

# Managers in the driving seat: How self-guided development works

## **VUCA within and outside of organizations increasingly require managers to self-guide their development. How does this look like?**

Management development does not happen in a vacuum but within the context of organizations. The acronym VUCA describes how organizational change has increased both in volume and in quality. In "What VUCA really means for you" the authors Nathan Bennett and James Lemoine describe that VUCA stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. In other words, organizational change is accelerating, cause and effects are becoming more complex, and it is becoming more difficult to predict the consequences for employees. For example, German car manufacturers are confronted with the growing importance of "mobility" services and new competitors (such as Google, Uber and Tesla). Audi, BMW and Daimler's investment in the mapping service "Here" and BMW's and Daimler's plans to merge their previously separate car sharing services show that they are taking the competition seriously. Like many companies from the 20th century, German automotive manufacturers need to position themselves in the new markets against their lean, young competitors. That is why Daimler's CEO Dieter Zetsche announced that, as part of the "Leadership 2020" initiative, one fifth of the company will be transformed into a so-called "Swarm Organization". In the new future, those employees will work together independent of existing hierarchies as well as reporting lines and collaborate autonomously across divisional boundaries.

## **Self-guided development**

In order to handle the new realities successfully, managers need a broad repertoire of skills and behaviors that they can deploy quickly and flexibly. In this situation, traditional management development programs with their standardised content will rapidly lose its relevance and impact if they continue to operate on the "one-size-fits-all" principle, take managers' individual needs too little into account, and relatively slowly adapt to new needs. Therefore, in times of VUCA, on the one hand managers need to take full responsibility for identifying areas of development and for steering their development process themselves. On the other hand, it is the responsibility and

expertise of HR to provide managers with a framework for their self-guided development process. Such a framework is described below: It combines insights into success factors of executive coaching with ways of individualizing development through digital tools.

## **Development traps in the coaching process**

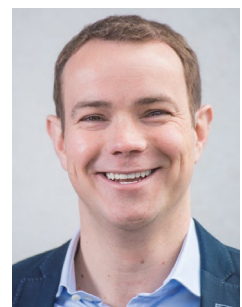
One-on-one coaching helps managers to develop solutions for their challenges. In "Why coaching clients give up", Marshall Goldsmith, who is regularly rated as one of the best executive coaches in the world, describes the most important reasons why clients give up during their development process. Considering counterweights to these pitfalls in development frameworks should increase the likelihood of successful self-guided development.

- "I didn't want to do it in the first place."  
The manager is unclear why the development process is important for him.
- "This is a lot harder than I thought it would be."  
The manager has unrealistic expectations about how hard it is to change behaviors.

*Dr. René Immanuel Kusch,  
MSc Business Psychologist,  
MD of Relevant Management Consulting  
in Düsseldorf, Germany,  
rene.kusch@relevant-mb.de*



*Patrick Hypscher,  
BA Business Economics,  
MSc Philosophy of the Social Sciences,  
CEO of Skill Hero, Berlin, Germany,  
patrick@skillhero.de*



## Leadership reloaded

### Statement from a manager who excels in self-guiding his/her development

I consciously manage my behavior and regularly ask myself how to increase my effectiveness.	I regularly identify opportunities in order to become a more effective manager.	Applying the behaviors in my development plan makes me represent my core values more "strongly".	Achieving my development goal is becoming far more difficult than I thought it would be.	I have made arrangements with people who are role models, whom I trust and who keep me accountable.	I know how to use routines to stabilize my behavior.
Strategic self-awareness	Pragmatism	Attitude	Expectations	Social support	Routines
How often do you evaluate your effectiveness?	What concrete measures do you take to increase your effectiveness?	What does the development goal mean to you?	How easy will it be to achieve your development goal?	Who can support you in implementing the development measure?	What can you do to stick to your target behaviors?
I don't question my effectiveness.	I am not sure which measure increases my effectiveness.	The development initiative is in contrast to what is important to me.	It won't be a problem.	I can do it myself.	I rely on remembering what I planned to do.

### Statement from a manager who experiences difficulties self-guiding his/her development

#### Pillars of self-guided development

- "The situation has changed." The manager does not integrate the development topics and process in everyday life.
- "I lost sight of it." The manager is not held accountable by others.
- "It simply doesn't pay off." The manager is rather focussing on short-term than long-term results.

Right at the beginning, when development processes are being planned, steps can be taken to counteract these pitfalls, thus making successful implementation more likely.

#### Digitalization creates opportunities for individualization

Digitalization allows people to (co-)operate across timezones and regions. It drives automation as well as interaction between human beings and machines. Digitalization is a significant element of forces that cause VUCA. It therefore presents managers with new challenges. At the same time, new instruments and methods are available for dealing with the

above-mentioned development pitfalls. In his book "Die granulare Gesellschaft" ("The Granular Society"), Christoph Kucklick presents a convincing description of how digitalization increases the ability to consider more details and information. This is a great opportunity for individualizing the development process. Additionally, support offered to managers not only can become more individualized but also highly automated and affordable. For example, while a personal fitness coach is expensive and time-consuming, fitness trackers and apps rely on individual support through algorithms. The principle can also be applied to digital support for personal development, as in coaching.

