are people who are widely known and sought out for help on numerous projects. They know how to get resources, influence management, and make change happen. Not just sitting in their cubicles waiting for the phone to ring, they take a proactive approach to their work. They look for areas where their expertise and background will be helpful, then find ways to contribute.
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Making the novation from Stage 2 to Stage 3 is often the most difficult transition. There are several shifts in activities that must take place if an individual is to move into Stage 3. He or she must:

- develop a greater breadth of technical skills and apply those skills in several areas.
- build a network of people outside his or her own work group and use that network to help the group get its work done.
- become involved in the development of people and the stimulation of others through ideas and information.

One Stage 3 non-manager described her role in these words:

> Right now I find the sponsors for our work. I do the conceptual thinking, develop the project, and then get someone to support it. After I get the support, I must coordinate and collaborate with others, and still do my share of the actual work.

She remained the force behind the project and also worked closely with those doing the detail work.

Some employees are exceptionally innovative. Often this kind of individual becomes an idea person or consultant for a group. Jonas Jensen, a 59-year-old idea leader, described his work in this way:

> I sell ideas. When I work on a problem, it starts to bug me. At some time, I will read or discover something and apply it back to solve the original problem. I then share my learnings with others so they don’t need to reinvent the wheel. Others often come to me with problems they cannot solve. Generally I can pull some information from my experience or reading and give them a direction to follow in solving the problem.

Probably the most central shift that occurs as individuals move into Stage 3 is the nature of their relationships. In Stage 2, you had to learn to take care of yourself. In Stage 3, you have to learn to be interdependent, to assume some form of responsibility for work other than your own. A marketing person who had been doing a lot of independent work described the process:

> I sold my manager on a new project. Now there are three other people working on the project. We are putting in long hours and having a lot of fun. But there are new challenges. I have always asked my bosses to give me independence, and I gave them loyalty in return. Now I have to learn to do that with the people on my team.
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Stage 3 requires strong interpersonal skills like agreeing on objectives, delegating, coaching, and coordinating. You need to be able to build the confidence of co-workers, not tear it down. If you’re threatened by the success of others, you won’t be able to provide them the guidance and freedom to explore and test their skills.

One dilemma for technical Stage 3’s is that you’ll find yourself pulling away from technical work. The question is: How far? Some make a great effort to stay close to their field:

I assumed when I came here that being a good engineer was all that was necessary. Later I found that engineering was more than just doing equations. You have to conceive, sell, and direct a program. I began to do all those things and found myself in management, mainly because I didn’t want to work for the other people they were considering. I want to stay close to technical work and maybe move back into it. Because I know it is difficult to move out of management into technical work, I have stayed close to my field, written papers, and still consider myself to be an engineer.

Keeping a foot in each camp is hard to do long-term. Eventually, you’ll probably have to let go of some of the hands-on technical work in order to be successful in a broader Stage 3 role.
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Stage 4: Contributing strategically

Not many people progress beyond Stage 3, and that’s okay. Moving through the stages isn’t a race with the prize going to the one who gets to Stage 4 first. But your employer does need some people to provide the high-level leadership that will define the future. Only 5 percent of employees operate in a Stage 4 way. If you have the interest, here’s what it takes. Stage 4 people:

• exercise significant influence over critical decisions in the organization.
• help to shape the future direction of a major part of the organization.
• represent the organization in wide and varied interactions both outside and inside the organization.
• sponsor promising people who might fill future key roles in the organization.

Believe it or not, many technical contributors find ways to play a Stage 4 role without moving into management. Here are some examples:

1. **The idea innovator.** These people influence the future of the organization through original concepts that often lead the organization to change the way it does its work. They champion new systems, processes, and operating principles that improve the productive capacity of the organization. Their influence is based on a reputation for achievement and a keen sense of what builds the organization’s ability to compete in the marketplace. Such individuals may work quite closely with a manager or peer to help sell their ideas. Donna Jones is an example of the idea innovator. Her department manager described her as follows:

   Donna is one of the brightest people I know. Her knowledge of the field is outstanding. She is talented, hard-working, and disciplined. She sets goals for herself on a technical project and achieves them. Every two or three years she has a new direction she wants the company to follow, and she is almost always right. She is not a saleswoman; she gets people like me to sell her ideas.

