An Individual Guide to Decoding the Workplace: 50 Keys to Understanding People in Organizations

By John Ballard, PhD

An Individual Guide to *Decoding the Workplace: 50 Keys to Understanding People in Organizations*

To the reader:

Thank you for buying, borrowing, or somehow obtaining a copy of *Decoding the Workplace*. I want this book to be helpful. There are many ideas and suggestions in *Decoding the Workplace*.

The purpose of this guide is to help you benefit more from reading *Decoding the Workplace.*

The guide is organized around the 50 keys. I suggest here a reading plan. Read 15 minutes a day five days a week for 10 weeks. Each day you read a few pages at most. For each of the 50 reading sessions, I have posed questions for you to think about.

The questions are intended to help you think about the content and how it may relate to you, others, or your workplace. Skip any questions that for whatever reason you choose not to answer.

I welcome your comments on the usefulness of this guide and suggestions on how to improve it. Just contact me at johnballardphd@gmail.com.

Enjoy *Decoding the Workplace*.

John

First Thoughts

Reading 1

> 1. Read the guide on our website under Free Resources: "Suggestions for Reading and Using Decoding the Workplace."
>
> 2. Read the Preface and Chapter One: Using Keys to Decode the Workplace

How would you like reading *Decoding the Workplace* to help you?

Have you known people like Laura or Marcus (p.3)? Or have you had situations or jobs where you felt like Laura or Marcus?

In the story about Gerald, Gerald wondered why he gave fewer presentations than others even though he felt well-qualified? Have you seen someone like Gerald who was good at what they did but had something that held them back, something they probably were not aware of?

After reading the text pp. 6-7, could you help someone with an "uh" problem, or if you have an "uh" problem, could you tell someone how to help you?

My experience is that "uh" problems are easy to fix. It is just a matter of awareness and then practice. It usually only takes 5-10 minutes for me to help someone overcome an "uh" problem. If you have an "uh" problem when speaking in public, you can fix it. This is an example of useful information that I have not identified as a key but may be a key for some readers.

First Thoughts

Reading 2

Systems: Read pp. 9-12, Introduction and Key: **Think of your workplace and the people in it as parts of systems, connected in ways you can see and ways that you don't see.**

Have you seen situations like at TXZ Enterprises where technology is implemented but the consequences were different than expected?

Have you seen changes in the workplace or your organization where the intended consequences were not as expected?

Do your decision makers have a "systems" perspective? In other words, do they consider how changes will impact other areas?

The book poses questions to help you identify systems of which you are a part:

Who knows whom?
How does my work affect other people?
How is my work affected by activities in other parts of the organization?
How is our organization affected by external factors such as the economy, the government, or changes in society?

Think about how you are connected to other people, processes, and other workplaces. You may be part of systems that you have not thought about.

First Thoughts

Reading 3

Think about a decision you made, your team made, or your boss made. Were the people who would be affected by the decision consulted?

If yes, how did that affect the decision?

If no, how did it affect the outcome?

How could a "systems perspective" have helped you in a decision you made, or might help you in some decision you have to make?

Taking a systems perspective, especially on important decisions, gives you an advantage over those who do not. I have found this very helpful. It may take more time but in my experience it was usually worth it. It helps to avoid pitfalls and problems later.

First Thoughts

Reading 4

In Nara's story, doing things by the book was not critical. The informal organization found a more efficient way. In your workplace, is the influence of the informal organization positive, negative, or both?

To what degree do you recognize the informal system of which you are a part?

How does the informal system affect you?

What differences do you see between the formal system (the way we say things are) versus the informal system (the way things really are)?

Identifying differences between your formal system and your informal system looms large in truly understanding the workplace. It also helps explain certain events and suggests areas for workplace and organizational improvements. As a manager and as a consultant, I have used the six-box model to solve problems.