For example, the app from Skill Hero, a provider of learning transfer programs, makes it possible for people to be reminded of personal goals via a smartphone (see last page). Skill Hero also allows to exchange ideas with other people via the chat function. The use of digital methods is not an end in itself but a catalyst for the individualization of development processes.

#### Framework for effective management development

The graphic above shows the various pillars involved in planning and implementing self-guided development processes. It takes the above-mentioned experiences of coaching processes into account. These pillars can be used as a framework for promoting managers' ability to take over responsibility for their own development and thus increasing their effectiveness. The order in which the pillars will be planned might differ from person to person. The questions in the graphics assess how much the managers take over responsibility for their own development. At best, the development is planned in such a way that managers can give the answers at the top of the pillar.

In the following the pillars will be described in more detail. As an example, the pillars will also be applied to the case of a sales manager with leadership responsibility across EMEA countries. His team's sales figures remain below expectations, although market analyses show that his portfolio has great potential. It seems that

the staff knows relatively little about their own products.

### **Pillar one: Strategic self-awareness**

The first step involves defining a development topic. People with high strategic self-awareness have a clear understanding of where they stand compared to others, they are aware of their personal strengths and weaknesses, they listen to feedback and they identify the requirements of different situations and people. They deliberately decide to use their "autopilot". These are behaviors that come particularly easily to them and that they are happy to apply (Kusch, 2014). Or they employ more demanding behaviors if they seem more likely to lead to success. Strategic awareness is thus a meta-skill that people apply in order to identify areas for development in different (new) situations. Online personality questionnaires (such as Hogan Assessment Systems' Potential Report) help to identify a person's individual "autopilot". Comparing behaviors with the specific job requirements helps to identify development needs.

For example, the sales manager mentioned above is faced with his team's poor sales figures. Reflecting on his personality profile helps him understand that, when on "autopilot", he tends to keep to himself instead of seeking contact with others. He learns that his team may simply lack information and that team members know little about the product portfolio." He can then deliberately address the fact that he might just have communicated too little. Without this knowledge the manager might have attended a sales training session that would have covered other issues not relevant to him.

### **Pillar two: Pragmatism**

To boost self-guided development as defined in pillar one, it is important to be clear about what exactly can be done.

Selected online personality questionnaires suggest specific behaviors on the basis of personality profiles. For example, the assessments used by Hogan Assessments provide automatized development suggestions to the sales manager based on big data analyses. The suggestions are based on what has been proven effective for managers with a similar profile.

The sales manager can now select the suggestions that he finds particularly relevant and useful in his given situation. For example, in the spirit of developing an "open door culture" he notes:

- "Skype for Business" will be introduced for online video conferences. The status icon indicates the team members when the sales manager is available and can be approached even virtually.
- Regular video conferences will be held and replace irregular telephone conferences.
- The principles of "phone calls instead of emails" and "three phone calls per day" will be applied.
- Documents on FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) and USPs (Unique Selling Propositions) for the most relevant product will be produced by the team.

### **Pillar three: Attitude**

A manager will be more willing to apply a development plan if it is closely linked to what is important to him. Also, a manager's motivation to take action is higher if those actions reflect his/her own values. Development processes are often discontinued in those cases in which this connection was not evident. This can lead to the impression that "it's not worth it".

Values are also part of an individual's "autopilot" and they can be assessed by using online personality questionnaires (such as Hogan Assessment Systems' Values Report). Especially, for sales managers, who sell their products with great conviction, it has repeatedly been found that a potential increase in their personal bonus

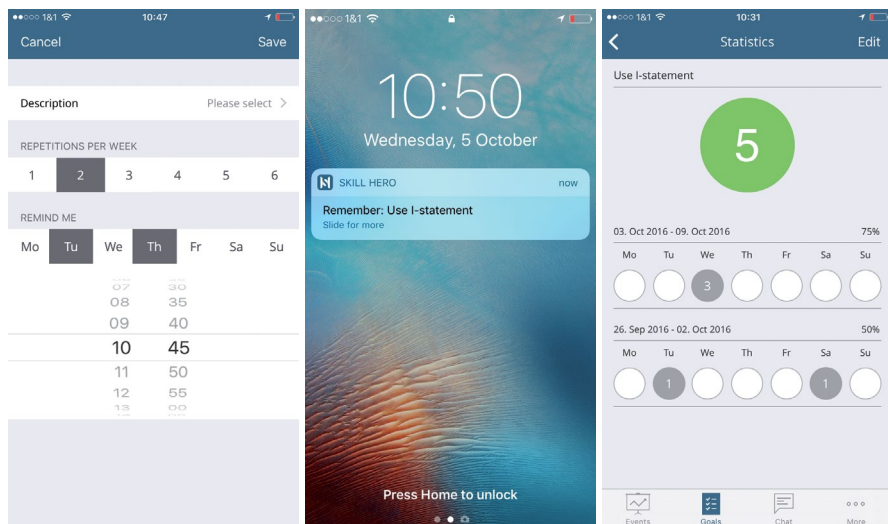
is not the strongest driver for personal development. In the example, while reflecting upon his personal values profile, the sales manager realizes that he has a great need for security. It helps him to understand that, if he has more communication with his staff, he is probably contributing not only to an increase in the team's sales. Beyond, improving his communication skills makes him more valuable as a sales manager and hence also more valuable for his current but also other employers. It is helpful for him to understand that this logic may apply: "With strengthening my position, I increase my personal job security."

