

Knowledge Worker

What Does Your Work Profile Look Like?

(January 2015)

Somehow, somewhere along the way, we have managed to divorce performance from work. The two of them need to be remarried.

To perform – in the sense that that term has any meaning at all in the world of work and working – is to achieve some result of value. It is to accomplish something – hence, Tom Gilbert’s focus on “accomplishments as the chief indicator of performance.

Work is a process and it has a result. Working is the activity of the worker in carrying out that process. Work, worker and working – these are the components of performance. Lose sight of these three and you might as well forget about managing and improving performance.

As is the case with all processes, there is content to consider (i.e., that which is being worked on). In the case of work, there are two basic types of content: (1) materials and (2) information. There are also two basic types of work processes: (1) those “canned routines” that have been prefigured or worked out in advance and (2) “crafted responses” that are prefigured or worked out in response to the circumstances at hand.

Arraying the kind of work process against the kind of work content yields the 2x2 matrix shown below (with illustrative examples).

Configured	I Materials Craft (Cabinet Maker)	II Information Craft (Researcher)
	Process	
Prefigured	III Materials Production (Assembly Line)	IV Information Production (Claims Examiner)
	Materials	Information
	Content	

© Fred Nickols 2014

Figure 1 – Types of Work

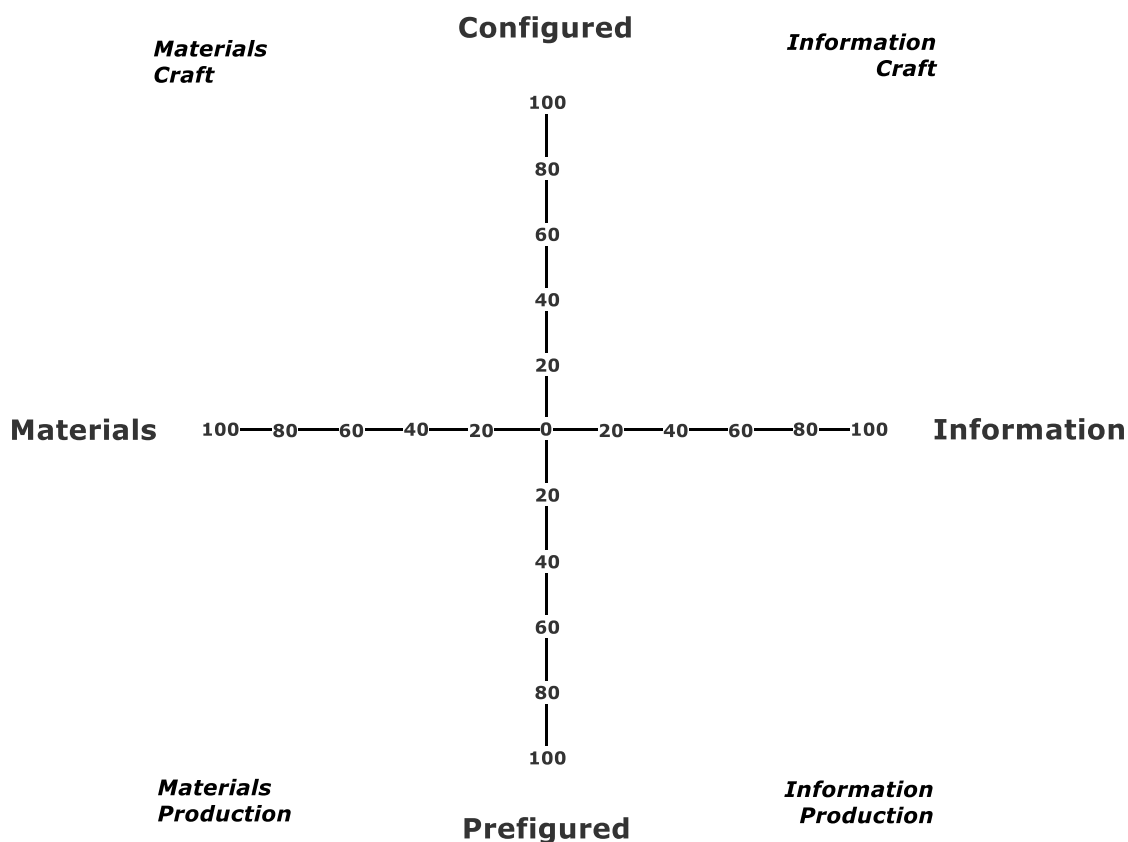
Knowledge Worker

What Does Your Work Profile Look Like?

(January 2015)

There are, then, really only four basic kinds of work, two of which are production and two of which are craft and two of which entail processing materials and two that are focused on materials. However, the work of most people is some mix of these four. To be sure, an assembly line worker might be focused on materials production but even there workers sometimes have to figure out what to do in response to unforeseen circumstances. The same is true of the researcher, who might well be focused on information craft work in the course of figuring out how to conduct a new kind of study but who might also have to attend to some information production work in the course of filling out and submitting an expense voucher. Consider surgeons and dentists; their work is clearly a mix of materials (i.e., human beings) and information (e.g., medical and dental practices). Even the fabled ditch digger must often give thought to what he or she is doing and adapt to the particular conditions at hand. All that said, most people also have a fairly stable work profile, that is, their work is essentially a stable mix over time.

