Amrop
Leaders For What's Next

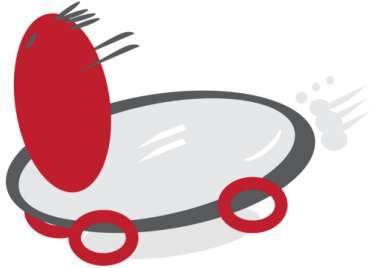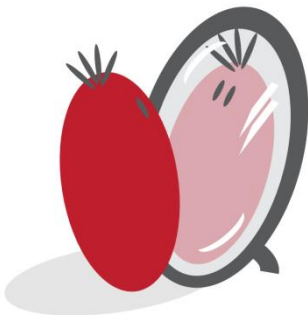# Personal Governance – 4

Principle III – Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment and Self-Regulation

Contents

Executive Summary

In today's turbulent and pressured environments, managers all too frequently find themselves in a metaphorical prison. They slavishly replay old thought patterns, trapped by static world views.

It's hard to see things in a new light if we don't know what our resources are. Or when anxieties and self-protection needs prevent us from seeking help or feedback. Not only is our personal development hindered, so too is our ability to establish the Life Plan that will give us a sense of purpose and act as a beacon for our decision-making. So we drown in the day-to-day, often in a role (or conflicting roles) that miss our sweet spot, for reasons we can't explain. No wonder so many managers are gasping for air.

Worse still, we fail to create space to breathe, to stop and reflect, to nourish personal renewal. The systematic mis-investment of a manager's time can foster functional and personal misalignments that can go on for years. Not only can this damage the manager, it can cause misery for his or her direct reports and close entourage. How can we get back on track?

A Trio of Critical, Related Competences

Managers with good Personal Governance are masters of *self-reflection, self-assessment and self-regulation. Self-reflection* applies to how we think, communicate and act. Being aware of our thinking and behavioral models means we can *self-evaluate* in a personal and situational way. S*elf-regulation* means knowing when we have reached our limits, and need help. Peter Senge sees reflection and exploration as key to personal and organizational learning, Donald Schön views reflecting on thinking at the moment of acting as a characteristic of outstanding leadership. And Daniel Goleman firmly positions self-awareness and self-regulation within Emotional Intelligence.

Self-Reflection Means Being Self-Aware

When we are self-reflective, we are attuned to our feelings and our thinking models. We stop and think in a constant, recurrent loop. This 'Personal Action Research' facilitates permanent learning and development. Its capstone, Reflection in Action, is the antithesis of: *'how should I know what I think, before I hear what I say?'* It enables us to recognize the thought patterns, the mental models (assumptions, convictions and world views) that influence our perception, judgement and reaction models. These can trap us in recurrent behaviors and conflicts.

In this article you'll find keys to working on your mental models and identifying the roles that you play in your 'life's theater'.

Self-Assessment Springs From Self-Reflection

Self-assessment helps us to establish areas for learning, and recognize the limits of our self-regulation. It also demands being self-critical – and having a high enough resource-orientation to view sometimes-painful insights through a positive lens. But anxieties and self-protection needs can get in the way, the fear of being psychologically wounded, or losing status, for example. They can also block our ability to deal with feedback or take risks.

This article contains key questions to kick-start your self-assessment process.

Amrop

## Self-Regulation Means Self-Steering – Within Our Limits

Managers often ask the 'make or buy' question of companies. They ask it less about themselves. Yet they should - ideally, with an external coach or sparring partner.

This article contains a set of simple insights explaining why we so often fail to recognize our limits.

For The Right Role, Ask the Right Questions

The Peter Principle explains why and how talent tends to be promoted upwards to a point of failure. Not only this, but role conflicts (such as double Chairperson/CEO mandates) obstruct and confuse the business landscape. And all too many managers are struggling in ill-fitting roles and rarely experience 'flow'. A lack of reflection on their positive motivations or self-protection needs, as well as poor self-assessment, can lead managers into positions that damage themselves and others.

In this article you'll find the vital signs of role conflicts, with keys to identifying the ones you can solve today. You can take an honest, hard look at your own role, its visible - and hidden - conflicts of interest.
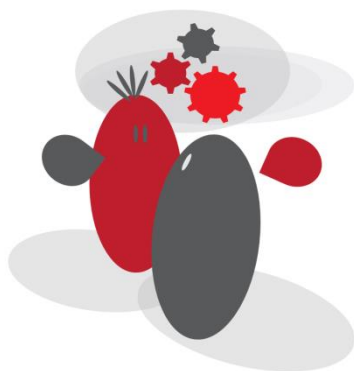
We Must Make Time for Time

If time is needed for reflection and the 'renewal' of our personality, mis-managing the way we spend our time means that Personal Governance eludes us (in the sense of a clear mission, strategies, concepts, life goals).

In this article you'll find clues to recognizing and solving time investment conflicts, including the Foundation Model for Time Structure and Time Investment.

Behavior Checks Are Easier With Rules

Self-regulation means reflecting upon and examining our behavior. Supervision and intervision, a familiar problem-solving tool in social and medical fields, are neglected by business leaders. So, too, is personal coaching. And bilateral feedback – often feared, misunderstood and infrequently-solicited - is a critical component of learning and development.

We provide some rules of supervision, intervision and feedback..

Personal Governance – 4

Principle III – Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment and Self-Regulation

Managers with good Personal Governance have highly-developed self-reflection, self-assessment and self-regulation skills.

Marco, the CFO of a globalizing software company, is at a loss. Over a rushed coffee with his golfing partner, he complains: "I'm stuck in a groove, and it's getting worse by the day. The CEO comes to me with a request, I jump. I face a problem, I approach it the same old way. I'm like a hamster on a wheel. And I'm not the only one. I've begun to notice a pattern in our Executive Board meetings. Our Board Members are like brick walls, every time you try to move forward, you bump into their convictions or insecurities. Our Independent Directors have given up trying to get us to see things differently. If we go on like this, we're not going to make it beyond the next three years.

And I'm no better. I'm wondering how I got myself into this job – or jobs. It feels like I'm squeezing myself into a suit that doesn't fit. It's exhausting. I spend my days, nights and weekends doing a thousand things, yet I can't find time for anything. And let's not even start on that yoga retreat that Diane has been nagging me about. I keep putting it off. No time.

The worst thing is the loneliness. The CEO fancies herself as a coach, but whenever we get together she spends five minutes paying lip service to "how are you doing", before diving into her operational problems that I'm expected to solve.

I'm trying to catch up with my life. But I can't follow the thread of what happens day-to-day, let alone the big picture. It's as if I'm white water rafting without a paddle. I'm trying not to think about the effect this is having on my team, I've already lost two people this year…"

Taking responsibility for ourselves includes our feelings and emotions, and the modes of behavior that result.

Introduction

This Principle is about a trio of critical and related competencies. First, *self-reflection* – regarding the way we behave, think, communicate and act. Next, being aware of our thinking and behavioral models. This means we can *self-assess* in a way that is both highly personal, and adapted to a specific situation. Thirdly, *self-regulation* is about knowing when we have reached the limits of self-assessment and self-help, and when it is time to look for guidance from other people.

Peter Senge stresses the importance of reflection and exploration for personal learning and development - and for the learning organization. He defines reflection skills as a slowing-down of our thought processes.

