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# The Role of Self-Reflection, Emotional Management of Feedback, and Self-Regulation Processes in Self-Directed Leadership Development

Human Resource Development Review  
11(2) 203–226  
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DOI: 10.1177/1534484312439196  
<http://hrd.sagepub.com>



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## Abstract

This article presents and explores a framework of self-directed leadership development (SDL) to advance conceptual understanding and practical applications for self-development approaches to development of leaders in organizations. Drawing on a diversified literature associated with experiential learning, emotion research, and social cognitive theories of change, the nature of self-development is explored. It is argued that underpinning effective self-development is the integrated operation of three metaskills—skills that are required for the development of other skills—relating to one's ability to manage emotional reactions to feedback, to carry out effectively the practice of self-reflection, and to enact self-regulatory processes for development. The SDL framework extends formal organization-based leadership-development practices and integrates multiple processes to aid leaders and human resource development (HRD) practitioners in the promotion and enactment of leadership self-development. The framework also provides guidance for HRD research on self-development and a number of research implications are presented.

## Keywords

leadership development, self-directed learning, reflection, emotions, self-regulation

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While training and development of all employees has always been a central concern in human resource development (HRD), in recent years, considerable research attention has focused on the need to develop organizational leaders<sup>1</sup> who are able to exhibit cognitive and behavioral complexity in the face of dynamic complex environments (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Lord & Hall, 2005; Spreitzer, 2006). Indeed, it has been suggested that the one of the biggest challenges facing organizations is “how to develop a new breed of senior managers that have the knowledge, the sensitivity, and the abilities necessary to lead organizations throughout the uncertain times ahead” (Ghoshal, Arnzen, & Brownfield, 1992, p. 50). In addressing this need for the development of leaders, a great deal of attention has been directed to enhancing the development impact of traditional and formal educational experiences, both within university and organizational settings (Day, 2001; De Déa Roglio & Light, 2009; Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

However, a major problem for formal leadership-development approaches arises from the continuous dynamic environments confronting organizations, which suggests that leaders’ development should also be continuous and adjusting to environmental changes and demands. Formal organizational development programs, especially highly selective and expensive programs, are by their nature episodic rather than continuous and ongoing. As noted by Daudelin (1996), there is an inherent game of “catch up” in development of MBA programs, executive development programs, leadership seminars, and workshops, so that “by the time these designers understand existing issues and trends, develop cases, write texts, and create workshop designs, a new wave of business challenges appears” (p. 36). Although formal programs may provide a stimulus for a concentrated effort to improve skills, the need for continuous updating of skills and knowledge as well as the problem of transfer of learning back to dynamic workplaces (Enos, Kehrhahn, & Bell, 2003) may undermine the impact and value of these formal development programs and seriously impede HRD efforts.

One way to deal with the need for continuous development of leadership talent is to focus HRD efforts on assisting leaders to take greater control of their development, in other words to become self-directed learners. In this way, rather than being dependent on development programs initiated by HRD practitioners within the organization, leaders who become self-directed learners would “take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Furthermore, any leader can engage in self-directed development not just those selected for formal leadership-development programs. In addition, encouragement for self-development could result in lower costs associated with skill development of managerial-level staff in organizations (Antonacopoulou, 2000; London & Smither, 1999). Indeed, this concern for controlling costs of development is growing more salient as employment relationships are increasingly reflecting increased career mobility (King, 2004).

Self-directed leadership development (SDLD) can be considered a form of informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990) 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 (Marsick & Watkins, 1990), self-directed learning is a conscious and intentional process of learning by leaders within their work environments. The aim of SDLD is for leaders to take greater control of their knowledge acquisition and skill development, to increase their behavioral repertoire and leadership flexibility (De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010; Denison et al., 1995), and consequently enhance their leadership performance.

Given the dynamic environment facing leaders in contemporary organizations, it can be argued that a leader's capacity for continuous learning and adaptability is becoming a critical leadership competency. Furthermore, given the continuous change pressures facing all organizations, this need for self-development is likely to be endemic to leaders, irrespective of industry or culture. Since self-development can be applied to the development of a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and conceptual skills, enhancing self-development skills should, paradoxically, constitute a fundamental focus in formal leadership-development programs. However, despite the benefits of a self-directed learning approach to leadership development, there are a number of challenges limiting its widespread adoption for use in leadership development.

## Challenges for SDLD

First, managerial work and motivation is primarily directed toward operational performance rather than learning (Berings, Poell, & Simons, 2008). Thus, leaders are typically less attentive to learning opportunities inherent within their experiences than its performance implications. Second, self-directed learning from experiences and self-regulated actions require considerable cognitive effort (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) and leaders may find the demand of self-development extremely difficult to initiate and maintain, especially given the cognitive demands and the stressful nature of leadership (Yukl, 2009). Third, there is relatively little available guidance within the field of HRD for individual leaders in their self-development efforts. Although there is a growing research literature on self-regulation in the industrial and organizational domain (Vancouver & Day, 2005) and a lengthy research attention to self-directed learning and experiential learning in the adult education field (Ellinger, 2004), application of such research within the field of HRD is not highly evolved. Thus, for many leaders, the concept of self-development may present as more rhetorical in organizational narratives than practical and guiding (Hallier & Butts, 1999).

