

# **SELF-DEVELOPMENT AS A MANAGERIAL COMPETENCY: INTEGRATING SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-REGULATION PROCESSES FOR SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a self-directed model for development that conceptualises self-development as a two broad phased process. The first phase relates to actions associated with managerial self-understanding and the second phase concerns actions associated with self-change. Underpinning the operation of the model is a set of meta-skills – skills required for the development of other skills – managing self-awareness reactions, self-reflection practice and self-management. It is argued that the intrapersonal skills of managers should incorporate the skills these three meta-skills as they form the foundation for continuous adjustment of behaviour and skills to dynamic complex environments.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In response to the increasing attention given to the development needs of managers in recent years there has been considerable advancement in the nature and extent of formal development activities, both within university and organisational settings. Classroom based education, which have traditionally been associated with management development, has been complemented by a variety of development activities, such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, and use of 360 degree feedback that highlight opportunities and support for reflection on action. A less researched approach for enhancing development of managers is to emphasise the use of informal learning where managers take responsibility for their learning and development and use work experiences as a vehicle for ongoing and continuous development [7]. This paper argues for a greater role for this alternate approach and articulates and explores a model of managerial self-development proposed as a guide to the underlying processes of self-directed learning for managers.

### **Traditional-Formal Management Development**

In recent years there has been a growing realisation that organisational and national prosperity is linked to continuous development of managerial talent [1], [13]. In parallel, with this increasing attention to management development, there have been. These criticisms focus on the view that management is fundamentally about practice and behaviour within organisational settings and that formal class-based learning, while providing for the learning of facts and theories, is deficient in preparing students for the complexity of demands that they will experience as managers. Lecturing to would-be-managers about the research evidence on increasing motivation or in providing effective team leadership can only provide a pale reflection of the actual experiences of managers as they actively engage in the process of motivating and leading teams of highly diverse and skilled employees.

In response to increasing concerns expressed about the appropriateness of formal management development activities, especially the value of MBA programs [17], [19], many university-based executive development programs [11] and internal organizational executive development programs [4] have been restructured to make stronger links between theory and the practice of management [21]. While these development programs enhance the managerial relevance of the training, they require

expensive and extensive effort to develop and implement. Consequently, many organisations choose to target these development programs to selected groups of “rising stars” [23] in order to leverage the developmental benefits to those managers seen as occupying future leadership positions. However, the targeted use of these sophisticated development approaches to those managers already displaying strong performance may result in only limited impact on the overall managerial culture and operating potential of the organisation’s management.

An additional problem for formal management development approaches arises from the continuous dynamic environments confronting managers, which suggests managers’ development should also be continuous and adjusting to environmental changes and demands. However, formal organisational development programs, especially highly selective and expensive programs, are generally episodic.

Assisting managers to take control of their development to become self-directed learners is one way to deal with the concerns listed above. Self-directed learning for managers means that managers would seek to continuously assess their own capabilities and identify development needs, initiate their own goals and engage in self-regulation of behaviour in order to establish new behaviours to enhance their managerial performance [9].

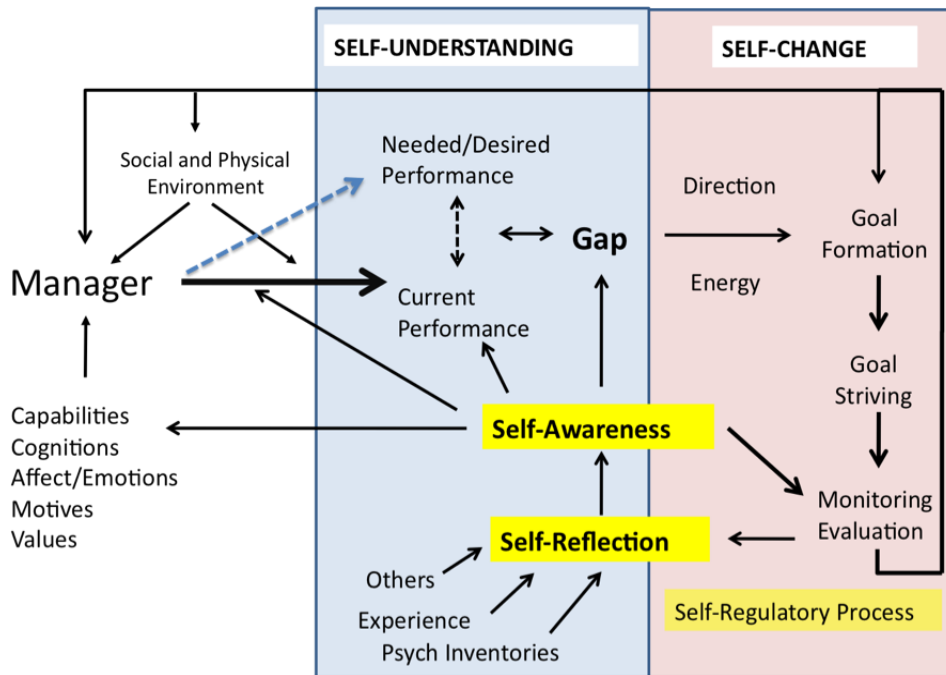
The MSD model, discussed next, is presented as a conceptual map highlighting a sequence of processes to guide the efforts of organisations and managers in promoting and enacting self-development.