If reflection skills equip us to recognize, understand and adapt our *mental models* (deeply rooted, internal ideas about the world), and *behavioral patterns*, they also concern our 'reframing ability.' This means being in a position to view images, perceptions, and situations with a negative connotation in a different, broader, more fluid way. It gives us more room for maneuver, more flexibility in the way we behave, and allows alternative approaches to emerge.

'Personal Action Research' or *'Reflection in Action'* also belong here. The aim is to reflect on our own thinking *at the moment of acting*. Donald Schön cites this as a characteristic of outstanding leadership. And Daniel Goleman positions self-awareness and self-regulation as two of the five core competences of Emotional Intelligence.

Taking Responsibility For Ourselves

In Principle I, we touched on two phenomena: the dissolving borders between work and private life and the subjectivization of work. These demand a variety of different traits: self-confidence, self-responsibility, self-esteem. And we must constantly engage in self-reflection, self-assessment and self-regulation.

Taking responsibility for ourselves includes our feelings and emotions, and the modes of behavior that result. Our ability to reflect, to take a helicopter view of how we think and what we do, distinguishes human potential from that of most other living organisms (which behave in an intuitive and spontaneous way).

Amrop

1

Habits become characteristic traits that directly impact the way we behave and, indirectly, the way we view difference. So it's important to recognize what habits we're consciously or unconsciously grooming, and how they translate into our behavior.
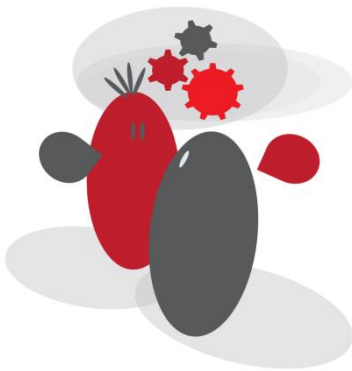
Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is an analytical and comparative consideration of ourselves. Thinking about our own way of thinking.

Self-reflection presupposes a high level of self-awareness. That we are attuned to our own feelings and thinking models, can interpret them, and use these insights to nourish our personal development. That we are aware of our own habits and reflect upon them. Habits become characteristic traits that directly impact the way we behave and, indirectly, the way other people perceive us. So it's important to recognize what habits we're consciously or unconsciously grooming, and how they translate into our behavior. Consciously changing our individual (and biggest) habits can strongly influence the image we have of ourselves, and other people's image of us.

Self-reflection also demands regularly stopping and thinking, taking stock in a critical way, raising our awareness about our own thinking and behavioral processes. The challenge is to integrate the insights we gain from doing that in the way we think and act going forward. This is not a one-off operation, however, it's a constant and recurrent loop - a kind of Personal Action Research, one which makes permanent learning and development possible. Its capstone is the aforementioned Reflection in Action, a real-time discipline which enables us to steer our thinking and behaviour. This is the antithesis of *'how should I know what I think, before I hear what I say?'*

At the other end of the scale to Reflection in Action is spontaneous, emotional and as a result, unreflecting, behaviour. Whilst we should never rule this out, or judge it negatively, we can never use 'spontaneity' and 'emotionality' as an automatic excuse for shooting from the hip.

Thought Patterns, Mental Models

Reflecting upon how we think and behave helps us to recognize our *thought patterns*. Thought patterns contain *mental models*, which in turn store up our experience, and the knowledge we gain from that. Mental models are fundamental assumptions, convictions and world views, and are personal to us. They strongly influence our perception, judgement and reaction models. Mental models mean that our behaviour follows recurrent patterns in certain situations. In theory, they can be re-developed. In practice, they often remain static over long periods of time. Nietzsche described convictions as prisons. In this sense, reflecting on our mental models offers us a way of breaking out.

Amrop

Self-reflection, then, is an important instrument for becoming aware of our mental models and working on them. Once we know what our mental models are, we can set change in motion. We can mold our models more flexibly, adapting them to new situations, envisaging new behaviors. Indeed, unconscious, unreflected and bogged-down mental models are often at the source of under-developed organizations and people. Have you ever met a situation in which convictions have built defensive walls, blocking progress, consensus, or openness to doing things differently? Conflict situations are often branded with the rigid mental models of the parties involved. Advisors and mediators have the job of softening up mental models, to make them more transparent, open them up to new perspectives. Working on mental models also allows 'double loop learning'. This is based not just on visible information and assumptions, but on challenging dominant assumptions, exploring new perspectives

Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling once said that he had a picture in his head – a general theory of the universe. He had been developing it for decades. Whenever he got hold of new scientific information (via the media, seminars, discussions, and so on) he asked himself how it fitted into his world view. When it didn't, he asked why it didn't. This is precisely the kind of conscious interaction with mental models that facilitates double loop learning.

<div style="background:#cc1122;color:white;padding:10px">

Working on mental models and self-reflection means that we must be able to:

</div>

Take a step back, observe ourselves from outside, on the levels of content and feeling
Identify our thinking and behaviour patterns (and habits) and examine these in a critical and poly-perspective way
Recognize our personal taboos and name what is typically unsaid
Re-frame, see images, ideas and opinions with a negative connotation in a new light
Catch our own leaps of abstraction mid-flight, notice when we are generalizing our observations
Work with our own 'internal team'

Self-reflection also means being conscious of the behaviors we adopt in the different roles we need to play in life and reflecting on these. Goffmann suggests we look at our day-to day lives as theatre. What role is being played, by whom? How often do we hear: "what are they playing at?" or "they're putting on a show again" or "what a circus" or, "he's putting on an act" or "what's going on behind the scenes?"

<div style="background:#cc1122;color:white;padding:10px">

Role Questions

</div>

Which roles do I play, in which situations?
How does the audience perceive me in these roles?
Which roles would I *like* to play?
How authentic am I in these roles – in which do I feel at my most authentic?

Thinking about roles can provide valuable clues for our life plan, and is closely connected to self-assessment.

2

In management circles, one theme is rarely examined. But it plays a significant role in self-assessment: *personal anxieties*. The fear of failure, for example, existential fear, the fear of losing control, of losing status and prestige, of being psychologically wounded, the fear of our own emotions, and other kinds of stored-up fears.
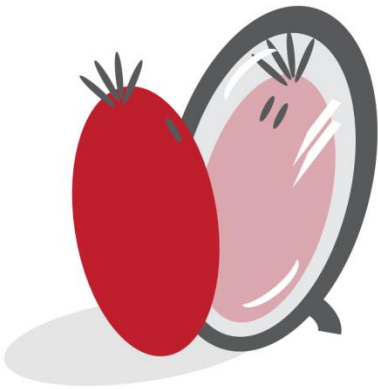
Self-Assessment

Only on the basis of self-reflection can we embark upon self-assessment and Life Planning. Self-reflection - and the self-assessment that arises from it — also help us to establish areas for learning and development and recognize the limits of our self-regulation. Self-assessment is also a foundation stone for external assessment (for example, with an assessor or coach).

Reflection in Action almost automatically leads to regular self-assessment, because it is impossible for any practitioner of reflection *not* to self-evaluate.

Self-assessment is a basic competence for mastering the art of living *per se*. If you can assess yourself well, the door is wide open to good Personal Governance.

Constructive self-assessment demands a degree of self-criticism - honesty with ourselves. And we need to connect our self-assessment to the individual resources (e.g. talents, strengths, strong relationships) at our disposal. Moreover, we need the self-confidence to face the results, with a view to unleashing more of our potential But we are not all able to recognize our resources, the potential of those resources, and the alternative behaviors that can spring from these. Later, we'll look at the importance of knowing our limits and the support third parties can offer.

