## CHAPTER 23 DRAFT BLUEPRINT: FACTOR THE FEAR OUT

**People should opt for being a manager for the right reasons and at the right time. One must like the responsibility, be able to deal with uncertainty, and, most importantly, truly enjoy working with people – all people. It is, of course, also the training grounds for higher pay, power, and prestigious roles within the organization.**


This worksheet provides a structured approach for readers to explore and address their fears and challenges within each of the FACTOR elements, ultimately guiding them toward personal and professional development as middle, or frontline, managers. Utilize the process to consider strategies that foster growth and inclusivity so that you can take steps toward a more fulfilling and effective career.

Start by taking a closer look at how these factors manifest themselves in the table as you begin to consider your own perspectives and circumstances. Many of these have come up during my conversations with mentees, peers, managers, and in my reading about the topic.

### FAILURE

**Fear**

*The element of failure refers to the fear of making mistakes or experiencing setbacks. It can manifest as a reluctance to take risks, fearing that any misstep will have negative consequences.*

**Impact**

Can hinder personal and professional growth, as individuals may avoid challenging opportunities due to the potential for failure.

**Example**
A middle manager is offered the opportunity to lead a high-impact project with tight deadlines. However, the fear of failure prevents them from accepting responsibility. They worry that if the project doesn't succeed, it could harm their reputation and career advancement prospects.

**Strategy**
Encourage a culture that views failure as a steppingstone to success: Emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes and failures, both for yourself and your team. Set realistic expectations and communicate that it's acceptable to encounter challenges.

**Tactics**
- Conduct thorough risk assessments for important projects and decisions.
- Identify potential challenges and develop contingency plans to mitigate failure.
- After a setback, hold a post-mortem or debriefing session with your team to analyze what went wrong and focus on lessons learned. Widely communicate them.
- Recognize and celebrate small achievements and milestones along the way to larger goals. This instills confidence and a sense of progress.

## ANXIETY & INSECURITY

**Fear**
*Anxiety & insecurity encompass feelings of unease and self-doubt. Middle managers experiencing this fear may doubt their abilities or feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities.*

**Impact**
These feelings can undermine confidence and performance, making it difficult to effectively lead teams and navigate complex situations.

**Example**
A middle manager's insecurity about their abilities, especially in interactions with senior management can lead to anxiety and undermine confidence, communication, and decision-making. This insecurity can manifest in a tendency to second-guess decisions and avoid bold actions, impacting team trust and respect.

**Strategy**
Self-confidence building and self-acceptance: Recognize that it's part of growth to

experience moments of insecurity. Invest in professional development to boost self-confidence.

**Tactics**

- Practice positive self-talk and affirmations to boost self-esteem and combat self-doubt.
- Consider seeking professional coaching or counseling to address deep-seated insecurities and develop coping strategies.
- Regularly reflect on your accomplishments, skills, and competencies and seek feedback and constructive criticism.
- Challenge and reframe negative thoughts that contribute to insecurity.

## CHANGE & ACCEPTANCE

**Fear**

*Change & acceptance relates to the fear of change or resistance to new challenges. Middle managers may struggle to adapt to evolving circumstances or view change negatively.*

**Impact**

Resistance to change can impede personal and organizational progress, as adapting to new circumstances is often necessary for growth and innovation.

**Example**

A middle manager is resistant to adopting new project management software that their team needs for improved efficiency. They prefer sticking to familiar methods and fear that learning the new software will be too challenging, which hinders progress.

**Strategy**

Foster adaptability: Develop a mindset that embraces change as an opportunity for growth. Create effective communication plans and provide training to manage through change.

**Tactics**

- Identify and empower 'change champions' within your team who embrace new initiatives. Leverage their enthusiasm to drive change acceptance.
- Develop a clear and comprehensive communication plan to explain reasons for changes, benefits, and expected impact. Regularly update progress.
- Conduct workshops or training on change management to equip your team with the skills and mindset needed to navigate change.

## TRUST ISSUES

**Fear**

*Trust issues involve a lack of confidence in professional relationships. Middle managers with this fear may struggle to trust their teams or may not feel trusted by upper management.*

**Impact**

Trust issues can lead to communication breakdowns, a lack of collaboration, and overall reduced effectiveness in the role.

**Example**

A middle manager lacks trust in their team's ability to complete tasks independently. They often micromanage and struggle to delegate responsibilities, fearing that team members may not meet expectations. This lack of trust can lead to low team morale.

**Strategy**

Build trust through transparency: Practice transparency in your actions, decisions, and communication. Consistently share information and demonstrate openness. Foster trust by delivering on your commitments and being reliable in your interactions.

**Tactics**

- Create an environment of open and honest communication. Encourage team to share concerns and feedback.
- Lead by example and demonstrate trustworthiness in your actions and decision-making. Show that you trust your team members, and they are more likely to reciprocate.
- Organize team-building activities to strengthen interpersonal relationships and build trust.