2. **Internal entrepreneur.** These high-energy people are adept at seeing new business opportunities, then assembling the buy-in, money, and staff to pursue new product ideas and other business objectives. Often these people head large programs but directly supervise very few people. Art Fry, the inventor of 3M’s original Post-It Note, is a classic example of an internal entrepreneur. Another less famous individual who seemed clearly in Stage 4 described his work this way:

   I had an idea for a new product area and was getting very little support through the formal channels. So I talked to a couple of people on my level and convinced them it was a good idea. We went ahead and did it, on the premise that when you’re successful, it’s easier to get forgiveness than permission. Today that new product is bringing in a significant part of our sales.
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3 Sponsor. Sponsors influence the direction of the organization through the selection and development of key people. A sponsor keeps an eye out for competent people, then gets them placed in key positions where they will be tested, challenged, and have the opportunity to prove themselves capable of making decisions affecting the organization’s future. A sponsor makes sure key individuals are not pigeonholed or left to stagnate in unchallenging assignments by a rigid seniority-type promotion system or by less competent, insecure supervisors.

In comparison to the mentor role in Stage 3, the sponsor role requires less frequent contact and is probably a more distant relationship. Often, individual contributors who are in Stage 4 have a reputation outside the organization through their achievements and/or publications. This enhances their credibility inside the organization and enables them to play an important role in recruiting key talent.

Another characteristic of people in Stage 4 is their extensive network of relationships outside the organization. One of our Stage 4 interviewees described himself as “multi-organizational” because he worked on so many external boards, committees, and associations. Many of these individuals maintain extended networks of contacts. Maintaining these outside contacts is critical because it brings into the organization current information about events and trends in the environment.
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Value of contributions

As we noted earlier, the original research found a strong relationship between development stage and value placed on an individual’s contribution. In general, a person’s perceived value increases as she or he moves through the Four Stages. The Stage 3 contributor, for example, not only does his/her own work well, s/he builds the productive capability of those around him/her. Likewise, the Stage 4 contributor influences the corporation to allocate its talents and resources to increase its productive capacity and competitive standing.

As Figure 1 shows, the perceived values of contribution in Korn Ferry’s original research, and as replicated in 1998 and 2010, plainly indicates that those who do their jobs in a “Stage 3” or “Stage 4” way are judged to have made larger contributions and had higher impact.

To illustrate how impact increases with stage growth, let’s establish a “value equation” for each stage—a career development algebra of sorts. First we’ll create a set of variables, with “y” representing YOU—your skills, talents, passions, experience, expertise, and the hard work you bring to the game. We’ll propose that “n” stands for the number of people who either influence you or are influenced by you. Finally, let “v” equal the “value added” you create in the organization. Each of the Four Stages can then be expressed by a different combination of these variables.

Stage 1: \( v = \frac{y}{n} \)

Early in your career, you’re dependent on others for guidance and direction. You need the wisdom of more experienced teammates to channel your ideas and enthusiasm. Your own contribution is diluted by the amount of coaching and “aiming” the organization has to give you. This “help from others” is the denominator in your contribution equation, and it shows why you don’t want to remain in Stage 1 for long (but you don’t want to try to skip it, either).

Stage 2: \( v = y \)

Stage 2 people know how to do something extremely well. They are specialists in their area. The problem: They really have no leverage. With a Stage 2 contributor, the value equation comes down to “what you see is what you get.”

Stage 3: \( v = y(n) \)

Stage 3 people have learned how to contribute through others. Notice we don’t say “manage” others. Our studies show that five out of six people in Stage 3 are still individual contributors—they don’t “manage” anyone. Yet they know how to get things done through the efforts of their co-workers, their suppliers, their support organizations, and/or their clients. They leverage information by bringing new ideas into the group and sharing the group’s discoveries with others in the organization. They’re broadly
networked, facilitating the flow of learning through the flattened organization structure. They provide a lot of leadership—idea leadership, project leadership, team leadership—without needing the formal titles of management. Since they have a multiplier on their contribution, they add more value (in the vast majority of cases) than all but the most brilliant Stage 2’s.

**Stage 4: \( v = y^n \)**

A handful of individuals—less than 5% according to our 2010 study—move to the final stage of contribution. Their work at this point consists of mapping the future, influencing key decisions, monitoring the market and the competition, keeping the organization focused on its distinctiveness. If you’re in Stage 4, the rate-limiting factor is the ability to get things done through people with whom you have no interpersonal relationship. Stage 4 people leverage the entire resource base of the organization, hence the exponential value equation.
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Growth within the job

All of our research indicates that what you do with your job assignment is the single most important variable in developing your career and delivering contribution. This does NOT mean that your ability to contribute is dictated by your formal job description. Quite to the contrary, the nature of the job is usually determined by how the individual chooses to influence the assignments that make up the job. Role development is the process of changing or expanding your current job responsibilities.

