



Clout – Getting It and Keeping It with Human Resources Technology

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Specific to my fellow HR technologists, “clout” involves two key components: identifying whether or not you have what is called clout and your ability to understand HR technology; and use available HR technology components to your personal and professional advantage while providing actionable deliverables to create or build your level of personal influence within your organization.

Webster’s Dictionary defines clout as “a blow, especially with a fist,” “a long powerful hit in baseball.” Additionally and alternatively it is defined as one’s ability or capacity to exercise control and authority in order to wield influence and get others to perform effectively. Informal synonyms of clout are *power, influence, pull, and muscle*.

Clout manifests itself as power, which is a person’s right or prerogative of determining, ruling, governing or the exercise of that right or governance over others. The most common types of power are: coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, and referent power (given by law, title, or any other authority).

Power is gained by those people who are perceived as controlling scarce resources, decision processes, knowledge and its dissemination, technology, boundaries, access to others, and control of the *informal organization* (groups) within any organization.

Below are people in various positions and industries who undoubtedly would be described as having power, either by people who recognize their name, or by people directly influenced by their opinions and actions.

Overall Clout	Media/Entertainment Clout	Business Clout
		

The President of the United States certainly has clout; one cannot argue that. He has at his disposal all the powers of his office. Plus, his power is considered “given” as a result of his original mandate and election. Others shown are in the media/entertainment industry – Ryan Seacrest, Oprah, Roger Ailes, and Brad Pitt. The last group are “captains of industry” – Zuckerberg, Trump and Gates. You most likely recognized these faces because of their influence and ability to market their personal brand over the years.

A high level of clout implies a high level of experience-based confidence and self-awareness. These people are insightful. They have the ability to read and understand others – some may refer to this as being instinctive and savvy. As a group, individuals who are considered influencers, authorities, or people of power (and thus having clout) are intelligent, determined, strategic and energetic. They know how to handle upheavals, and have the ability to survive corporate disruptions.

One less appealing quality they all share is “benign deviousness.” Benign deviousness, or passive aggression, is the ability to get what you want without other people realizing that you are manipulating them. It’s a tactical approach with a ruthless single-mindedness and is essential in negotiating and wielding influence.

It is also important to note that clout is a changeable characteristic. Politicians rise or fall in influence based on personal scandals or successes. Media stars do the same, sometimes dependent on the roles and pictures they undertake, and whether or not the film is a box office hit or flop.

Here is a list of common personal traits of people with clout:

Clout Characteristics					
People Insight	Intelligence	Corporate Resilience	Time Management	Delegation Skills	Ruthless Single-Mindedness
Motivation Skills	Determination	Benign Deviousness	Directed Energy	Health Awareness	Strive for Effectiveness

As HR technologists, we have a narrow, yet important focus. Our daily professional activities are greatly influenced by the technology tools or enablers we have at our disposal. The ability to acquire HR technology and to be able to deploy it strategically to your company’s benefit is the primary driver of your personal and professional level of clout.

So, the question becomes, *Do you need clout to get a new HR technology solution? Or does a new HR technology solution give you clout?*

The answer is “Yes” to both.

Human Resources technology helps to ensure a direct link towards bringing the overall strategies and resultant executable plans to the workforce. The ability, for example, to track employee performance, individual goals, and objectives

will help position the HR function as a vital strategic business partner in your organization. An effective HR technology strategy identifies the core competencies and internal value processes essential to maximize job performance and strategic support while simultaneously increasing shareholder profit. Business intelligence metrics can be implemented for forecasting staffing levels and identifying projective costs and values. Built-in workflow templates trigger events, proxy approvals, multifunctional modules; and real-time, payroll calculations empower employees to utilize their time more effectively.

Having clout (or influence, or power), is critical to the success of any HR technology solution. Individuals with clout have the ability to affect or control decision-making – from the selection of a HR technology solution to activities to keep HR in alignment with corporate strategy.