## ORGANIZATIONAL SAVVY

**Fear**

*Organizational savvy refers to the ability to understand and navigate complex corporate structures, politics, and dynamics. Middle managers may lack this skill, which can hinder their organizational influence.*

**Impact**
A lack of organizational savvy can limit a manager's ability to make strategic decisions and build influential relationships.

**Example**
A middle manager's difficulty navigating the organization's complex bureaucracy and decision-making processes. They are unaware of the informal power structures and political dynamics, which makes it challenging to influence critical decisions.

**Strategy**
Develop political acumen: Invest in developing your understanding of the organization's politics, power dynamics, and informal networks. Build relationships with influential colleagues and stakeholders to increase your ability to navigate the organizational landscape effectively.

**Tactics**
- Seek a mentor who can provide insights into the organization's politics and dynamics. Use their guidance to navigate effectively.
- Create a stakeholder map to identify key influencers and decision-makers. Tailor your communication and interactions based on this map.
- Attend organizational events, industry conferences, and networking opportunities to build relationships and understand the broader organizational landscape.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Fear**
*The relationships element pertains to the quality of professional connections with team members, peers, and management. Managers with this fear may struggle to build collaborative, positive relationships.*

**Impact**
Weak professional relationships can lead to difficulties in team dynamics, communication, and overall effectiveness in the role.

**Example**
A middle manager has strained relationships with several team members due to past disagreements. They avoid addressing issues directly. This can result in a lack of collaboration and reduced team cohesion, affecting overall performance.

**Strategy**
Improve your active listening and communication skills to foster positive relationships with team members, peers, and upper management. Create opportunities for open dialogue, encourage feedback, and resolve conflicts promptly.

**Tactics**
- Practice active listening during team meetings and one-on-one discussions. Show that you value and respect the input of team members.
- Invest in conflict resolution training to develop the skills needed to address conflicts and challenges within the team effectively.
- Implement a system for providing and receiving regular feedback.

Reflect on how the six elements represented by FACTOR relate to your experiences and attitudes in middle or frontline management.

## FAILURE

- Reflect on a specific instance in your career where the fear of failure held you back from pursuing a particular opportunity or making a decision.
- Describe the impact that this fear had on your professional growth and the outcome of the situation.
- Consider what strategies you can employ to overcome the fear of failure and take calculated risks in your role as a middle manager.

**Instance:**

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**Impact:**

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**Strategies:**

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## ANXIETY & INSECURITY

- Identify situations or responsibilities in your middle management role that trigger anxiety or feelings of insecurity.
- Explore the reasons behind these anxieties or insecurities and how they may impact your confidence and performance.
- Think about ways to manage and reduce anxiety and insecurity in your managerial responsibilities.

**Situation(s)**

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**Source(s)**

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**Strategies:**

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## CHANGE ACCEPTANCE

- Discuss how you typically react to significant changes or new challenges in your work environment.
- Consider whether you tend to embrace change or resist it and the reasons behind your response.
- Reflect on how you can adopt a more positive attitude toward change and view it as an opportunity for growth.

**Typical Reaction:**

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☐ **Embrace** ☐ **Resist** **Date:** .....

**Reasons:**

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**Attitude Opportunities:**

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### TRUST ISSUES

- Think about situations in which trust issues, either in your team or with upper management, have hindered effective communication and collaboration.
- Describe the consequences of these trust issues on your role as a middle manager and your team's performance.
- Explore strategies for rebuilding and maintaining trust in professional relationships.

**Situation(s):**

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**Team Consequence(s):**

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**Strategies:**

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### ORGANIZATIONAL SAVVY

- Assess your level of organizational awareness and your ability to navigate complex corporate structures.
- Reflect on instances where a lack of organizational savvy may have impeded your progress or effectiveness.
- Identify steps you can take to improve your organizational acumen and enhance your impact as a middle manager.

**Instance(s):**

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**Steps:**

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### RELATIONSHIPS

- Consider the quality of your professional relationships with team members, peers, and upper management.
- Reflect on any challenges you face in building strong, collaborative relationships.

- Explore ways to enhance your relationship-building skills and create a more positive and collaborative work environment.

**Relationship Quality:**

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**Challenges:**

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**Strategies:**

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## PRIORITIZED ACTION

- Share any personal experiences or fears related to these elements, particularly in the context of your career or leadership roles.
- Consider the lessons from the essay about confronting and overcoming fears, both personally and professionally.
- Reflect on how you can apply the idea of 'letting it go' to overcome fears that may be holding you back from career growth and personal fulfillment.

Summarize your main takeaways from the reflections above:

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Identify and rank three strategies or tactics you wish to prioritize to confront and overcome fears in your middle/frontline management role or your career in general. Consider what type of time commitment you wish to make for this effort (i.e., weeks, months).

1 ..... Commitment .....

2 ..... Commitment .....

2 ..... Commitment .....

Understanding each FACTOR can help middle and frontline managers recognize the specific fears that may be holding them back in their roles. It is human to experience fears – but by addressing and confronting them, managers can work toward personal and professional growth and fulfillment.

A manager's role, in my view, remains as a pivotal one, serving as a training ground for senior leadership and for the practice in leading with a strong human element.