Individual Differences

Reading 5

Perception: Read pp. 21-25, Introduction and Key: **People see the world differently.** Key: **Promotions and opportunities are not based on you and your performance but on perceptions of you and your performance.**

Have you ever just assumed someone saw things as you saw them and it turned out that person actually did not share your view? How could that situation have been avoided?

There's a problem. You have a solution. Do you care about how others see the problem?

Your opportunities are determined by others' perceptions of you and your performance. Knowing that, what advice would you give to someone who wanted to be successful in his or her job?

How good are you at networking? What could you do to improve your networking?

Our world is perceptual. We see it differently. Recognizing that others' perceptions may be different from yours is critical to working more effectively.

Individual Differences

Reading 6

Perception: Read pp. 25-29, Key: **Be aware, as best you can, of the impressions that you create.**

How impressions do people have of you? The second paragraph on p. 26 has a list of questions. Answering these questions should help you determine how people see you.

A blindspot is something others see but you don't. What could you do to learn about your blindspots?

Ted changed some behaviors that made him more effective. What behaviors might you consider changing that would improve the impressions you make?

Impression management is a very difficult subject for many people. It was for me – but I came to understand that I really needed to be aware of how others saw me and make adjustments sometimes. Like it or not, you are on the stage.

Individual Differences

Reading 7

Motivation: Read pp. 31-34, Introduction and Key: **Work is more than a paycheck; we have various needs that can be satisfied in the workplace.**

What if you won $10,000,000 after taxes? Would you continue to work? Why or why not?

We work and earn money. Think about your job. Besides pay and any benefits, such as medical insurance, what do you get out of your job?

On p. 34 in the paragraph that starts "Empowering employees . . ." I ask you to think about your job and pose seven questions. Answer those questions and think about your answers.

Understanding that people are motivated by different things helps you understand them. Thinking about what really motivates you helps you understand yourself.

Individual Differences

Reading 8

Perception: Read pp. 37-41, Key: **When you believe your effort will get the job done satisfactorily and lead to outcomes you desire, you are more likely to be motivated.**

What do you desire from the workplace?

What can you do to increase the odds that you can get from the workplace what you want?

With whom do you compare yourself? Another employee, a relative, a friend, or such?

If you have feelings of being treated unfairly, how do you resolve the tension that results from the feelings of unfairness?

Feeling that you are being treated unfairly can be huge and stressful. I've been there. This reading addresses how people handle feelings of unfairness. The last paragraph on p. 36 is especially important.

Individual Differences

Reading 9

Perception: Read pp. 37-41, Key: **When you believe that your effort will get the job done satisfactorily and lead to outcomes you desire, you are more likely to be motivated.**

This reading is about the implications of what scholars refer to as expectancy theory. The implications are huge for understanding yourself, others, your boss, and your organization.

Do you have the knowledge, resources, and equipment to do your job well?

Do you know what's expected of you in your job?

Do you know what it takes to excel in your job?

Are the outcomes you receive from your job tied to your performance?

Are there outcomes you would like to receive from your job but you don't?

What could your organization do that would affect your motivation the most?

There is much to digest in this reading. If you understand the concepts of expectancy, instrumentality, and valence I explain, you should be able to gain insights into your motivation, others' motivations, and the management effectiveness of those with whom you work. Sometimes motivation can be as simple as doing your job well enough to keep your job. More often, there is much more to your motivation. The ideas in this reading can help you sort that out.

Groups

Reading 10

What is your reaction to the story of Jonas? What would you do if you were Jonas?

What are some of the norms in your workplace that are easy to identify?

Have you been made aware or became aware of any norms that are not necessarily apparent to everyone (such as in Ethan's story)?

Are there any norms in your workplace about things you can say or should not say?

Not recognizing or ignoring norms can be risky. Norms are part of "fitting in." Step 1 is to know norms exist and then to recognize the norms in your workplace.

