
Character Shifts

The Challenge of Improving Executive Performance Through Personal Growth

by
Robert E. Kaplan

Development requires more than learning
new behaviors

A Center for Creative Leadership Report

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About the Author

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Acknowledgments

This paper grows out of a long-term project on intensive, person-based executive development. The project began with a study of executive character and development conducted by Bill Drath, Joan Kofodimos, and me. The study has gone on for several years. The ideas and data in this paper owe a great deal to Joan and Bill.

After the first couple of years the project evolved into a service-delivery operation that many people have had a hand in designing and running. The service, intimately bound up in the research, has also been a fertile source of ideas about how executives grow and improve. The fellow service-providers with whom I have worked closely are: Fred Kiel, Frank Kalgren, Kathryn Williams, Diane Ducat, and Rebecca Henson.

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Human beings have always employed an enormous amount of clever devices for running away from themselves. . . . we can keep ourselves so busy, fill our lives with so many diversions, stuff our heads with so much knowledge, involve ourselves with so many people and cover so much ground that we never have time to probe the fearful and wonderful world within. . . . By middle life, most of us are accomplished fugitives from ourselves.

– John Gardner

Let him who would move the world first move himself.

– Socrates

As organizations struggle to adapt to a new order, executives must struggle to play the part required of them in that new order. As Torbert (1987) argued: "A manager either leads the organization through . . . fundamental changes by equally fundamental changes in his or her own style at the appropriate times, or else he or she does not last. Many managers today do not last (p. xiv)." In this spirit one upper-level manager, taking part in a discussion with a few of his peers about the change each of their organizations was going through and the leadership challenge facing each of them, offered this summary comment: "We're all concerned with the change around us, change that we see as being needed. We're also concerned with our changing to do that. Each of us worries: Am I changing fast enough to make a difference?"

One popular misconception is that an organization's leadership can introduce change as if it is manipulating an object outside and independent of itself. Senior managers who labor under this misconception don't learn to play their complementary part and therefore unconsciously undermine the reorganizations or cultural changes they initiate. They need to learn the simple lesson that a colleague of mine, Bill Zierden, taught his executive clients about effecting organizational change: "Changing you means changing me." In the same spirit Tolstoy once observed: "Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself."

Why is it critical that executives continue to develop as leaders? One upper-level manager said: "No longer can executives get away with telling an organization that it has to change and that the organization is everyone but you." When an individual heads up an organization with hundreds or thousands of people, what that individual does—productive and nonproductive—ramifies powerfully through the ranks. A small improvement in how the executive conducts himself or herself¹ can make a big difference in how large numbers of people feel and perform. We asked one manager what blind spots, if any, did his executive-level boss have. "He has a blind spot that most of top management has—not leading in an enabling way and not seeing the effects of not enabling. They don't understand the huge negative effects of not leading, not enabling, not teaching. Because they feel they know it all, they stop growing. This is the major blind spot—not knowing how their lack of performance on those dimensions is multiplied manifold out into the system."

For executives to improve as leaders, they frequently must grow not just in a narrow, behavioral sense but personally, characterologically. If executives can correct a performance problem simply by learning to adjust their behavior or by acquiring a new technique, so much the better. But when these straightforward interventions don't work—and they often do not—then it may be necessary to approach the problem at its root by consulting the characterological underpinnings of a given behavior.

This approach challenges the dominant tradition in management development with its behaviorist preference for confining itself to what is observable, public, and nonintrusive. As one example, Blake and Mouton (1978), in describing the "critique of style" that each manager participating in their Managerial Grid seminar receives, were careful to specify that "the emphasis is on personal style of managing, not on character or personality traits" (p. 161). Efforts to develop executives typically focus on skill development, and rarely encourage personal learning or development of a person's *identity* (Hall, 1986).

If executive development matters not just because executives can always stand to improve but also because fresh capabilities are often needed to run reconstituted organizations, then what is executive development?² I define it as the executive's learning to make better use of himself as an "instrument." This image of self as an instrument may sound mechanistic but it is instead intended to make vivid the very human notion that to be effective, executives must call adroitly upon the resources available to them as complete persons. Like any manager, the individual "plays" the executive part by employing as appropriately as possible the knowledge, expertise, experiences, interests, and drives available to him. To learn to play better, executives can expand their repertoire (i.e., learn new skills), improve their "sound" (i.e., learn to use existing skills more adroitly), or, by discovering more clearly their limits and liabilities, call more effectively on others to complement themselves (i.e., learn to compensate for weaknesses).

In the field of acting, Jack Nicholson "tunes" himself as an instrument by, among other things, chanting "Three Blind Mice" over and over again, elongating each syllable while ignoring the melody and meaning. Nicholson said: "It's . . . what's known as

'diagnosis of the instrument.' . . . The idea is . . . to hear through the voice what's actually happening inside. . . . It's a way of locating the tensions, the tiny tensions, the problems with your instrument that can get in the way of getting into the role" (Rosenbaum, 1986, pp. 12-13). Executives face an analogous challenge of identifying and dispelling the problems with their "instruments" that can interfere with performing their roles. Can they, on line, tap into the precise capability required in a given situation or, knowing their limitations, marshal that capability in someone else?

An executive's "manual dexterity" in using himself as an instrument will only be as good as his knowledge of himself. Knowing what his instrument is capable of doing enables the executive to capitalize on strengths. Being cognizant of what it cannot do makes it possible for him to limit the damage done by weaknesses. The reflective executive goes far beyond the accumulation of knowledge and expertise to the dextrous application of these resources in the moment, on the firing line (Schon, 1983). Executives who operate in this heads-up way perform more effectively because they adapt better to the particular situation; they are more flexible.

In the complex, continually unfolding situations in which executives find themselves, can they identify—among the host of possible causes—the contributions they uniquely made to the success or failure of a meeting, a project, a conversation, a strategic initiative, or a protégé? The ability to learn about oneself in this way is critical. A recent study found that one of the factors distinguishing executives who succeeded in their careers from those who derailed was the ability to learn from one's experience, including mistakes and failures (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). A replication of this study with women executives obtained the same finding. Executive women who derailed were less likely to become aware of their faults, sometimes because they rebuffed other people's attempts to apprise them of those faults (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1987).

Along with making the best possible use of self, leadership can be thought of as a kind of self-expression. To develop, then, is to understand better what self is, in effect, being pressed into the role. Beyond the reading of the part they played in a given episode or series of events, executives, like the rest of us, form fairly durable

impressions of themselves that guide the way they deploy themselves. The greater the self-awareness, the greater the opportunity to deploy themselves in an enlightened way (Bennis & Nanus, 1985).

But what is there to know about one's self, particularly in a more or less enduring rather than episodic sense? It is generally accepted that executives, as well as other managers, must know themselves on the surface: How do they behave? What skills do they have? What skills do they lack? Along with my co-researchers, Bill Drath and Joan Kofodimos, I take the position, generally less well accepted, that because much of what is revealed on the outside springs from inner life, executives must also know something of themselves below the surface. What drives me, what are my hang-ups, what scares me to death? These basic conflicts, bedrock assumptions, overriding drives are what is meant by character. Character is not the numerous personal traits that are evident on the surface but the deep, fundamental patterns that unite those traits.

Development at this level is an ongoing process of discovering one's potentialities, with the discovering always relative to present roles, present circumstances, and present stage of life. We are always changing so there is no knowing oneself once and for all. If the search is for the real self, "such a real self is something to be discovered and created, not a given but a lifelong endeavor" (Lynd, 1958). What self-discovery is possible at any point is limited, even hampered, as we shall see, by the person's own resistance and by the difficulties of others in seeing the individual clearly (from their vantage point) and in making insight available to the person.

How did we manage to study executives in depth and while they were in the process of gaining and using self-insight? A full account of our research method, which we call Biographical Action-Research, is available elsewhere (Kaplan, Kofodimos, & Drath, 1986; Kofodimos, 1989). Of the 75 senior managers who have participated in our exceptionally intensive study, I have personally worked with 32 and studied the data sets of 5 others. In addition to this "official sample" of 37 I have drawn on a large set of data collected opportunistically during training programs and informal conversations.

Of the official sample of 37, nearly all have been white males, ranging in age from their late 30s to mid 60s, from Fortune 500

companies based in the United States. Four are from Europe; just one is a woman. Twenty-four have participated in the full-blown process about to be described or something quite near it, and 10 in an abbreviated version. With these individuals we have struck a bargain of insight for access. Their work with us has been a chance to understand themselves better and, in varying degrees, to put that insight to work for them. In the process we have gained unusual access to these executives' worlds and psyches.

Biographical Action-Research is governed by three operating principles. First, we view the executive from *multiple perspectives*. This means that we were not willing to limit ourselves to the executive's own view of himself or herself, as honest and earnest as that person might be in offering it. It also means that at work we investigated the similarities and differences among the perspectives taken by superiors, peers, and subordinates. What initially seemed contradictory frequently turned into a foothold for understanding the individual better. Data about the person at work came chiefly from interviews and managerial ratings.

A second operating principle dictated that we study the executive in *multiple settings*. This is where the method becomes biographical because it consults the person's total life and his or her past. As much as we might learn by examining multiple perspectives at work, we believed that our grasp of the executive's basic character would be firmer if we also saw something of how character manifested itself at home. To get this other reading on character we interviewed the executive and family members. In addition to the person's role in his present family, we looked into that individual's place in his original family. Early history proved especially useful in revealing the executive's underlying driving forces. Data sources included the executive, the spouse, and members of the original family.

The third principle driving our research method was to understand executives by attempting to change them, always by giving them a chance to clarify or revise their notions of themselves in long feedback sessions and sometimes by working over time with the executives as they attempted to deepen and act on their insights. It is to this intervention-minded approach that I owe the understanding of executive growth and development reported in this paper.

The reader may find the understanding of executives and their development slanted toward the negative. This slant, to the extent that it exists, stems from the method's deep probing that is bound in the end to reveal human frailty even in the most effective leaders and the most admirable people. It also stems from our substantive interest in the developmental process and therefore in what could or must be improved.

ORIGINS OF PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS

The performance of executives is rooted not just in their managerial expertise and their knowledge relevant to the job but in their basic character as persons. This rootedness of performance in self is something we all at some level recognize yet may also prefer to overlook. Moreover, the majority of executives have in common a personality type that I call "expansive," they are governed by a drive to attain mastery (Kaplan, 1989).

Performance also is affected by the settings in which the executive is embedded. Every executive is located in certain roles and settings at work and outside of work, and these settings serve to support or challenge the individual's behavior and character. For executives, a major aspect of embeddedness—a term borrowed from Kegan (1982)—is their elevated situation, consisting among other things of high position, high socio-economic status, considerable power and prestige, and prerogatives and special treatment (Kaplan, Drath, & Kofodimos, 1985).

Rootedness and embeddedness have a bearing on present performance, whether effective or ineffective, and on future development, whether realized or unrealized. What makes this an investigation of *executive* development and not just managerial or adult development is the executive-specific treatment of rootedness in terms of the expansive personality and of embeddedness in terms of elevation.

Performance problems (which broadly speaking include opportunities to improve performance in one's current job or to prepare for an even more responsible job) are the reason why executive development comes up at all. This section shows how performance problems can originate in the executive's character, especially in expansive characteristics, and in the executive's elevated situation.

An Example

To appreciate the characterological dimension of problems in the performance of executives, let us look at an extended example from our intensive research (Kaplan, Kofodimos, & Drath, 1987; Kofodimos, 1990).

This case of an executive in difficulty is representative of one portion of our sample, but the small portion. Most of the individuals we studied were in fine shape managerially, save for the foibles present in all human beings and the limitations inevitable in people with jobs whose demands are so numerous and so varied. Even highly successful and esteemed executives have personal issues of one kind or another that play out in the way they lead. These issues—whether conflicts, doubts, compulsions—came to light when we as researchers and facilitators ceased to take their performance at face value and dug beneath the surface. As one executive observed about the extensive feedback he had received, “It’s like peeling an onion: When you peel enough, you reach flaws.”

When we met him, Hank Cooper had been the general manager of a small business unit for 18 months, after spending 15 years working his way up the ladder in a technical service function of his company. His promotion to general manager was part of his company’s attempt to increase the number of senior managers with strong technical backgrounds. To broaden his knowledge of business, he had recently attended an advanced management program at a prestigious university. Being highly intelligent and energetic, he had little trouble acquiring the knowledge necessary to make the transition from his functional specialty to general management. He did, however, run into trouble for behavioral reasons, in particular for treating people roughly. One of the leading causes of executive derailment is abrasiveness (McCall & Lombardo, 1983), and Hank Cooper was a classic case whose own career was in jeopardy because of it.

His abrasiveness mattered not so much because it violated a social code, but because it cost him some of the support he needed to move his organization forward. Part of this was tied up with his exceptional intelligence; he tended to look down on those people whom he saw as beneath him intellectually. A superior said: “He is an arrogant intellectual type, treats with disdain those who are not his equal.” Another superior: “He doesn’t suffer fools easily. He has a low tolerance for those at lower levels who are not as bright as he.” A friend made a similar comment: “He does not have much tolerance for those without much intelligence. He doesn’t want to give much time to people who are mediocre [in intelligence] in his

eyes." His superior attitude is probably associated with the low ratings he received on the questionnaire item, "Good coach, counselor, mentor; patient with people as they learn." No one, including Hank himself, saw the item as applying to him, and two-thirds of the people responding, again including him, saw him as especially needing to improve in this respect.