Anxieties and Self Protection Needs

In management circles, one theme is rarely examined. But it plays a significant role in self-assessment: *personal anxieties*. Examples include the fear of failure, for example, existential fear, the fear of losing control, of losing status and prestige, of being psychologically wounded, the fear of our own emotions and other kinds of stored-up fears. Knowing what our own fears are, and our related tendencies, are a very important factor of self-assessment, and of Personal Governance.

Linked to this, it's worthwhile analyzing our 'self-protection needs' against loss and psychological injury. The fear of being hurt, for example, limits our ability to deal with feedback - a critical part of Personal Governance and one which we'll explore in this article. Or our appetite for risk-taking - an equally important factor of self-assessment.

Amrop

What are my core strengths and weaknesses?
What are my greatest talents?
How, and how often, do I use my talents?
In my work, do I have the daily opportunity to do what I do best?
How, and in what activities and situations, could I use my talents more effectively?
Where does my untapped potential lie?
Which of my weaknesses are the most unpleasant for me, and how do I deal with that?
Which themes do I steer away from, whenever possible?
How do I react to feedback and criticism?
What do other people particularly appreciate about me?
Which are my most striking personal habits?
How helpful are these habits for my personal development, for the successful implementation of my Life Plan?
Which of my behaviors can be disruptive to others, or elicit negative feedback?
How would I classify my appetite to take risks? Which risks do I consider threatening?
How would I characterize my conflict behaviour (based on my two or three most recent conflict experiences)?
Which anxieties and worries follow me around, and what causes them?
What are my positive motivations and self-protection needs?
How do I react to ongoing institutional insecurity and ambiguity?

The process of self-assessment, and the knowledge we gain from it, give rise to self-regulation.
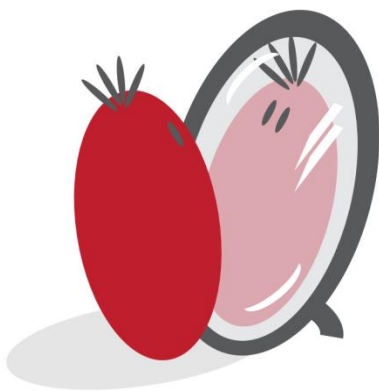
3

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation or *homeostasis*[1] is a concept of cybernetics. In System Theory, it's described as the ability of a system to remain in a stable condition, via feedback with itself, within certain limits. Psychology understands it as processes that have to do with the way a person steers him- or herself.

Know Your Limits!

Make or buy? It's an omnipresent question for companies as well as managers. What is a core competence? What can I, as a manager, or we, as a company, contribute, in a way that adds qualitative and economic value? What can be outsourced to a third party, based on capacity or competence?

As a manager, you need to ask questions like this not only about your company, but about yourself. Self-reflection, self-assessment and self-regulation mean that we all come up against our limits, sooner or later, and we need to recognize these as early as possible. It's worthwhile reviewing our self-reflection and self-assessment with a coach and sparring partner. The external view of a trusted advisor allows us to raise the bar for self-regulation - and self-development.

Why do managers fail to recognize their personal limits?

Self-reflection and self-assessment are embarked upon only occasionally, or in an unsystematic way. The fundamental: 'know thyself' is missing from the equation; in most cases, it takes a Fateful Moment to establish this (see Personal Governance Principle I – the Life Plan)
A lack of experience with self-reflection and self-assessment means we overestimate ourselves or misjudge our situation. Overestimating ourselves blinds us to our limits
Our sensory awareness is under-developed; we are poorly-attuned to the subtle (warning) signals of our minds and bodies and fail to take remedial action
A high pain threshold, overstretching our resources, are seen as normal managerial attributes – we overstep our limits in a negligent (not very conscious) way
We suppress our own life situation. As a manager, we first see to the needs of our colleagues (in the best case), or those of other success-critical stakeholders. We hope we'll somehow muddle through (in a case of 'the shoemaker's children going barefoot.')

Good Personal Governance demands a capacity for self-reflection, self-assessment and self-regulation and the ability to recognize our own limits in this area.

---

[1] From the Greek, homeo (similar) and stasis (stable)

Amrop

The Role that Fits

Managers with good Personal Governance take on functions in which they can best apply their strengths and preferences and avoid role conflicts.
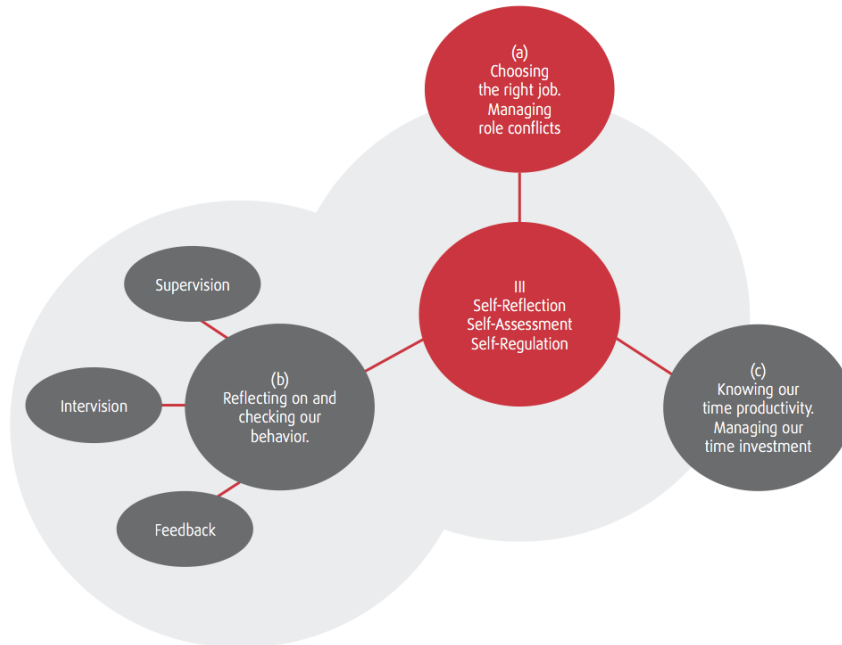
It's well-known that in many companies, exceptionally able and successful people tend to be promoted 'upwards' (or in an otherwise unsuitable direction), to a point where failure becomes inevitable.

The 'Peter Principle' was formulated by Dr. Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hall in 1969. It set out the idea that in any hierarchy, "managers rise to the level of their incompetence." What does this mean? Peter bases his reflections on a typical promotional system: an employee does a good job, and is therefore competent. So s/he is promoted to the next one. And so it goes on, until s/he reaches a role s/he is not up to, and is therefore incompetent. The promotional system halts one step too late. And because there's no way back, (or down), there is no corrective measure. Ultimately, every corporate position is occupied by an individual who is not up to its demands. In theory, this will lead to the collapse of the system, because the system can no longer complete its task.

This phenomenon affects top management in three ways. Firstly, a certain number of top managers came by their current roles via the dynamics of the Peter Principle. Secondly, the Principle is as relevant as ever. Thirdly, today's managers often climb the career ladder not in a conventional or linear way, but by accumulating ever more unfamiliar and complex tasks, without an up-to-date assessment of the role, or of the manager's competencies.

Amrop

Fernando Bartolomé and Lee Evans confirm the relevance of this Personal Governance principle. In their Harvard Business Review article "Must success cost so much? Why people take the wrong job" they present four main reasons for making the wrong job choice: *"the strong attraction of external rewards, organizational pressure, the inability to say no, lack of self-knowledge or self-assessment."*

This Principle is also about professional (and avoidable) role conflicts. The double mandate of Chairperson/CEO is a familiar one. When double mandates such as this are at play, it's essential to clarify any role conflict with the relevant interest groups..

