

The Four Stages of Contribution

Model for increasing performance and career impact.

In every industry and organization, individuals want and need to understand how they fit, how they can contribute and be valued, and how they can keep their value over time. Organizations want and need high-performing people who contribute in greater, more meaningful ways.

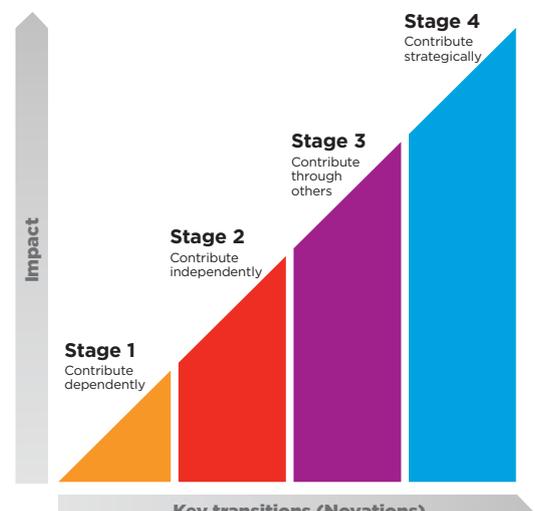
Overview.

The Four Stages of Contribution Model, based on research pioneered by former Harvard Business School professors Gene Dalton and Paul Thompson, makes clear what high performers actually do and the contribution they make. This model identifies the ways or “stages” in which people contribute and describes what high performance is in each stage—contributing dependently, contributing independently, contributing through others, and contributing strategically.

The Four Stages of Contribution helps explain why careers do not proceed in a straight line. Instead, careers develop in distinct stages, each different from the other and each requiring different activities, skills, and interaction. Movement from one stage to another is a complex and often difficult transition. It requires a renegotiation of expectations and relationships with others and, often, a significant internal shift in the thinking of an individual. This renegotiation is called a “novation.”

At a glance:

- ▶ Presents a clear and effective way of thinking about employment, development, and contribution.
- ▶ Provides a clear and common language to discuss individual and organizational needs and responsibilities.
- ▶ Describes what high-performing contribution is over the course of employment.
- ▶ Provides a new paradigm of how people develop, grow, and contribute in organizations.
- ▶ Enables organizational HR practices to get the right people in the right jobs doing the right things.
- ▶ Provides a strategic framework for developmental needs and performance improvement.



The four distinct career stages.

Stage one: contributing dependently:

- ▶ Willingly accepts supervision and direction.
- ▶ Demonstrates success on a portion of a larger project or task.
- ▶ Masters basic and routine tasks.
- ▶ Shows “directed” creativity and initiative.
- ▶ Performs well under time and budget pressure.
- ▶ Learns how “we” do things.

Stage two: contributing independently:

- ▶ Relies less on supervision; works independently and produces significant results.
- ▶ Assumes responsibility for definable projects.
- ▶ Increases in technical expertise and ability.
- ▶ Develops credibility and reputation.
- ▶ Builds a strong internal network of relationships.

Stage three: contributing through others:

- ▶ Increases in technical breadth.
- ▶ Develops broad business perspective.
- ▶ Stimulates others through ideas and knowledge.
- ▶ Involved as a manager, mentor, or idea leader in developing others.
- ▶ Represents the organization effectively to clients and external groups.
- ▶ Builds a strong internal and external network.

Stage four: contributing strategically:

- ▶ Provides direction to the organization.
- ▶ Defines/drives critical business opportunities and needs.
- ▶ Exercises power responsibly.
- ▶ Obtains essential resources.
- ▶ Sponsors promising individuals to prepare them for leadership roles.
- ▶ Represents the organization on critical strategic issues.