The first two challenges, relating to leaders' attention and motivation to engage in self-directed learning, are ultimately connected with the personality dispositions, values, and interests of individual leaders, as well as the nature of organizational environments and culture in which leaders operate (Boyce, Zaccaro, & Wisecarver, 2010). Although leaders differ in their capacity and willingness to engage in self-development and learn from experiences (Illeris, 2007; Maurer, 2002), organizations are increasingly expecting them to be responsible for updating and maintaining the relevance of their skills (Antonacopoulou, 2000; London & Smither, 1999). Furthermore, organizational

environments provide substantial opportunities for experiential learning and feedback on performance, two critical factors for self-directed learning. Thus, SDLD aligns with the contemporary organizational zeitgeist.

The third challenge for an increasing role for SDLD relates to the need for conceptual guidance both for HRD practitioners and for individual leaders to direct self-development practice. Many of the issues related to traditional formal learning, such as preparedness to learn (Bell & Ford, 2007; Harris & Cole, 2007), the enactment of and engagement with learning activities (Zimmerman, 2000), cognitive processing of experiences (Reynolds, 1998), transference of learning (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cormier & Hagman, 1987), and maintenance of new behaviors (Marx, 1982), are also of concern in SDLD. However, SDLD also involves a variety of unique learning challenges as the learner must initiate and construct their learning experiences and must self-motivate ongoing learning outside of formal organizational support. In the section that follows, the nature of these learning challenges are discussed and particular skills required for SDLD are highlighted and integrated into a framework to guide efforts for SDLD.

## **SDLD**

Given that leadership development implies a change, evolution, or growth from a current level of performance to a capacity for more complex and sophisticated performance, gaining insight into the nature of a leader's development needs is a key process within the development process (Spreitzer, 2006). Specifically, performance is judged relative to a valued standard, and these judgments result in discrepancy assessments (Carver & Scheier, 1998). In development processes, negative discrepancy (below standard) results in identification of development needs, which direct attention to the nature of development strategies and contributes to motivation to engage with development actions (Kanfer, 2005). Thus systematic development needs analysis plays a central role in both the design of developmental experiences and motivating preparedness to engage and learn (Baumeister, 1997; Karoly, 1993).

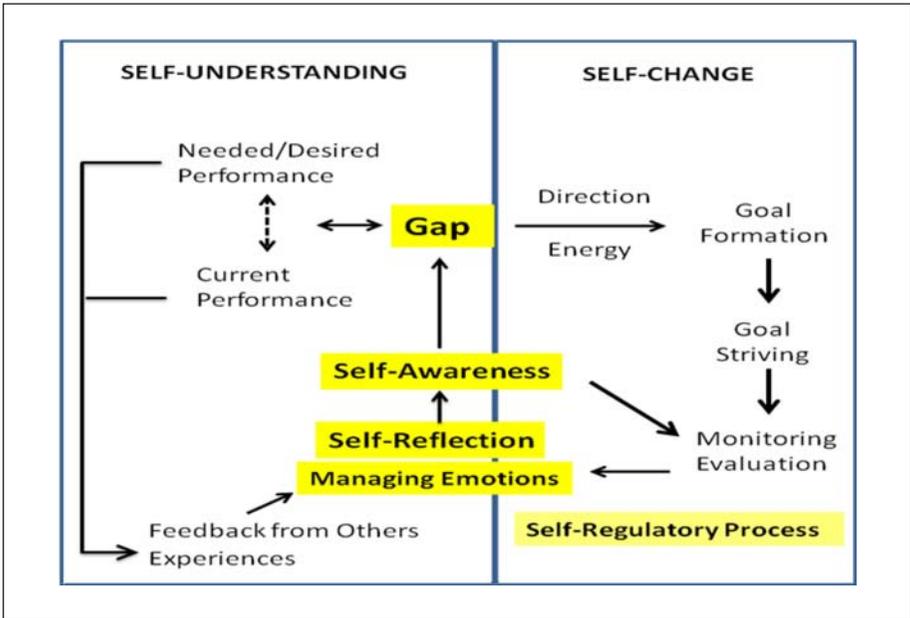
As with formal managerial-development programs, SDLD requires developing self-awareness of competency strengths and deficits as a primary focus in a leader's self-development. This process requires self-initiated obtainment of performance feedback and the self-reflective analysis of this feedback in terms of its implications for one's self-development (Day, 2001; Moon, 2004). Self-reflection involves introspective analysis of feedback information (Moon, 2004) arising from a variety of sources, including formal or informal feedback from one's immediate manager (Ashford, Blatt, & VandeWalle, 2003), from other stakeholders such as provided in 360-degree feedback (Ryan, Brutus, Greguras, & Hakel, 2000), as well as self-observation of one's work related experiences (Kolb, 1984). Given the need within SDLD 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.

In organizationally initiated development programs, participants are aided in reflecting on the nature of their development needs. One problem in using self-reflection for development is that although leaders regularly engage in self-reflection in conducting their work, they rarely examine the quality of their reflections. Reflection for development requires more than just casual introspective thinking about events and experiences (Day, 2001) but needs systematic thinking leading to deep-level analysis (Argyris, 1976; Kolb, 1984; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999). Another problem of reflection, as noted by Moon (2004), is that “reflection and learning are essentially private and under the control of the learner” (p. 23). In other words, reflection is not something that is done to a manager but something managers must do for themselves. Although organizations can provide environments that stimulate a manager’s self-reflective behavior, such as providing executive coaching support, reflection itself cannot be mandated. Thus, a central need in traditional leadership development is the skilful engagement in self-reflective thinking by leaders.