Directors serving on various Boards, conducting consulting assignments in the same industry as one or more Board assignments, risk role conflicts and impairing their independence as Directors.

Balancing Challenges and Capacity
Finding a role that fits like a glove is an art. Many of us aren't employed quite as we would choose to be. And it's just as demanding for organizations and managers to find the right job for everyone.

Let's first ask ourselves under which circumstances a role can be considered a perfect fit. For Csíkszentmihályi, 'flow' arises when challenges and abilities are in equilibrium. If it may be a tall order to achieve a perfect balance, the two do have to approximate if human resources are to be deployed in the best and most sustainable way.

Where challenges and abilities do achieve some kind of equilibrium, it's likely that positive motivations and self-protection needs will have been factored in. Working reflectively with our own positive motivations and self-protection needs is indispensable when it comes to choosing the right function.

Just how complex this is becomes clear when we consider that several stakeholders need to be involved in deciding where the good role fit is. The company, (and its managers, for example line or HR) have to consider the mandate as the right one, just as much as the candidate needs to. Usually, we also have to build in the candidate's close entourage, people who have a major influence in determining what is right. So several parties, with different interests

Finding a role that fits like a glove is nothing short of an art. Many of us aren't really employed quite as we would choose to be. And it's just as demanding for organizations and managers to find the right job for everyone.

Amrop

At the other end of the 'suitability scale' we find rather less enviable people. They operate in ill-fitting functions, often spanning several years - and functions.

Visible or invisible dissatisfaction, over-taxing, burnout symptoms and a slide in achievement, recognition and compensation can all sneak into the picture.

and stakes, will need to arrive at a common definition of what "suitable" actually means, at a given moment in time.

Determining whether a role fits doesn't just arise during a transition from one company to another. These days, internal role changes are just as problematic.

Frequently, it's hard to evaluate the exact content and responsibilities of a new role, because re-organizations (either underway, or imminent) present a fuzzy picture of opportunities and risks and it's almost impossible to anticipate how functions will crystallize. So many appointments end up written off as a mismatch – and career ruptures ensue.

From Hobby to Profession

Determining the suitability of a role is easier for those enviable folk who have turned their hobby into their profession. They seem to have found the 'ultimate job'. They often have a clear-sighted view of their positive motivations and self-protection needs. As a rule, and at the point of deciding to transform personal interests into professional job content, they must bring their long-term personal interest motives to the fore. Self-protection needs must temporarily take a back seat. Having the courage and decisiveness to transform our well-reflected core interests into our professional life content (also out of a true vocation – following our desires and talent) means being prepared to take a risk and kiss certain things goodbye. We may have to envisage a drop in financial compensation and social prestige, for example.

From Profession to Burnout

At the other end of the 'suitability scale' we find rather less enviable people. They operate in ill-fitting roles, often spanning several years (and roles). Visible or invisible dissatisfaction, overtaxing, symptoms of burnout and a slide in achievement, recognition and compensation can all sneak into the picture. In the case of a manager, this *via dolorosa* must also be trodden by colleagues or direct reports – whether they like it or not. So leaders in ill-fitting roles can inflict serious damage on themselves and other people. This is compounded by the fact that companies, superiors and the colleagues affected by the phenomenon often have a high pain threshold, so that this state of affairs can be sustained over a long period of time, and the damage can pile up.

A Harvard Business Review article on Work-Life-Balance (The New Age of Self-Reliance (Levinson, 2000) described the dangers of executive burnout. Existing knowledge needed to be seen in a new light, the authors proposed. They raised career alternatives and individually-tailored activities as central to burnout prevention. In 2016, the problem is as acute as ever, and the solution just as valid.

Based on soundly-reflected self-assessment, Managers with good Personal Governance are well-equipped to judge what functions best suit them. They rarely take on jobs where their development will likely be limited. They are also able to choose environments in which they experience what Geissler refers to as "maximizing positive co-evolutions[2], and minimizing negative co-evolutions" (2003). When they come together, such players are willing and able to inspire and motivate each other. This leads to a climate of job satisfaction, and allows potential to unfold.

Does the Role Fit? Key Factors For an Analysis		
Mission and Ethics of the company/unit function	vs.	Our own life plan and ethical value concepts*
Our talents**	vs	The talents needed for the function**
Company and function	vs.	Our positive motivations and self protection needs

Due diligence is recommended: as regards the reputation of the company, the functional environment - and our key co-workers.

*Also see questions surrounding Sense and Meaning in Principle I (Life Planning) and Taking our Ethical Bearings in Principle II (Ethics)
**Ideally, this should be determined not in a purely intuitive way, but on the basis of systematic talent profiling (See Principle I, Life Plan and Goals). What's more, we need to evaluate the likelihood of intra and inter- role conflicts.

---

[2] Positive co-evolutions occur when "the possibilities of intellectual energy unfold, and an optimum amount of happiness energy is released."

Amrop

Role Conflicts

Inter-role conflicts occur between our different private and/or professional roles, and are very significant for Personal Governance. Let's take a look at the most important aspects for Corporate Governance.

Different Hats

Simultaneously exercising roles that are connected in the sense of supervision and execution – the double mandate of Chairperson/CEO for example
Simultaneously exercising different directorships. Although glaringly obvious content conflicts are usually avoided, time conflicts can slip under the radar
Performing different, fundamentally equivalent tasks – for example, heading up several different business units or departments. This is a frequent by-product of an (often long-lasting) interim solution
Simultaneously exercising line and project responsibility.

Individual vs. Company Interests

Goal-orientation in the best interests of the company vs. micro-political interests of the people involved
Focussing heart and soul on today's task, vs. positioning ones-self with a prime focus on the next career move.

'Wearing different hats' and 'individual versus company interests' often present as conflicting fields of interest, and in combination. They can be problematic. Of course, we can't avoid all conflicts, all the time. Some, we just have to put up with. Others can be worked through, clarified, or at least, made transparent..

Self check questions on inter-role conflicts

Which role conflicts are part of my life situation?
Which of these role conflicts are unavoidable, which could be eliminated?
Which of my professional role conflicts have been transparently surfaced/not transparently surfaced?
Which have been worked through/not worked through?
Which of my professional role conflicts are manifestly disruptive, for me and/or others?
Which of my professional role conflicts are latent and close by, and how could they develop?
How satisfactorily (or unsatisfactorily) do I manage to evaluate my role conflicts?

Good Personal Governance demands a well-reflected assessment of our role, addressing visible and latent conflicts of interest in a way that is as well-reflected, as it is transparent and self-critical.