Additionally, individuals with clout possess the essential communication skills, conflict resolution styles, and insight into the behavior and motivations of others that are needed to guide HR technology projects.

Linking HRT to Your Business

Linking HR technology to your business is critical to the success of maximizing HR technology effectiveness. The underpinning of this is the need for HR technologists to understand what the stakeholders of HR are seeking and what the board of directors expects in terms of value-added *information* to run the business and implement strategic initiatives. For example, CEOs or CHROs might want such questions as these addressed by the HR function:

1. Who are the key players in our organization? Are our highest-level performers adequately compensated?
2. How much would it cost in severance pay and other expenses to reduce head count by 10 percent while retaining our highest-level performers?
3. How many of our most effective managers will leave voluntarily or retire in each of the next five years? What will be the cost to recruit, train and retain replacements?
4. How is the business of HR performing in terms of cost effectiveness, program effectiveness, workforce utilization, and growth/new program potential.

Thus, understanding the needs of your senior management (as high up in the organization as feasible) and effectively communicating strategic information to them will raise the value of the HR function – thus potentially increasing your personal and professional clout. When senior management at the highest level sees that the HR function provides information for strategic direction, facilitates change as a result of strategic decisions, and provides policies/programs that empirically benefit the corporation’s overall performance, then recognition and influence will continue to increase for HR in the minds of the executives. Below is a list of the expectations and common concerns of C-level executives:

- Administrative efficiencies resulting in cost reduction;

- Leadership and support in implementing business strategies;
- High service quality to all customers (stakeholders);
- Responsiveness;
- Risk management;
- Talent acquisition and pipeline; and,
- Effective leveraging of technology to all appropriate functions within the realm of HR, Payroll and Benefits.

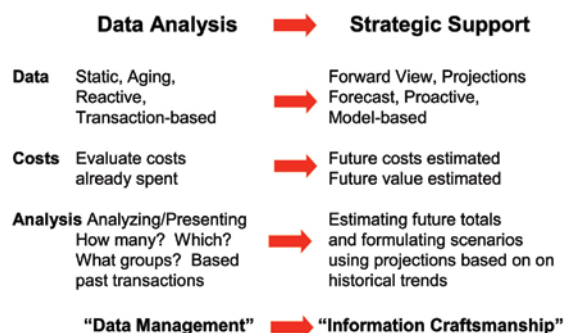
They are concerned about:

- Organizational financials
- The marketplace
- Competitors
- Acquisitions and mergers
- Research and development
- Technology development
- Products and cost of production
- Overhead
- Economic indicators
- Organizational structure
- The workforce and its utilization
- Human resources programs and measurement.

HCM: Effectiveness versus Efficiency

People with clout understand the difference between effectiveness and efficiency. Efficiency is often interchangeably used with effectiveness; however, you can be 100 percent efficient but completely ineffective. Efficiency is about doing things right. It involves solving problems, safeguarding resources, following standardizes duties, lowering costs, implementing human resources technology (HRT) on time and producing standard reports. On the contrary, effectiveness produces alternatives, optimizes resources, obtains results, increases profits, implements the right HR technology, satisfies users, and provides strategic value reports. Producing timely standard reports, rather than strategic value reports may be efficient, but may not prove to be valuable, and certainly will not increase HR’s level of influence or clout.

In effect, I am suggesting an active move from *data management* to *information craftsmanship*. This would be a key component in gaining increased levels of clout. Eliminating the generation of “static reports” of old data, and instead generating forward-oriented projections and metrics using modeling and other tools such as regression analysis will prove invaluable to your personal and professional clout.



The ability of the HR technology solutions to forecast, model, and present results as a graphical format or dashboard and then presenting such information to senior management is an impressive and clout-laden activity.

The need for a HR technology solution with clout is evident. Human Resources technology strategic reporting should support the strategic plans of your organization while accommodating changing organizational structures, and also assist in the identification of key employees and the overall talent management initiatives.