At times he became so aggressive as to be clearly destructive, even though some people saw this behavior as innocent and unintentional. As one would expect, subordinates were especially sensitive to this. One said: "If the discussion doesn't go his way, then he goes on a personal attack. It's an acid, sarcastic attack." Another subordinate: "He'll make a fairly neutral but cutting remark. It stops you right there. It's like a verbal slap in the face." Another subordinate: "He berates people in front of others. I've seen him do it twice. He demolishes them right in front of others." Another subordinate: "He wields a verbal whip." Peers pick up on the same attribute; for example: "He is overly aggressive and pisses people off."

His results on the managerial rating scales put a point on the poor shape he was in interpersonally. On the item, "Builds warm, cooperative relationships; isn't abrasive," no one, including Hank himself, thought that it applied to him, and all but one person indicated that he needed to improve in this area. To his credit, he shared this view. On the item, "Has good relationships with subordinates," the result was largely the same except that in this case, being out of touch, Hank agreed with the item. In contrast, all but one person indicated that he "has good relationships with superiors." But because of his abrasiveness, he had hurt his reputation with some of his superiors. One said: "He impacts people so negatively. Unless he corrects that, I wouldn't want him in this division." Another said: "Having no manufacturing experience, he never got the rough edges knocked off. If he's going to be a general manager, he must learn to deal with people."

When we reported back to Cooper, the data, in the form of ratings and anonymous quotations from interviews, did not come as a complete surprise to him. He knew going in that he rubbed people the wrong way. On the item having to do with abrasiveness he joined everyone else in indicating a need for change. In fact, as he

told us in the feedback session, he had long known about his abrasiveness: "I have this concern that I come across to you as being insightful, but I've known these things for 20 years."

Why with this knowledge, then, had the abrasiveness persisted? First, he had known but he hadn't really known. He had not fully appreciated the seriousness of the problem. After receiving the report, he expressed a "certain level of surprise at the intensity of the criticism. One of the illusions I've been operating under is that I'm hard-hitting but fun. I meant no harm, and I'm doing no harm. It's no big deal. When you're in a certain group, people get to know you. They kid me about it, so it's no big deal."

The abrasive tendencies persisted for another reason, a characterological reason, that helps to explain why he had failed to appreciate the seriousness of the problem. However aware of his mistreatment of others he had been, he was out of touch with the hurt he caused. He had little sense of what his victims felt. At one point, when a fellow manager and friend told him that it's fine for him to be "right a lot" but not OK to "push it in people's faces" and thereby make himself into "an arrogant SOB," Hank responded by saying: "I see that intellectually but not at a gut level." He (and we) discovered that any feelings he had about hurting people simply did not register. In a session to plan the changes he would make, I read him a long list of things that people had said about him in sharp, graphic language: "Uses a verbal whip, treats people with disdain, makes personal attacks, a wise ass, makes cracks at people's expense," and so on. When I asked him how he felt about hearing those unflattering descriptions of him, he said, honestly: "Nothing." Thus, the characterological basis of his mistreatment of others becomes clear: He frankly could not feel what his targets felt nor what he himself felt about committing his aggressive acts.

To understand the characterological basis better, let us look briefly at the likely origins of his aggressive interpersonal style and his difficulty knowing his feelings about it and its effects. As the only child of now deceased parents, he was our only source of information on his childhood. He remembered his mother as something of an emotional tyrant: capricious, critical, and at the same time overprotective. His father, a shadowy figure during Hank's childhood, allowed himself to be eclipsed for the most part by his wife and did little to moderate her negative impact on Hank.

In concentrating on the influence of Hank's mother, it is important to remember that a child's character is formed in a family system, which in our research we learned relatively little about. The most we can say in Hank Cooper's case is that his mother's transgressions have to be viewed in light of his father's abdication. Our data on early history is simply suggestive of the forces that shaped these executives and helpful chiefly as a way of shedding additional light on their inner lives.

Recalling those early times with his mother, Hank told us, "Maybe she flared up too easily. As a result, I talked back a tremendous amount. I could tell that I drove her up the wall. As a little kid, my mother might say: 'Take this medicine.' When I balked, she threw it at me. I'd say: 'I guess I can't take it now.' At 15 it was no longer a contest. If she threatened me, I'd threaten to break a certain vase." It is obvious that he and his mother were locked in a destructive relationship in which he, presumably to cope with her, developed a repertoire of reflex aggressive tactics. He sees the penchant in his present life for repeating that pattern: "I can get into war games easily. There's a strong element of survival."

In addition to learning to counterattack, he evidently adapted by cutting himself off from the hurt inflicted by a mother who regularly criticized him or otherwise aggressed against him. Although he sometimes got wind of nice things his mother said about him to other people, she "didn't find it necessary to say anything positive about me; she managed me by exception." In effect he built a shell around himself designed to protect him from the pain suffered at the time. Although for years he had been telling friends entertaining stories about his epic struggles with his mother, the stories of his horrific exploits—including those told to us—were not occasions for him to re-experience the psychic injury. Being cut off from his feelings, past and present, Hank Cooper lacked empathy for other people and for himself.

What came of Hank Cooper? For several reasons, one of which was his way of handling people, he was moved out of his general manager's slot into a staff position. Shortly after that, he transferred to another company. His transfer cut short his work with us, yet the energetic developmental efforts he had made evidently bore fruit. A year after his transfer he told me on the phone: "I have a number of times thought about the things we talked

about. The whole thing about sensitizing me to people has helped a lot." On the other hand, a subordinate of his whom I happened to meet gave me reason to believe that he was still to some extent up to his old tricks. The evidence was too slim to determine how much he had changed and how much he had remained the same.

While abrasive behavior in executives like Hank Cooper sticks out plainly for all to see, the roots of it are not nearly as obvious. Yet it is important for the actors in the drama surrounding any significant performance problem in an executive to appreciate and have a healthy respect for the fact of a problem's likely rootedness in character, even if the details of how the problem is rooted are not available.

Effects of the Expansive Personality

Despite the infinite variety of executive performance problems and an equal variety in their underlying causes, we can gain further insight into the influence of character by examining a type of personality common among executives—the expansive personality (Kaplan, 1989). This personality type, which emerged from our research on senior managers and from a reading of relevant literatures, is characterized by a pushing out, an expanding into the world to attain some kind of mastery over it. Expansive individuals thrust themselves into high positions, positions of influence and visibility, by virtue of their skills and accomplishments. The object, apart from the intrinsic satisfaction in becoming skilled and having an impact, is to derive a sense of worth and esteem as a person. Note, however, that not all executives are expansive and those who are vary in how much they are. (In this paper I will look only at the effects of expansiveness at work and not touch on the considerable effects on private life [Kofodimos, 1989].)

Expansive executives have several characteristics:

1. A willingness to push themselves extremely hard. They work long hours, expend great effort, display brute persistence.

2. A willingness to push other people equally hard. They may or may not be aggressive interpersonally, but at a minimum they exercise influence by expecting a lot, by having very high standards.
3. An exceptional drive to mastery. They badly want to excel and want their organizations to excel. They want to be the best and want the best from their people.
4. A devotion to task and achievement that tends to put them out of touch with feelings, their own and other people's. They are especially likely to suppress doubts and fears that could interfere with the attainment of mastery.
5. Confidence in their own abilities. A bullishness about themselves that is in many cases accompanied by underlying self-doubt. The drive to mastery is often designed as a remedy for unconscious insecurity.
6. A hunger for the rewards tangible and intangible that come with the attainment of mastery. Many expansive executives actually want to succeed so triumphantly as to achieve heroic standing.
7. A resistance to criticism, failure—at least initially. Wanting to create a masterful presence, they react against views to the contrary as deflating.

Not an entirely new concept of leadership, expansiveness does perform an integrative function by: (a) treating the executive as a whole person rather than a fragmented set of strengths and weaknesses and (b) bridging the intrapsychic world, as understood by clinicians, and the world of managerial behavior, as understood by students of management.

We get a sense of the intensity of the drive to mastery from none other than Albert Einstein, explaining why a fellow physicist, Michele Besso, who was Einstein's intellectual confidante in the

early 1900s when he developed the theory of relativity, never made an important discovery of his own. Einstein said: "Michele is . . . a universal spirit, too interested in too many things to become a monomaniac. Only a monomaniac gets what we commonly refer to as results" (Bernstein, 1989, p. 89).

Monomania and phenomenal drive are exemplified in D. Wayne Lucas, who has for the last several years run the most successful stable for thoroughbred horses. He drove himself as hard as a jockey rides a horse in the Kentucky Derby. "He would do without sleep, if he could. For six or seven years, he said, when he switched over to thoroughbreds from quarter horses, he got by on three to four hours of sleep a night. He would work out his schedule on a yellow legal pad, budgeting his time for twenty hours a day, seven days a week, allowing thirty minutes for lunch and forty-five minutes for dinner" (Flake, 1988, p. 37). Lucas has made an informal study of success and discovered that what makes the difference is the "intensity factor." "These people who are extremely successful, whether an Olympic athlete, a baseball coach, or the head of a large corporation, they've got a fire burning in them that the average person doesn't have. . . . The successful person can reach down and get a little extra, and win when the chips are down" (Flake, 1988, p. 46).

So far the picture of expansives that should have emerged, while showing them to be a specialized breed with highly developed and pronounced characteristics, should be relatively neutral and non-evaluative. It is neither necessarily good nor bad to have these characteristics. But expansiveness can take on a positive or negative cast. It can be a force for the good of the organization, its members, and its external constituencies, or it can be a detriment (see Figure 1 which is based on our research and a review of the management literature and the psychoanalytic literature [Kaplan, 1989]).

Executives who are "positive" expansives harness their intense drive for mastery and their needs for control for the benefit of the organization; they subordinate their ego needs to the organization's needs. There is an essential honesty about positive expansives: They earn the credit given them; they support whatever claims to mastery they make; they are able to acknowledge their

Figure 1

Negative vs. Positive Expansives*

Negative	Positive
1. Self-oriented: Overly concerned about own interests, ambitions.	1. Organization-oriented: Subordinates own interests to organization's interests.
2. Dishonest: Makes false claims to mastery, takes credit not due, willing to cut corners to create a good impression.	2. Honest: Supports claims to mastery; a favorable image is a result of true competence and accomplishment.
3. Destructive: Diminishes the organization's or individuals' capability or morale; pushes self and others too hard, too far.	3. Constructive: Builds up the organization's or individuals' capabilities or morale; pushes hard but respects own and organization's limits.
4. Rigid: So anxious about self-worth and so desperate to demonstrate it that he becomes defensive and inflexible. Righteously adheres to beliefs about his "way."	4. Adaptable: Secure enough in sense of self-worth that he can accept limitations and adjust to them. Open to revising beliefs about himself.

* Note: These dimensions are somewhat independent: An individual can fall on the positive side on some and on the negative side on others. Also, the positive and negative versions represent the extreme ends of the dimensions, and points in between also exist.

mistakes and failings. While they are capable of expending and expecting extreme effort, they know and, if possible, observe their own limits and those of the organization. They manage to mobilize the organization to attain its objectives and to leave it in at least as good a shape as they found it. The head of a new-product development unit exemplifies positive expansiveness in that his consuming drive to mastery—in his case, to gain a command over new technical areas—takes on an organizationally useful form. Referring to the wide range of projects going on in his unit, he said: “I like the variety. I am stimulated by the variety. My natural tendency is to keep expanding. So I need to maintain a balance between getting into new things and being focused. . . . We are continually put in areas we are not expert in, and the challenge is to quickly develop mastery and to contribute.”

When expansiveness turns negative, at the least it becomes self-oriented and results in lost contributions to the organization, and at worst it becomes an out-and-out destructive force. Negative expansives can be so concerned about projecting an image of efficacy and success that they become overly concerned with appearances and trappings and may even, in effect, cheat to create the desired impression. Because others tend to interpret this concern for making a good impression as a lack of integrity, negative expansives undercut their reputation and effectiveness. They likewise hurt themselves and the organization when they put their own needs first—by, for example, being unduly ambitious for themselves. In addition, negative expansives tend either to misuse or to abuse power, as we saw in the case of Hank Cooper’s overly aggressive tendencies. In pushing for success, they may go too far and overextend themselves and their organizations. In Goethe’s *Faust*, Mephistopheles, whom another character calls “the would-be superman,” has the unrestrained energy and insatiable appetites of many negative expansives, albeit in mythic proportions.

There’s an unrest about him that drives him off the map. He half knows how crazy he is. He claims that heaven ought to yield him the pick of the stars and earth, its uttermost delights. And nothing, near or remote, can ever satisfy him. (Goethe, 1984, p. 10)

An upper-level R&D manager, describing himself as he was early in his career, captures some of the flaws of the negative expansive: "Early on I wanted to teach, to demonstrate that I was superior. I wanted to win every argument, be right. . . . Engineers [he is one] are nasty people, they have big egos. They have to show that they're smarter. So some things about my management style turned people off, but it also got me where I am."

Yet the picture of negative expansives I wish to draw is by no means entirely bleak. In their consuming need to excel, some of them in fact obtain outstanding results from their organizations. The drawback is that they tend to run down their organizations in the process.

Negative expansiveness, as one kind of executive character, can give rise to any number of performance problems. Rather than provide an exhaustive list, let us look at a few examples of how performance problems can have their roots in the personality of the executive.

- Sloppy preparation and follow-through is often described as poor attention to detail or lack of self-discipline, but if we look more closely, we may find an expansive need to be the author of one heroic masterstroke after another. The executive can't bring himself to be thorough, hasn't the patience for it, because he is impatient to move on to the next high-profile activity.
- Overmanaging and failure to delegate is at one level an inability to give up control. Digging into an executive's character, we may discover a pervasive fear of failure, which anytime the executive encounters a crisis, real or imagined, makes the individual panic and prompts him to hover or to take over. Since an executive's subordinates are senior managers in their own right, this anxiety-induced overcontrol not only represents a needless intrusion but an insult as well, because it seems to signify a lack of confidence in their abilities.