While engagement in reflection is a major concern in formal development processes, it is particularly critical in SDLD, as reflection must be initiated and sustained by the leader outside of organizational support. Thus understanding of and ability in carrying out the self-reflection process is proposed as a critical skill in self-development.

Clearly, self-reflective insights from feedback need to be accurate and accepted by leaders to usefully inform their development efforts (Ashford et al., 2003; Ryan et al., 2000). However, although 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, the capacity to gain accurate self-awareness insights through self-reflection has been questioned (Duval & Silvia, 2002; Wilson & Dunn, 2004). Researchers have identified that the way people perceive and make sense of feedback can be biased, which would challenge the accuracy and acceptance of self-awareness insights (Ashford et al., 2003; Guenther & Alicke, 2008; Hoyt, Aguilar, Kaiser, Blascovich, & Lee, 2007).

A central issue underlying this bias is the emotional reactions that derive from the drive for self-enhancement (Guenther & Alicke, 2008) and the protection of one’s self-concept (Swann, 1992). Specifically, people generally value, seek, and readily accept positive feedback about themselves but reject or distort feedback that is inconsistent with one’s self-concept (Cope & Watts, 2000; Hardless, Nilsson, & Nulden, 2005; Hoyt et al., 2007; Kluger & deNisi, 1996; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Swann, 1992). Given that self-awareness for development is by its nature concerned with negative evaluation of one’s behavior and skills, the potential for distortion of feedback is ever present. In traditional formal leadership development, leaders are aided in collecting and supported in their interpretations. However, in SDLD, a leader may easily avoid confronting negative feedback and actively seek positive endorsement of performance through judicious feedback-seeking (Ashford et al., 2003). Thus, another important practical and theoretical issue within the self-development process is the skill of leaders to deal with emotional reactions that may arise as they seek to gain greater self-awareness. Within the SDLD framework proposed (see figure 1), self-awareness of



**Figure 1.** The self-directed leadership-development framework

development needs is associated with a self-understanding phase that requires leaders to skillfully engage both in self-reflective practice and in management of any emotional reactions that arise within this reflective processing.

In formal development programs within organizations, once accurate and accepted insights about one's development needs are established, leaders are given opportunities to engage in appropriate development activities. They are also provided with support to nurture the learning process and aid in the transference of learning back to the workplace and for the long-term maintenance of new behaviors (Spreitzer, 2006). For example, Alldredge, Johnson, Stolfuz, and Vicere (2003) describe a development program targeting high-potential leaders that uses 360-degree feedback to aid development insights, and a combination of lectures, action learning strategies, and coaching to encourage and support sought after developmental changes.

However, even when leaders receive considerable support in the design of learning strategies and ongoing development plans, transference of learning and maintenance of new skills remain a concern (Cormier & Hagman, 1987). The demands and pressures of work may hinder the transfer and ongoing enactment of new behaviors, especially when changing a deeply ingrained pattern of leadership behavior (Polivy & Herman, 2002). Thus, in development processes, a capacity for self-regulation to guide learning goal-directed activities over time and adapt to the demands across changing circumstances (Karloly, 1993) are critically important. However, self-regulation knowledge and practice is rarely an explicit focus in formal development programs. Rather the

self-regulatory skills of leaders are often assumed but while “people are natural self-regulators in that goal-directedness is inherent in the life process, they are not innately effective self-regulators” (Latham & Locke, 1991, p. 240).

In SDLD, self-regulatory skills play an even greater role since action strategies for development and ongoing maintenance of new behaviors must be built into self-constructed and self-initiated action plans. The design and implementation of these plans reflects the leader’s capacity in self-change (see figure 1) and highlights a leader’s skill for self-regulation.

In summary, SDLD is conceptualized within a framework emphasizing a self-understanding phase and a self-change phase that are dependent on the integrated operation of three skills concerning one’s ability to manage emotional reactions to feedback, to carry out effectively the practice of self-reflection, and to enact self-regulatory processes for development. It is suggested that the accomplished operation of these skills enable more refined and effective self-development efforts allowing leaders to respond to changing work environments in a continuous and productive fashion. As with the development of other skills, HRD practitioners may institute formal training programs for teaching the self-development skills identified within the framework; however, once learned and incorporated into one’s behavioral repertoire, the operation of self-development strategies would become self-guiding. Given that self-development capacity is underpinned by these critical skills and that one’s self-development capacity will determine self-directed learning of other leadership skills, the three skills for self-development can be considered as metaskills—skills that allow for the development of other skills. In the sections that follow, each of these self-development metaskills is examined further to draw out prescriptive insights to assist HRD practitioners and leaders in advancing SDLD practice as well as to identify implications for future HRD research.

