

Meyer's Management Models

52. Status Snakes & Ladders

How can I increase or decrease people's status?

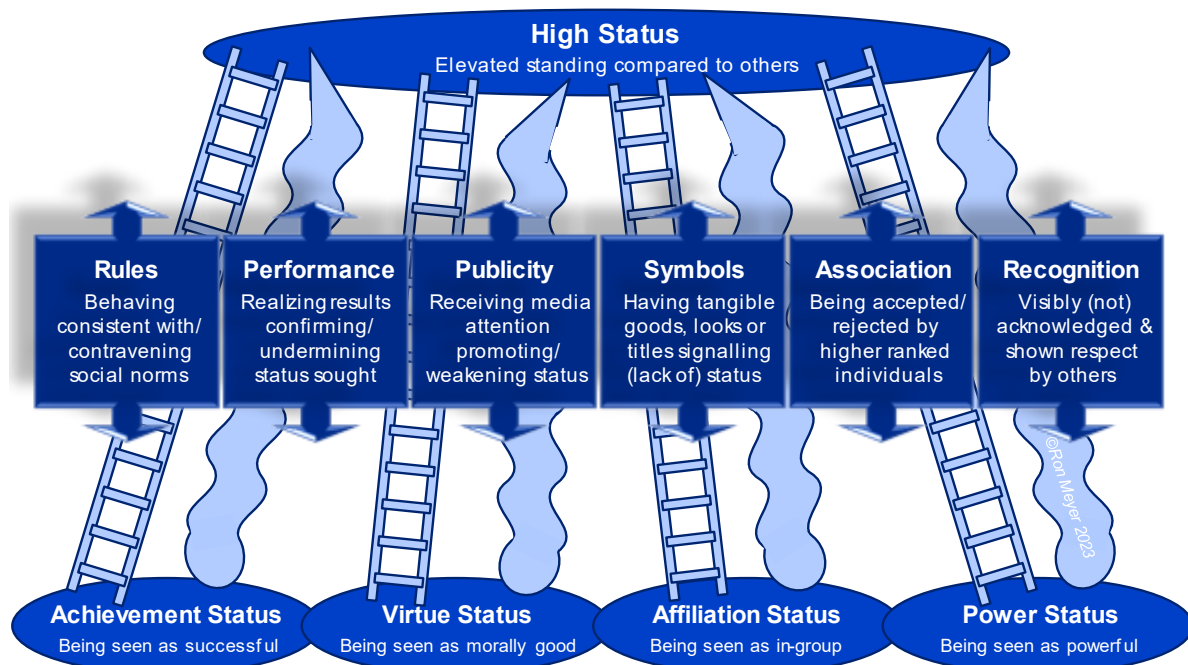
Key Definitions

A person's or organization's *status* is their standing compared to others – it is how they are ranked in the eyes of the people around them. As this relative standing is based on perceptions and reputation, status is not static, but changes over time and can be influenced.

Status can be derived from four key sources: From being seen as successful at a particular endeavor (*achievement status*), from being seen as morally good (*virtue status*), from being seen as member of a desirable group (*affiliation status*) and from being seen as powerful (*power status*). These are described in more detail in model 46 (Ambition Radar Screen).

Conceptual Model

The *Status Snakes & Ladders* framework outlines the six key factors influencing whether people and organizations gain or lose status. The name of the framework is a reference to the old board game Snakes and Ladders, in which participants can slide down away from the finish line or can take a shortcut up towards the finish by climbing a ladder. The framework's key message is that the same up and down dynamic is true when it comes to status. However, in the board game everything depends on a roll of the dice, while in the status game there are six levers that can consciously be pulled to accelerate someone up or down. All six levers can be used by the people or organizations themselves, but also by those around them.



Key Elements

The six levers for increasing or decreasing someone's status are the following:

1. **Rules.** Higher status is awarded to people who behave according to social expectations – consistent with the unwritten rules that are part of the culture. For example, a successful

person shouldn't gloat, a morally good person shouldn't be condescending, an in-crowd person should wear the right clothing and a powerful person should help the powerless. Conforming to these implicit social norms is key to achieving higher social status.