- Overly quick, negative reactions to marginal performers is sometimes chalked up to being judgmental or to having exceptionally high standards, when at bottom the executive may have projected his conflicted experience of himself onto others. Torn by a conflict between the acute need to feel worthy and the disturbing suspicion that he is not, the executive denies and cuts himself off from his feelings of unworthiness. Likewise anything less than supreme competence in other people makes him uneasy, and marginal performers may get dismissed out of hand.
- Slow decision making, risk aversion, and overcautious strategy formulation may stem from an overdeveloped need to be right accompanied by an equally strong need to avoid being wrong. So negative expansives of this kind may go to such great lengths to put a solid information base under a proposed action that they may not make a move unless they are virtually certain it will come out right.

Examples abound of the characterological basis for performance problems taken piecemeal. In addition to considering performance problems singly, it is instructive to appreciate the rootedness of an executive's leadership in a holistic sense. The individual's overall leadership specialty, to the extent it can be ascertained, has direct reference to his or her basic character as a person. Executives who play a maintainer role, whether merely in a custodial capacity or in continually restoring and sustaining the existing scheme of things, typically have less expansive or even non-expansive—that is, more or less disengaged—personalities. Proactive, change-oriented executives differ in the sort of change they characteristically seek to make, with the change varying according to the kind of expansive they represent. The classic fix-it specialist generally has a "vindicating" personality, whose reason for being seems to be the need to disprove a powerful underlying sense of inadequacy. Preoccupied by what is wrong in themselves and in others, they prove their worth by purging their organization of substandard performance (Kaplan, 1989).

The Contribution of Elevation to Performance Problems

There is no doubt that the power, prestige, and prerogatives of high position—what we call elevation—fortify executives and enable them to meet the leadership challenges thrust upon them. Yet, as if expansiveness by itself weren't enough of a source of performance problems, elevation can easily feed expansive tendencies and therefore exaggerate performance problems.

Kipnis (1976) spoke of the "metamorphoses of power"—the transformations that leaders undergo when they attain power; for example, a newly found exalted sense of self-worth. Teddy Kollek, the mayor of Jerusalem for more than 20 years, changed in this respect over time. According to a long-time associate: "In the old days . . . Teddy didn't have such a big opinion of himself and saw his shortcomings. Since then he has learned to accept that people regard him as something special, something elevated" (Rabinovich, 1988). Drew (1988) observed the phenomenon of elevation in U.S. presidential candidates: "Despite the strain, campaigning for the Presidency, if one has enough success, is intoxicating, and it's difficult to walk away from the crowds, the cheers, the acclaim, and even the comforts of limousines and Secret Service protection. Like addicts, candidates come to need a regular shot of adulation. Candidates don't have to get airline tickets, or wait at gates; they don't even stop at stoplights."

Kipnis' major argument is that "the continual exercise of successful influence changes the powerholder's views of others and himself" (p. 169)—a transformation that is most dramatic in the holders of high position. As Kipnis (1976) pointed out, the Greek tragedians portrayed vividly how heads of state could be swept away by a sense of their own importance and could, simultaneously, devalue the opinions of others and become impatient with disagreement.

The result in modern organizational life is that if an expansive individual already tilts toward an exaggerated confidence in his abilities, then a highly elevated position in the hierarchy only increases that tendency. If an executive already worries over how he looks to others, then a position of high visibility only accentuates his need to project an image of efficacy. If an individual is naturally self-focused and keeps his own counsel, then inhabiting an

executive suite, being removed physically and set above the rest of the organization, will augment the executive's isolation. If an individual has the unfortunate habit of indulging himself at the expense of the organization, then a high position with its relative freedom from restraint only makes it more likely that the individual will exploit the situation or give vent to destructive impulses with impunity (at least in the short run).

In the rarefied atmosphere surrounding the top rungs of an organization, previously negative expansives thus become more so. In addition, previously positive expansives may, in the face of the pressures and temptations of their privileged situations, develop negative characteristics followed by associated performance difficulties. It is also possible that otherwise non-expansive individuals, in occupying highly placed positions, take on the coloration of expansiveness, including its negative tinges.

WHEN BEHAVIORAL CHANGE DOESN'T WORK

When executives run into problems on the job, their first impulse and that of the people around them—if there is an attempt to do anything—is often to try to alter their behavior. The typical response is to help the executives to make a change by getting them feedback on their behavior, in a performance appraisal or training program or candid conversation. This straightforward, practical and eminently reasonable approach can work, and its efficiency and businesslike quality recommends it highly. When it doesn't work, it may be that behavioral change by itself isn't enough and that characterological change of some kind needs to accompany it. The attempt fails because as they try to make better use of themselves as an instrument they confine themselves to the instrument's surface properties. Before exploring what characterological change means, let us look more closely at why an attempt to modify an executive's behavior sometimes doesn't get to first base or is left standing at third.

For executives to attempt to change their behavior is no mean trick, for there is much in their expansive natures and elevated situation that militates against seeing the need for change and against producing change. First, let us look at what makes it difficult for the executive to see the need.

Seeing the Need for Change

Getting Feedback

For explicit feedback on his or her behavior to reach the executive, it must get through a veritable obstacle course (Kaplan, Drath, & Kofodimos, 1985). The executive's immediate environment is not what one would call feedback-rich, and elevation is often the culprit. Organizations do not generally provide feedback to high-level managers. Even organizations with formal performance appraisal systems tend not to subject executives to these systems, or do so erratically. A senior human resources manager observed that in his highly respected company: "There's an inverse relationship

between the quality of the [appraisal process] and level of the organization. We do it better at lower levels than at higher levels." Appraisals don't get done when executives use their power to exempt themselves from having to appraise their executive-level subordinates, just as they exempt themselves from being appraised. The norm at executive levels seems to be that one does not presume to tell highly placed and highly accomplished people about the weaknesses in their leadership styles.

In this vein, a subordinate of one executive made a comment about top management in their company: "One level [of top management] is reluctant to tell the next level down what to do. This is true for the CEO and his subordinates. It's true of the division presidents with their GMs." One of the executive's former bosses said: "You rarely if ever get a performance review at this level or anywhere near this level." The executive himself heard very little about how he actually behaved as a leader. He said: "I don't get feedback on my performance [beyond business results]. . . . My superiors don't know what kind of manager I am." A human resources professional speaking of another executive told us that executives at his level got no feedback from above: "Top managers in this company don't confront; never in this world would that happen at this level."

Feedback can come from subordinates, but they get few legitimate opportunities to offer it. The power relationship between boss and subordinate, along with the executive's organizational standing, can discourage it. Beyond that, if the expansive executive uses his or her power in a negative way, the problem of getting feedback to him or her is simply compounded. If at all intimidating, the executive can stamp out direct feedback from subordinates completely. Although extremely successful, a high-ranking executive in our sample had a power-oriented and somewhat forbidding leadership style which meant that few subordinates saw fit to take him on. A direct report in good standing said: "It's easy to back off from telling him anything because his manner can scare you." Jeff Jorgensen was even more difficult to approach because he tended to react against criticism of his ideas, to say nothing of his behavior. A subordinate put it this way: "There's no criticism [going to Jeff]. . . . The message is: 'I'm your boss. I criticize you, but you're sure not going to do it to me.'"

Of the executives we studied, Mike Boylan was one of those who most actively discouraged criticism. A subordinate said: “[People don’t give him feedback] because of fear of retaliation. His favorite expression is: ‘Don’t get mad, get even.’” Thus, the negative expansive quality of being overly aggressive shuts down the supply of feedback, including any complaints about the executive’s aggressiveness.

Subordinates sometimes withhold their opinion of their executive bosses, not out of fear or defeat, but out of admiration. Some executives we studied had a couple of subordinates who were essentially uncritical of them. In their eyes the executive’s success made it gratuitous to be critical. A subordinate said of his executive-level boss, for example: “He’s done quite well. Why should I give him any advice? There’s a young guy who’s going places.” The extreme case is when subordinates are so admiring as to see no weaknesses or to minimize any they do see. One executive, as the competent and moral patriarch of his privately controlled business, inspired an awe in his subordinates—some of whom are also his children and therefore doubly subordinate—that virtually blinded them to his faults. About this executive, a subordinate and son said: “I wouldn’t feel right criticizing him.” The executive himself saw some of this phenomenon from his angle: “My biggest problem with [a particular subordinate] is that he takes my suggestions too seriously. He’s somewhat in awe of the fact that I’ve always made decisions and been right. I wish he’d disagree with me more.” One can see how the executive’s sense of himself as “always right” helped to create awestruck subordinates. The reality was that being exceptionally good at what he did, he did have excellent judgment. He was right much of the time—but not all the time.

Thus the flow of valid feedback can be restricted by subordinates who glorify the executive, just as it can be hampered by subordinates who fear him or her. Executives can spot exaggerated criticism, but will the expansive ones among them see through blind faith?

Accepting Feedback

Information about their behavior can benefit executives, but only if they accept it. Obviously, they don't swallow such input whole. As with information of any kind, they discriminate, consider the source, and make allowances for the kind of relationship they have with the person giving it. But with this qualification made, if they do not come to see a need for change, then the input has gone for naught.

Some executives are outrageous in the way they defend against criticism offered by responsible others. If Mike Boylan, who hated it when people found fault with him, got fed up, he would snap back at the critic, us included. On one occasion, the following ironic exchange took place: We reported to him that many people thought he was "not open minded." At that point, he retorted: "I disagree!" Jeff Jorgensen had a big problem with the heavy dose of criticism in the feedback report. Reacting against the low marks on openness to influence on the managerial rating form, he defensively disputed and explained away the data: "I vehemently disagree. My subordinates have had lots of influence, but their expectations are too high. I have a problem with this conversation because it's out of context. The CEO is so autocratic that this pales out of significance." Similarly, the ratings indicating problems with his relationships prompted him to say combatively: "I reject the data base. I think we might have to redo the data base because things have settled down since the survey was administered." Both Jorgensen and Boylan clung stubbornly to their points of view even though the rap on them eventually hurt their careers badly.

Self-justification. One important reason why executives reject constructive criticism is self-justification, which is related to the expansive executive's tendency to believe strongly in his capability and in his particular approach to leading. The expansive executive behaves not only pragmatically—to get the job done—but also, in a sense, ideologically, out of a conviction that his is the right way. Actions and beliefs interact. Basic assumptions about oneself and the world give rise to one's actions, and the way one chooses to act gives rise to rationales for those actions. In negative expansives, however, the line between rationales and rationalization becomes

blurred. The individual who adheres rigidly to his beliefs regards his way as unquestionably right and perhaps the only truly right way. This self-protective moral absolutism makes it difficult for the individual to give credence to criticism that challenges these bed-rock beliefs.

Dean Humbold, when confronted with the view that he made decisions too slowly, said in effect that he wasn't slow but deliberate and thorough. He argued that in fact his way was the only way to make decisions effectively. A superior said to us: "I told him that his division had analysis paralysis. He was defensive—said they had a lot to do." Another executive tended to deflect suggestions that he soften his power-oriented style of leadership because he believed so strongly in his approach and undoubtedly also because it met his needs. According to a subordinate: "He wouldn't admit he's too tough."

Mike Boylan is another executive who made liberal use of self-justification. On one occasion he told us belligerently: "I'm very difficult and I feel it's justified." At another point he said: "Yeah, I am hard to influence. Maybe I've got a problem and I can't recognize it, but when a guy won't give me what he's supposed to, I'm going to be hard to influence." Boylan's inability to take in others' objections is captured by one of his peers: "It would be to his advantage if he were more willing to be open-minded and consider criticism. I've been there when he's had discussions about a problem with his people or his peers. A peer would say something like: 'Mike, your attitude is too abrasive with customers. You drive them away.' And Mike would say: 'I disagree with that concept. I am what I am; my way is the best way.' And if the peer were rigid, Mike would still say: 'That's me. I am what I am and too bad.'"

Thus Mike Boylan's righteous and rigid attachment to his way of operating—a counterproductive belief in self, common among negative expansives—interfered with his ability to make use of well-meant criticism. In all these cases, the executive became aware of what other people defined as a problem, but he denied the existence or seriousness or costliness of it, because he was so invested in his preferred way of operating.

Need to appear competent. The other major reason why executives dispute the perceived need to alter their behavior also

inheres in expansiveness and, in particular, in the negative expansive's need to maintain the appearance of competence and worthiness, in his eyes and in the eyes of others. To be presented with an "objectively" legitimate criticism has a two-edged quality: It simultaneously offers the individual a chance to learn, and it takes the individual down a notch. To the extent that an executive with positive expansive tendencies is driven by a need to be competent, and to become more so, then he experiences well-intentioned criticism largely as a benefit. A colleague of one executive who said that his ability to accept feedback was "excellent" and that he was "always willing to examine his cherished beliefs [about how to run the business]," took this to be "an indication of a secure ego." Another executive was seen as largely open to feedback when he got it because of his "humbleness." According to a peer: "He has a less than normal ego [for an executive]. He doesn't spend a lot of his time trying to make himself look good for the sake of maintaining superior capabilities or an image that he's all-knowing or all-powerful."