Amrop

Time

Managers with good Personal Governance know how productive the time they invest in different areas or tasks is, and allocate their energy accordingly.
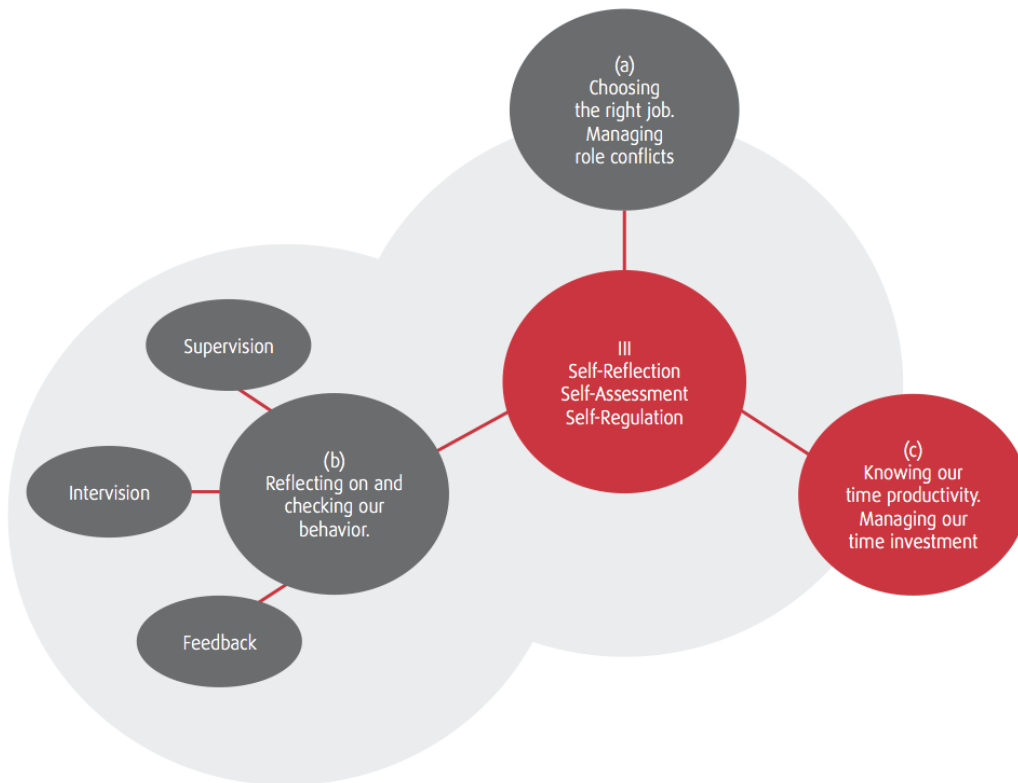
Time is one of the most valuable - and rare - commodities in management. Philosophers claim we have enough, because every second is followed by another. No rare commodity is as seemingly infinite as time. Yet this wisdom ignores both the finite nature of human life, and the time pressures we inflict upon ourselves.

Today, it seems symptomatic for managers to be doing a thousand things, whilst being unable find time to do anything at all. Plagued by deadlines, never able to find a time slot at short notice, having to perform lengthy, concentrated tasks late in the evening or at weekends – these have become features of most managerial lives. A more conscious, more focussed relationship with our personal time resources seems to be an obvious - if tricky - demand.

Having no time, rarely being available for anybody or anything, is also an image factor; it can potentially be a sign of 'importance'. It is also a factor for the renewal of our personality. But if we have no time (because it's well-known that we have to take time for renewal), we also lack time for reflection. So good Personal Governance eludes us (clear missions, strategies, concepts, life goals). We are condemned to do our day's business incrementally. We muddle through without any concept, or prospect, of improvement.

Amrop

In terms of Corporate Governance, Malik asks: *what makes a healthy company?* He sees four different forms of productivity: *work, money, time and knowledge*. The time productivity of Malik's: "intellectual worker" is key for Personal Governance. He suggests we should become more conscious of how long we typically need to carry out critical professional activities (preparing a meeting, drafting a speech, a concept or a proposal, for example) and thus create a basis for improving our time productivity. This might seem rather obvious, still, most managers just don't do it. Poor time *productivity* makes managing our time *investment* all the more difficult.

Dealing With Time Investment Conflicts

Short term, at least, we all have an equally generous amount of time. The sum of freely-available time windows or 'free time flows' rises or falls according to the fixed, time-sensitive duties we take on, and how much regeneration time we grant ourselves. Our 'time autonomy' fluctuates. So, too, does our personal space for shaping our lives. Managers typically have a low level of free time flows (even if they do sometimes generate high cash flows), signing up, as they do, to ever-increasing time commitments. Only people who know the productivity of their own time can plan its investment effectively and create free time flows (also a decisive factor for sustainably achieving free cash flows).

C.D Eck developed a helpful Foundation Model for Time Structure and Time Investment. He divides our available time into 5 main categories:

5 Categories of Time (C.D Eck')
1. Regeneration (e.g. sleep, physical care, eating, breaks)
2. Work (salaried time, education and learning, domestic upkeep)
3. Transition (e.g. journey to work, the periods elapsing between the categories mentioned here)
4. Social (e.g. partnership, family, friends, community)
5. Private (nourishment of personal interests and needs, time for the Self – reflection)

Two recommendations here: firstly, analyze your current time investment, working through a scenario of goals set. Secondly, communicate these goals, whether professional or private, to respective stakeholder groups in a targeted way, (much of our time investment involves other people). Few managers (and even fewer life partners) would turn down a re-allocation. The question is, are we as managers doing enough about this? Time allocations are seen as set in stone, and instead of acknowledging our desire to change them, we sign up for more commitments and our 'free time flows' shrink even more.

Yet a regular check of our own time investment, using an 'ist and soll' analysis (measuring the gap between what 'is', and what 'should be' has to be an integral component of our rolling Life Plan (see Principle I)

Their rather hapless relationship with time is set against the fact that managers occupy positions of power. They rarely have to account for how they spend their time. So power and powerlessness are close companions. Yet managers must engage in a conscious and systematic treatment of time to avoid being swept along by an endless stream of deadlines - to the point of being washed away altogether.

The Higher I Rise, The Harder it Gets

The more senior a manager's level, the less work time is spent on personal activities. The focus is on information management (the capture, selection, analysis and processing of information with varying degrees of relevance for the company's leadership). Information management demands internal and external communication, leveraging information to improving product and service delivery in a strategic and meaningful way.

The manager must also secure the best possible cooperation of units and people most vital for performance. This all demands substantial presence, engagement, and personal proximity to key players – not only in one location or country, but often in several, demanding considerable mobility and *time*. Regeneration, social and private time zones are squeezed, allocation conflicts intensify, and managing time investment becomes ever more demanding.

Workloads frequently blow up into proportions that make a healthy life balance impossible. Nor do higher workloads even guarantee greater success - the causal relationship between time investment and success is limited.

Their rather hapless relationship with time is set against the fact that managers occupy positions of power. They rarely have to account for how they spend their time. So power and powerlessness are close companions.

Yet managers must engage in a conscious and systematic allocation of time to avoid being swept along by an endless stream of deadlines - to the point of being washed away altogether.
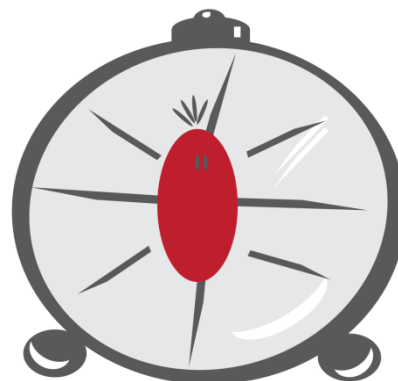
The Value of Awareness

The first thing managers will discover when they work regularly with the Foundation Model for Time Structure and Time Investment is how systematically they miss their goals in time investment – quarter in, quarter out. Still, even if their time investment models are difficult to shake off, raising their awareness will make for a healthier relationship with the theme, and enable behavior change.

This means agreeing to commitments in a more selective way, giving a higher priority to private/social time, and so on. The process must be agreed upon by a manager's life partner, and above all, Personal Assistant – people who exercise a considerable degree of influence on time investment.