## Metaskill: Self-Reflective Practice

Dewey (1933), who provided the seminal foundation for research on reflection, especially within the field of education (Moon, 2004), **considered reflection as an “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 118).** These further conclusions of reflection, referred to by Dewey, draw attention to the intent of reflection which as noted by Daudelin (1996) and Kolb (1984), **is to analyze one’s past and current experiences to operate more effectively in the future.** This aim distinguishes reflective thinking from other forms of mental processing of experiences, such as rumination, which relates to cyclic thought patterns where experiences are repeatedly examined but adaptive action plans are not developed (Jones, Papadakis, Hogan, & Strauman, 2009; Silvia, Eichstaedt, & Phillips, 2005).

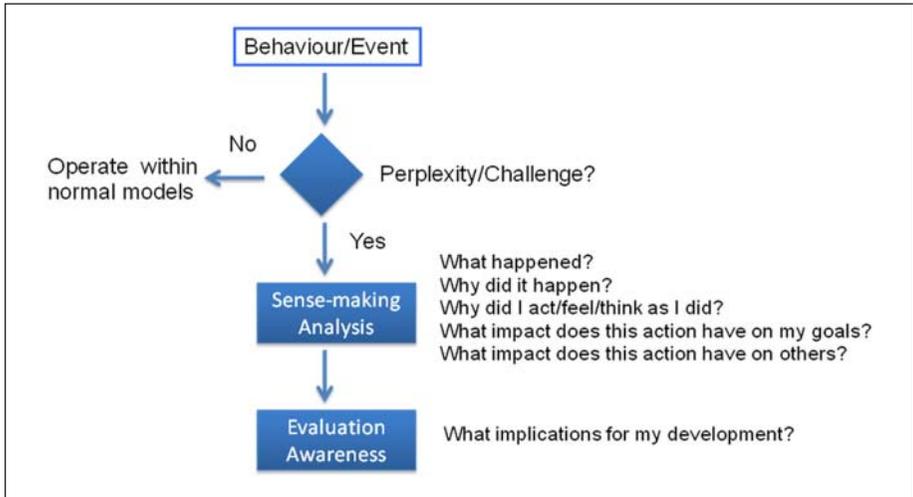
Although experience and associated reflective thinking is undertaken as a continuous stream of mental effort, a number of researchers have drawn attention to qualitative distinctions associated within reflective thinking (Daudelin, 1996; Duffy, 2008;

Gray, 2007; Schön, 1983; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999). As noted by Dewey (1933), reflective thinking is initially stimulated by the experience of challenge which leads to a sense of “perplexity” or uncertainty in dealing with a problem or experience. This perspective is echoed by Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) who argue that the initiation of sensemaking “tends to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world, or when there is no obvious way to engage the world” (p. 409). The state of “perplexity” draws attention to one’s experience so that “there is a shift from the experience of immersion in projects to a sense that the flow of action has become unintelligible in some way” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Thus, when leaders experience events, receive feedback, or evaluate actions that do not conform to expectation or challenges self-perceptions, reflective processes are automatically activated (Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006; Flanagan, 1954).

Another aspect of reflection, inherent in Dewey’s description of reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration” refers to the cognitive processing engaged to arrive at some meaningful understanding or reconceptualization of events. Discussions of reflective processes typically involves the use of self-questioning to aid retrospective sensemaking and prospective action clarification (Kolb, 1984; Seibert & Daudelin, 1999; Weick et al., 2005).

**Daudelin (1996), for example, has proposed that reflective analysis for personal development can be represented by four distinct stages.** Reflective thinking begins with efforts to describe events, people, and actions being focused on. This stage seeks to produce a relatively objective account of what happened, as well as descriptions of the actions of people involved. These questions are followed by an analysis on the problem where one questions why things happened as they did and why one acted the way one did. Evaluative hypotheses, arising from the analysis, about how one could better handle the “event” or act differently form the third stage. In SDLD, an important consideration during this stage would be to make judgments about the significance of insights in terms of their relevance to performance goals and the leadership of others. Thus, leaders reflectively ask “so what?” questions to explore the leadership implications for changes in how they might act. Specifically, in SDLD, reflection engages leaders in thinking about how their current and potentially new actions would affect their leadership of others. The fourth stage of reflective analysis is a “planning” stage that requires the leader to consider “what now?” for their development. In this stage, leaders also need to judge their willingness to deal with their development evaluations and insights. Clearly, not all reflective insights will be acted on, and leaders need to assess the cost–benefits of addressing their insights. Answers to these questions raised in the various reflective stages bring into focus the future development implications of the reflective process. These various questions within the reflective process are represented in the flowchart diagram in Figure 2.

Research has also examined the most appropriate form for reflection practice, exploring the impact of thinking, writing, and talking about experiences on the organizing and structuring of experiences that leads to sensemaking (Gray, 2007; Moon, 2004; Osmond & Darlington, 2005; Pavlovich, 2007; Price, 2004; Turnbull & Mullins,



**Figure 2.** Reflective process

2007). For example, Lyubomirsky, Sousa, and Dickerhoof (2006) assessed the costs and benefits of thinking, writing, and talking on capturing and processing positive and traumatic experiences. They found that for traumatic experiences, writing and talking into a tape led to improved subjective reports of well-being and health relative to participants who thought about the experience privately to themselves. The authors proposed that negative events benefit from the organizing and gaining a sense of understanding and that writing and talking aid in this process of organizing and structuring of one’s reflections. In contrast, thinking about negative events may lead to rumination and “easily degrade into negative repetitive cognitions that are relatively more difficult to integrate, condemning the person to the re-experience and maintenance of painful memories” (p. 705).