Groups

Reading 11

Norms: Read pp. 49-50, Key: **The nature of norms varies by group, type of organization, and level in the organization, with norms becoming stronger as you advance in an organization.**

Think about the norms in your workplace. Are there different norms for men and women?

Are there some troublesome norms that should be changed, such as those discussed in the last paragraph of this reading?

People often think that that can change norms when they move to higher levels of leadership in an organization. It rarely works that way. New norms emerge as you advance and these norms are often stronger.

I recommend Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* as being worth reading for men and women.

Groups

Reading 12

Have you known people like Ol' Joe?

Have you known people like Captain Jones?

Have you ever had group pressure because you were violating a group norm? What happened?

The newspaper test mentioned in this reading is helpful in making decisions.

Knowing some people are "house deviants" and others have a lot of idiosyncrasy credits explains why some people can ignore norms and be OK.

Groups

Reading 13

What are some of your roles, in the workplace and in life?

Who cares about how you do your workplace roles?

Think about a time when you were new to a workplace. Did you notice people trying to send you messages about how do your job by what they said and how they acted?

Don't confuse a job description with roles. Job descriptions are part of the formal organization. How you do your job is affected also by the informal organization.

Understanding the role episode model described in the reading should help you decode what is happening around you in the workplace, especially relative to new employees or people in new positions.

Groups

Reading 14

For these words or phrases, which are more likely describing men? Describing women?

Aggressive
Works well with others
Dynamic
Good administrator
Logical
Perceptive
Assertive
Personable
Forceful
Tactful
True leader

Which words to you think would create the best impression in a performance appraisal?

What can you conclude?

We are raised with stereotypes about boys and girls, men and women. These sex-role stereotypes can result in obvious and not-so-obvious biases in our behaviors and judgments in the workplace.

Groups

Reading 15

Roles: Read pp. 59-62, Key: **Roles are major sources of stress in our lives.**

In the four stories, Teresa, Tom, Kerri, and Nanji experience different types of role-related conflict. With which of these stories, if any, did you identify? Why?

If you had been Teresa, what would you have done? Why?

Of the types of role-related conflict discussed in this reading, is there one that is most common in your workplace?

Role-related conflicts can be very stressful. In a later chapter we talk more about stress and how to deal with it.

Groups

Reading 16

Organizational Socialization: Read pp. 63-66, Introduction and Key: **No matter how much we learn about a new job, career, or organization before making a change, there always will be aspects – often important ones – that we do not know about.**

How would you have felt if you had been Calida?

In the last paragraph on p. 63, I ask you to think about your first day on a job and what it was like. I pose several questions for you to think about. How could your first days have been improved?

Think about Jennifer's story. Have you ever taken a job and found that it was not what you had expected, either positively or negatively?

Realizing that a gap exists between what you thought your job, career, or organization would be like and what it is really like can be troublesome. My personal story told in this reading was one of the most difficult decisions I have faced.

Groups

Reading 17

Organizational Socialization: Read pp. 66-68, Key: **Organizational socialization occurs in training, education, apprenticeships, even selection methods.**

Think about your experiences in education, training programs, and/or apprenticeships. Can you identify any attitudes or ways of seeing things that you picked up in your experience(s), things other than what you were being taught formally?

How does your company's hiring practices shape your workplace, if at all?

What are some of the experiences or people that most affect how you approach the workplace?

Informally we pick up a lot of information, and attitudes, in various education and training programs. I've heard people who went to college say they learned more out of the classroom than in the classroom. Understanding the origin of some of our attitudes can be helpful in understanding ourselves.

Reading 18

Organizational Socialization: Read pp. 68-71, Key: **Organizations, supervisors, and co-workers will vary significantly in how much they help you "learn the ropes."**

Think about your current position or last job. Who helped you make the transition into that job?

Does your workplace help new employees adjust to your workplace? How?

Think about Liz's story. Is there anything else your workplace could do to make new employees feel welcomed?