To the extent that a negative expansive is driven by a need merely to appear competent, a need that can be reinforced by an organization's culture, he experiences this type of input as a threat—as a deflation of his expansive place in the world. Rather than putting one's energy into developing, the individual takes a defensive position. The threat to the negative expansive's esteem prompts him to disown responsibility for problems and to project that responsibility onto others.

Jeff Jorgensen had a habit of creating self-serving myths, fiction. A peer once remarked: "He's so articulate, he almost creates reality. He would almost take reality beyond what was real." When it happened, he would exaggerate his part in a successful outcome or exaggerate someone else's part in an unfavorable outcome—in other words, rationalize. When he was in real pain, he might go so far as to blame someone else for causing it, as he did his wife when he initially found the transition into his international assignment rough going. His wife complained: "When he got there, he was very unhappy at first. I was the obvious person to blame for insisting that we come, which I never did. [She did urge him to get over a period of indecisiveness about whether to make the move.] I resented being blamed."

In reality, all executives (as well as all human beings) possess a mix of the two motives—the need to seek true mastery and a sense of worth and the need to build and protect an image of mastery and worth. For that reason they greet every instance of negative feedback with some ambivalence. In the expansive executive, this ambivalence is heightened. Whether expansive executives typically come down on the negative or positive side of their ambivalence has everything to do with their inner lives. As we have seen in the discussion of expansiveness, most executives have substantial needs to excel, to stand out, to elevate themselves. At the same time, most of the same executives are subject to fear of failure and to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. These two emotional states may seem diametrically opposed but, in fact, they are closely linked. For it is, in part, their very claims to superadequacy that exposes them to the threat of inadequacy. Conversely, it was a sense (or fear) of inadequacy that, in part, motivated them in the first place to shoot so high.

This internal dynamic produces effective executives when, in the form of positive expansiveness, it leads individuals to actualize their ambitions for themselves, when they continually build up the expertise necessary to perform their increasingly challenging jobs. In this case, their ideals for themselves serve as a kind of beacon of efficacy and success which they then try to approach but never quite reach. In contrast, the internal dynamic of the negative expansive results in impaired, if not seriously flawed, executives when it leads them to idealize themselves, when they succumb to the temptation to act as if they are what they wish to be. Self-idealization is a shortcut to the fulfillment of one's ambitions for oneself—a substitute for the hard and sometimes painful business of getting there step-by-step.

Dean Humboldt displayed a mix of the need to be competent and need to appear competent. On the one hand, he was strongly motivated to learn and improve, and consequently he was willing to recognize, on his own or with input from other people, some of his short suits so that he could make them longer. He readily acknowledged, for example, his limited skills as a presenter and worked hard to improve, with formal training as well as informally. On the other hand, he had a strong need to be right, which sometimes led

him to defend himself reflexively against criticism. What would start out as a subordinate's attempt at constructive criticism could end up in Humboldt's attempt to put the monkey on the critic's back. He would defend his overly thorough style of decision making which seemed in fact to result from wanting the decision to turn out right, as the right way, showing no appreciation of the fact that it was also his preferred way. From what we know about Dean Humboldt's upbringing, he seemed to have acquired his strong need to be right from his parents, who treated him—the firstborn son whom they had relatively late in life—as a special child for whom they had high, almost religiously tinged expectations.

In summary, there is much about executives' expansive natures, especially those with a negative cast, that militates against seeing the need for change; for example, excessive aggressiveness and the excessive need to create an appearance of competence. Similarly, there is much about their elevated situation that has the same effect; for example, power differences that inhibit the flow of negative feedback, privileged status that encourages a feeling of self-importance, a sense of being entitled to be treated well, and the tendency of other people either to flatter or demean the executive and therefore to disqualify themselves as sources of valid information about the executive.

Still, although I do not detail how until later, feedback can and does get through to executives, especially those who are positively expansive and whose organizations do not elevate them sharply. When the executive does get the message, the question becomes: Will he make use of it?

Producing Change

Despite the multitude of ways in which constructive criticism can get waylaid, some of it does get to and get through to some executives and some of *that* prompts the executive to try to modify his behavior. Assuming that the executive gets—and takes seriously—a clue about a problem with his performance, will he make use of the input or let the opportunity slip away?

When executives attempt change, the method of choice is usually behavioral: Their self-improvement projects are straight-

forward efforts to alter their behavior. And there is a lot to be said for a behavioral approach to leadership development. If a manager wants to build a new capacity, one of the best ways to do it is simply to begin exhibiting the new behavior. Actually taking the desired role, which means practicing it a lot, and getting some coaching will often eventually do the trick, whether the goal is presenting better, controlling less, or delegating more.

But behavioral change has its limitations. Sometimes executives, like anyone else, simply cannot produce the desired behavior. One hard-nosed executive literally agonized when he tried to encourage subordinates in person. Appreciating anew his problem with supporting, praising, expressing faith in subordinates, he made a fresh effort, only to find himself literally in agony when he tried to praise subordinates face-to-face: "Since the last time we got together, I have worked on providing positive feedback to my people. It's almost impossible for me to do it. I experience tremendous emotional turmoil. I try to provide some positive feedback, but I find it agonizing to do it. I understand the roots of this. I expect perfection."

Executives who come to see change as desirable but fail to make it happen may, as we saw earlier, fail because of their strong attachment to their fundamental way of being, of which the bit of managerial behavior they are trying to change is merely an expression. This way of being represents the executive's identity as a human being. While a strong sense of self is crucial to the individual's well-being, it may be so strong that it becomes rigid and resists change. One's current self-definition is both an achievement and a constraint (Kegan, 1982). Individuals tend to build fortresses around their identities (Friedlander, 1983). In fact, identity as a mode of adaptation doubles as a means of defense (Vaillant, 1977), so much so that it can be difficult to distinguish adaptation from defense.

The attachment to one's character helps to explain the conservatism and even superstition that frequently surfaces when executives contemplate change (Kaplan, Drath, & Kofodimos, 1985). Of course, they are constrained from trying something different not just by who they have been but by what they *believe* they should be, which rationalizes and reinforces their existing identities.

One executive, Larry Cerone, who parlayed high principles and perfectionism among other things into a successful career and a rewarding marriage and family life, struggled with the question of modifying his style, even though it hurt his effectiveness at work and deprived him of certain satisfactions at home. "I have believed that if I stay within the box of what's good, moral, ethical, and proper, then I'll continue to get what I want from work and family. I am nervous about advice that I make the box bigger." The box confined him because it compelled him to spend every waking moment in accomplishing something and in doing it extremely well, even if it may not be worth doing well or for that matter at all. His "orderly world," as he called it, has proven to be a demanding taskmaster, but obeying it slavishly had allowed him to demonstrate his "goodness," reassured him of his worth and, in the end, made him a success. It is understandable, then, that he felt possessive about his identity and even superstitious about straying from his box. "I am reluctant to tamper with my winning formula," he confessed.

The people surrounding an executive bring a similar conservative attitude to the prospect of intervening to correct a performance problem in an otherwise effective executive (Kaplan, Drath, & Kofodimos, 1985). A peer and friend of a high-ranking and highly effective executive expressed concern over the possible harm that could be done to this individual by the extensive feedback he was about to receive and by any attempts at improvement he might make. "I am very uneasy. This guy should not be spooked. I don't want him to go into a shell. . . . We are definitely in a fine-tune mode. If Warren improves, it will be a marginal improvement, not a major improvement. What I worry about with this kind of process with Warren is that people are complex packages and his package has allowed him to be very successful. If you have a guy [a golfer] who shoots 80, and that's better than most, and you say 'There are a couple of little flaws; let's rebuild a little,' you fix the flaw but undermine the confidence. Everybody wants everybody to be perfect, and they aren't. When you tinker with the swing, the end result may not be better. It may be worse—because the change isn't natural. If someone is a 95 golfer like [another executive who had gone through the same program], it's worth trying. But Warren is an 80, so you have to be careful tinkering with his emotional make-

up." This concern is of course well placed in general. Incidentally, in expressing it in relation to Warren, his fellow manager also indirectly spoke to Warren's character, which despite all his success and capability and promise contained a vulnerability that manifested itself in a touchiness about being criticized.

To oversimplify: Executives, like the rest of us, adopt a basic personal strategy, typically as young adults, that enables them to maintain their self-esteem and to make their way in the world. It is no mean feat to find a solution to the problem of being an effective, satisfied person in this life, and executives naturally become strongly attached to their identities, so much so that they can be extremely reluctant to modify or even examine themselves in this respect, even when their solution has become the problem.

Of the many reasons that executives fail to produce or sustain change that they do come to see as needed, an important one is that the executive works exclusively at a behavioral level. To confine oneself to intervening on the surface means that one resorts to willpower. The effort frequently is to control the offending behavior out of existence and to do so by latching onto something on the surface (Woodman, 1988). But, according to Vaillant (1977), whose conclusions about coping mechanisms come from his analysis of data from a 30-year study of 100 Harvard graduates, "Mature mechanisms cannot be acquired by a conscious act of will. There is nothing more transparent than someone trying to use humor or altruism, or someone trying to hold back rage" (p. 84). If Warren wanted to tone down his touchiness about criticism, then sheer willpower wouldn't do it; he would have to see what about his sense of self made him so sensitive. As Brian Bills put it to a few of his peers (without prompting from us), taking stock of their progress to date several months after they had each received feedback: "I have found that behavioral modification is not lasting. If all we're doing is acting differently, then we go back to what we've been, we regress back to what we've been. The key question is: Are we being different or only behaving differently? That's an important difference. So far I don't feel comfortable that I really am different."

A lack of attention to the executive's identity can hinder his efforts to alter the way he acts, as we saw earlier in the case of Hank Cooper. He remained abrasive even though he had tried off

and on for years to change. The inner restraint turned out to be characterological: He knew in his head that people saw him as insensitive, but he had no true appreciation in his heart of what his victims felt. Long ago he had shielded himself from his own frequently painful feelings so that now his lack of empathy for others stemmed from his lack of empathy for himself. For him to rectify his managerial problem, it would seem that he would also have to grow personally.

The field of executive development has concentrated on task-oriented learning and, in particular, skill development; it has neglected personal learning and, in particular, "identity development" (Hall, 1986). Likewise, executives driven by expansive urges to achieve and advance tend to be motivated to build managerial expertise and to acquire technical, organizational, and industry knowledge. Successful executives do not go in for reflection on their identities as persons, and "most career development processes reinforce this strong task orientation and low concern for self-reflection in the mobile executive" (Hall & Richter, 1988, p. 214). But the simple truth is that, if leadership is in essence a form of self-expression, if it is inescapably personal, then leadership development would at times also have to be personal. What does this mean?

CHARACTEROLOGICAL SHIFTS

If characterological change has a role to play in helping executives learn to perform more effectively, to make use of themselves as an instrument more adroitly, then what does it entail? What it is *not* is characterological transformation; it is not a clean sweep of the executive's inner self. People who argue that adults, and especially highly successful and confident executives, cannot and do not change, except perhaps "stylistically," are in a sense right, if what they mean is that people do not remake their core personalities. Your college friend remains easily identifiable as essentially the same person at your 10th reunion and at your 25th reunion. But I have reason to believe that executives can accomplish shifts in the way they define themselves, though paradoxically the self remains mostly constant. They revise their concept of self—what about themselves they see, accept, and believe in. The shift is one in which executives revamp their stance toward their core self and in the process de-emphasize certain aspects of that core and accentuate certain others.

Let us understand better what defining and redefining self means by consulting an insightful passage from Pat Conroy's melodramatic novel *The Prince of Tides*, about a tortured middle-aged man raised in the low country of South Carolina and now priming himself to transcend some of the early influences that made him, perversely, unsuccessful at work and a decided mixed blessing at home:

First there had to be a time of renewal, a time to master a fresh approach to self-scrutiny. I had lost nearly thirty-seven years to the image I carried of myself. I had ambushed myself by believing, to the letter, my parents' definition of me. They had defined me early on, coined me like a word they had translated on some mysterious hieroglyph, and I had spent my life coming to terms with that specious coinage. My parents had succeeded in making me a stranger to myself. They had turned me into the exact image of what they needed at the time, and because there was something essentially complaisant and orthodox in my nature, I allowed them to knead and shape me into the smooth lineaments of their nonpareil child. I adhered to the measurements of their vision. They whistled and I danced like a spaniel in their yard. . . . I longed for their approval, their applause, their pure uncomplicated love for me, and I looked for it years after I realized they were not even capable of letting me have it. To

love one's children is to love oneself, and this was a state of supererogatory grace denied my parents by birth and circumstance. I needed to reconnect to something I had lost. Somewhere I had lost touch with the kind of man I had the potential of being. I needed to effect a reconciliation with that unborn man and try to coax him gently toward his maturity.

To cease being "a stranger to myself," to "reconnect with something I had lost," to "effect a reconciliation with that unborn man" bespeaks the kind of internal reorientation I am concerned with here. To illustrate this process from another angle, I will take an extended example from our research. This and other examples of professionally assisted characterological shifts that follow are instances of personal growth and as such are "therapeutic" but do not, in our view, constitute psychotherapy. While our work helps the executive recognize basic patterns of defense and adaptation and gives him or her a glimpse of the childhood circumstances that seem to have motivated him or her to adopt those patterns, we do not push the individual to re-experience fully the pain long since repressed. If that kind of exploration seems advisable or if the person turns out to be in trouble emotionally or maritally or parentally, then he or she is referred to a therapist.

Chris Cramer is a high-potential manager, not quite 40, already a department head, who described for me how he had undergone an inner change. A strong manager and a powerhouse functionally, Cramer's career was in great shape. Unbeknownst to the people around him, his considerable effectiveness and rapid rise in the company had not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in inner satisfaction. In short, he had been succeeding more and enjoying it less.