The logic is obvious. The potential for HRT success and clout is evident. Raw data should lead to information. Information should lead to influence. Influence should lead to power. Power and influence means *clout*. Clout should lead to new, visible initiatives and programs. All this will lead to increased personal and professional success, including enhanced influence and power.

Here are my suggestions for *10 characteristics of an influential HR technology environment*:

(This list will be referred to in Miller's Clout-Level Determination Questionnaire as Factor 2 that can be found on the IHRIM publications website.)

1. Web-delivered SaaS – by a third-party, established HRT provider;
2. Employee self-service and manager self-service integrated – manager “inbox;”
3. Mobile applications available and enabled;
4. Metrics – business intelligence (not simple data reports);
5. Metrics presented as a graphical dashboard;
6. Workflow built-in, e-mails, templates, trigger events, default approvals – life cycle changes pushed directly to employee and manager;
7. Single sign-on within multiple functional modules – onboarding, payroll, benefits administration, etc.;
8. Modeling and forecast projections of some key metrics such as “future turnover;”
9. Onboarding component integrated with recruiting and applicant processing; and,
10. Real-time, payroll calculations, ability for “on-the-go” adjustments and rerun of payroll calculations – including time entry, integrated with all necessary HR components.

And yet, HR technology projects (just like many others) can and do fail.

Human Resources projects involve all levels of end users from line employees to department and division executives, as well as systems staff and third-party representatives (usually from a vendor of some sort). There is a team selected to oversee and implement whatever HR technology is wanted. An effective team effort in implementing a new HR technology component that is in alignment with corporate strategies, has increased functionality, and is effective and efficient, will

induce and enhance the clout level of the people involved and will likely lead to a successful results.

However, this is not always the case. These projects often fail. If they do, the team members, individuals, and “owners” of the effort will potentially have their influence and, thus, clout negatively impacted. Without going into too much detail, as that is the subject of many texts and other articles, here are some issues to keep in mind to help avoid a HR technology project that is not a success.

- On a specific team, each member has his or her own wants, desires, beliefs, and agendas – hidden or open. Some individuals are seeking recognition and their own higher level of power. Everyone wants some power. However, if an individual's “thirst” for power is not aligned with others on the team/project, then interactions will create conflict, and conflict can easily create a path towards project failure.
- Team members react to each other based on their own individual set of experiences and learnings. As humans we react to each other based on fears, information, goals, perceptions, agendas, feelings, personality, experience and beliefs. These have been formed since infancy. They will not change easily. An effective team will learn to recognize individual differences and strengths and weaknesses, and adjust for the common team good.
- As a team leader, that person must recognize the “personalities among the team members,” and set an example at all times in terms of acting in an empathetic manner, with appropriate ethics on display, and, of course, with a constant “can do” supportive and visible attitude. The team leader must simultaneously be supervisor, boss, coach and supportive mentor. If he or she does not exhibit these characteristics (among others), the team can degenerate into conflict mode.

When these characteristics create actions that adversely affect the team's goals and objectives, then conflict will arise and the project will eventually fail. Teams fail when people are in conflict, and also when they resist change.

Power and clout is the medium through which conflicts of interest are ultimately resolved. A leader with clout has to first recognize conflict, prepare for it, and eventually make decisions that remove it – at any level. And, those decisions, tough as they may be, must be made with empathy and within ethical practices, being visible to all members.

In addition to the interactions and interests among and between team members, conflict is also often influenced by the organization itself and organizational politics. People with clout understand the nature of “politicking” in their workplace. In some organizations, power is discouraged and not rewarded (or limited to a very few people who are considered high-potentials or climbers.) In other organizations, it is a major means for getting ahead or being accepted according to standardized rules. Some organizations view the lust for power as good, while others think those actions (such as character assassination, rumor mongering, back-stabbing, etc.) border

on the unethical. A person with clout, aware of the political climate in his or her organization, will recognize what is acceptable and may use it to his or her advantage. Even better, he or she may use it to the advantage of any HR technology solution project. Gaining executive approvals, sponsorship, funding, and staffing are all action items that will end up helping any HR technology project effort.