The more we do to help new employees fit in, the more effective they can be. Likewise, if you are the new employee, how you are welcomed can be useful information. As a new hire, I've been welcomed very well in one organization and pretty much ignored in another. Guess in which one I was most effective.

Groups

Reading 19

Organizational Socialization: Read pp. 71-73, Key: **Ultimately much of what you learn about surviving and succeeding in the organization will be "trial and error."**

On p. 71, the second paragraph that begins, "People will communicate . . ." Regardless of how long you have been in your current position, are there questions for which you would still like answers? How could you get answers to those questions, or can you?

Have you ever been in a situation like Sam where you deviated from an informal norm that you were not aware of?

Have you brought habits from a previous job that perhaps you needed to change in a new job?

Listen, observe, learn – good advice in new situations.

Groups

Reading 20

Organizational Socialization: Read pp. 73-75, Key: **As you experience a new workplace, you create a psychological contract with the organization – a contract with costs and benefits as you see them.**

Do the people in your workplace give 100%? Do you?

What do you really like about your workplace that you agree with and have bought into?

What about your workplace do you go along or ignore but it is really not you?

What do you really want from your job?

What are you willing to give?

Whether you have ever thought about it or not, you have a psychological contract with your workplace. You give this and expect that in return. When what you bring (inputs) doesn't match up well with your expectations (outcomes), that becomes a source of stress. How to resolve? See pages 35-36.

Organization

Reading 21

Do you work independently, or as part of a work group (such as Megan), or a team (where the team is accountable for results, not the individual)?

If you organization talks about teams, are they really teams or just work groups?

In general, would you rather work in a team or a work group? Why?

Why is the difference between work groups and teams important? If you are use to working in one and then find yourself working in the other, expectations of you will be different. Depending on whether you prefer working in teams or work groups, this could be great or somewhat difficult.

Organization

Reading 22

Groups, Teams, & Organization Structure: Read pp. 82-83, Key: **How your organization is structured affects how you do your job; organizations have different structures based on how work is grouped and coordinated** and

Is your workplace functional (people doing similar jobs) or divisional (people doing different kinds of work that contribute to the same product or project)?

Do you need to coordinate much with others in your workplace? If so, how effective is your coordination processes?

Information systems are essential to share and coordinate information among people in the workplace. How effective are your information systems?

Of the 50 readings, this reading and the next may be the most difficult. Here I introduce new terms: functional, divisional, complexity, formalization, centralization, mechanistic, and organic. These can be overwhelming. As a student I thought this was academic gobbledygook. As a consultant I found understanding these terms and organizational structure was essential to decoding how the workplace operated – and how to improve workplace effectiveness. If you can grasp the ideas of these two readings, you may see things others do not.

Organization

Reading 23

Think about your organization.

A. Is your workplace high in complexity (people in very specialized positions, most with job descriptions) or low in complexity (your actual work may vary widely from day to day)?

B. If your workplace high in formalization (lot of rules, regulations, manuals) or low in formalization (not a lot of written rules and policies)?

c. Is your workplace highly centralized (the chain of command makes the decisions) or low in centralization (decision making is spread out across the workplace)?

If you answered high to A, B, & C, you have a mechanistic workplace. Here work groups work well. This is a good design if the business you work in has a fairly stable environment (e.g., banking).

If you answered low to A, B, & C, you have an organic workplace. Here teams work well. This is a good design for innovative, entrepreneurial companies (e.g., technology start-ups)

If you answered other than these, you have a mix between mechanistic and organic. Work groups are probably best.

Would you prefer to work in a mechanistic workplace or an organic workplace? Why?

People prefer different organizational structures. Even within a mechanistic organization, a workplace may be organic and vice versa. I know people who like the structure of mechanistic organizations and others who like the flexibility of organic organizations. Which structure is best for an organization depends on a variety of factors, the discussion of which is beyond the focus of this book.