Daudelin (1996) sought to explore different dimensions of reflective practice, focusing on which of three approaches to reflection—reflecting alone, reflecting with one other, or reflecting in a group—was most effective in “helping managers enhance learning from challenging work experiences?” (p. 43). Forty-eight managers were divided into groups focusing on each of these approaches to reflection. All groups were asked to follow a four-stage reflection questioning process (as discussed earlier). A postreflection-session questionnaire measured the number and nature of insights or lessons that were produced by each group. A follow-up questionnaire 10 days later collected information on subsequent learning. Both the individual and dyad approaches were seen as superior to groups in terms of the number of learning insights. Also, the nature of learning by individuals and in dyads tended to be of an intrapersonal type, relating to personal development insights such as needing to work more with details or to engage in more coaching behavior when interacting with staff. In contrast, group-level

reflections tended to produce mostly interpersonal learning, such as recognizing the need for diversity among teams or insights about organizational contexts, such as recognizing the cultural dynamics of reward systems and so forth.

These research findings suggest that reflection using writing and talking carried out alone or in dyadic arrangements may contribute to more effective reflective practice. Writing a reflective journal provides discipline to the process of reflection by helping to organize and structure the sensemaking process. Also, writing helps to distance events and actions, thus reducing biases related to protecting one's self-concept. A reflective journal also 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 behavior 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 use of a reflective journal may present as an unlikely activity for a busy leader who already struggles to find time to carry out reflective analysis of events experienced, let alone engage in a disciplined approach to journal writing. Like most actions, journal use or nonuse is related to one's value about the activity. A well-known example of a business leader who regularly uses a journal is Richard Branson, as highlighted in his book *Losing my Virginity* (Branson, 1998). Thus in pursuing one's self-development, many leaders may learn to value journals as a useful tool to help the reflective process.

Reflective processing of experiences would also likely benefit by purposeful reflective interactions with another person, such as the use of an executive coach or mentor (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009; Gray, 2007). Talking about events can stimulate reflective processing as it aids the leader in making sense of events and drawing out insights about one's areas for improvements and to assist in the development of action plans.

## **Metaskill: Managing Emotional Reactions to Feedback**

In work situations, performance feedback typically implies or explicitly makes an assessment of a person's performance relative to normative standards of performance. **Given that people have a tendency to overestimate their own level of performance relative to the views of others (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004), one is likely to experience negative feedback at some point in formal and informal appraisal by others.** This negative feedback draws attention to development needs and potentially stimulates leaders to direct and energize efforts to reduce the perceived discrepancy. **However, as noted by Trope, Gervy, and Bolger (2003), situations that offer individuals self-relevant feedback often create motivational conflict between providing information that guides self-improvement and threatens self-esteem.**

When a person receives negative performance feedback, emotional responses naturally arise (Ilgen & Davis, 2000) and these reflect one's perceptions about the nature and attributions of performance-standard discrepancies as well as appraisal of future goal-attainment prospects (Bagozzi & Pieters, 1998). If negative performance feedback

is evaluated as a problem with effort or existing strategies and one has self-efficacy beliefs for goal attainment (Bandura, 1982), then problem-solving analysis is engaged to reduce the discrepancy (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Consequently, a person may decide to put greater effort into pursuing a goal, and/or reflect on and develop or modify goal pursuit strategies, including developing new or existing skills. However, when negative feedback is interpreted as questioning one's self-concept, there is typically heightened salience of the self (Hoyt et al., 2007) and cognitive processing and behavior are directed to protection of the self-concept rather than to goal attainment (Swann, 1992). In this case, feedback may be rejected or distorted (Guenther & Alicke, 2008; Kluger & deNisi, 1996) and future performance standards reduced (Ilies & Judge, 2005) or avoided by withdrawing from pursuit of the goal (Ilgen & Davis, 2000).

Emotional reactions may also limit the extent that leaders are willing to put themselves into positions where they will acquire experiences and where they may learn about their skills and deficit areas. As argued by DeRue and Wellman (2009), developmental challenges activate arousal and interest but at very challenging levels they can induce anxiety related to task uncertainty and the potential for performance failure. These emotional responses "can hinder the learning processes and ultimately threaten the developmental value of experience" (p. 859).

Emotional reactions also play a role in the quality of ongoing reflective processing because emotional processing may undermine the limited conscious resources available for reflection (De Rue & Wellman, 2009; Muraven & Baumeister, 2000; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998; van Woerkom, 2008). Therefore, even for experiential self-observation, accompanying emotional reactions (Steelman & Rutkowski, 2004; Swann, 1992) may adversely affect cognitive processing and retard the quality of reflection and the employment of effective self-regulation (Cron, Slocum, VandeWalle, & Fu, 2005; Schwarz & Clore, 1996; Tyson, Linnenbrink-Garcia, & Hill, 2009). Thus from the perspective of SDLD, the subsequent engagement and quality of reflective analysis and development efforts following feedback is related to the nature and intensity of emotional reactions engendered by that feedback (Ilgen & Davis, 2000; Swann, 1992) and the capacity of the leader to regulate those reactions. Fortunately, as noted by Gross and Oliver (2002), "People are by no means passive as emotions come and go. Individuals actively regulate their emotions, shaping them in an attempt to capitalize on their good features while minimizing their bad features" (p. 297).