Self-check questions for professional time productivity

Which important, time-intensive or deadline-critical tasks do I need to re-examine regarding my time productivity?
How can I raise my time productivity with regard to these tasks?
Which means and resources (personal, other) are available to me?
How do I secure implementation and regular re-examination?

Self-check questions for personal time productivity

How satisfied am I with my current time investment?
What does the desired profile look like?
Which changes seem most urgent, which seem most important?
What can I do in the short term, to implement the most urgent changes?
What can I do in the medium term, to implement the changes I envision?
What can I implement myself, and what external support do I need?
How do I ensure sustained implementation and regular re-examination?

Good Personal Governance requires knowing and improving our own time productivity in a targeted way, and demands a well-reflected relationship with our time investment.

Amrop

Behavior Checks

Managers with Personal Governance Competencies regularly reflect upon, and check, their own behavior.

We have touched upon the fact that competent self-regulation demands the ability to recognize the limits of our own self-assessment and self-help, and seek support in a timely way. On the other hand, we need to regularly reflect upon and examine our behavior. *Supervision* and/or *Intervision* are excellent platforms for this. *Intervision* (collegial coaching) mostly takes place without an external professional – involving a group of managers from the same, or different organizations, within the same professional group, whereas *Supervision* sessions are facilitated by a professional coach.

These approaches are consistent with organizational, or inter-organizational learning.

Rounding out this form of learning, feedback-seeking (for example, 360^0 feedback from our superiors, colleagues and direct reports) is vital, and can also provide valuable input for Supervision and Intervision. The crowning discipline is the feedback we immediately give ourselves on the basis of running or concluded behavior. Csíkszentmihályi points this out in the context of Flow. Feedback about our own performance (and its effect) can come from business colleagues or superiors, he says. However, it's our own insights – *the activity itself* - that provides the most valuable indicators.

Management roles can be loaded with conflict, and personally very taxing. In business, it's often assumed that a superior is on hand to take care of difficult situations, as part of his or her leadership role. Sometimes, that is enough. More frequently, it is not.

A manager who engages in personal development via Supervision or Intervision is demonstrating a special – and unusual - competence. These methods allow us to break free of the anonymity and isolation of our company-intrinsic top management circle, and harvest energy and ideas from outside.

What makes this competence unusual? Supervision and Intervision are mainly practiced in social and medical institutions – often public-legal, not-for-profit. In certain professional fields, Intervision is part of Quality Assurance – for example in social work, psychotherapy and organizational development consulting. *Supervision* also plays a role in these domains.

It is hard to understand why this invaluable platform for reflection, learning and self-checking is restricted to social and medical fields. Establishing Supervision and Intervision in business is clearly called-for.

Collegial Coaching
Collegial (often bilateral) coaching is a common feature of the management – and top management – landscape. Yet in my experience, its potential is underexploited because managers only have a superficial or intuitive knowledge of the approach. Furthermore, the colleagues with whom we should have such exchanges are only available from time to time. They also have a limited interest in a deeper guidance and advisory process. A collegial coach can tend to cut a session short to discuss his or her own issues. So, when it comes to collegial coaching, it's important to define and co-agree on some rules of the game.

Not only can medical or social work roles be very burdensome, management roles in particular can be loaded with conflict, and personally very taxing. In business, it's often assumed that a superior is on hand to take care of difficult situations, as a part of his or her leadership role.

Sometimes, that's enough. More frequently, it is not. Even the most sensitive and attentive senior manager can only offer partial support. Particularly in upper management ranks, the role of the (operative) superior is missing from the frame. On the following page, you'll find an example.

Amrop

1. The coach greets the participants, and the whole group agree on the rules of the game. For example, the 'Balint' method states that cases should concern a professional relationship (e.g. difficult, conflictual) with another person (e.g. peer, superior, client)
2. The participants state whether they would like to introduce a case, and its core theme
3. The group and coach decide which cases to address, and their order of priority (to generate the highest possible value for the group, and looking at urgent cases first)
4. The first case-bringer outlines his or her case, considering the most important factors for him or her, factually, and emotionally

> **Example:** A CFO is regularly criticized by the Chair of the Board of Directors' Audit Committee, Mr. Pain. He has a habit of calling the CFO with a host of demands. Mr. Pain has not put the CEO in the picture. The CFO keeps the CEO updated, and seeks the CEO's support in his relationship with Mr. Pain. Mr. Pain and the CEO avoid each other; the CEO expects the CFO to smooth over the relationship with Mr. Pain, deal with his constant demands, and involve him, the CEO, as little as possible. This situation has been creating tension between the CEO and CFO for about a year. The CFO is irritated by the CEO's passivity, and his perceived reluctance to handle conflict. As a consequence, the CEO and CFO have clashed over the past three months. However, the CFO has a good relationship with the Chairman (Mrs. Boss) and thinks he has a fair chance of being the CEO's successor (the CEO steps down in about two years' time). Mrs. Boss and the CEO have been running mates for several years, and her opinion will probably bear weight with the CEO in the choice of his successor.

The request of the case-bringer: How can I win over the CEO – restabilizing and improving my relationship with him?

5. The other participants now ask questions to help them understand the case (no comments or recommendations). The coach takes over, asking questions to complete the picture
6. The case-bringer adopts the role of observer and listener. The other participants discuss the case, outlining their understanding, introducing associations, interpretations and hypotheses, and discuss the beginnings of solutions. This is still not about serving up recommendations or advice. The coach can identify and supplement the contributions from his or her perspective
7. The case-bringer comes back into the huddle and comments on the discussion, taking a position on whether the indications and perspectives have been useful, or provided new signposts. He comments on inspiring indications from the discussion, and the insights he has gained
8. The case has been processed. It is now the turn of the next case.

How does Intervision differ from Supervision? As mentioned, no professional supervisor is facilitating an intervision session. This said, it is a good idea to bring in a seasoned supervisor, one who will help to define the *modus operandi*. It also makes sense to conduct a regular review of an intervision group with a professional supervisor. This allows reflection on the way in which the method is worked with, and further development of the way its results are implemented.

Supervision and Intervision sessions can be seen as the equivalent of research Focus Groups.

Benefits of Supervision and Intervision
– Individual and collective learning on the basis of a poly-perspective reflection on a real case
– Access to new perspectives, alternative ways of approaching and solving problems
– Easing the burden for the person who raises the case, and for the sparring partners, as they raise common themes and break out of isolated problem-solving
– Trust-based discretion within non-competitive relationships
– A marketplace opens up for working on problems, putting the experiences and knowledge of other market players at our disposal, rather than restricting ourselves to introspection.