Organization

Reading 24

Groups, Teams, & Organization Structure: Read pp. 85-88, Key: **People have informal networks and informal groups about which you might or might not be aware.**

Think about your workplace. You know to whom you report and the formal network. Who is in your informal network, people who help you get your work done?

Do you have someone like Steve in your informal network, or perhaps you are Steve?

Who is in your informal social group, people with whom hang out or just enjoy talking about what's happening?

How many people in your informal network are also in your informal social group?

How strong is the grapevine where you work?

Try to identify the informal groups, both work-related and social, that exist in your workplace. Knowing who knows who and how may be useful.

Organization

Reading 25

Organizational Culture: Read pp. 89-91, Introduction and Key: **Cultural differences and how people behave in different cultures influence the workplace.**

If you have traveled outside your country, what did you see or experience that you found most different?

How does the culture of different countries or different ethnicities affect your work and/or your workplace (if they do)?

Countries differ widely in what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable behavior. I recommend the latest edition of *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands: The Bestselling Guide to Doing Business in More than 60 Countries* by Terri Morrison and Wayne Conway

Organization

Reading 26

Organizational Culture: Read pp. 91-92, Key: **Just as the cultures of countries are very different, so too are the cultures of our organizations.**

I wrote, "We are like fish swimming in the sea, totally unaware of the water."

Here are ways you may have become aware of organizational cultures:

Working for different companies or organizations.

Your company being taken over by another or merged with another.

Your job taking you in and out of different organizations.

Even a part-time job can give you a feel for an organization's culture.

What are some aspects of culture that you think might be important to you?

Organizational culture and organizational climate are not the same although they are often used interchangeably. Change a supervisor and you can change climate – but not the culture. We'll explore culture in the next three readings.

Reading 27

Organizational Culture: Read pp. 92-94, Key: **The culture of your organization profoundly affects your life in an organization --- and in ways you may not recognize.**

List artifacts (visible manifestations of culture) in your workplace? Your organization?

What can you conclude about your organization's culture from your list of artifacts?

The consulting study involving the "low-talkers" was easily the strangest I ever conducted. This story illustrates how we can be influenced profoundly by factors of which we are not even aware. One of those factors can be organizational culture.

Organization

Reading 28

Organizational Culture: Read pp. 95-97, Key: **Differences between what an organization preaches and what it does could reveal the real core of an organization's culture.**

What are some of your organization's espoused values or beliefs, things commonly shared, such as "no one is above the rules" as in the Tom Watson, Jr., story?

How would you describe your organization's core values -- the real values, which may or may not be the same as the espoused values?

You may not know some core values unless they are revealed to you, as in Madison's story. Based on your experience, do you think your organization's core values are aligned with its espoused values?

Answering the last question here may be difficult. Sometimes your experiences or perceptions are such that you think there may be differences between espoused and actual core values but it is possible you may never know. Pay attention to differences between words and actions.

Reading 29

Organizational Culture: Read pp. 97-99, Key: **Culture gives members of an organization a common lens to look through to make sense of events around them.**

I shared a story about one of my classes. Had you been a student in my class, what might you have thought?

In the classroom story I acted differently than the students expected. I did this to help students see the organizational cultural lens they shared. Can you think of anything that could happen in your workplace or organization that would make the common lens you share easier to see?

Organizational culture influences everyone in the workplace, usually in ways we don't think about. But thinking about the culture (artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and core values) can reveal these influences and help decode workplace behaviors.

Influence

Reading 30

Leaders and Managers: Read pp. 103-105, Introduction and Key: **A leader inspires others to go above and beyond the normal requirements of the job.**

Have you known someone like Mr. Howl? Why do you think that person was a great leader?

Think about the managers you know. How many do you think are also leaders? What's the difference?

In my opinion the difference between being a leader and being a manager is the leader inspires you. If your manager inspires you to work harder or smarter and you willingly agree, your manager is a leader.