Cramer began by describing the situation before the change: "For the last year, I was unhappy in my job. I think I did it because that's the way I am. I have to *do*—I don't think that will ever change. I have to do and achieve in order to live. But there was no joy in it, and I felt unfulfilled.

"I was my own worst enemy in that I placed tremendous pressure on myself to be perfect. This, I think, led to unrealistic expectations of myself and tremendous frustration when perfection was not achieved.

"I believe that this also played out in my relationship with my boss. I put him in a position where I tried to pretend that he was the one that was expecting the perfection . . . so that whenever he gave any kind of criticism I took it as a tremendously negative thing. . . . If he did not feel I had done well or if I was not perfect in his eyes, I was not perfect in my eyes, and therefore I was worthless. Therefore, I was always feeling frustrated, worthless, not good about what I had achieved even though I had achieved quite a bit within the organization. I couldn't understand why he couldn't give me more credit. I think now it was because I couldn't give myself any credit and everything he did that was critical was put through the wrong end of a telescope."

This combination of striving for perfection and falling prey to feelings of worthlessness is significant, especially for expansive personalities, and I will return to it later. Cramer went on to reflect on why it was difficult to come to grips with his contribution to the jam he was in: "It was almost impossible for me to face up to my deficiencies at that time simply because my deficiencies meant I wasn't a good person, a good soldier, a good boy, whatever you want to call it. So I would do almost anything to try to make those things look smaller in comparison to what I achieved. The problem is that it's almost as difficult for me to talk about [my achievements; it's difficult to say to myself:] 'Well, you've done really well, Chris. You've achieved an awful lot. You started at the lowest rung, you weren't given a boost, and now you're a department head.' It's strange when you can't handle the success and you can't handle the failure."

In recounting the evolution he went through, Cramer traced its beginning to the realization that he expected himself to be superhuman: "I felt that every day I had to come in here and achieve some astronomical feat. Now that, I will have to admit it, only came from me. I can't blame my boss for this, I can't blame my peers, I can't blame the people who work for me. I think that's what I saw with your help. Finally seeing that and seeing how ridiculous this was was the thing, the crack, that kind of allowed me to open all of this up. It was the most insightful thing that you showed me. That's what I have been building from ever since."

"It was this feeling that 'you don't have to wear your superman suit every day. You don't have to leap tall buildings every day. You can come in and act like a normal person and you will probably be able, without your superman suit on, to do quite a lot of pretty good things, just because inherently you're capable of it.'"

The strength of Chris Cramer's attachment to his "characterological armor" became evident to him that first time he imagined removing it: "I thought to myself, 'Clark Kent wasn't such a bad guy after all; he was able to do a lot of decent things.' So I visualized that OK, but I couldn't just take my superman suit off right away. To do that made me feel frightened as hell. This little plucked chicken without his superman suit was totally and obviously ineffectual; like Clark Kent, bumbling, incompetent, inarticulate. So if I had suddenly taken my superman suit off, I would have felt naked, totally unable to deal with this place."

In a shift that, because of a happy confluence of circumstances, was much easier than usual for executives, Cramer undertook the mental change on his own over the next several weeks by removing the suit one piece at a time. He did not dispose of the suit entirely but kept it on hand in case of an emergency. "I would never get rid of it totally because I do need it. There are still times when I need to leap tall buildings but I can put it on, do that, and then take it off again. I put it on to give me a little extra courage. But I'm able to take it off again.

"So I think as long as you have your positive feelings about yourself in place and your realistic feelings about yourself in place, then when you put the superman suit on, it is a whole different thing. In the past I used it in a defensive way and also in an aggressive, negative way towards my peers and also as a way to try to feel good about myself. To try to be good. To be acceptable to my boss and to myself. But it's not a crutch anymore. I'm using it in a positive way."

What benefit did he derive from recognizing and discarding his superhuman aspirations and his secret heroic costume? In Chris Cramer's words: "I think I'm less a striver now. I feel good about me because of me and because I can see I have influence within the organization and people listen and all that. What I don't so badly need is [the high opinion of] the upper guys—you know, all that bull."

Beyond the inner easing of his phenomenal push to excel, how was his leadership affected? "I was always reactive before, always selling. I spent a lot of time thinking: 'How are we going to sell this to Steve [his boss]? How are we going to sell this to the organization?' Rather than thinking about what *it* is. Now I don't really worry too much about selling it, because I know I can. Because I am so much more confident that people will listen, selling has become a minor thing."

The newly found sense of worth, helped by getting a flattering job offer on the outside, meant that Cramer worried less about the merit of his ideas and, accordingly, felt less compelled to push them hard, in classic expansive fashion. As he relaxed internally, he took some of the edge off his aggressiveness and became more receptive. "I feel so much more relaxed. I am much more willing to listen. I am much more willing to let other people take control; I sit back more. I sit back with my peers more and I sit back with my people who report to me more. I gave them a lot of operational freedom before; I didn't give them much strategic, directional freedom. I think I am able to give that now. That doesn't mean I don't have a big impact on them. I certainly do but in a different way, that is more subtle. I do more taking input in, thinking about it, putting it in perspective, guiding it.

"I'll give you a recent example. This week my boss sent me in his place to a meeting at corporate, with these people who are vice presidential, most of them, or the tier down from vice presidential. And I sat in there and I was relaxed. I didn't feel any anxiety. I didn't feel like I had to talk. I didn't feel like I had to make any points. I only had to say what needed to be said. If it had been six months ago, I would have tried to talk a lot. I would have tried to make a lot of points. I would have been agitated. Instead I sat there in a groove. There I was without my superman suit on and I was enjoying it."

As part of the process of seeing the supercharged aspect of his drive for what it was, Cramer delved briefly into his own history. He was helped in appreciating the full proportions of his drive by examining some of the forces that created it. In retrospect it was clear to him that his parents' expectations were a major determinant. According to Cramer, an only child: "Growing up, I can see that I had to be perfect in order to be loved. All my parents'

emotional energy and eggs were in my basket and it was a tremendous responsibility. I certainly got a tremendous amount of attention. I certainly got a lot of material things that I probably wouldn't have had if there had been more than one child. But also it put a tremendous pressure on me."

Already affected by his parents' idea of what was best for him, his aspirations for himself were sharply intensified at the age of thirteen when his father died suddenly of a heart attack and his mother became severely depressed and had to be institutionalized. "My father was a very strong figure in my life. . . . I always felt that he was the primary protector in my life. But suddenly he has a heart attack and dies. He just disappears from my life. Then my mother, who I learned later had tremendously low self-esteem, got severely depressed. When my father suddenly disappeared from my mother's life, she felt worthless. She even tried to kill herself, and I found that painful too, because obviously I wasn't worth living for. It has taken me a long time to face up to that. So suddenly I was all by myself, and I think that this was another thing that affected my way of dealing with my life. I decided: 'No way will I ever be dependent on anybody, certainly financially.' It has also made it hard for me to be totally dependent emotionally on anybody again."

When I speak of characterological change, it may conjure up images of a transformation in an executive's basic character, a literal discarding of the contents of an individual's core self in favor of a new, improved make-up. Images of radical psychological surgery are, however, seriously mistaken. Even Vaillant's (1977) image of "casting aside ill-fitting identities" is more a matter of making alterations than acquiring an entirely new wardrobe. In actuality, characterological change, even when its effects are profound, never means replacing what is there but rearranging or extending it, intensifying it or taking some of the intensity out of it. I will make one disclaimer: Drastic changes in the make-up of the self may be brought about by wars, economic depression, or social upheavals as they translate into personal devastation and personal tragedy. But extreme circumstances and their dislocating effects on personality are beyond the scope of this paper.

Characterological change in most adults is neither a rare nor remarkable occurrence. It happens from time to time throughout

adult life as the person moves into different roles, encounters various challenges and crises, and alternates between periods of relative stability and change (Kegan, 1982). In Kegan's "constructionist" view, the person is not so much a thing—a fixed entity—as an activity, always in motion. The individual constructs himself, just as he makes sense of, and creates cognitive maps of, the world around him. Rather than being formed once and for all at an early age, the individual's definition of himself evolves over time as his needs change and the world around him places new demands upon him. When the occasion warrants or perhaps virtually requires, the adult may *re-form* himself, give himself new form. He may subject himself to *re-vision*, see himself in a new light.

Characterological shifts have three aspects: degree, structure, and content. As to degree, a characterological change, to my knowledge, is never total, which is why I use the term *shift* (which of course could be minor or major). The content of a personal shift refers to those aspects of self that undergo change. Chris Cramer, for example, became less perfectionistic and self-pressuring. The structure of a shift refers to the way the aspects of self are configured and how they become reconfigured. People are made up of polarities—pairs of opposite characteristics such as aggressive versus receptive, dependent versus independent. The relation between these opposing qualities is frequently out of balance—in fact, polarized and unequal, with one element winning and the other one losing (Jung, in de Laszlo, 1959). The structural change then consists of some form of resolution of this internal conflict, some kind of reconciliation. To echo Kegan (1982), the person reconstructs his notion of himself to incorporate the previously disavowed, devalued elements.

Let's look more closely at content by considering what personal reconstructions consist of. A change from what to what? Kegan made a convincing case for the fact that human beings, starting in childhood and extending across the life span, alternate between stages that emphasize independence, differentiation, and self-determination on the one hand and interdependence, inclusion, and close relations on the other. Bakan (1966) made a similar contrast between *agency*, manifesting itself in self-assertion, self-expansion, the urge for mastery, separation from other people, and

restricted expression of feeling, and *communion*, manifesting itself in membership, connection to others, intimate contact, and emotional expression. Gilligan (1982), who saw human development in the same bipolar terms, argued that the emphasis on the agentic represents, in our society, a largely male psychology and the emphasis on the communal represents a largely female psychology. Similarly, Minuchin (1974) conceptualized families and their members in terms of separation and attachment.

Executives display a strong preference for agency, mastery, independence, and control—all properties of the expansive personality. For executives to undergo a characterological change, then, can often mean a move in the direction of the “feminine.” And, in fact, a midlife transition in males typically entails just that—a reduction, albeit modest perhaps, in their investment in work and career with its ceaseless striving and an increase in their investment in personal relationships, in being nurturant, in expressing feelings (Levinson, 1978; Vaillant, 1977). For men to make this shift at midlife is to redefine themselves as now being less wrapped up in the quest for mastery and more concerned with cultivating close, mutual relationships. If the change is to take hold, the redefinition must translate into the way the individuals actually spend time and energy.

For men to discover their potential for intimacy can be understood in structural terms as an increase in “variability”; the capacity to recognize heretofore contradictory—or what may have seemed like contradictory—aspects of oneself (Pazy, 1985). Increased variability means that one’s self-concept is more varied, contains greater variability. Men who go through this classic transition make room, in their notion of themselves, for a previously neglected element. Like Pazy, Loevinger (1987) took this expanded concept of self to represent a higher level of ego development that entails incorporating previously disowned aspects of oneself (Jung, in de Laszlo, 1959). In this sense reconstruction consists of overcoming denial.

Again, structurally speaking, one can understand denial in terms of “polarities,” or the opposite sides of a person’s make-up (Jung, in de Laszlo, 1959). Frequently, the person prizes and develops one pole and devalues, disregards, and perhaps actively

suppresses the other pole. In terms of the content of the self, the individual dwells on his "persona," or the side of himself he presents to the world as a way of registering a favorable impression. At the same time the individual avoids his "dark side" and may even reject it outright (Jung, in de Laszlo, 1959). The potential locked up in what the person looks upon as his dark side is thus lost to him (Miller, 1981).

The highly successful and personally impressive head of a small business reported having anger bred out of her as a child. Talking with us at the point of realization, she in retrospect felt the loss of a capacity to make appropriate use of anger. She also recognized that suppressing her anger didn't eliminate it but simply forced it to find alternate avenues of expression such as sarcasm and other indirect, "passive" forms of aggression—habits that, she was chagrined to see, copied those of the same person, her mother, who had disallowed direct aggression in her. So denial, as Jung (de Laszlo, 1959) pointed out, entails not just a loss but a distorted and often destructive version of what is denied. Submerging something in oneself doesn't get rid of it but simply forces it to find another way to make its presence felt, often in a disguised, and rarely in a helpful, form.

Often the content of what is denied is the sense of oneself as small, worthless, or contemptible—a sense intrinsic to the natural childhood state of relative smallness, powerlessness, and helplessness but also derived from the childhood experience of being mistreated or neglected or rejected or having too much expected so that one lived in fear of not measuring up. Also repressed is the pain associated with being made to feel—or to feel in jeopardy of becoming—inadequate. The combination of having demands placed on the child and the child's sense of hardly ever being equal to the demands leads to perfectionistic striving. According to Woodman (1988), "Authority figures in our childhood acted out of power, demanding the best little boy or girl, the best little scholar, the best little athlete, so the child introjects that power and constantly criticizes, evaluates, and judges himself or herself. An inner voice is constantly saying, 'I'm not good enough'" (p. 55). The psychology of perfectionism is such that "the image of the ideal is accompanied by feelings of compulsion to achieve the ideal" (Hirschhorn, 1988,

p. 234). So the ideal and the striving to meet the ideal take over the personality and relegate anxiety about worth to distant recesses of the psyche.

In effect, the individual is plagued by an inner conflict between a private, often unconscious sense of himself as "bad" or potentially bad and a claim, often supported in the case of executives, to be especially "good" or worthy. That these polar experiences of oneself should coexist is not so much the point as that the conflict has escalated. The individual experiences himself, largely unconsciously, in opposing terms; the concept of self is divided sharply in two, with each part resting at opposite poles of the goodness-badness continuum. Literally polarized, the individual splits off the definition of himself as bad or as in serious jeopardy of becoming bad (Klein, 1975; Hirschhorn, 1988).