Gross and Oliver (2002) propose that specific strategies for emotional regulation "can be differentiated along the time line of the unfolding emotional response" (p. 301). These strategies can be broadly classified as antecedent-focused strategies that are adopted before the emotion response tendencies are fully activated and response-focused strategies that are engaged once emotion response tendencies are underway.

Gross and Oliver's (2002) research showed the benefits of cognitive reappraisal, an antecedent emotional regulation strategy, where one actively seeks to construe a situation to reduce the emotions associated with one's previous interpretation of the

situation. As noted by Gross and Oliver (2002), “the personal meaning you assign to the situation is crucial, because it powerfully influences which experiential, behavioral and physiological response tendencies will be generated in the particular situation” (p. 303). In contrast to response-focused strategies where emotions are generated and felt but suppressed, reappraisal was seen to involve less cognitive effort and allowed more attention to other features of events experienced. Reappraisal was also seen to be more effective in dampening negative feelings and emotional expression while allowing positive feelings to be felt as well. Given the aim in SDLD is to use negative feedback for developmental aims, the use of reappraisal or reframing of feedback so that it is perceived as less negatively emotional provides a potentially useful emotional-regulation strategy.

Work by Dweck and colleagues (Dweck, 1986; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliott & Dweck, 1988) have also shown different affective, cognitive, and behavioral implications of different approaches to framing performance feedback. They contrast performance orientations, which highlights a person’s goal of demonstrating one’s competence and avoiding looking incompetent with learning orientations where people strive to understand and learn from experiences to increase their level of competence in a given activity. Under a performance orientation, negative feedback is interpreted as undermining the goal of displaying competence and so threatens self-esteem. Thus, when a person takes a performance goal orientation, negative feedback typically results in effort to limit the threat to one’s self-esteem rather than engage with the developmental potential of the feedback. People taking a learning orientation, in contrast, are highly motivated to learn from experiences and value experiences that foster development. They view errors as feedback and opportunities for learning which can aid them in redirecting and increasing effort.

Thus, for successful SDLD, leaders need to adopt a learning orientations where they consciously monitor their emotional reactions in response to negative feedback and consciously highlight interpretations of feedback as opportunities for learning. Given the aim in SDLD to use negative feedback for developmental aims, the adoption of emotional reappraisal strategies in dealing with feedback, so that it is perceived as less negatively emotional, also provides a potentially useful emotional-regulation strategy.

## **Metaskill: Self-Regulation**

In recent years, researchers using social cognitive perspectives (Bandura, 1991; Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, & Hall, 2010; Zimmerman, 2000) have drawn attention to the affective-cognitive and behavioral dimensions of self-regulation and the cyclic and reciprocally deterministic processes associated with the pursuit of development goals. In discussing these aspects of change, researchers have tended to focus attention on distinct phases of the self-regulatory pursuit of goals, such as goal-setting, planning, goal-striving actions, and evaluation (Gollwitzer, 1990). Zimmerman (2000), **for example, presents self-regulation as a dynamic cyclic process beginning with a**

forethought phase where goal-setting and strategic planning interact with motivational beliefs such as self-efficacy, expectations, intrinsic motivations, and learning goal orientations to prepare a person for self-regulatory performance. The forethought phase is followed by the performance phase where task strategies, self-observation, and monitoring of actions are implemented. The performance phase is followed by processes associated with reflection on performance outcomes from which arises affective and cognitive consequences, which in turn cycle back to forethought processes and so forth. The use of phases within self-regulatory frameworks appears regularly in the literature on self-regulation and can provide guidance for training program development for HRD professions and for leaders by drawing attention to important issues within the self-regulation process for self-development (Lord et al., 2010).

The SDLD framework also conceptualizes development as a sequence of phases (see Figure 1) beginning with a self-understanding phase that incorporates processes that highlight the role of self-reflection and emotional management and lead to a self-change phase, which focuses on self-regulation performance processes. These self-regulatory performance processes incorporate subphases of goal-selection, goal-striving, and monitoring and evaluation actions.

An important aspect of goal selection, which influences goal-striving efforts and likely success in self-regulation, is that the person must have commitment toward the goal (Lord et al., 2010). Factors such as the value attributed by a person to the obtainment of the development goal, the intrinsic interest in the skill area, and one's level of self-efficacy beliefs of being able to address the development goal all play an important role in determining this commitment (Zimmerman, 2000). Within the self-understanding phase of the SDLD framework, substantial attention is given to the development of self-awareness and the construction of development goals. These efforts, which highlight the nature and inherent value of addressing development goals, are seen to contribute to a leader's commitment to addressing development goals and are thus consistent with self-regulatory research.

In the self-change phase of SDLD, goal-striving is preceded by planning and documenting task strategies encapsulated in development action plans (Higson & Wilson, 1995; Tamkin, 1996). The documentation of an action plan makes salient one's development goals and actions, which in turn aids attention to one's development among the myriad of competing tasks typically associated with a leader's work day. These plans typically convert abstract and distal development goals into actionable proximal subgoals (Latham & Locke, 1991; Lord et al., 2010). Plans should also outline task strategies used in the striving for goal obtainment and specify monitoring and evaluation processes.