Influence

Reading 31

Leaders and Managers: Read pp. 105-107, Key: **Whether someone is a leader ultimately is a perception, an attribution made by a follower or followers about another person.**

The book discusses several aspects of an individual that might help them be effective leaders:

High level of individual achievement or performance
Elevate performance of those around them
People like them
Good social skills
Good speaking skills
Good listeners
Like to lead
High energy

Which of these is your strongest asset?

Which, if any, would you like to improve?

We can learn to be better listeners. Even if we tend not to engage much with others, we can learn to do so. And many people through groups such as Toastmasters have improved their speaking skills.

Influence

Reading 32

Does your boss use more of a Theory X "carrot-and-stick" approach or treat people more like Theory Y, that is, people are responsible, creative, innovative?

Do you tend to be more task-oriented, people-oriented, or both?

People demonstrate leadership in different situations, not necessarily all situations. For example, in my most memorable leadership experience I did not see myself as such. But others did. I was working with National Park rangers on a policy and procedure for backpackers to climb Mauna Loa and see a total eclipse of the sun. Leadership is situational.

Influence

Reading 33

Leaders and Managers: Read pp. 111-113, Key: **An effective relationship with your boss increases the likelihood of success in your job.**

For each pair of words, circle the answer that best describes your boss.

My boss is mostly or usually:

A. Intuitive   OR   B. Analytical

C. Does not consult with OR   D. Consults with others
    others

E. Fast decisions   OR   F. Slow decisions

G. Flexible in opinion   OR   H. Doggedly single-minded

I. Likes to delegate   OR   J. Does not like to delegate

K. Usually available   OR   L. Available occasionally

M. Lots of rules   OR   N. Few rules

O. Relaxed pace   OR   P. Hectic pace

Q. Supportive   OR   R. Demanding, challenging

S. Task-Oriented   OR   T. People-oriented

U. Listener   OR   V. Reader

Was this exercise easy or hard? How well do you know your boss?

If you know your boss and your boss's preferences, then you will have a better idea of how to interact with your boss, and hence be more effective.

Influence

Reading 34

Power: Read pp. 115-117, Introduction and Key: **Power is essential to get things done with or through others.**

What words come to mind when you think of "power"?

In the two stories, Steve and Heather build their personal power in small helpful acts. Think about your workplace. Do people do helpful acts for each other, acts that are not required?

Are there some people in your workplace who are more likely to be helpful than others?

This reading and the next seven are a primer on power. If you think power is negative, I hope these readings help you see power is neutral and can be used positively. Power cannot be avoided. These readings can help you understand workplace interactions more clearly and help you be more influential.

Influence

Reading 35

When people in the workplace ask for your help, what typically do you do?

If you see that someone could use your help, do you ask them if you can help?

Are there some people in your workplace who are more likely to be helpful than others?

The story of Scott and Holly underscores that a positive, helpful attitude goes a long way. There are limits of course. Mostly we are talking about small favors or those that do not take an unreasonable amount of time.

Reading 36

Power: Read pp. 119-121, Key: **People seen as experts have more influence, usually proportional to the perceived value of their expertise.**

Think about Kayla. She went beyond the requirements of just doing her job and became an expert. Are you an expert in your job?

Do you know people who are?

What could you do to build your expertise?

How do you stay abreast of the latest trends or changes in the business of which you are a part?

The better you know your job, the more likely people will turn to you for answers, ideas, solutions. Know your job better than anyone else.

Influence

Reading 37

Do you find it easy or hard to engage in social chitchat?

What are some scripts you use in the workplace, or could use, to start conversations?

In new encounters, for example interviewing for a job or doing business with someone new at their location or office, do you consciously look around for things you might have in common?

In conversations and interactions make mental notes of things you have in common with another. These provide a basis for more, and more meaningful, conversations.

Influence

Reading 38

Power: Read pp. 123-125, Key: **People who control resources that others depend on (or are perceived to control such resources) have greater power.**

In the workplace who depends on you? How?