Don’t let your job description limit what you can contribute. The highest performers in any organization are always testing the boundaries of their roles. They often discover a lot of room for development. The truth is, if it fits your talents and the organization’s needs, you can grow from Stage 1 to Stage 2 to Stage 3 in practically any job. Even when the scope of the job does limit your ability to move to the next stage, this does not mean the end of growth. High performance in that assignment will invariably influence your ability to get new and more challenging assignments that have fewer limits on growth and potential contribution.
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Making a novation

Most people find it easy to understand the Four Stages® of Contribution. Somewhat less clear is the process by which you move from one stage to another. Such transitions are by no means automatic. Moving from one development stage to another requires taking a new approach to one’s job—in effect, renegotiating one’s role in the organization. Such role renegotiations require a change in your relationships, tasks, perspective, knowledge, skills, and abilities.

We call this transition process a “novation.” It has to be driven by you, the individual. The organization can promote, demote, hire, fire, transfer, reassign, or outsource you. But it cannot “novate” you. You have to do that yourself by taking a different approach to the way you accomplish work in the organization.
Common questions about the Four Stages® of Contribution

Q The Four Stages® implies that even if an individual's performance does not decline over time, his/her perceived value to the organization could decline. Why?

A Maintaining a specific level of performance over time is not sufficient to sustain high ratings. The reason for this is the “Law of Increasing Expectations.” In an era when continuous improvement is essential to the survival of business organizations, employers require people to grow, develop, and add more value over time. The company expects that as individuals gain more experience, their capacity to contribute to the organization should increase. Contributing more seldom means doing more of the same. Rather, it means changing the way you do your job. Developing within your current role is an important way to ensure that you continue to grow your contribution, and it doesn’t require the organization to promote or transfer you.

Q Do the Four Stages® imply that the only successful people are those who have progressed to Stage 4?

A Not at all. In fact, of all successful people, very few will progress to Stage 4. Research shows that less than 5 percent of the organization’s workforce functions in Stage 4. Fortunately, people in all four stages add tremendous value to the organization. Most people—over 50% of the workforce at any given time—are in Stage 2, and are making very valuable contributions.

Also, we must remember that the Four Stages® do not pretend to measure anything as comprehensive, multifaceted, and personal as “success.” Success in life is measured on many dimensions beyond mere perceived value to one’s employer.

Q Do people only move forward in these stages? If they do return to an earlier stage, what is the likelihood of their being able to make the eventual transition to one of the later stages?

A As organizations rely more on lateral moves to develop their people, we are seeing more and more individuals having to return to an earlier stage. However, if the lateral move is well planned, most of these individuals quickly move back into the stage they were in prior to the move. Making a temporary transition to an earlier stage is often essential to one’s long-term growth.

Q Are stages just another way to describe the management hierarchy?

A No! Stage 3 and Stage 4 are not limited to people in formal management positions. Figure 2 shows the percentage of managers and individual contributors (non-managers) in each stage, according to our recent research.
Figure 2: The Korn Ferry research (2012) shows that about one third of those in Stage 3 and one quarter of those in Stage 4 do not have people management responsibility, and yet have significant influence.

Granted, these percentages may be somewhat different in your organization. But remember, Korn Ferry has found that in almost all functions and roles, many individual performers are described as doing Stage 3 work, and some as doing Stage 4 work.
## The Four Stages® of Contribution

### Milestones

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<tr>
<td>• Grasp small opportunities</td>
<td>• Establish solid technical roots and a reputation for a high level of competence</td>
<td>• Go beyond original area of expertise</td>
<td>• Find ways to influence the direction of a major part of the company</td>
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<td>• Get others’ help when needed</td>
<td>• Manage independence well; honor commitments and keep others informed</td>
<td>• Take responsibility for developing and coaching others</td>
<td>• Be willing to exercise power on behalf of the organization</td>
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<td>• Deliver under pressure</td>
<td>• Be a strong colleague and team player</td>
<td>• Build a strong network of internal and industry relationships</td>
<td>• Represent the company to external stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attend to detail and quality of work</td>
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<td>• Let go of some “Stage 2” type activities; let others be recognized as the experts</td>
<td>• Sponsor promising people for key future roles</td>
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Implications

In the past 20 years, organizations have shed millions of management jobs. Meanwhile, the need for strategic organizational leadership hasn’t gone away. It has simply been redistributed.