Self-Check Questions on Supervision and Intervision

When was I first confronted with the theme?
How robust is my knowledge of these methods?
How could I imagine deploying them for myself?
What reservations do I sense in myself?
What is my assessment of the chances and potential of this learning form, for myself?
How can I start a pilot?
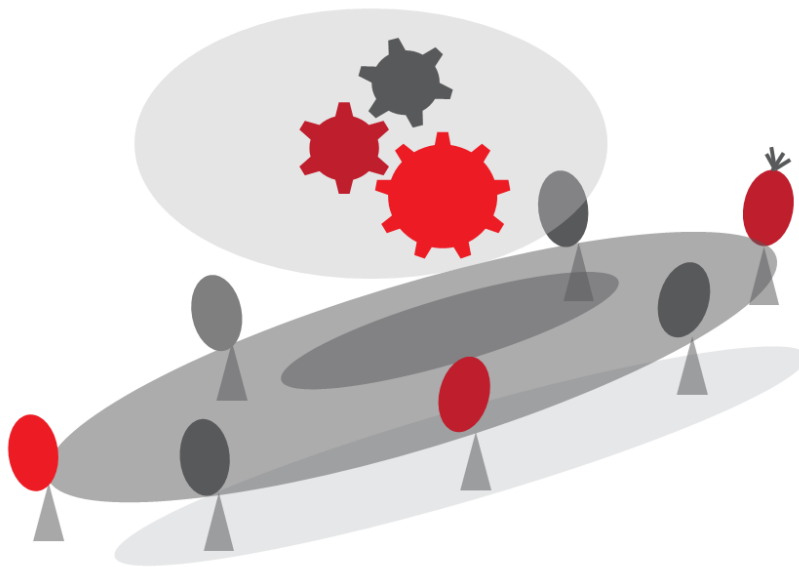
The Feedback Loop

Good Personal Governance demands the regular examination of our own behavior and the readiness to share and reflect with others.
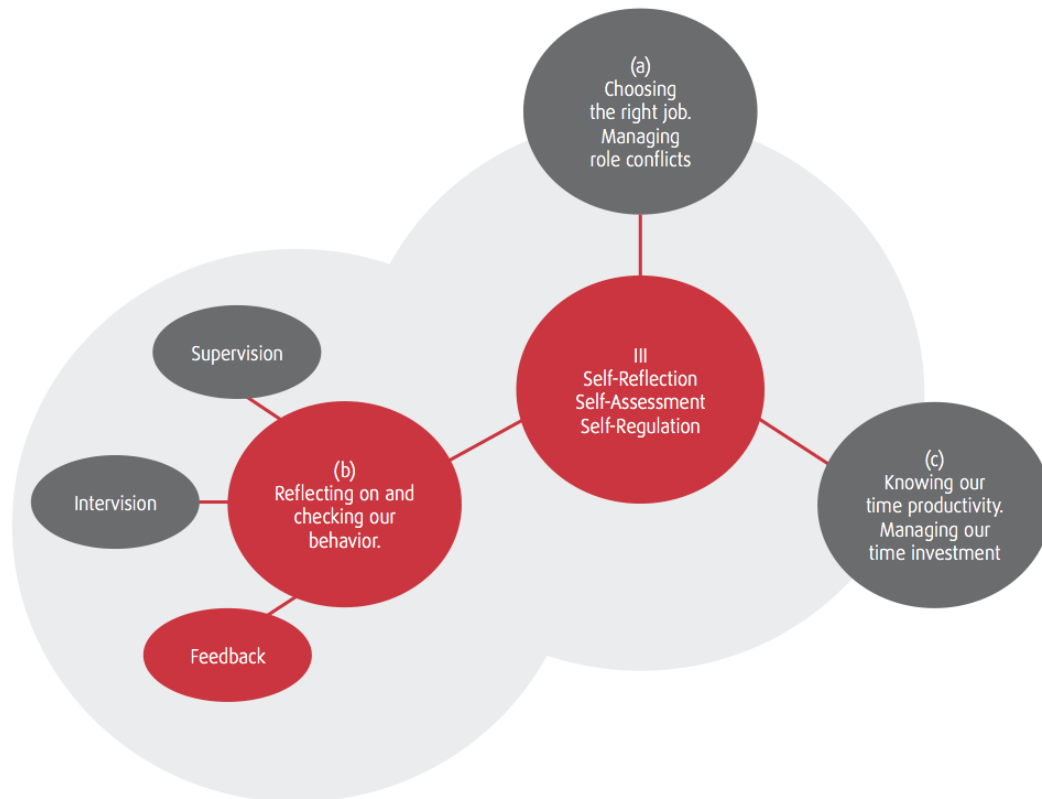
Next to supervision, intervision and coaching, feedback is an accessible and effective method of reflection and self-examination.

Feedback is an unavoidable and central component of inter-personal communication. It is a courageous discovery process of how others see us. Feedback enables us to better understand why people behave towards us in the way they do, and to conduct ourselves in a more targeted manner. It helps us to recognize, and work on, our tendencies to perceive things selectively.

I hypothesize that many managers are somewhat wary of feedback. They have rarely experienced a relationship with constructive, rather than hurtful, feedback, or learnt how to give or receive it.

Whilst positive feedback provides joy and reassurance, it raises fewer opportunities for personal development, because it is essentially conveying the message: "well done, keep going like this." Critical feedback can feel unpleasant, irritating, disturbing, hurtful, even damaging. Yet it offers enormous learning and development opportunities, and stimulates important reflective processes. This positive effect is only possible when feedback is communicated in a way that the receiver is able to accept.

Just like our work on mental models, the ability to work with our 'internal team' is extremely important when it comes to feedback. Our different voices have to agree on the following areas if we are to give feedback – and take it on board - in a constructive way:

—   Self declaration: (what I allow others to know about me)
—   Relationship: (what I think about you, what I can accept from you in terms of feedback, my stance towards you)
—   Appeal: (what I advise you to do, and in what direction)
—   Comment on the matter in hand: (the contribution I can bring to the table)

Personal feedback can take many forms, and pursue widely different goals. Two central goals are a) self awareness, the fundamental pre-condition for steering and changing our own behavior, and b) building and maintaining transparent, trusting working relationships (Doppler/Lauterberg, 2002).

Here are some common variants:

—   Unsolicited, spontaneous, verbal feedback: (now I'm going to tell him what I think of his behavior)
—   Unsolicited, spontaneous, non-verbal feedback: (now I'm going to give her a signal about what I think of her behavior)
—   Solicited, spontaneous feedback: (tell me what you think of my behavior)
—   Systematically prepared, bilateral feedback: (e.g. between a line manager and direct report)
—   Systematic, 360^0 feedback: (e.g. between peer managers)
—   Feedback on the meta-level
—   Self-feedback

Feedback is all around us. We regularly meet it in some form or other, whether unsolicited, spontaneous, (verbal or non-verbal), or systematically prepared.

Feedback is all around us. We regularly meet it in some form or other, whether unsolicited, spontaneous, (verbal or non-verbal), or systematically prepared.

Amrop
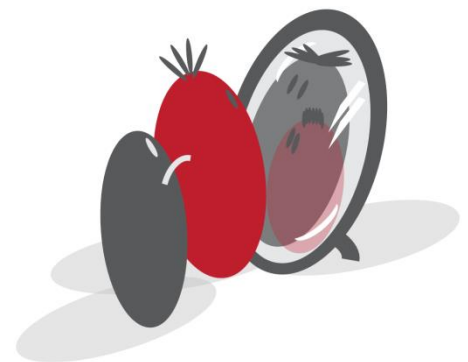
Common at management levels, 360^0 feedback unleashes a variety of reactions, because the request to share formal feedback is like a green flag for manager-colleagues to play out political games or power struggles.

Any 360^0 instrument has to bear this in mind.

The Many Faces of Feedback

Solicited feedback is rare, because it takes a great deal of courage and trust on both sides. However, systematic, 360^0 feedback is common feature of management. It also unleashes a variety of reactions, because the request to share formal feedback can act as a green light for manager-colleagues to play out political games or power struggles. Any 360^0 instrument has to bear this in mind.

Feedback on the meta-level can be used in difficult discussions – by taking a step back and sharing our perceptions of the dynamic underway. For example: "I have the impression that I'm not finding a connection with you in this discussion and that we don't really understand each other, how do you see it? How do you feel right now?" This can relax and open people up, but it also means being prepared to expose ourselves.

