SELF-AWARENESS, SELF-REFLECTION AND SELF-REGULATION: AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF MANAGERIAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In this paper it is argued that self-development can play an important role in the learning process of managers. Three meta-skills, self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-regulation are proposed as drivers of the self-development process and have been brought together into a conceptual model of managerial self-development. The paper first discusses the need for self-development approaches for managers as opposed to traditional development approaches that rely on the initiation of interventions external to the manager. The paper then articulates a model of the self-development process. The paper then explores each of these aspects in more detail and highlights their relevance in the development of managerial self-development programs.

In the last two decades, there has been a growing realisation that organisational and national prosperity is linked to development of managerial talent. For example, in 1995 the Federal government released a report on the leadership and management skills of Australian managers (Karpin, 1995), which suggested that continued competitiveness of Australian industry required greater attention to the development of managers at all levels of the organisation. The taskforce conducted extensive research into the ideal and existing skills of Australian managers and identified eight main areas where Australian managers needed to improve their skills. In particular, it drew attention to people management skills—leadership, communication, negotiation, resolving conflict, creativity and innovation, and managing change – as the principal development needs of Australian managers. Subsequent studies (AIM, 2003; IBSA, 2006), have reiterated the need for continuous development of management skills within changing organisational environments.

In parallel, with this increasing attention to management development, there have been growing concerns expressed about the appropriateness of formal management development activities, especially the value of MBA programs. For example, Mintzberg (2004) argued that most MBA programs provide training in analytical skills whereas development of managers requires exposure to and reflection on actual management experiences. Similarly, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) question the appropriateness of formal management education and challenged the relevance of business schools claiming that "there is little evidence that mastery of the knowledge acquired in business schools enhances people's careers" (p.80). Such criticisms highlight the fact 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.

Consistent with these views, many internal organisational development programs for managers have sought to make stronger links between management theory and practice. An important aspect of these program are the use of reflective practices of teams and individual executives as they undertake action learning projects (Alldredge, Johnson, Stoltzfuz, & Vicere 2003). Managers use their work experiences as stimuli for reflective learning and "experiment" with insights about behaviour in order to refine their understanding and skills.

While these experiential based development programs enhance the managerial relevance of training, they require expensive and extensive effort on behalf of organisations to set up. Consequently, many organisations choose to target these development programs, to selected groups of managers. However, given that organisations are systems (Baker, 1973), the targeted selection and exposure of "fast track" managers, limits the impact of these development initiatives on the overall managerial culture and operating potential of the organisation's managers. It is a fundamental tenet of systems analysis that improving systems requires working on the weakest links of that system (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Thus all managers, not just the most talented managers, need to be stimulated to develop their managerial skills and improve their performance. One solution is to promote self-development efforts by managers to continuously assess their own capabilities and to initiate their own development actions.

Managerial self-development focuses on a process of self-initiated and self-directed development of skills and knowledge, in order to enhance managerial performance. Managerial self-development, accords with adult learning theory in stressing engagement with experiences as the primary learning strategy (Galbraith, 1991). Furthermore, while self-development is applicable to all managerial staff within an organisation, it can be targeted to the specific individual needs of a manager. Formal training programs may be required for teaching the self-development model and its application, but once learnt the process focuses on self-directed actions on behalf of managers. In a sense, managerial self-development is learning to learn and once acquired, the skills enable more refined and productive self-development efforts. In the next section of this paper, a model of managerial self-development is presented that can form the basis of design of such a self-development program.

A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF MANAGERIAL SELF-DEVELOPMENT

The model of managerial self-development presented here is centred on three interrelated meta-skills – skills that enable the gaining of more skills – of self-awareness, self reflection, and self-regulation. Figure 1 highlights the managerial self-development process which draws upon the integrated operation of these three meta-skills.

Development implies a change, an evolution, growth or advancement from a current level of performance to a capacity for more complex and sophisticated performance. For a manager, the degree of development need is reflected in the concept of a 'performance gap', which refers to the difference between current and needed performance. Knowledge of this gap plays two important roles in self-development. First, it highlights the direction of development efforts of managers. Efforts can focus on developing specific skills, such as enhancing listening skills, or more broad based skill domains, such as team leadership etc. Second, knowledge of the 'performance gap' stimulates motivational effort in the pursuit of these efforts to close the gap. Motivation is essential for engagement in the development process as it provides the energy to persist in change endeavours and overcome obstacles encountered in such efforts (Locke & Latham, 1990; Zimmerman, 2000).

Knowledge of the 'performance gap' requires managers to be aware of their skill strengths and deficits. This self-awareness is generated from feedback from three primary sources about the manager's performance. These sources relate to feedback from people familiar with the manager's work, from the manager's own experiences, and from insights generated from psychological tests and inventories. Information from these three sources of information can contribute to managers developing accurate and accepted awareness of current skills and needed skills as well as understanding of their dispositional nature that contribute to their leadership style.

