# Knowledge Worker
## What Does *Your* Power Profile Look Like?
### (May 2013)

Students of organizations are familiar with the distinction drawn between what some call "positional power" (i.e., formal authority) and "personal power" which is the kind of influence you exercise based on your style, personality or charisma. To these two can be added a third: the power, authority and influence that you exercise by virtue of your knowledge and expertise. This is your "professional power." These three forms of power, authority and influence form a pyramid (see Figure 1).
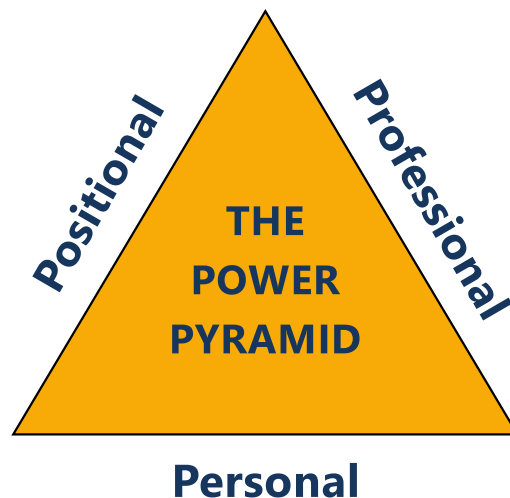


© **Fred Nickols 2013**

Figure 1

The Power Pyramid shows Personal Power as the base because it is the most pervasive of the three; it is the foundation for the other two. Your personality and style carry over into the way you exercise the authority of your position and in the way you work or apply your knowledge and skills as a professional, especially in interactions with others. Your personality puts indelible marks on those interactions. Positional Power reflects your formal or official influence over matters like resource allocations, work assignments and budget control. As mentioned above, Professional Power is the kind of influence that your knowledge and skills or expertise earns you in the eyes of others. In a very real sense, Positional Power is assigned, Personal Power is granted and Professional Power is earned.

The three sides of the pyramid are shown as roughly equal in Figure 1 but that's not necessarily the case. Some people rely almost entirely on their positional authority or power; some rely mainly on their expertise or professional authority; and some rely mostly on their personal power as their chief means of influencing others. All of us exercise influence (with varying degrees of success) based on some mix of the three kinds of power. The mix of these three kinds of power defines your Power Profile.
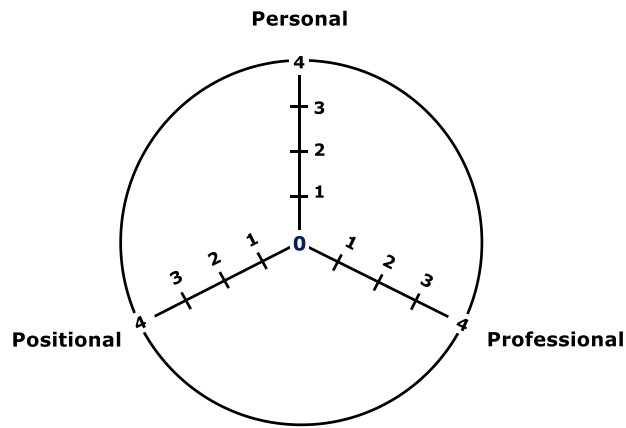
# Knowledge Worker
## What Does *Your* Power Profile Look Like?
(May 2013)

With that in mind, here are a couple of interesting, fun and hopefully informative exercises for you.

Using the diagram in Figure 2, take stock of the extent to which you rely on each of the three bases of power, influence and authority.  Rate each on the scale from 0 to 4.  Place a dot on each scale where you rate yourself.  Then connect the dots and see what your Power Profile looks like.
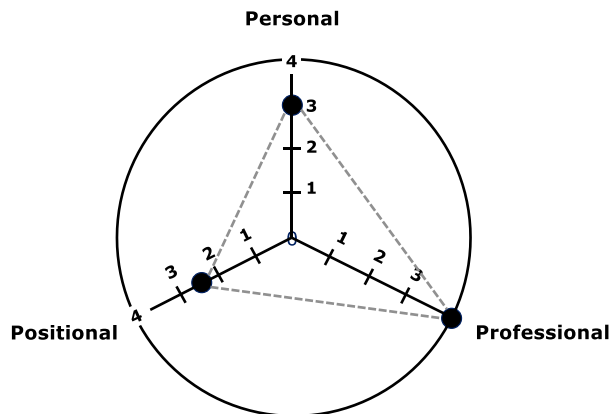
Again, using the diagram in Figure 2, ask others to rate you from their perspectives.  See what kind of Power Profile they assign to your exercise of power, authority and influence.

© Fred Nickols 2013

Figure 2

To illustrate, consider Figure 3 which shows what I see as my Power Profile.

© Fred Nickols 2013

Figure 3

# Knowledge Worker
## What Does *Your* Power Profile Look Like?
### (May 2013)

As you can see, my perception of myself is that I rely mainly on my professional expertise, secondarily on my personality and least of all on my positional power or authority.  However, that might not be what others see.

By way of further illustration consider the three stereotypes shown in Figure 4.
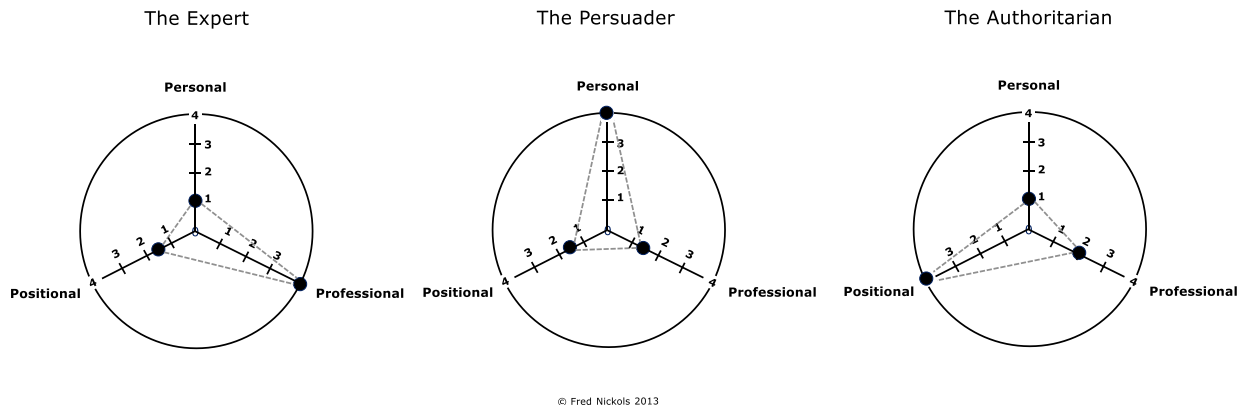


Figure 4

So think it over then take stock of your view of your Power Profile and, if you're so inclined, check with others to find out what they see when they look at ways you exercise the three kinds of power.  You can use the diagram in Figure 2 to plot your Power Profile.  Then ask yourself one simple question:  How's that working for you?  Think about it.

## About the Author
Fred Nickols, CPT, is a knowledge worker, writer, consultant, and former executive who spent 20 years in the U.S. Navy, retiring as a decorated chief petty officer.  In the private sector, he worked as a consultant and then held executive positions with two former clients.  Currently, Fred is the manager partner of Distance Consulting LLC.  His website is home to the award-winning Knowledge Worker's Tool Room and more than 200 free articles, book chapters, and papers.  Fred is a longtime member of ISPI and writes this monthly column for *PerformanceXpress*.  A complete listing of all Knowledge Worker columns and access to them is available here.