Self-feedback is closely linked to Reflection in Action and is part of the 'crowning discipline' mentioned in the introduction. Exploring it is highly recommended.

Solicited and unsolicited, spontaneous feedback are constantly practiced. Yet their full potential, in my experience, is systematically underexploited and misused. When these forms of feedback are delivered in a sub-optimal way, they generate zones of frustration, even fear, for many professionals.

Feedback Rules

Feedback-handling is a cornerstone of good communication and its mastery is a key competence for leaders. It can be particularly effective in top management bodies, whether supervisory or executive. Leaders can also skilfully leverage feedback-handling as a positive differentiator, because very few are virtuosos.

Not least for this reason, mastering and regularly implementing feedback techniques are an important part of Personal Governance.

Before proposing some rules, let's recall an old piece of wisdom: *before giving feedback, pause, breathe deeply three times, and only then, formulate.* This is a simple recommendation, one that, like many simple recommendations, is difficult to apply. Why? It demands a Magna cum Laude from the metaphorical school of Reflection in Action.

Amrop

Giving Feedback

Check your positive motivation: a constructive inner attitude, whether giving or receiving feedback

Ensure that feedback is sought: and that the timing works on both sides

Send 'I' messages: express personal perceptions from the 'I' perspective, on the basis of observable behavior

Express positive feedback first: where there is shadow, there is light – the two perspectives give a full picture

Describe, don't judge: bearing in mind the influence of our mental models, describe your perceptions and the feelings, associations, hypotheses and questions these raise, in terms of 'I' messages

Be concrete and differentiated: also cite recent examples

Adapt to the needs of all the affected stakeholders: not just your own urge to let off steam

Irritations first! if a feedback is hurtful or blocking, the receiver must say so immediately to deal with it on the meta level and restore his or her ability to work

Assume ignorance, be humble: we cannot and should not expect to fully understand the other person and should respectfully operate on this basis.

Ensure a basis of trust: feedback discussions have an intimate character. Their content has to be handled with strict confidentiality.

Receiving Feedback

Declare goals and fields of interest: for more concise and useful feedback

Give feedback on the feedback: this is a learning process for both sides

Ask clarifying questions: also during an unpleasant discovery process

Never self-justify: this is not part of the feedback process. No-one is fully right. Holding back is an art – and linked to relational and reflection work

Remember that processing and applying feedback are for the receiver alone: control, follow up and warnings are not part of the process.

Self Check Questions on Personal Feedback Handling

How often, and in what situations, do I seek feedback about myself?

How often, and in what situations, do I give feedback?

Have I received feedback about my feedback, and what did I learn from that?

Do I accept feedback as a form of learning and development, and practice it?

How do I handle negative feedback about myself?

What aspects of myself stimulate positive feedback?

To what extent do I observe the 'rules of the game' of feedback, and the feedback cases?

What would I like to change about my feedback behavior?

'You' messages: if 'I' messages are a recommended approach for giving feedback, 'You' messages are far more commonplace: "you handled that completely wrong" or "you're so negative, you're a real spoilsport…" or "you represented us pretty badly back there" or "you need to learn to see it this way" and so on are ongoing variants. The important, relativizing sentence: "in my view" is often left out.

'No' messages: starting a contradiction with a 'No' isn't conducive to trust-building. For example: "no, that's not how it is, it's…" "no, that will never work" or "no, you've got it all wrong" and so on. "No" needs to be used very selectively, because it disrupts communication on the relational level.

Generalized value judgments: in personal feedback, generalized value judgments can never be appropriately applied to an individual. They unleash feelings of rage, hurt and powerlessness, and cause blockages in communication. "You're not a team player, you're incapable of learning and what's more you have a sloppy work ethic," is a concentrated presumption that sends the person on the receiving end into a state of shock and makes it difficult for him or her to react. How can you adequately respond to such a devalorizing judgment?

It can even be worse when the generalized value judgment is formulated in a more subtle way. For example: "you're not (and most people around here would agree with me) really a team player, and learning isn't one of your strengths. Both of these points seem to be part of your work ethic, which frankly, we couldn't say is entirely up to scratch…"

Accusations: people tend to be approached in a hostile way with statements such as: "you're hindering…" "you're blocking…" "you're making it impossible to…" etc., and these have a negative impact on the work climate, and limit people's choice of responses.

Moralizing: Implicit or explicit judgments regarding moral behavior are overbearing and also impede communication. Examples: "the well-being of the company/employees isn't important to you" "justice is an alien concept to you" "you're only interested in money."
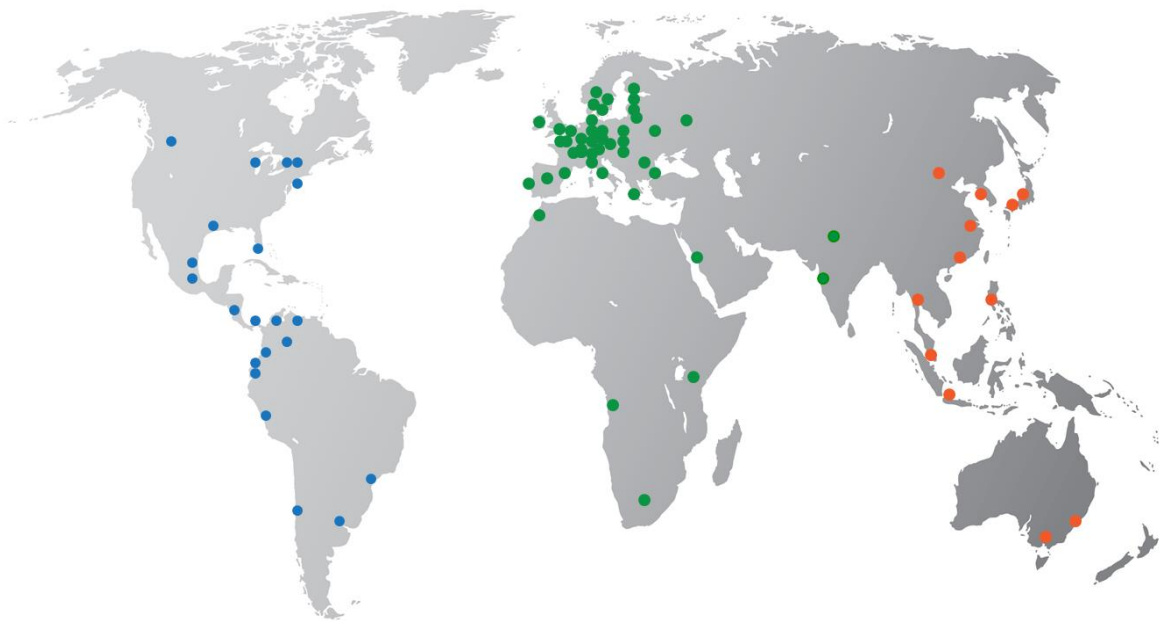
Credits

This article series is based on 'Personal Governance als unverzichtbarer Teil der Corporate Governance und Unternehmensführung' – Fredy Hausammann, (Haupt Berne, 2007). It was translated from the original German and adapted by Steffi Gande, Amrop.

About Amrop

With 83 offices in 57 countries, Amrop provides services in Executive Search, Leadership Assessment and Board Consulting. It is the largest partnership of its kind.

Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

www.amrop.com/offices

Amrop