In structural terms, growth can come in the form of de-escalating the internal conflict or, to use Klein's language, reversing the splitting and thereby making oneself whole (Klein, 1975). "Reparation," again Klein's term, is the "tendency to repair, to make *whole* again, that which has been split or torn apart. People enter a stage . . . in which they integrate their once split awareness" (Hirschhorn, 1988, p. 205). In the view of Hirschhorn, a "Kleinian," a maturing person develops an "integrating" tendency to go along with, not to replace, the splitting tendency.

In the overly expansive executive, integration pays off in improved performance and relief from inner turbulence, if the person can go against his expansive grain and reconcile himself to the human condition with its finiteness, fallibility, and vulnerability. Reparation enables the person to pursue goals and efficacy, yet without the desperate edge to his motivation. Chris Cramer illustrates this well: As he removed the superman suit and its imperative for daily superhuman feats, he remained strongly motivated. There was no danger, as some executives fear, of his losing his intensity, his potency. He did rid himself, however, of the excesses brought on by trying too hard.

Reparation pays dividends psychically as well as in the executive's relationships because of the intimate connection between our experience of ourselves and our experience of others. A split awareness of ourselves is also a split awareness of the world

around us because when we disown our own "bad" parts, while keeping the good, idealized parts for ourselves, we have a tendency to project the bad parts onto other people (Hirschhorn, 1988, pp. 203, 205). As a result, our relations with these perceived "bad" people also become polarized and split. But as we accept ourselves, we take back the misattributed bad parts and then become able to experience both ourselves and others as both good and bad, as whole. We cease dealing internally and externally primarily in blacks and whites and learn to work better with shades of gray (Hirschhorn, 1988, p. 212). For a capsule description of this process see Figure 2.

To illustrate this interrelationship, let us consider the case of a high-ranking functional executive in his mid-forties. Although he had reached executive levels only recently, he had held his present job long enough to demonstrate a strong ability to formulate and implement strategic change. His reputation in the organization was

Figure 2

Self-Redefinition

(which consists of some movement from
split to whole consciousness)

Split Consciousness

A polarization of "good" vs. "bad" in one's concept of oneself and of others, including denial of the bad in oneself and the attribution of it to others.

In expansives, "good" equals a sense of worth derived from mastery, and "bad" equals the absence of mastery or doubts about being masterful.

Whole Consciousness

A greater unification of the good and the bad in one's concept of self and others.

In expansives, this means a better acceptance of their own limitations and insecurity and a corresponding greater appropriate tolerance of the same in other people.

good; he chose to work with us to see better how he was perceived by his coworkers. In the feedback session he discovered a tendency to idealize himself, which showed up, for example, in his consistently overrating himself on managerial dimensions also rated by his coworkers. A firstborn son, he had working-class parents who expected a lot of him: "Being the oldest makes you different. Being the only boy probably focused more of my parents' attention on me. Academically, I was the strongest in the family; my parents probably encouraged that. I was fairly protected from the ups and downs of the family, especially in high school. My sisters took the brunt of the chores. My parents may have put up a bit of a wall around me. Obviously, I must have gotten some favoritism." His parents struck an implicit bargain with him—reminiscent of Chris Cramer's experience—whereby he was given a favored, privileged position in exchange for high achievement. In the process he evidently became hooked on an idealized image of himself. "Wanting to impress," he told us, "that's bothering me slightly." Yet he could now see evidence of it: "My predecessor undersold this organization in the corporation. I set out to sell and impress management. I see now that's partly because of who I am."

With his subordinates his split sense of self seemed not to hurt him, probably because he saw them as an extension of himself: "They're *my* team." With them he did not use the aggressive, tweaking brand of humor that he did with his peers and his superiors. At first, he and I chalked it up to his rebellious streak. But this interpretation gave way to recognition of a certain competitive feeling in himself. He confessed: "I might bait peers. . . . With peers and superiors, the identification is not there. I look upon them [many of whom were located at some considerable distance from him] almost as part of another company. Maybe there's an element of superiority, a feeling that 'we've done a lot more [in this function]!'"

Although he liked teamwork and got credit for being team-oriented within his function, he had trouble generating a feeling of teamwork with peers. Initially in the session the difficulty was inexplicable to him but it became understandable to him when he got in touch with the sense of "me being up here and they being down there." As he came to accept his "wanting to impress"—a reparative insight—he began to see the possibility of easing "the good-bad thing," as he called it, with his peers.

It should be noted that the same process can work in reverse: If an executive depolarizes a relationship, it will tend to have a reparative reverberation within the executive. Hirschhorn explained that "to repair a present relationship [that is, with an external 'object'] is also to do some repair of relations to one's internal objects. The present relationship becomes a symbol of many past similar relationships so that habitual modes of relating are to some extent restructured" (1988, p. 211).

A characterological shift in an expansive executive, then, consists of a self-redefinition that moves the individual beyond a sharply conflicted experience of self and away from the locked-in extremes associated with that internal conflict. In Vaillant's (1977) view, the individual moves over time to a higher level of adaptation where the coping mechanisms are more flexible, more mature. Although people with immature defenses construct a fortified, self-reinforcing world that resists change, they can, as adolescents do, grow out of these patterns. Vaillant found that "immature mechanisms of defense are not just a rigid armor that deforms the personality but can be a dynamic mode of adaptation. They are not always the incurable bad habits they appear on the surface" (pp. 158-159).

These patterns, set in childhood or early adulthood, and once adaptive for the situations in which the executives earlier found themselves, come to require revision. To function more effectively, the executives need to adapt their adaptations. But this developmental requirement is a tough pill to swallow when the qualities in need of change are the very things that made the executive successful in the first place. If an executive can evolve his basic pattern of adaptation further, then the result is a "ripening of the human personality" (Vaillant, 1977, p. 227). As much as a career transition, this is a midlife transition that can spell the difference between stagnating and staying vital in the second half of one's lifetime.

An example of adapting an adaptation came to us from an executive who had become something of a legend in his company for engineering dramatic turnarounds. After the feedback session in which we had read a number of admiring comments as well as comments on his powerful presence, he came on his own to the following realization, which is riddled with expansive imagery: "I have created a larger-than-life image—which isn't healthy—with

my children and the people who work for me. . . . There was a time when I needed it—10 years ago when I was building the image. [But] I've let the inflated caricature get out of control. . . . I've got an exaggerated image that my kids have to live up to. There's an exaggerated power image the people who work for me have to live with. I can see it creating problems, and it's not healthy for me either." This executive's internal redefinition is graphic and palpable. He adopted the heroic role in part as an antidote to insecurity early in his career, but very much to his credit he has started to get a perspective on his heroism as it became less adaptive for him.

HOW EXECUTIVES CAN CHANGE— THROUGH A DOUBLE INTERPLAY

Executives can correct or at least ameliorate major and deeply ingrained problems if two conditions obtain. First, behavior adjustment and characterological shifts must go on *simultaneously*; and second, the effort to change sets up a mutually reinforcing interaction between self and situation. Thus, improvement comes about once the process is set in motion as a result of a double interplay—between adjustments on the surface and below the surface and between the executive's involvement and that of the people around him or her. The section that follows conceptualizes this doubly intertwined process and demonstrates how it occurs but does not offer a formula or set of procedures for bringing about change. This is not a manual.

Combining Inner and Outer Change

As shown earlier, change on the inside may have to accompany efforts to modify an executive's external behavior if the desired improvement in performance is to take place. What is often needed is an active interplay between self-discovery and experiments with new behavior. At the start of work with one upper-level manager we were impressed with the way he understood the developmental process awaiting him as he sought to overcome some people problems: "I recognize that the situation is pretty serious, that I need to improve both as a manager and as a person. Some things that you need to work on are part of who you are—part of your values and character—and not just management style. . . . This [being confronted by his boss with a performance problem] is a harsh reality because I thought I was beginning to show progress. But these career pathologies hold me back from a major breakthrough. So I want to stop and take advantage of the opportunity to make me a better person, not just for [the company] but for my family and friends." In another case an executive entered the process expecting only to modify his behavior and realized during the feedback session that more was involved: "I expected that we would

put together a plan [for me] to act different. What I got hit with was a challenge to be different."

In this latter case the executive, Larry Cerone, in good standing and looking for ways to get better, worked simultaneously on the inner and outer planes. Characterologically, he discovered himself to be a perfectionist—one subtype of the expansive personality (Kaplan, 1989). This meant that he had spent a lifetime devoting himself—and subjugating himself—to his "orderly world." It meant "having to do everything and having to do it perfectly." His perfectionism translated on the job into, among other things, a talent for introducing order and systems as well as a penchant for being judgmental and sometimes harsh with people who failed to adhere to his organizing principles. At home he combined a quite loving attachment to his wife and only child with an almost finicky demand that they hew to his standards for orderliness and structure. His wife complained, for example, that it wasn't enough for their daughter just to clean the family car once a week; "It had to be 110 percent." When his daughter finished the job, he inspected her work meticulously.

The prospect of change made Cerone uneasy. To relax his perfectionistic demands on himself raised the irrational specter of total irresponsibility. To inch away from the extreme position he occupied characterologically awakened in him a fear of swinging all the way to the opposite pole. In fact, as we have seen with a number of other senior managers, his unrelenting drive probably arose originally out of a fear of being lazy, irresponsible, worthless, and represented a campaign to eliminate that possibility. He confessed: "I have a great fear of complacency." At a behavioral level, the perfectionistic grip on him was so strong that he literally could not imagine waking up on a Saturday morning without a full schedule of activities mapped out in advance.

Yet with encouragement and guidance from his family, a consultant at work, and us, Cerone called into question the domination within of his particular brand of expansiveness and dared to try out some new patterns of behavior. On a vacation, for example, he restrained himself from introducing the customary degrees of structure and, although it was something of a struggle, he permitted himself to partake of the pleasures of spontaneity and relaxa-

tion. His daughter, a college student who joined her parents on this vacation, found the change remarkable: "On the way to Florida I was bracing myself because I don't look forward to vacations with my dad. Everything is highly structured. We know what we're doing every hour. I was really surprised with how he went with the flow all week! I could tell it was a struggle for him. . . . I don't know how much of it has to do with the work with you folks, but he's a much more reflective individual. He's consciously trying not to be as much in control."

This combination of an internal and external shift also made a difference at work where he remained no less dedicated to his job but shed his, for want of a better term, negative habits. A high-ranking subordinate put it this way: "I am sure the experience has been helpful to him. I see a number of changes, all for the better. The Larry Cerone of old I might have been reluctant to go to if I had a difficult issue. He might have responded with criticism, reprisals, threats. I'm exaggerating: Let's call it blame-placing. He has really opened up his vision a lot to the point where he is now a really good sounding board. In the past you tended to want to work around him. Now there is an openness in communication style."

Contrary to what one may assume, especially if one is a partisan of intrapsychic development, self-redefinition taking place at a deep level does not have to precede intervention into behavior. When modifying ingrained patterns, the process can start either at the surface or below the surface so long as both levels soon come into play. The argument that one or the other type of intervention works best is reminiscent of the old debate in social science over whether the most effective way to correct a social problem like racial discrimination is to alter people's beliefs (through education) or change their behavior (through legislation). Clearly, as an agent of change you are better off if you don't have to choose but can employ both methods.

Behavioral intervention and characterological intervention support each other. An executive like Larry Cerone who gains some perspective on his inner workings sharpens that understanding by reducing the insight to concrete actions. Especially when it comes to appreciating what it means to give expression to a previously suppressed aspect of himself, it helps immeasurably to gain firsthand

experience with it. To comprehend better the meaning of freeing himself from the strict dictates of his "orderly world," Cerone needed to leave the realm of abstract reflection and enter the world of concrete action. So experiments with new behavior can, importantly, serve as tests of new constructions of self. By the same token, an executive's effort to break a bad habit is aided by appreciating the deep personal significance of the habit. If Cerone had committed to leave his most recent vacation unstructured simply out of acquiescence to his daughter's request or demand, he would probably have had a harder time living up to the commitment than if he understood the departure, as he did, in terms of his compulsive striving. Cerone's reform of his harshly judging, overly structuring relationship to himself went hand in hand with his reform of the same sort of interaction with others.

Harnessing Self and Situation

The second interplay indispensable to executive development, as with development of adults in general, is that between the efforts of the executive himself and the efforts of significant others in his environment. This is where the notion of embeddedness reenters the scene: For an executive's performance to improve in a lasting way, the change must be supported not only by the individual but also by his situation at work or at home or both. The executive's personhood, which shapes the way he performs his job, rests on a platform consisting of his current definition of himself and the way the people around him relate to that definition and define themselves. Kegan (1982) put it this way: "The person is an 'individual' *and* an 'embeddual.' There is never just a you" (p. 116). The executive's "holding environment" does just that: it holds or supports the individual's current definition of self. But it can become a "letting go environment" that supports the individual's reconstruction of himself (Kegan, 1982) or that, in the form of a "prying loose environment," actually initiates such a reconstruction. Growth takes place when the individual or situation (or both) stops confirming his present identity and, by disconfirming it or affirming a new one, dislodges him from it. Lynd (1958) argued that "at each

stage of the developing personality there is . . . a surplus internal energy and the possibility of enhanced support from social relations that makes it possible for the individual . . . to incorporate the resolved conflict into a strengthened identity" (p. 206).