As organizations flatten and opportunities to move up become increasingly scarce, individuals need to think of new ways to grow and expand their contributions. If we think of growth in terms of promotions, we place our future in someone else’s hands. If we think about growth in terms of stages, we enable ourselves to control our future.

To reiterate, the Four Stages® of Contribution do not imply that everyone can or should try to move to Stage 3 or Stage 4 as quickly as possible. We all have different talents and interests that will influence our level of success in different roles. Some people get frustrated by trying to be something they’re not. Others shortchange themselves because they are so intent on assuming broader roles that they don’t take the time to establish the technical base and credibility they need in order to effectively lead and direct others. For those who have both a talent and passion for technical work, focusing on building their contributions in Stage 2 may be more effective than trying to become a Stage 3 or Stage 4 contributor.

However, in order to remain competitive, today’s flatter organizations need more people with the ability and desire to perform Stage 3 and Stage 4 functions, regardless of job title or position. This does not mean organizations should try to force everyone to assume Stage 3 or Stage 4 roles. But if you’re interested, your organization may desperately need you to “step up.”

To summarize the implications of the Four Stages® research for individuals and the people who manage them:

• The organization’s definition of valued performance is not static; it keeps changing.
• The Four Stages describe these changes; the stages lay out the rules of the game in today’s flattened, non-hierarchical organizations.
• You need to take charge of your learning and growth, thinking in terms of contribution, not position.
• Resist the temptation to “fast-track” your way through your career. Build a solid foundation in Stage 1 and 2 to have credibility and influence (if desired) in Stage 3 and/or 4.
• Coaching and mentoring is crucial to you at all stages of your career, not only when you’re just getting started. In fact, the move from Stage 2 to Stage 3 is much more complex than the Stage 1 to Stage 2 transition. Seek out the help that you need.
• Job changes and career moves may require you to return to an earlier stage for a while. Usually, it’s worth it. You gain greater breadth and exposure, which will help you remake the transition to your previous stage.
• Don’t get trapped in the old “pyramid” way of thinking. In other words, don’t sit around waiting for the phone to ring with your next promotion. Rather, grow your contribution and impact by advancing through the stages, and the recognition will follow.
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Key findings of the recent research

The preceding article covers the most significant aspects of Four Stages framework overall. Our recent research confirms the key messages above and adds some new insights into today’s workforce. See the summary points below for the main findings. For more complete information, please visit the website address listed at the end of the findings.

1  The Four Stages® of Contribution continue to define high value. As with Dalton and Thompson’s original research, the Four Stages continue to define high value contribution to organizations. Helping people understand that their value is not limited by job title or job description is a major benefit of the Four Stages® research.

2  Gaps exist between direct reports and managers on assessment of contribution. Our research continues to point to the need for better dialogue between managers and direct reports on contribution expectations, development goals, and feedback.

3  Too many people managers are contributing independently rather than working through others. The psychological transition from independent to interdependent contribution is challenging, and many managers struggle with this transition, even those with significant tenure and time in position. Organizations must prepare new people managers to handle the responsibility of supporting others in their work.

4  One does not have to be a manager to be viewed as contributing in Stages 3 or 4. Nearly anyone can increase their contribution and value to their organization through demonstrating the behaviors of Stage 3. Our research shows that one third of those in Stage 3 (as determined by their manager) are not people managers, but rather individual contributors. One quarter of those viewed as operating in Stage 4 are also individual contributors. These findings open up non-traditional career paths to those desiring to increase their value but not move into people management.

5  More work is needed to help women and people of color contribute in higher stages, especially Stage 4. Our research shows that progress has been made in helping diverse candidates become successful in Stage 3, although there is still room to improve in this area. What remains elusive for women and people of color is strategic contribution that defines Stage 4. This is a difficult transition for anyone, but especially for those who may not have many role models and sponsors to provide the support required.

6  Generation X and Baby Boomers need to step up into Stage 3 and 4 contributions. These generations are now either in mid or late career, and have tremendous experience and knowledge that can benefit Gen Y and even the upcoming “Gen Z.” Our research shows that too many of these generations are in Stage 1 or 2. Coaching and helping to develop the younger generations is an opportunity to share knowledge and to increase the engagement and value of these more senior employees.

Each of the challenges identified here can be addressed with purposeful development on the part of individuals, managers, and organizations. The key is to be proactive in assessing your career and determining what steps are necessary to keep you on the path to career success.
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References


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Notes