Human Resources technology projects have a greater chance of success when there is an understanding of individual behaviors and motivations (this includes their *thirst for power* and desire for clout), communication styles, conflict resolution styles and team participation styles.

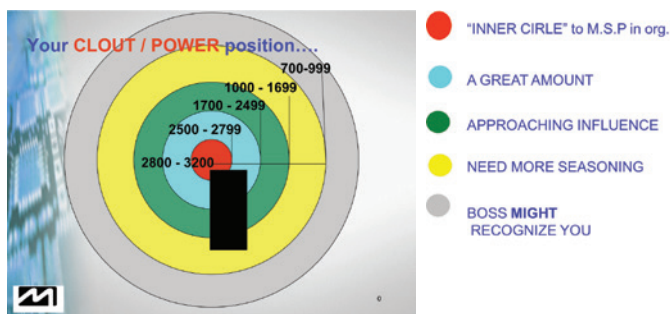
Determining Your Own Clout Level

Please go to *Cloud Calculator* (www.ihrimpublications.com/Cloud_Calculator-final-self_adding.xls) to download and complete the *Miller Clout Questionnaire*.

Answer each question within each Factor as your best “guesstimate.” If a particular question seems to not apply to you or your situation, give yourself the maximum score anyway (we will need all the help we can get).

As stated, this is completely unscientific and based on anecdotal concepts, with a touch of “tongue-in-cheek” – however, it is based on perceptions and real career experiences of this author.

Total Clout Score – Your total raw clout score should range from 665 to 3110. Round your score up to the next hundredth, and your final clout score results should range from a minimum of 700 to a maximum of 3200. Now see the concentric circle target chart below to position your personal clout level.



Determining and Understanding Your Clout/Power Position and What You Can Do About it

If your final score results falls in the “inner circle” (2800-3200 range), you have gained HR technology clout at the highest level. You potentially have a high degree of power, influence, and HRT clout. The concentric circle (2500-2799 range) also reflects a great amount of influence and power. The green circle (1700-2499 range) means you are approaching influence. The yellow circle (1000-1699 range) suggests you need more self-awareness and marketing of your responsibilities and achievements. The recognition of your activities and its benefits is low. The gray circle (700-999 range) indicates a very low level of influence and power. At

this level, you will be lucky if your boss recognizes you passing in the hallway. The good news is that clout is changeable and dynamic.

You can be full of clout in one specific area of expertise and full of something else (omg) in another. Recognize your strengths and weaknesses. Be self-aware. The following “to-do” list may prove helpful as you navigate the ever-changing environment of HR technology and deal with the concerns of your stakeholders. Consider these action items. Doing so could create a path to greater personal and professional success and clout.

A Potential “To-Do List” to Increase Your Personal Clout Level

- Learn your company and learn your industry (competitors/trends).
- Understand your clients/stakeholders needs.
- Market and publicize the capabilities of your existing or new HR technology solutions – be proactive.
- Participate in industry benchmark surveys.
- Nurture informal relationships – politics.
- Review and upgrade your job description.
- Remain current in legislative trends.
- Understand statistics and modeling.
- Know about the other systems in your company.
- Know what your industry cohorts have and how they are using their HR technology – collaborate and share.
- Be visible, speak and write, blog, use internal company social media.

Good luck on your journey to achieve clout!

About the Author



Marc S. Miller, president of Marc S. Miller Associates is a nationally known independent Human Resources technology consultant and thought leader. His firm guides his clients and HRT/HCM providers in HR technology solution evaluations and business development. Miller is a frequent speaker at national HRT industry events, conferences, vendor events, and delivers many webinars. He is an adjunct professor in HR at the MBA programs at NYU and LIU. He is known for his lively and incisive talks on topics related to the role of HR and its use of technology to strategic advantage. His book *Heroic HR* is available on Amazon, at www.ihrimpublications.com, and on his website at www.marcmillerassociates.com.