### **THE MANAGERIAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

MSD is a form of informal learning [16] in that it is learning that is typically outside institutional sponsored and structured learning experiences. Unlike incidental learning, in which learning is a by-product of other activities [16], MSD is a conscious and intentional process of learning by managers within their work environments. As with the development of other skills, formal training programs may be required for teaching the self-development model and its application, however, once learnt and incorporated into one’s behavioural repertoire the operation of self-development strategies would become self-guiding.

As with formal managerial development programs, the MSD model builds on a framework that seeks to identify competency strengths and deficits to clarify manager’s performance gaps and then focuses attention on efforts to overcome gaps [24]. Within the MSD model, identification of development needs is associated with the self-understanding phase (see Figure 1) and requires managers to engage in self-reflective practice as well as management of self-awareness reactions that arise within this reflective processing. Self-reflection involves introspective analysis of feedback information [17] rising from a variety of sources, including feedback by one’s immediate manager [2] and from other stakeholders as provided in 360 degree feedback [22]. However, given the aim of self-development to proactively engage in self-reflection and continuously examine and direct one’s learning it is envisioned that work experiences would be the primary source of information about development needs.

Figure 1: An Integrated Model of Managerial Self-Development



Self-reflective insights from feedback need to be accurate and accepted by managers in order to usefully inform development efforts [2]. While one is always present during one's actions, and can observe events and consequences of events in which one participates, as well as being privy to inner thoughts and affective states, accurate and accepted self-awareness is nevertheless difficult [5], [8]. A variety of perceptual and cognitive causes have been identified that challenge the accuracy and acceptance of self-awareness insights [2], [26]. A central issue underlying these perceptual and cognitive biases is the drive for self-enhancement in that people generally value, seek, and readily accept positive feedback about themselves but reject or distort feedback that are inconsistent with this self-concept [6], [14], [25]. Given that self-awareness for development is by its nature concerned with negative evaluation of behaviour and skills the potential for distortion of feedback is ever present.

Even with acceptance of insights about one's 'performance gap' managers need to institute corrective actions for development. However, many people learn about gaps in their performance but choose either not to deal with them or put relatively little effort into addressing the gap [3], [12]. Indeed, even if a person feels compelled to act to remedy a gap it is often the case that a person loses momentum for the change, especially if it relates to changing a deeply ingrained pattern of behaviour [20].

In traditional development programs within organizations managers are given opportunities to engage in development activities and provided with support in order to nurture the learning process and aid the transference of learning into their long-term behaviour [24]. In managerial self-development activities and support must be built into self-constructed and initiated action plans and their implementation reflects the manager's skills in self-regulation both of the learning process and the behaviour change process. However, even in traditional managerial development the effectiveness of development activities depends critically on the manager's self-regulatory capacity. While structured development activities and coaching can provide significant environmental support for change efforts, behaviour change ultimately reflects individual effort and the underlying self-regulatory knowledge and capacity to mobilise that knowledge. Nevertheless, self-regulation knowledge and practice is rarely an explicit focus in formal management development programs. Rather it is an assumed skill of participants and while

“people are natural self-regulators in that goal-directedness is inherent in the life process, they are not innately effective self-regulators” [15, p.240]. In contrast to more formal approaches to development, within the MSD model, the knowledge and practical actions associated with self-regulation are explicitly highlighted.

In summary, the MSD model conceptualises self-directed learning within an integrated development framework, emphasising a self-understanding phase and a self-change phase. Managerial self-development competency is conceptualised to be dependent on the integrated operation of three meta-skills: the management of reactions to self-awareness feedback, the practice of self-reflection, and the use of self-regulation processes. The accomplished operation of these skills enable more refined and productive self-development efforts allowing managers to respond to changing work environments in a continuous and productive fashion.

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