One of the difficulties encountered in the construction of action plans is in determining the specific set of actions needed to obtain one's development goals. This problem, which reflects the difficulty of setting effective courses of actions for complex goals (Wood, Mento, & Locke, 1987), is compounded by the cyclic nature and interplay between motivational, meta-cognitive, and behavioral influences underpinning

self-regulation. Thus, the nature of task strategies used in the goal striving stage will vary considerably depending on the nature of goals, the personal and organizational context, as well as the cognitive and affective responses to self-evaluations of goal-striving actions. For this reason, action plans need to give prominence to the monitoring and evaluation of action strategies and be adaptive to changing circumstances and performance outcomes. In addition, leaders need to recognize and deal with changing affective and cognitive motivations that arise during the goal striving efforts that play such a critical role in persisting with ongoing efforts (Lord et al., 2010; Zimmerman, 2000).

For a leader wishing to develop an action plan for his or her development, the plan should focus on actions related to reaching specific goal-related tasks, to tasks associated with developing supportive social and physical environments, and to tasks dealing with cognitive and affective states that arise during the enactment and in response to evaluations of goal-striving actions. Although goal-related tasks are uniquely tied to personal and contextual features encountered by the leader, they would typically include development tasks associated with increasing knowledge about the subject matter of the development goal. In this sense, action-plan strategies may include increasing awareness of explicit knowledge through reading (books, Internet, etc.) as well as learning from and observing those already displaying the desired behavior (reference on modeling as a learning strategy). A typical environmental-focused task strategy is to negotiate support from significant others, such as one's direct manager or work colleagues or mentor or coach (Day, 2001) to support one's efforts in the change process. Thus, HRD professionals can play an important role in SDLD through ensuring supportive environments aligned to development plans of leaders. Cognitive strategies, within action plans, can include the use of self-talk and imagery, as well as challenging dysfunctional thinking that can arise in the course of change processes (Godwin, Neck, & Houghton, 1999; Manz, 1986).

In summary, the phases associated with the SDLD framework are consistent with social cognitive perspectives of development, highlighting a cyclic process of continuous development efforts cycling between self-awareness and self-change and drawing on the skills of self-reflection, managing emotional reactions, and engaging in self-regulatory behaviors.

## **Implications for HRD Practice**

As previously noted, the dynamic nature of contemporary work environments is making a leader's capacity for continuous learning and adaptability a critical leadership competency. Clearly, all leaders must learn from their experiences to advance in their careers and to deal effectively with changing work environments. The SDLD framework presented in this article highlights the significance of three metaskills related to a leader's self-development learning capacity. In this section, a number of implications for HRD practitioners within organizations derived from the framework, to improve and encourage leader self-development, are discussed.

One practical implication for HRD is that the SDDL framework provides insight into the design of training that would seek to enhance leaders' self-development capacity. Training in self-reflection that highlights the systematic questioning process of reflection is likely to deepen the quality of self-understanding that can arise from reflections on performance feedback. Given that research finds reflection is more effective in stimulating insights when it involves either talking or writing (Daudelin, 1996), HRD professionals seeking to encourage self-development of leaders could develop training for the use of reflective journals (Bolton, 2010; Thorpe, 2004), as well as institute ongoing coaching arrangements (Grant et al., 2009).

A course to enhance self-development would also draw attention to the role that emotions play in influencing reflections. Taking a lead from training that seeks to help address the negative influences of perceptual biases (Ruggs, Martinez, & Hebl, 2011), and programs designed to enhance emotional intelligence (Groves, McEnrue, & Shen, 2008), leaders could be trained to recognize their own emotions as well as understand the potential distorting effects of emotions on self-reflective insights. Helping leaders to manage their emotions could emphasize techniques such as perceptually reframing emotionally sensitive feedback to focus on its learning insights for one's behavior (Dweck, 1986; Gross & Oliver, 2002).

Another significant dimension of a self-development course derived from the SDDL framework would be to focus on developing self-regulation skills. Such training would involve educating leaders about social cognitive perspectives of behavior (Bandura, 1991) and how these perspectives can be incorporated into self-development action plans (Gollwitzer, 1990; Zimmerman, 2002).

Insights from the SDDL framework could also be incorporated into existing formal leadership-development programs. In particular, the discussion of reflective processes and its role in self-development highlight the need for a closer examination of self-reflection practices and skills of organizational leaders. Given the importance of self-reflection for learning generally, HRD practitioners could seek to enhance the learning experiences of leaders within existing organizational programs. For example, action-learning strategies often used in formal leadership programs, could be combined with specific training in the use of reflective questioning as part of debrief sessions to enhance reflective processing.

An additional practical implication for HRD practitioners is to consider how organizational systems currently encourage reflection by leaders. For example, HRD practitioners might consider the extent that engagement in reflection is promoted among leaders within the work systems and processes of the organization and how insights developed are incorporated into organizational change initiatives (Franz, 2010). By helping to institutionalize reflective systems and processes, HRD practitioners can assist organizations to respond more appropriately to dynamic environmental demands.

## **Implications for HRD Research**

Boyce et al. (2010) have recently argued that despite the clear and growing need for self-development among leaders, there are few studies focused on this approach to

leadership development. One reason suggested in this article for this limited research is the need for further work on the development of conceptual frameworks regarding self-development. The three meta-skills presented in this article, suggested as building a framework for the effective operation of self-development, each present opportunities for HRD research.