Of course, it is not accurate to construe the executive's environment as monolithic. Instead, even if we limit the environment to those people in a position to significantly confirm or disconfirm the executive's sense of self, the environment breaks up into significant others at work (e.g., boss or bosses, peers, subordinates) and those outside of work (e.g., spouse, children, parents, siblings, friends, clergy). The influence wielded by those parties varies with the executive's relationship to them, which in turn depends on how much psychological weight he places on that category of relationship. For example some expansive executives orient themselves upward, as did Chris Cramer, and therefore invest superiors with real power to influence their self-definitions.

In addition to correcting the false assumption of the environment as undifferentiated, we must also not assume that it is static. If significant others are to play a growth-supporting role, they themselves may have to grow. Subordinates perform a developmental service by getting over a tendency to idealize a superior. Superiors, such as Chris Cramer's, become much better coaches when they get beyond split experiences of their subordinates, alternately expecting perfection and overreacting to problems. Of course, it helps if the organization's climate is in general supportive of development.

Ingredients for Change

Development resulting in improvement on the job can occur if the executive and the people surrounding him join forces in overcoming their respective ambivalence so that three essential ingredients for change become available. As shown in Figure 3 (next page), the three ingredients are: *data* indicating a need for change, *pressure* to make a change, and *support* for the person's inherent value as a person or manager. (This model is adapted from one showing how managerial action does and does not take place [McCall & Kaplan, 1990].)

Figure 3
Ingredients for Significant Growth

SOURCE	DEVELOPMENTAL FUNCTION	IMPACT ON SENSE OF SELF	EMOTION
Data { introspection (self) feedback (others)	Disconfirmation	Loss of self-esteem	Hurt, depression
Support { ego strength, sense of self-efficacy (self) emotional, social, or organizational support (others)	Affirmation	Reassurance about self	Comfort
Pressure { drive to grow (self) external pressure to change (others)	Moral commitment to change	Appeal of re-formed self	Hope and apprehension

One of our executives was a case in which this ambivalence was not overcome. He knew that his effectiveness depended on turning over more control to his lieutenants, but at the same time his characterologically based fear of failure, acute when the stakes were high, kept him from delegating well. Matching his ambivalence, his lieutenants simultaneously champed at the bit and were reluctant to confront him directly, in part because he rebuffed such initiatives when they were occasionally made. The lieutenant with the best relationship with him and the most interpersonally skilled person on his staff was the prime candidate to grapple with him. When this lieutenant finally decided to have a conversation, which a consultant would facilitate, he still had misgivings because the executive was difficult to read and capable of harboring resentment that could later come back to haunt this subordinate. The executive's superior represented another node in the system of ambivalence. While the superior saw the problem of overcontrol, he valued the results the executive achieved and he personally shied away from giving constructive criticism of this kind to anyone. At home, family members also recognized the executive's overactive need for control and at times resented it but even more strongly appreciated what he had become in the world and the personal contribution he made to the family. Furthermore, they tended to buy his rationales for exercising control.

Data. Explicit indications of a need for change are typically scarce because of the executive's elevated situation; and even when explicit indications are present, executives tend to resist them out of a need to be perfect. Yet there are exceptions to what seems to be the rule that executives generally do not get feedback on the way they behave as leaders. Most executives have a close associate or two in the organization whom they can confide in and from whom they get occasional candid observations about themselves. In our sample, Frank Lindler found it easiest to talk about himself with women subordinates (Kofodimos, Kaplan, & Drath, 1986). One of them, who was not shy about taking him on, said: "People don't generally say a lot about how they feel about others. I always felt free to do that with Frank, to express whatever I was thinking." Lindler would also, on rare occasions on the road, sitting in a bar late at night, invite a subordinate who was in his inner circle:

"Every time we go somewhere—every six months or so—we stay up late talking one-on-one. Once he asked how he was perceived by the division. He's curious, just like anyone else. We all have insecurities. He needs some feedback that he considers genuine. It only happens over a drink." Interestingly, one other executive in our sample, Bill Flechette, was also most likely to talk about himself with his women subordinates. This tendency may result from the stronger skills or readiness of women, whom in general both men and women are more likely to confide in (Jourard, 1964). It may also result from the fact that these women confidantes are not rivals.

Flechette also used his wife as a confidante: "My wife will tell me if I am getting obsessed with trivialities, overreading a situation, overworking myself. She also points out what I am doing well." Bill had also struck up a relationship with a consultant who "has always seen me as a diamond who needed cutting and trained himself as the diamond cutter. He has brought me face-to-face with some issues I wanted to face and others I didn't want to." Superiors can be a good source of input, but careful critiques from bosses are rare. An exception to this rule of little or no feedback from above tends to be individuals in their late 30s or early 40s who are relatively new to executive-level positions. Frank Lindler, reflecting his personal need to get "adopted" by top management, managed to get coaching from not only his boss but also his boss's boss, the CEO.

Other people—especially spouses and others who are close to the executives—help when they can overcome an inclination to collude with the executive, who may apply subtle or not so subtle pressure to conform to his wished-for view of himself. To succumb to this pressure is to hold onto a definition of the executive when one needs to let go. The wife of one executive managed caringly to corroborate criticism he received. According to him, she said, supportively: "There is smoke so it's worth seeing if there's any fire. You are intense, results-oriented, and sometimes you look upon the results as more important than the people. I could have told you that twenty years ago."

Whatever an executive's sources of data on himself, the information only has an impact if the executive concludes that there is something wrong and that that something at least in part includes

him. (The "something wrong" could be missed opportunities just as well as out-and-out problems.) Mike Boylan, although generally not receptive to feedback, had a subordinate or two whom he respected and trusted enough to sit still for direct talk. One of these individuals reported, "Whenever I have a problem with Mike I tell him to his face. He may shrug his shoulders and think I don't know what I'm talking about, but he doesn't challenge me." What defensive executives like Mike Boylan take away from such a conversation is that other people see a need for change. But the stimulus by itself guarantees nothing. The governing internal variable is whether the executive takes responsibility—neither too little nor too much—for his piece of the problem. Hank Cooper responded to possible derailment with soul-searching. In contrast, Mike Boylan's career was sidetracked, but by itself that event, along with considerable criticism in the feedback report, was not enough to convince him of the need for change. Another executive suffered from chronic and potentially life-threatening health problems yet improbably refused to take the symptoms seriously, his intensity level and threshold for pain were that high.

Naturally, executives, like the rest of us, must sort through the criticism they receive and separate the wheat from the chaff. It takes a combination of street smarts and self-honesty to cull out the false praise and the false blame. One executive, when asked how he responded to feedback, showed that he very much considered the source: "It depends who is giving it. If someone I trust, like my wife and [a certain trusted subordinate] give it, I take it seriously. I would be suspicious of [a certain distrusted subordinate] because there is so much self-interest involved and because he is attempting to manipulate the situation. With [the personnel manager], a genuine soul, I take it straight from him. With [a trainer], an enthusiast, a stream of consciousness, I go away and think about it."

Criticism contributes to development only if the executive experiences it as *disconfirming*. What gets disconfirmed is some aspect of the way the executive leads and perhaps also those aspects of him personally that account for that behavior. For disconfirmation to occur executives must see something wrong or missing with respect to their ability to meet the demands placed on them by a present job or potential future jobs. They must see themselves as,

in this sense, having a problem. As we shall see later, they must also have a strong enough sense of self to take the blow that disconfirmation delivers to their system.

Disconfirmation is always accompanied by a certain amount of discomfort or pain. Recognizing that they have a problem can hit executives hard. Starting out the feedback process with us, one high-potential manager explained in a telephone conversation how it felt to learn from his boss that he had a problem and one serious enough to warrant a development program: "It hurts, to be real frank with you. It really hurts. It's very difficult to deal with. A guy calls you in and tells you: 'There are some things you do well, but there are some other things you don't do well around dealing with people.' I went home smarting." The feedback provided in development programs also can be hard-hitting. One department head reported six months after receiving an extensive feedback report that "the process has been extremely valuable. There's been lots of growth. But the process has been internally, personally destructive at times. The book [feedback report] comes like a slug between the eyes. Early on in the process I resisted the idea of flaws, but I have since realized I do have flaws."

Another executive, Russell Wright, participated in the same program because, after being promoted to his present large-scope job, he developed performance problems that threatened both his job effectiveness and his career advancement. He made it clear how painful the experience had been: He called it "devastating" and pronounced it "one of the worst days of my life." The reasons for the pain were threefold. First, he had known the problems existed, but they were far more serious than he had realized. Second, he was someone whose sense of self-worth was thoroughly tied up in his career and to whom appearances meant a great deal. Third, being especially sensitive to contraindications of his worth, he keyed on the criticism in the report and disregarded the praises. By the next day he had done an admirable job of recovering from the shock, with the help of a long phone conversation with a loving wife who saw the feedback as valid but not devastating. Much to his credit, he was able to absorb the significance of the report. It is important to note that, although he didn't express it directly, he showed signs of being relieved to know exactly where he stood. The pain of recognition can also be a certain comfort in now seeing clearly what one

is up against, of resolving the tension that comes from sustaining an illusion.

It would be a mistake to conclude that the hurt comes entirely from the force of the feedback's impact. In actuality, much of the pain results from the *loss* brought about by the disconfirmation. The executive at first experiences the disconfirming feedback as wounding because it cuts into his favorable definition of himself. It strips away a chunk of the good opinion of others that he had imagined he enjoyed. Expansives are particularly prone to experiencing a sense of loss and the associated pain because they are so highly invested in mastery, both the reality of it and the image. Russell Wright reeled, as anyone would, from the news that he was in deep trouble at work, but the emotional impact was overdetermined by his negatively expansive penchant, touched on over and over again in his feedback report, for wanting to look good. In his interview with us he had, in passing, made a connection between his immense drive to succeed and a sense of insecurity he had had as a teenager. To be confronted, after his long climb up the hierarchy, with grave shortcomings put him back in close touch with the feeling of insecurity. It deflated him. It was a loss in the sense that it robbed him of some of his sense of how competent and valued he was. A pretension it may have been, but the disillusionment was painful nonetheless.

Pressure. The possibility of significant, lasting change hinges on the executive's ambivalence about change and the ambivalence of those around him or her at work and at home. The executive and the relevant others must overcome their ambivalence about acting on the data indicating a need for change. For the data to result in change, the balance needs to be tipped on the side of a vigorous, sustained effort to change. Tipping the balance means releasing forces powerful enough to overcome the inertia in the executive and the situation.

Pressure, which turns the potential for development into reality, is generated by a decision that the need for change is compelling enough to warrant making it a priority. Consulting their values, the players conclude that the performance problems are consequential enough to require a change. In this sense the decision to apply pressure has a moral aspect to it.

The executive, armed with fresh indications of his shortcomings and bolstered by support from within or without, does not automatically make the moral commitment to change. In a process that isn't as logical as it may sound, he first considers the trade-offs in seeking improvement versus standing pat. Perhaps granting that he will never attain perfection, he considers whether his strengths sufficiently outweigh his weaknesses. Further, given the limits on his time and energy, he will ask whether the potential payoffs are worth the effort. Contributing to a decision to leave well enough alone may be the elevation-related factor of his considerable career success to date: Why tamper with a winning formula (Kaplan, Drath, & Kofodimos, 1985)? The negative side of his ambivalence may express itself in a further conservative impulse born of a fear of failure: If I try to change, would I succeed? This was one of Larry Cerone's reactions once he understood the sort of change he might make. This anxiety is heightened in expansive executives because of their strong need for mastery.

The positive side of an executive's ambivalence can express itself powerfully in this same drive to mastery—the motivation to build competence. Also on the positive side, executives can bolster their confidence in their ability to effect the change and increase their commitment to it by referring to previous successes in self-development. Hank Cooper took heart that he could change interpersonally from the fact that as a child, laid up in bed in a body cast, he had resolved to go on a campaign of health and fitness and for 30 years had successfully carried on that program. In contrast, Mike Boylan labored at a disadvantage in this respect because his style of leadership had remained virtually unchanged over 25 years, and so he had no dramatic early successes in self-improvement to demonstrate to himself that could do it. Adaptability begets adaptability.

Executives can bring pressure to bear on themselves. One department head took advantage of the boost that superiors can give to a developmental effort by meeting with his boss, his boss's boss, and his boss's boss's boss to discuss his plans for developing himself as a corporate leader. Although none of them had previously come forward with their plans or wishes for him, they all responded to his initiative and helped him set priorities for his

development. By sharing his intention to change with these superiors, he applied a gentle pressure on himself to make good on his promise.

What can members of the executive's work and family systems do to help the executive reach the threshold necessary for change? A boss, or someone at an even higher level, can be among the most effective in gaining leverage on an executive. For an executive to hear from a top executive, perhaps the CEO, that he is in danger of topping out or even of losing his job, can do wonders for the executive's motivation for change. Russ Wright is a prime example. This can be acutely true for executives who care greatly about enjoying the high opinion of their superiors.

Pressure then can be invaluable to an executive's development. Another way that system members can apply it usefully is to help the executive follow through on plans for change. A project in self-development is fundamentally no different than any other project: It succeeds or fails according to how well it is conceived, organized, staffed, implemented—in general, managed. Unless it becomes and remains a priority, it will fizzle out. Unless the executive follows through, the project—especially an attempt to modify behavior—will amount to nothing. The executive can be the one who takes responsibility for managing a change project, but it is often desirable for another party, a boss or consultant or friend, to share some of that responsibility.