2. **Performance.** But behaving 'correctly' is not enough – a person also needs to deliver. Real successes need to be achieved, morally good deeds need to be done, tangible membership of the in-group needs to be exhibited and/or the public wielding of power needs to be on display. People will be looking for concrete proof that a person can perform according to their standing. Doubt about their future ability to deliver can be detrimental.
3. **Publicity.** As it is often difficult to see whether a person is performing and conforming to the social rules, people will look to what others are saying – they will listen to the gossip and scan the media to get a sense of someone's standing in the eyes of others. This presents the opportunity to promote yourself or others, highlighting performance and spinning it in the most beneficial way, or alternatively, making someone else look bad.
4. **Symbols.** People not only take their cues from the media but are also sensitive to symbols that reinforce a certain image. A private plane signals success, a self-help book implies moral goodness, a title suggests membership of a select group, and your name on a skyscraper shouts that you are powerful. This presents the opportunity to give people symbols (or withhold them) such as a fancy title, a company car and/or a corner office.
5. **Association.** Another type of status cue is how a person is treated by people of a higher rank. If it is made clear that a person is accepted as a peer by people of higher standing, this is a quick ladder up. Conversely, if people on a higher rung kick someone down, showing by their behavior that they don't embrace that person as an equal, that person will inevitably slide down the snake to a lower status. Who you associate with is everything.
6. **Recognition.** Besides acceptance by peers, it is crucial to be acknowledged and respected by all others, especially by people of higher status. Being invited to visit the president, being asked to comment by a national TV network, being given an award, and being promoted to a new role are all examples of receiving recognition. This presents the opportunity for anyone to give, or withhold, public acknowledgements.

Key Insights

- **Status is a social construct.** A person's status is their social standing compared to others in the eyes of those around them. In other words, it is the perception that others have about a person's rank in society. There is no objective measure, only a widely held impression.
- **Status can go up or down.** A person's status is not static, but can increase or decrease, sometimes relatively quickly. The change can be due to circumstances but can also be purposely influenced by people themselves or by those around them.
- **Status depends on six levers.** A person's status is shaped by how others view his/her conformance to social norms (*rules*), attainment of results (*performance*), coverage in the media (*publicity*), showcasing of signals (*symbols*), acceptance by peers (*association*) and acknowledgement by higher ranked individuals (*recognition*). Each of these factors can positively or negatively influence status but will typically reinforce each other.
- **Status can be influence by yourself.** In the status game, each individual can use these six levers to climb the ladder to a higher standing. Being conscious and taking ownership are crucial but note that too much self-promotion breaks a social rule.
- **Status can be influenced by others.** Being helped by others to move up the ladder is a good tactic. Therefore, leaders need to consider how they can use all six levers to strengthen the standing of the people around them (while indirectly profiting themselves).

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Insightful Tools to Kickstart Your Thinking