On p. 124 in the third paragraph are eight questions. Answering those questions will give you more insight into how your work relates to others – and hence your influence and how to increase it.

The last paragraph of this chapter cautions about people who deliberately create false impressions. Sometimes they cannot be avoided. But it is better to be aware of them than not.

Reading 39

More about Power: Read pp. 127-129, Introduction and Key: **People develop power through activities that are perceived to be extraordinary, relevant, and visible.**

Extraordinary here means going beyond the requirements of the job. Are there activities, challenges, improvements where you can go beyond the requirements of the job, within reason?

What kind of activities is most relevant for your organization?

What activities are most visible to higher levels in your organization?

Paragraph 2 on p. 129 poses an important question to be answered: Where do you put your energy?

Be aware of what's happening in your organization so that you can identify relevant, visible activities that may give you growth opportunities. Choose wisely.

Influence

Reading 40

More about Power: Read pp. 129-132, Key: **Power is strengthened by strong relationships with people above you, your peers, and people in lower positions.**

Think about your relationships. Do you have a sponsor or mentor, someone higher up in your organization or well-established externally who takes an interest in your success, someone who offers guidance or suggestions?

How are your relationships with others in the workplace?

Do people in the workplace support and help each other?

Are there any ways you can improve those relationships?

If you have direct reports, people who work for you, how are those relationships? Do they have your back?

As best you can, be aware of and try to manage your relationships up, down, and laterally. All your relationships may not be smooth but being aware and working on relationships will increase the likelihood of your success.

Influence

Reading 41

More about Power: Read pp. 133-135, Key: **People differ greatly in their abilities to use power appropriately and effectively.**

Are there norms about use of power in your workplace? Are people bossed around or is the climate more collaborative?

Have you known bosses who did not understand power, in that they were impulsive or vindictive? If so, how did this affect the workplace? How did it affect you?

Given a choice of two jobs, which do you think you would choose -- one with greater growth opportunities or one with slightly better pay?

Have you seen micromanagers like Mr. Wallace?

This concludes the readings from the two chapters about power.
What are your biggest "take-aways"?

The dynamics of power surround you in the workplace. The purpose of these readings was to help you see and comprehend the effects of power around you – and to suggest ideas that may improve your influence.

Outcomes

Reading 42

Job Satisfaction, Conflict, and Stress: Read pp. 139-143, Introduction and Key:
People who are happier in their jobs are not necessarily more productive, but they are more likely to show up for work and not leave the organization.

What is the climate like in your workplace? Do people tend to be happy at work or not happy?

Think about the factors we know are related to satisfaction with jobs.

How is your job? Meaningful? Boring? Challenging?

Can you see how your work "fits into the whole" or is "a whole piece of work"?

Is your work physically demanding?

In terms of pay and benefits, are people treated fairly?

Are your physical working conditions extremely good? Extremely poor?

Do you enjoy your co-workers?

Do you like your boss?

Think about your answers to these questions. Are you satisfied with your job?

The workplace can be a place to which you enjoy going each workday or a place you dread going. This reading is about what really affects the satisfaction of people on the job.

Reading 43

Job Satisfaction, Conflict, and Stress: Read pp. 143-145, Key: **Interpersonal conflicts occur in the workplace; some escalate, negatively affecting others, and might remain unresolved.**

This reading is about interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. The two stories (Shawn and Blake, Felicia and Martha) represent worse cases. However there is a range of interpersonal conflicts that can make going to work or being at work unpleasant.

Have you seen conflicts in the workplace between or among people that affected others? If so, what happened? How did it affect you?

Was anything done to resolve the conflict?

How should workplace conflicts be resolved?

Have you personally had a workplace conflict? If it was resolved, how was it resolved? If not resolved, what could be done to resolve it?

Interpersonal conflicts happen. My experience is that handling such conflicts is often difficult for supervisors, not necessarily part of their skill set. My opinion is supervisors need more training in resolving conflicts that affect the workplace.