Self-awareness is generated by reflection on the information provided by each of these sources of information. Self-reflection is a thinking style that uses introspective analysis of experiences to obtain greater self-awareness (Daudelin, 1996; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999). The awareness of, and reflection on, one's skills and the identification of one's 'performance gap' is, however, not sufficient for engagement and success with self-development efforts. Many people learn about gaps in their performance but choose either not to deal with them or to put relatively little effort into addressing the gap. Even if a person feels compelled to act to remedy a gap it is possible that a person may loose momentum for the change, especially if it relates to changing a deeply ingrained pattern of behaviour (Polivy & Herman, 2002).

The process of change is not simply a case of employing will-power to enhance one's goals but is a dynamic process that involves many strategies that the manager utilises in support of his or her change efforts. The study of these strategies and their impact on change is related to the third meta-skill of the managerial self-development process, namely the skill of self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to processes that enable an individual to guide his/her goal-directed activities over time and across changing circumstances (Karoly, 1993; Manz, 1986; Zimmerman, 2000). This skill relates to how well one can regulate thoughts, feelings and emotions, and behaviour in support of valued goals. Popular

writers on success and achievement provide some useful insights into motivating changes in behaviour but their advice is typically too broad and simplistic to act as a self-regulation guide (Nesbit, 2007). In particular, their advice tends to underutilise environmental influences to support change efforts. Social cognitive perspectives of self-regulation (Bandura, 1982; 1991; Zimmerman, 2000) on the other hand, provide a more comprehensive perspective on the self-regulatory process, viewing behaviour as embedded in dynamic systems involving reciprocal deterministic influences from personal factors, environmental forces, and behavioural outcomes. The proposed managerial self-development model incorporates insights from social cognitive theory to inform the nature of strategies that can be employed to support self-development action plans.

In summary, these three areas – self-awareness, self-reflection, self-regulation – are all involved in an integrated process of self-development. In the following section each of these meta-skills is examined in fuller detail and their relevance in the design of managerial development is highlighted.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is often considered little more than an outcome of a cognitive process involving introspective self-reflection and the active synthesis of these insights into self-concepts. However, self-awareness in an integrated self-development model is more than just the outcome state of insight, but involves the development of skills to consciously manage perceptual biases and emotional reactions to feedback. Self-awareness in this sense can be considered a skill, as people vary in their capability to manage their emotional reactions to critical performance feedback (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006). As with other skills, improvement in self-awareness (accuracy and acceptance of insights), can also be developed with training.

A self-development program would need to make participants aware that self-awareness can be distorted by perceptual biases designed to protect one's self-concept (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006). Thus to enhance self-awareness, managers need to actively manage their reactions to feedback. The first step is being aware of one's emotional reactions in the feedback process, and recognising rejection or censorship thoughts that arise. A useful strategy is to reframe criticism as poorly delivered but a well intentioned desire to help or to reinterpret problems as opportunities to learn about one self and acquire new skill (Jackman & Strober, 2003). Reframing can also be aided by developing communication scripts to respond to criticism with questions aimed at moving the focus from personal issues to behavioural issues (Whetton and Cameron, 2007).

A self-development program should expose managers to multiple sources of information about managerial strengths and deficits. Ideally, one should include information from others familiar with one's performance, from work experiences, and from psychological inventories and self-report skill

surveys. There are many examples of psychological inventories and other self-report instruments that can be employed. It is important to highlight the limitations of these inventories and instruments and should be used as tools for reflection. Thus the accuracy of self awareness is ultimately a product of the quality of our reflective practice.

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is an important skill for managers to develop as it drives the quality of learning insights that comes from feedback. Self-reflection is, in essence, an internal Socratic dialogue, where one asks oneself questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of one's behaviour in managerial situations as well as the impact on others. Self-reflection is not the same thing as rumination, which is related to cyclic thought patterns reliving experiences (Mackoff & Wenet, 2001). Nor is self-reflective thinking the same as self-criticism, which leads to critical self-assessment. In contrast to these other thinking approaches, self-reflection is a process that endeavours to focus on what one can learn from experience and how it will inform one's behaviour in the future. The ultimate aim of self-reflection is learning: producing a capability to act more effectively in the future (Daudelin, 1996; Kolb, 1984).

Self-reflection requires conscious effort in thinking about experiences. It is not something that is done to a manager but something the manager does to him or herself. Thus the self-development program can provide an environment that stimulate a manager's self-reflective behaviour, but reflection itself cannot be mandated.

One of the problems in developing self-reflection skill for managers is that managers engage in self-reflection all the time but rarely examine the quality of their reflections. Consequently, many managers may mistakenly consider their self-reflection skills as already developed. However, self-reflection from the perspective of managerial self-development requires more than just introspective thinking, it also requires learning from that thinking and building behavioural intentions to operate more effectively (Kolb, 1984; Seibert & Daudelin, 1996).