Publication Schedule

<i>July 2019</i>	<i>Mind the Gap Model</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2019</i>	<i>Digital Platform Map</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>September 2019</i>	<i>Interaction Pressure Gauge</i>	<i>Interpersonal Interaction</i>
<i>October 2019</i>	<i>Revenue Model Framework</i>	<i>Revenue Model Typology</i>
<i>November 2019</i>	<i>House of Engagement</i>	<i>Organizational Engagement</i>
<i>December 2019</i>	<i>Confidence Quotient</i>	<i>Trust Building</i>
<i>January 2020</i>	<i>Competition Tornado</i>	<i>Competitive Strategy</i>
<i>February 2020</i>	<i>11C Synergy Model</i>	<i>Corporate Synergy Management</i>
<i>March 2020</i>	<i>Leadership Fairness Model</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>April 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Agility Model</i>	<i>Strategy Process Approach</i>
<i>May 2020</i>	<i>Control Panel</i>	<i>Corporate Control Dimensions</i>
<i>June 2020</i>	<i>Rising Star Framework</i>	<i>Talent Management</i>
<i>July 2020</i>	<i>Strategy Development Cycle</i>	<i>Strategy Process Steps</i>
<i>August 2020</i>	<i>7I Corporate Center Model</i>	<i>Corporate Organization</i>
<i>September 2020</i>	<i>Storytelling Scripts</i>	<i>Leadership Communication</i>
<i>October 2020</i>	<i>Strategic Bets Framework</i>	<i>Strategic Decision-Making</i>
<i>November 2020</i>	<i>Rebound Model of Resilience</i>	<i>Organizational Resilience</i>
<i>December 2020</i>	<i>4C Leadership Capabilities</i>	<i>Leadership Competences</i>
<i>January 2021</i>	<i>Digital Product Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>February 2021</i>	<i>Digital Distribution Model Dial</i>	<i>Digital Strategy</i>
<i>March 2021</i>	<i>Empowerment Cycle</i>	<i>Employee Empowerment</i>
<i>April 2021</i>	<i>Innovation Box</i>	<i>Innovation Approaches</i>
<i>May 2021</i>	<i>Knowledge Sharing Bridges</i>	<i>Best Practice Sharing</i>
<i>June 2021</i>	<i>Followership Cycle</i>	<i>Leader-Follower Interaction</i>
<i>July 2021</i>	<i>Everest Model of Change</i>	<i>Change Management</i>
<i>August 2021</i>	<i>Fruits & Nuts Matrix</i>	<i>Priority-Setting</i>
<i>September 2021</i>	<i>Powerhouse Framework</i>	<i>People & Organization Strategy</i>
<i>October 2021</i>	<i>Strategy Hourglass</i>	<i>Strategy-Making Steps</i>
<i>November 2021</i>	<i>Disciplined Dialogue Model</i>	<i>Interpersonal Communication</i>
<i>December 2021</i>	<i>Team Building Cycle</i>	<i>Team Building Process</i>
<i>January 2022</i>	<i>Market System Map</i>	<i>External Analysis Framework</i>
<i>February 2022</i>	<i>Strategic Alignment Model</i>	<i>Business Level Strategy</i>
<i>March 2022</i>	<i>Creativity X-Factor</i>	<i>Creativity Enhancement</i>
<i>April 2022</i>	<i>Organizational System Map</i>	<i>Organizational Analysis</i>
<i>May 2022</i>	<i>Corporate Value Creation Model</i>	<i>Corporate Level Strategy</i>

June 2022	Change Manager's Toolbox	Change Methodologies
July 2022	Sustainable You Model	Personal Sustainability
August 2022	Value Proposition Dial	Business Level Strategy
September 2022	The Tree of Power	Organizational Power
October 2022	Psychological Safety Compass	Team Dynamics
November 2022	Strategic Action Modes	Strategy Process
December 2022	Corporate Management Styles	HQ Management
January 2023	Thinking Directions Framework	Reasoning Skills
February 2023	5I Innovation Pipeline	Innovation Process
March 2023	Resistance to Change Typology	Change Management
April 2023	Ambition Radar Screen	Motivation Analysis
May 2023	Corporate Strategy Framework	Corporate Strategy
June 2023	Cultural Fabric Model	Organizational Culture
July 2023	New Pyramid Principle	Presentation Approaches
August 2023	Activity System Dial	Value Creation Analysis
September 2023	Customer-Centricity Circle	Organizational Design
October 2023	Status Snakes & Ladders	Leadership Branding
November 2023	Dynamic Business Paradigm	Competitive Advantage
December 2023	Dynamic Organization Paradigm	Human-centered Organization
January 2024	Duty of Care Feedback Criteria	Feedback Method
February 2024	Stakeholder Heat Map	Stakeholder Management
March 2024	Best Practice Sharing Framework	Sharing Methods
April 2024	New Learning Curve	Personal Learning
May 2024	Partnership Distance Model	Interorganizational Relations
June 2024	Embedded Identity Model	Personal Awareness
July 2024	Interpersonal Interaction Levels	Communication Approaches
August 2024	BOLD Vision Framework	Organizational Vision
September 2024	Meaningful Mission Framework	Organizational Mission