Outcomes

Reading 44

Job Satisfaction, Conflict, and Stress: Read pp. 145-150, Key: **You can see aspects of stress in the workplace but the real effects of stress are mostly hidden.**

What are the most significant stressors affecting you?

Do you try to manage your stress? If so, how? If not, why not?

If you work in a stressful workplace, is the level of stress helpful to performance and productivity or is the level of stress a problem for employees? If the level is a problem, what could be done to change the level of stress?

My experience has been that I can manage routine workplace stress through exercise. However sometimes stress can be mentally and physically crippling. Several years ago I again experienced PSTD as a result of an illness that nearly killed me. A year after the incident I started to have trouble eating. I benefited greatly from the services of a clinical psychologist. Do what you can to manage stress but seek professional help when needed.

Outcomes

Reading 45

Meaning: Read pp. 151-155, Introduction and Key: **People differ as to what is most important in their lives, and these differences can be revealing.**

What is your life theme (Rychlak)? Your center (Covey)?

Do you have a sense of the life themes or centers for people with whom you work?

Do you know people who "eat, live, and breathe their jobs"? Do you?

This reading is about purpose and meaning in our lives. Think about your answer to Christensen's question: "How will you measure your life?"

Outcomes

Reading 46

Meaning: Read pp. 155-158, Key: **Setting goals at work and in life increases the odds of success.**

To what degree is goal-setting part of your life?

Let's assume you set goals. Do you have goals in different categories? For example, I have goals for my Profession, Personal Growth, Family, and Financial.

Do you have goals for different timeframes? For example, 10 year goals, 5 year goals, 1 year goals, 1 month goals.

What are several of your goals? Are they specific, somewhat challenging, and measurable?

I cannot overemphasize the importance of goal setting in life. Goals provide a roadmap and help adjust even when the map or terrain changes. Where do you want to be in 5 years? 10 years? 20? 30? In your senior years?

Outcomes

Reading 47

> Meaning: Read pp. 158-159, Key: **To truly understand another, try to see the world through their eyes.**

In the story have you known someone like Marcus? Or have you been Marcus?

Do you ever talk over another person, that is you start to talk while another person is still speaking?

How good are you at active listening? The next time you are in a conversation, see if you cannot think about how to reply or your next statement and just listen to the person talking. How difficult was it?

> If you are or if you can become an active listener, someone who truly hears and understands what others are saying with their words and emotions, you should have a competitive edge in the workplace.

Outcomes

Reading 48

> Meaning: Read pp. 159-160, Key: **We are never totally bound by our environment; we have choices, limited as they may seem at times.**

Have you ever felt helpless? If not, good. If so, what did you do about it?

What advice would you give to someone struggling in life and who feels totally locked in with no options?

After reading the story about my cooking a fabulous Indonesian meal, think about a situation in which you became angry or mad. Can you see that it was you who ultimately made yourself angry or mad?

> We always have choices, even in the most difficult circumstances. As William Henley wrote in the poem Invictus, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul."

Reading 49

Meaning: Read pp. 160-161, Key: **Sometimes people just behave arbitrarily**

Have you known someone who tried to change someone else? How did it go?

In the workplace have you seen people ignore directives no matter what the implications?

Is there anything about yourself in the workplace you'd like to change? Can you do it?

People change their behaviors when they decide to change behaviors. You can only do so much. You may try to help them change – or not. It is up to them. Truly you can only change your own behaviors.

Decoding the Workplace:
Concluding Thoughts

Reading 50

Read the last chapter, pp. 163-165

For you, what were the three most important keys? Why?

In the story about Steve, Steve benefited from the ideas and concepts in this book. He grew to better understand the workplace and thus improved his effectiveness. How about you? Do you think that reading and thinking about the information in this book will help you be more effective in the workplace? How?

As I stated at the end of this chapter, "I hope you found something that can make your life in the workplace a little better."