To increase the likelihood that self-reflection contributes to one's development, it needs to become a behavioural habit and ideally follow a relatively formalised structure. Daudelin (1996) has proposed that self-reflection process should proceed through a number of distinct stages. The process begins with a stage of 'event articulation' which entails providing a description of the events, people and actions being reflected on. This stage seeks to produce a relatively objective account of what happened, as well as descriptions of the actions of people involved. This leads to the second 'reflective analysis' stage where one questions why things happened as they did. Specifically one asks "Why did this happen?" "Why did I do this?" "Why did I feel this?", and the like. An important aspect of this stage is to challenge one's insights and answers, as we often initially seek to protect our self-concept

in this process. However, through conscious effort and an orientation to learn from insights brought about by our questioning, one can arrive at answers to help explain events, behaviour, and underlying feelings. These answers should be considered hypotheses to explain events rather than objective truths. Thus self-reflection is part of an ongoing learning process that takes time to develop understanding and insights (Kolb, 1984). These evaluative hypotheses form the third 'evaluation' stage. In this stage managers need to judge their willingness to deal with their evaluations. To be an effective manager does not require perfection but a willingness to work on issues that are important and a desire to make the most impact in their roles. The fourth stage of reflection is the 'planning' stage which requires the manager to consider how to do better in the future using their insights about the reasons why events occurred as they did.

To highlight the process and benefits of reflection a self-development program should incorporate the use of a reflective journal of experiences (Thorpe, 2004). Writing a journal provides discipline to the process of reflection, and offers a number of advantages. First, writing helps to distance events and actions thus reducing biases related to protecting one's self-concept. Second, a journal provides a record of the outcomes of the reflection process and over time provides a rich source of material to use in identifying patterns of behaviour that reveal one's dispositional nature and performance issues to deal with. Finally, writing and the disciplined self-development process that is developed, helps in the production of detailed action plans. The content of the writing within the journal should follow the four stages outlined above. Ideally, it should be carried out regularly, such as part of a review process at the end of each work day or at the conclusion of specific activities that the manager wishes to develop, and should occur in a location relatively free from distractions.

In addition to the use of a journal, self-reflection can be enhanced through the use of peer coaching. In this approach to coaching each member of the coaching dyad alternates between being coach and being the person coached. As peer coach, a manager practices their own active listening skills and increases empathy of different perspectives, skills important for management (Karpin, 1995). As the person being coached the manager is aided in the practice of reflective thinking. Additionally the relationship increases trust within the pair and highlights its role in the self-awareness process.

In the managerial self-development model, the two meta-skills of self-awareness and self-reflection provide awareness of the performance gap of a manager. An important aspect of this knowledge is that it provides motivational energy to engage in behaviours to address the gap. However, new management behaviours are often difficult to sustain. The process of taking action to improve managerial skills relates to the third important meta-skill, namely self-regulation.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is concerned with the implementation of action strategies to aid people in reaching desired goals (Karoly, 1993). For many people the process of goal attainment, such as adopting new behaviours and eliminating old undesired behaviours, is a question of willpower. Conceptualising self-regulation as a process of setting one's sights on a goal and simply pressing through with the desired behaviour, however, is not only a simplification of the complexity of processes of self-regulation, but likely to lead to poor outcomes. The most comprehensive and researched perspective concept of self-regulation is derived from social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1982; 1991; Karoly, 1993; Zimmerman, 2000).

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, people's actions are conceptualised within a cycle of interactions between environments, cognitive aspects of the person, and their behaviour (Zimmerman, 2000). So too, managers' self-initiated actions for development exist within a system of reciprocal influences. Managerial development programs need to capstone learning with the production of an action plan. While development plans are typical outcomes of formal development programs, the integrated model of self-development presented here reinforces actions consistent with social cognitive theory.

The first aspect, typically associated with self-regulation, is to consider the appropriateness of one's development goals (Karoly, 1993). Failure at self-regulation often arises from poorly constructed goals; goals that are too broad to action or allow evaluation of performance improvements, or goals that are not highly valued (Goshal & Bruch, 2003). Goal-setting research has shown that goals should be specific and challenging in order to stimulate performance (Locke & Latham, 1990). In the managerial self-development model, the processes of self-awareness and self-reflection play a significant role in identifying development areas to address. An important self-regulatory action is to convert these typically abstract development areas into specific, challenging, action goals. Analysis of one's managerial performance gap will aid in the development of specific goals by highlighting the managerial situations where improved skill and knowledge is required. For example, a manager's development area may be to improve communication. By reflecting on one's experiences related to this domain, one may decide to focus on speaking up in meetings as a specific communication related development goal.