The diagram below allows you to assess your work profile



© Fred Nickols 2014

Figure 2 – Work Profile

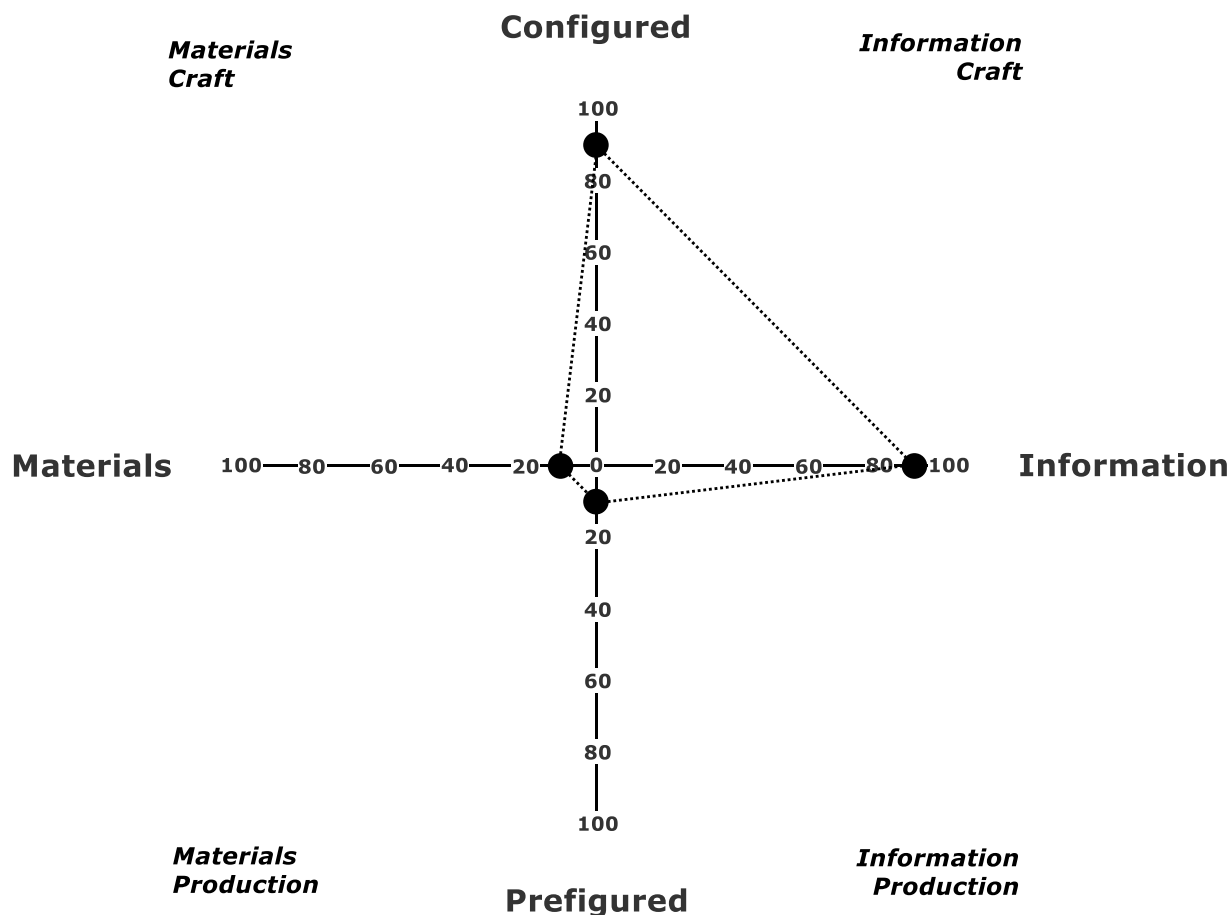
Knowledge Worker

What Does Your Work Profile Look Like?

(January 2015)

The scales array the percentages of configured and prefigured working activities against the amounts of material and information-based work. To determine your work profile, simply indicate the percentage of each category on all four scales then connect the dots. The scale runs from zero to 100 percent on each axis. The sum of any two ratings on the same axis should equal 100 percent (e.g., 80 percent information based and 20 percent materials based).

The sample below shows how I see my work profile as a consultant. As you can see, very little of my work is materials-based or prefigured; it consists almost entirely of configured, information-based work.



© Fred Nickols 2014

Figure 3 – Sample Work Profile (Fred)

Knowledge Worker

What Does Your Work Profile Look Like?

(January 2015)

So, back to the title of this column: “What does your work profile look like?” You can find a blank Work Profile Job Aid by clicking [here](#). You can use it to gauge your work profile. Listed below are some questions to stimulate your thinking about the four kinds of work.

Reflection Questions

1. Of the four kinds of work, what kinds do you do?
2. How much of each kind do you do?
3. What differences do you experience in doing those different kinds of work?
4. What kinds of difficulties do you encounter with the various kinds of work?
5. How do you get feedback with each kind of work?
6. How do the obstacles and barriers differ with each kind of work?
7. How do you gauge success in doing each kind of work?
8. Which ones take up the largest share of your time?
9. Which ones add the most value?
10. Which kinds present the greatest challenges to those who would manage or improve 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](#).