It is suggested that HRD research, especially in the field of leadership development, could be advanced by studies on the nature and quality of reflection carried out by organizational leaders. Existing research on learning from experiences tend to focus on the nature of experiences that stimulate learning (Cope & Watts, 2000; De Rue & Wellman, 2009; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988) rather than on a nuanced understanding of the specific reflective processes involved (Daudelin, 1996; Flanagan, 1954). Thus, a specific HRD research question, for example, is whether successful and less successful leaders differ in the extent and/or the way they approach thinking about their experiences. Qualitative studies to compare leader's reflective processes in different development contexts, such as in expatriate assignments, new roles, novel assignments, as well as in different industry and strategy contexts, would contribute to greater understanding of reflection processes and contribute to more effective implementation of reflection among leaders.

Another area for HRD research would be to investigate whether different leader personality variables influence the nature of reflective processing. For example, leaders recognized for their expansive learning approaches (London & Diamante, 2002) are said to engage more in reflective analysis. Considerable research has also focused on the role of the Big Five personality variables and different thinking styles (Zhang, 2006), and it is possible that the nature of reflective processing may vary between leaders in systematic ways. Introverts, for example, may be more inclined toward reflection due to their introspective nature. Thus, research could hypothesize and test relationships between different personality measures and the amount and quality of reflective processing, as well as the contingent conditions of such relationships.

The focus on the management of emotional reactions to feedback also provides opportunities for HRD research. Although the relationship between emotional reactions and performance feedback has received considerable research attention, this has primarily been related to feedback coming from other people, such as one's direct manager. However, emotional reactions and behavioral consequences of feedback arising from self-observation and analysis of one's experiences has been generally neglected (Seo, 2003). For example, comparison of emotional reactions to feedback from others, such as one's manager and from 360-degree feedback as well as self-reflected feedback on experiences, would advance theoretical understanding on the interplay between these two aspects of learning as well as advance research more generally into experiential learning. Furthermore, such research may usefully extend the developing research agenda associated with emotional intelligence and leadership (George, 2000) to include the area of leadership development and learning.

Self-regulation processes have also received considerable research attention, especially in health-related and academic domains (Schwarzer, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002),

but their role in leadership development has been limited. One suggested avenue for HRD research, arising from the SDL framework, would be to examine the development and learning consequence of designing development action plans according to the precepts of social cognitive theory.

In addition to research addressing each of the metaskills of self-development, HRD research could be advanced by research that examined the integrated operation of these three metaskills. An obvious focus for research is to examine the validity of the proposed framework for effective self-development. For example, does commitment for development-related goals increase with focused attention on self-reflection and management of emotional reactions?

Another HRD research implication from the conceptual representation of three metaskills of self-development presented in this article would relate to the development of a measurement scale for self-development capacity. In the same way that research on self-regulatory academic learning was advanced by the development of appropriate measurement scales (Zimmerman, 2008), developing a valid and reliable assessment tool for a leader's self-development capacity would promote exploration of a range of interesting HRD research issues. Research to examine the relationship between self-development capacity and the behavior of leaders in a range of critical development challenges, such as in expatriate assignments, action-learning assignments, change management scenarios, and the like, would open up considerable research opportunities and enhance the understanding of these research domains. For example, the relationship between self-development capacity and leadership performance and more broadly the impact on career progression would be interesting areas for research attention and would link in with increasing attention to vocational research associated with self-career management (King, 2004).

Research on derailing executives (Hogan, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2011; Lombardo, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1988) would be another area where self-development capacity might present opportunities. Derailment, where leaders find themselves either unable to rise further or in fact removed from their leadership roles, has been linked with a range of issues including the inability to adapt to changing circumstances. Research could be carried out to explore whether self-development capacity is related to career derailment (Capretta, Clark, & Dai, 2008). Research on whether derailment relates more to underlying personal characteristics, such as one's learning and development orientation (Maurer, 2002) or development capacity, may provide further insight into this important HRD issue.

At a broad HRD organizational development level, the relationship between self-developmental capacity among the organization's leaders and organizational change can be explored. For example, an individual's readiness for organizational change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Choi & Ruona, 2011) has implications for engagement and success of change efforts. Research could explore whether there are linkages between the collective capacity of the organizations change, by summing individual leaders change capacity and macro change behaviors. These suggestions highlight just some of the opportunity for an active and engaging research agenda associated with the SDL framework outlined in this article.

## Summary

In this article, the nature of SDDL has been explored. The discussion has focused on highlighting three metaskills of self-development—one's ability to manage emotional reactions to feedback, to carry out effectively the practice of self-reflection, and to enact self-regulatory processes for leadership development. Although each of these areas have been the subject of active research efforts, they have remained relatively isolated from each other in terms of their significance for the development of leaders in organizations. As this article has argued, there is significant practical and theoretical utility within HRD in exploring the role of these three metaskills in supporting a self-development approach to leadership development.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Note

1. Although many scholars distinguish leadership and management, the perspective taken in this article is that many managers carry out leadership responsibilities and that those in leadership roles are typically referred to as managers. However, throughout this article the term *leaders* is used to emphasize the focus on leadership development.

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### **Bio**

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