Goals are typically constructed as part of an action plan which outlines task appropriate strategic behaviours to reach goals (Zimmerman, 2000). As with the formulation of goals, the process of action planning requires considerable care in its construction. Social cognitive perspectives of self-regulation

highlight the importance of giving attention to ongoing cognitions and motivation, as well as environmental aspects, in the development of task strategies in action plans. Indeed, a major cause of failure to sustain newly acquired behaviour is the non-supportive nature of the environment. Therefore, action plans need to be developed that acknowledge the reality of the physical and social environment confronting managers (Zimmerman, 2000). Specifically, managers should identify obstacles to new behaviours and design appropriate actions to nullify or avoid obstacles as well as build support for their action.

Well designed action plans should also ensure that goals and plans remain salient (Zimmerman, 2000). Demands on the time and attention of managers can easily distract them from important development actions. Writing down goals and action plans and keeping the document in a position so that it can be constantly referred to, is a useful strategy in constructing supporting environments. The complex nature of action plans also raises the need to maintain a flexible approach to their implementation. While action plans should be written down and constructed in a way that allows easy access and reference, the plan should be open to ongoing refinement rather than be seen as a fixed construction. Finally, action plans need to be regularly monitored to evaluate the impact and success of plans, which then provides information about needed adjustment in task strategies. Action plans need to detail explicit methods by which development progress is monitored and recorded.

One important aspect in self-regulation behaviours are manager's beliefs in their ability to regulate their behaviour. Efficacy or belief in one's ability to set goals and follow through with appropriate behaviour has been shown to play an important role in actual change processes (Bandura, 1982). Efficacy can be enhanced by setting action plans that allow one to have "small wins" (Whetton & Cameron, 2007), which focuses on realistic obtainable goals.

Given the inevitable discrepancy between action plans and behaviour actually carried out, how a manager thinks about their goals and performance can play an important role in determining his or her reactions. There are two orientations or mindsets that managers can take in the operation of their action plan, referred to as either learning or performance mindsets (Dweck, 2006). Individuals with a learning mindset are motivated to increase their competence and to master challenging situations. Such people deal with obstacles in reaching goals as opportunities for learning and a natural and constructive part of the learning process. This behaviour is in contrast to individuals with a performance mindset, who seek to demonstrate task competence for the purpose of gaining favourable judgements from others (Dweck, 2006). Consequently, these people tend to avoid situations where they appear incompetent or inadequate and quickly lose interest in action plans that do not prove successful or too challenging. Therefore, in the early stages of self-regulatory efforts, managers need

to approach their action plans from the perspective of learning and gaining insights about the self-regulatory experience rather than a focus on performance success.

Self-development programs ultimately rely on the extent that managers are able to engage self-regulatory processes within their development actions. Self-regulatory actions are enhanced to the extent that they incorporate insights from social cognitive theory. Specifically managers should give considerable care and attention to the construction of goals. These need to be actionable and specific in nature and derived from self-awareness of the performance gap. Action strategies should be appropriate to the social and physical environment of the manager, and consider strategies to develop and utilise social supports, such as mentors, within the environment to aid performance. Action plans should consider avoiding or limiting obstacles, such as toxic people, to aid performance. Ideally action plans and goals should be written down and be easily located in order to remind managers of their goals and desired behaviours. Plans need to incorporate a review and evaluation process to monitor performance of the action plan. They should also be flexible in nature to respond to needed changes based on the evaluation process and changing environments. Finally, a learning mindset should be adopted which views early stages of the regulatory process as an opportunity for learning about self-regulation of oneself rather than behaviour change itself.

Summary

In this paper it is argued that self-development can play an important role in the learning process of managers. Three meta-skills, self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-regulation have been proposed as drivers of the self-development process. Self-development requires managers to enhance the accuracy of their self-awareness insights from feedback sources. However, bias perceptions and unwillingness to expose to situations that provide information about skill deficits can limit self-awareness accuracy and acceptance. Development programs that do not recognise the limitations of feedback that runs counter to self-concepts are likely to underestimate the effect of perceptual biases on self-awareness, Self-reflection skills are also considered a central process in the self-development model proposed. However, reflection skills are rarely developed by managers in a systematic fashion which restricts the quality of insights from learning opportunities. Development programs that assume the quality of reflection skills managers will result in relatively unexamined learning outcomes. Self-regulation is the process of turning insights into new behavioural capabilities. Too often development programs rely on managers to simply enact new desired behaviours. Issues of transfer of learning highlight the importance of environments in supporting new behaviour. In the managerial self-development model the role of self-regulatory processes based on social cognitive theory are highlighted. While each of these meta-skills is well known in psychological literatures their application to managerial development is relatively less well developed. This paper outlines a conceptual model to show the

relationship between these meta-skills and highlights implications for managerial self-development programs.

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Figure 1: An Integrated Model of Managerial Self-Development