### **Pillar four: Expectations**

Also, expected results are an essential driver for changing behaviors. However, development is a process that often lasts weeks, months or years. At the same time, managers find themselves in a VUCA world of rapid change. This can put pressure on managers to accelerate their own development. Also, it can increase a manager's motivation to take responsibility and action. However, the process often takes longer and is more time-consuming than initially anticipated, and the effects of the development process on the company's KPIs take longer than typically hoped for. In addition, new problems and opportunities can crop up along the way that seem more urgent or more attractive than the pursuit of one's own development. It is therefore essential to expect obstacles right from the start and to be prepared to deal with them. This prevents disappointments and develops tolerance for set-backs at an early stage.

The sales manager accepts that, despite greater efforts towards proactive communication, the sales figures are not going to improve in just a few weeks, and he plans how he will deal with it. This helps him build more realistic expectations and motivation to "stick with it".

## Leadership reloaded



An example of online support by app: define goals, receive trigger, evaluate actions

### Pillar five: Social support

The likelihood of effective development increases with a supportive social environment (staff, colleagues, superiors, even people from one's private circle), who are available resources in challenging circumstances and who help overcome them. Social support may involve feedback from people in the manager's environment. Colleagues who have already found a solution in similar situations can be role models and sparring partners. "Accountability partners" can help the manager stay committed to implement the actions defined in his development plan. Knowing that the development topic will come up some time with an "accountability partner" results in repeated reflection on one's own behavior and will have a positive influence on a desired change. While identifying a network of supporters, it is important to pay attention to the personal "fit". The manager might find the right person in an informal network rather than in a formal setting (such as a mentoring program). Support can also be provided virtually.

The chat function in the Skill Hero app enables the sales manager's team to exchange experiences on implementing their action items. Selected colleagues may even be allowed to keep the sales

manager accountable to actually stick to his resolution of "phone calls instead of emails". Beyond that "instant feedback applications" can provide feedback on actual behavior, in real time.

### Pillar six: Routines

It is the aim of a development process to make behaviors available that have not been part of the behavioral repertoire in the past. A trigger can help to remind and initiate those behaviors. The trigger helps the manager to activate the new and desired behavior in order to then act accordingly. The behavior is followed by a result. Ideally the result in itself is a reward that makes the behavior attractive for the manager, and to establish the sequence Trigger → Behavior → Results as a recurring routine. The "Tiny Habits" method developed by the psychologist B.J. Fogg, who teaches at Stanford, shows how existing routines function as reliable triggers: getting a cup of coffee, leaving the office or taking a phone call can all serve as a trigger for new behavior. Smartphones can also provide a trigger for new behaviors.

Thus the sales manager can use his smartphone to set daily personal, timed reminders to make three phone calls each morning. These remind him of the be-

havior during his everyday life. As a result, he notices how questions can be clarified directly. Even if he does not experience the effect on the sales figures directly, the feedback about how helpful the call was can help him build up his routines.

### Outlook into the future

At times of rapid and complex change, a management development process based on the "one-size-fits-all" principle will lose its impact and therefore relevance. HR managers can use the six pillars to provide managers with a framework for self-guided development. Digital solutions can play an important part in this. Managers who regularly reflect their experiences sharpen their awareness when their behaviors need to be adapted. It is this meta-reflection that helps them become aware of the many factors that influence them, take a stand for what they are convinced of and make more appropriate decisions. Managers benefit from this not only at work but in all areas of their lives.

### Further reading

- Bennett, N. & Lemoine, G. J.** (2014). What VUCA really means for you. *Harvard Business Review*, January-February/2014, 27. Available: <https://hbr.org/2014/01/what-vuca-really-means-for-you> [2/7/2017].
- Fogg, B. J.** (2016). *Tiny habits*. Available: <http://tinyhabits.com> [2/7/2017].
- Goldsmith, M.** (2014, May 28). *Why coaching clients give up*. Available: <http://www.marshallgoldsmith.com/articles/coaching-clients-give/> [2/7/2017].
- Kucklick, C.** (2014). *Die granulare Gesellschaft: Wie das Digitale unsere Wirklichkeit auflöst (The Granular Society: How the digital realm is replacing our reality)*. Berlin: Ullstein.
- Kusch, R. I.** (2014). Strategische Selbsterkenntnis: Den eigenen Autopiloten erkennen (Strategic self-awareness: Identifying your autopilot). *Wirtschaftspsychologie aktuell*, 21 (2), 26–30.