

Circles of Concern and Influence exercise

An aspect that can help leaders going through change is looking at circles of concern and influence by Stephen Covey.

A circle of concern encompasses the wide range of concerns we may have at any one time e.g. our health, our children, problems at work, the amount of government borrowing, or the threat of war etc.

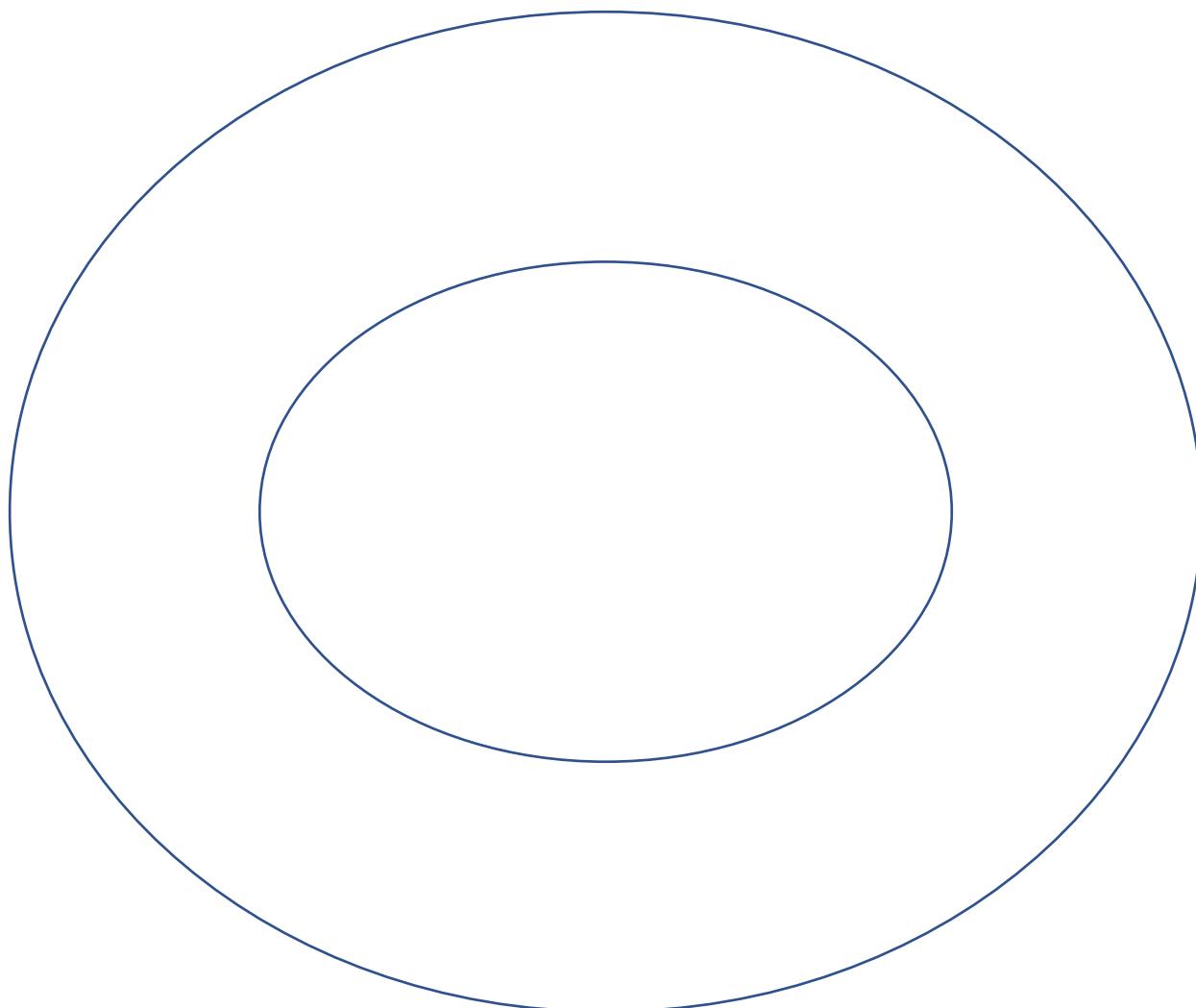
The circle of influence encompasses those concerns that we can do something about and have some control over.

Covey in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* talks about being proactive i.e. being responsible for our own lives and recommends that people focus on issues within their circle of influence i.e. they work on areas that they can do something about.

He states that our behaviour is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. The nature of our energy in doing this is positive, enlarging and magnifying. We can thus increase our circle of influence.

This can help leaders learn that throughout change, you can explore the steps needed to behave proactively, rather than being reactive. So, you do not lose energy on what you cannot change! Here is a very practical exercise that you can do:

1. Take a A4, or large size page and draw two concentric circles on it, a bit like this:



It's good to make each of the circles as large as possible, make sure there's space to write, within each one.

2. Then separately list the concerns you have at the moment. You can decide to focus on one part of your life i.e. your work, or your life outside of work. You may also want to combine these, it's up to you. It would be good to come up with a list of about 5 or 6 concerns.
3. Write these concerns, using a brief description, in the outer circle. This outer circle is called the 'circle of concern'.
4. The inner circle is called the 'circle of influence'. Make sure you have given yourself enough room to write within this circle. Take each of the concerns in the outer circle and write down, in the inner circle, anything you can think of doing to influence them, so that they might get closer to a resolution. I advise using arrows from the inner circle towards the concern, so that when you are looking at it in the future, you know what relates to each one.
What you might find, is that there are some elements that there is nothing you can do about – for example Brexit, politics, other situations that you are completely stuck with. Just leave these for now, I'll come back to them.
5. Once you've done this, try to separate the comments so the diagram is easier to interpret when you come to look at it again. I recommend colour coding, the descriptions on the outer circle with those in the inner circle.
6. Coming back to those concerns that you can't do much about. If you can't do anything at all to influence them, tell yourself this and then try not to worry about them.
If there is a concern that you have thought you can do a little about, a good example here is the climate emergency. Then do what you think you can do, e.g. recycle, reduce and reuse etc.
7. Be proactive as possible about the concerns that you can influence. Come back to the exercise as often as possible over the next month, and you may come up with other solutions and the concerns may reduce or even disappear. What should happen is the inner circle, the circle of influence should increase and you should find that you have more control over your life.