The importance of the managerial aspect of development was brought home to us around one executive's efforts at improving the way he managed his time. Out of a planning meeting came the idea that he would make better use of his executive secretary. A month later, the consultant happened to ask the secretary whether the executive had talked with her. She said, "Yes, he asked me to badger him to do his paperwork." Thus, instead of sitting down and retooling the relationship with his secretary, he had made a casual comment or two. The consultant arranged a conversation between the two of them in which the executive clearly stated his need and the secretary disclosed both her interest in an expanded role and her reluctance arising from the difficulty she often had influencing the executive. Out of the conversation came an agreement for how the two of them would work together differently. Their relationship

was still slow to change, but at least he had clearly defined the role he wanted her to play. The lesson, then, is that it is unwise to leave even what seems like straightforward implementation to chance. An executive's good intentions alone may well not be enough, and pressure should be generated by holding the executive accountable for following through on plans for development.

To play their role in pushing for change, other people too must overcome their reluctance, which can take the form of the elevation-related conservatism we saw earlier. "Why," coworkers may well ask, "should we put this successful executive's capability at risk by pursuing an improvement? Besides, his management style has carried him this far. Why meddle with it?" In addition to a part realistic and part superstitious belief, this may serve as a rationalization for not getting involved. Coworkers may also elect to stand on the sidelines out of skepticism that the executive can change or out of uncertainty as to whether the change will be constructive or destructive. Paralleling the executive's own lack of confidence, theirs may spring from a perverse wish that he fail or from a reluctance to hope for relief from the executive's bad habits only later to have their hopes dashed.

One executive illustrated graphically how the presence or absence of pressure can prove decisive in making change. Out of the blue his boss, with backing from the CEO, had strongly encouraged him to get extensive feedback preparatory to adjusting his style. The executive said he "was forced" to go through the assessment and development process but having done so he now, a year later, realizes how "valuable the experience was" for him. His boss, whom he trusted and who had recently had a similar experience of stock-taking and change, did the forcing. In the preceding year this executive had had occasion to go over his data with three other senior managers who like him "faced a comeuppance; people who had been in the company for a number of years, who are suddenly in need of change—interior plastic surgery." They too were being pushed into self-assessment and readjustment because their styles were interfering with their effectiveness in current jobs or threatening progress to more senior jobs.

Just as the presence of pressure spurred him to introspect and to make changes at work, the absence of pressure at home was

associated with a lack of change there. During the feedback session it had come to light that this particular executive had partially disowned his son for marrying someone not in his league educationally nor career-wise, despite the fact that his son had otherwise followed in his father's footsteps, including getting a degree in engineering and going to work for the same company. About this situation the executive explained: "He did extremely well in school and I was very proud of him. But on a personal basis I'll never accept that he married as he married. So that's gotten in the way of our relationship. I keep him at arm's length." I suggested that this was a form of punishment, and he responded: "Yes, in a way it is. It's my way of saying that this is how I'll treat you for doing what I didn't want you to do. I've chosen not to get over it." Note that he admits to holding onto his displeasure deliberately. I next asked him how it felt to have estranged himself from his pride and joy. His response: "I feel very uncomfortable." He was troubled by the fact that he had been able to adjust his behavior at work but had made no such adjustment at home. "It should be easier to move in this way in one's private life. But in the work environment I've been forced to change. No, I had an option when they told me—change or else. I could have told them, 'Screw you, I'll see you!'—which I would have done without this process. But I've not been forced to make changes in this other situation."

Why is he able to refrain from making changes at home? A traditional male, he is the patriarch of his family and as such holds relatively uncontested authority, even with his wife. "My wife doesn't oppose me, though she doesn't necessarily accept it [the position he has taken with their son]. Eric [his son], who is never reluctant to say what he thinks, is the strongest of my children. But he's not said anything. He seems to accept it. He has not made a fight of it and continues to be friendly." So what is the opposing force that keeps this man from reconciling himself to his son's choice of spouse? "I've examined it and I've seen that it would be relatively easy to change but there's another force greater than the change. An element of the force is what I perceive to be a rejection of my authority. Another element is: 'I know what's best for you!' At work I don't respect blind loyalty. I respect people who will challenge me. It's very interesting. But the way I conduct myself in my

family is according to a model: The decisions I make are right and if I back away I am rejecting the model." One gets the feeling that the executive yearns to make peace with his son but can't release himself from the grip of his principles and, in particular, his operating principle for running the family. To relent in this instance would be to revise his role as the figure of high authority in the family. What makes the change especially difficult is that he borrowed the "model" from his father, whom he admires uncritically to this day. Still, one gets the distinct feeling that the change would happen, along with healing effects for his relationship to his family, if only there were an effective opposition. In the offing is a change in his relationship to his father as an internal object, as something his father represents psychologically. This revision in the way he relates to his father internally is part and parcel of any revision in the way he relates to his son.

Pressure, then, is necessary to significant development. As Jung (1983) wrote: "Without necessity nothing budes, personality least of all. It is tremendously conservative, not to say torpid. Only acute necessity is able to rouse it. . . . It needs the motivating form of inner or outer fatalities [read: pressures]." At the same time if external pressure must be applied to get the individual off dead center, the pressure must also ultimately be internal. As Jung (1983) argued: "Personality can never develop unless the individual chooses his own way, consciously and with moral deliberation. Not only the causal [i.e., external] motive—necessity—but conscious moral decision must lend its strength to the process of building the personality." The individual must come to feel that the change in question is the right thing to do and that for moral reasons it must be done.

Support. At least as important as the data indicating the need for change and the pressure, moral or otherwise, to make the change, is the support necessary for the individual to undertake and sustain an effort to change. Given how hard it is for any of us, and perhaps for expansive executives in particular, to discover that we are not as masterful and not seen to be as masterful as we had thought, what is to prevent us from responding to the call to developmental battle by giving up? For people hooked on mastery and the heady rewards that come with it, defeat can bring on depres-

sion, if only short-lived (Miller, 1981). Kegan (1982) spoke of the painful predicament of being oneself and at the same time composing oneself anew. These are "the moments when I face the possibility of losing myself. The moments that Erikson refers to hauntingly as 'ego chill.' The chill comes from the experience that I am not myself, or that I am beside myself" (p. 169). The present danger for the expansive executive is that the vision of a recreated self gets obscured by pain and self-loathing. An expansive person prone to splitting could potentially, under the stress of being devalued professionally and personally, flip from staunchly denying the bad in himself to seeing nothing but the bad.

Russell Wright sagged visibly during the feedback session when the criticism began to weigh heavily on him, and he in effect told us, "I'm not sure I can go on." We tried to correct for his overreaction by pointing out that, as bad as the feedback was, it wasn't as bad as he saw it. We also chided him gently for overlooking the very real strengths reflected in the report—strengths that meant he had enough credit with his coworkers that he, in contrast to some other executives we had known, was in a position to make a comeback. That night his wife, after listening to him read chunks of the report over the phone, said much the same thing.

Executives going through the hurtful diminution that comes with criticism or failure, badly need expressions of support for their inherent value as persons and professionals. Without the support, which can come from within as well as from other people, executives find the encounter with their weaknesses unbearable and escape through some defensive maneuver. For executives to face up to their failings, they must be reassured of their fundamental worth, faults and all.

To inflict what amounts to a wound on themselves as they undertake change, executives must obtain strong support from within themselves or from one or more people in their lives. In Russ Wright's case this internal support came in part from a strong religious faith. No matter how strong, intact, self-confident, and even invincible executives may seem, they can be vulnerable, especially when they expose a weakness and start struggling to overcome it. As they undergo the disconfirmation that change involves, they need a steady dose of confirmation of their value as execu-

tive and person. They need to feel that the other parties to the process are for them, not against them; that any attempt to confront them is motivated by an interest in building them up, not tearing them down. They must feel that their critics' intent is constructive, not destructive; that their intent is to "add value."

Russ Wright ended the feedback session by anticipating his return to work where he expected a cool reception from his boss, who had not coached Russ nearly as much as he would have liked. But he was in for a pleasant surprise: "The first couple of days back were difficult but it got progressively better. I wasn't looking forward to my first meetings with Zack and Susan [the division manager and human resources manager, both of whom had criticized him roundly in the report]. The first morning back Zack came into my office [rather than Russ having to seek him out as he had feared] and said: 'How did it go?' I told Zack: 'Good stuff, and I'm committed to working on it.' Zack said: 'I knew it would be difficult. But I wanted to get your attention and I wasn't getting it in the subtle ways. When I'd bring something up, you'd explain it away or in some way vindicate yourself. What I said in the report is between us. What I am saying to corporate is: 'I've got a bright capable person and he and I are going to work together to make it happen.'" It appeared sincere but things have a way of changing. Then he came over to me and put his arm around me and said: 'I'm going to help you get promoted.'" Russ's superior gave him emotional support and came across as working off of seemingly trustworthy, constructive motives. But perhaps more important to Russ who, with a negative expansive's concern with appearances, had all along feared career-jeopardizing exposure, Zack provided political support: He let Russ know that he had kept his criticism confidential and had left Russ's high standing with corporate intact.

Russ went on to describe his encounter with Susan, the human resources director, whom he knew shared with his boss a critical view of him: "Then shortly after the talk with Zack, the scenario with Susan Elston was much the same. I told Susan: 'They were a difficult two days. There was more there than I had expected to see. . . . I've identified a couple of areas to work on.' Susan said: 'Great. You've got my total support. I'll help in any way I can.' I felt she meant what she said. She and Zack are likeminded in what makes me tick and what I have to do organizationally. . . . I'm past

the point of challenging their perceptions because the evidence is overwhelming.”

Russ Wright trusted the human resource director's overture, and his trust in his boss's benevolent posture solidified further when they ran into each other at the office over the following weekend as Russ was making an extra effort. Russ: "I went in on Saturday to see how a major project was going and to show support, be visible. Zack came in. I gave him a status report on what was going on. Zack said to me: 'That's [the kind of thing] I want to see.' Then he told me a lot about how he wanted projects to be managed. He sat down with me and started mentoring. He did some coaching and teaching. That's not common. That felt good." I asked about his trust level then. "It went up. Zack told me: 'You have to give more and I'll do more.'" At another point in our session Russ volunteered: "Things are coming together in a way that suggests Zack means what he says. It's not a ploy. It's beginning to look like his motives are pure. That's comforting."

On top of the strong support from these two key individuals with control over his fate, he received "even stronger support from the subordinate group." Myron, a key subordinate, for example, "really extended himself. My second day back he came to me and said: 'You're going to get through this thing and be a stronger person because of it. I've already seen noticeable things you're doing better with others that you have done with me. You'll be all right.' We talked about social things, which we hadn't done before. He'd just joined a country club and asked me: 'When can you play tennis?' That was a key change." Russ clearly appreciated the triple affirmation he received from Myron—as a person, manager, and friend worthy of being invited to a prestigious club where Russ did not have a membership.

In addition to all the support that quickly formed at work, Russ had the benefit of his wife's honest, noncollusive caring. He also had the active interest of two close friends, whom to his credit he had let in on the process and who called the night he got home and coached him about the mental attitude to take during the difficult return to work.

In the end Wright was able to face the people who had made him face up to his shortcomings: "I've concluded that they were sincere in their motive to have me go through this as a corrective."

The process helped because they didn't see me as approachable. . . . They're not playing games." The key ingredient that gave him the heart to come to terms with them and their message was their unmitigated support. "So I mustered enough to get through the day. I realized I'd elevated the thing to a life-and-death thing, but I had time to scale it down the night before going back to work. The calls from friends came that evening and they helped. What really helped the next day was Zack coming to me. So a lot of the emotions started to subside."

To repeat: As important as social and emotional support is to executives personally, political support is also crucial, in light of how important efficacy and career success are to expansive types. As they confront their inadequacies, executives generally need ratification of their worth as managers and reinforcement of their value to the organization.

The strength necessary to combat the depletion of psychological reserves that occurs when one's weaknesses come to light can issue from within or from other people. When it comes from within, we call it ego strength, a strong enough conviction of one's inherent worth that the individual can take the blow to his self-esteem and before long bounce back. This ego strength can build as a manager progresses beyond the strong doubts about one's abilities common in young adulthood and early career. The superior of a department head who had recently turned forty commented that, early on, his subordinate "didn't accept criticism, but he's better able to tolerate it now. He's matured." To say that managers gain ego strength over time means that they become more confident in their abilities and in themselves, but it does not mean that the insecurity inherent in expansives goes away. The two psychological states—a certain comfort with one's self-efficacy and the anxiety about inadequacy—coexist. When the individual's sense of self is too weak to tolerate the blow to self-esteem, the defenses kick in and the developmental value of disconfirmation is lost.

Support from other people, also vital, can come from the people doing the confronting, from "noncombatants," from fellow executives themselves going through the same experience. It is highly desirable that the individuals providing the feedback find it within themselves to offer genuine confirmation of the recipient in

some respects while disconfirming him in other respects. In general, people will take criticism better from individuals they trust, who care about them and think well of them in general. But this can be difficult for people whom the executive has victimized, since the temptation will be to respond in kind. Having been treated, from time to time, as if they were totally "bad," they may, if they can bring themselves to tell off their oppressor, judge him in the same polarized way. The temptation may be as strong in people in authority who hear reports of the executive's transgressions and identify indignantly with the people who were his targets.

Professional Intervention

These ingredients—data, support, and pressure—can come together on their own, without professional intervention, to produce growth and change in executives. Development can occur naturally when and if the individual and his or her relationships and human contexts cooperate to instigate and then usher the person through a period of transition and growth. If anything, "natural therapy," as Kegan (1982) called it, is preferable because there aren't enough helping professionals to go around and natural processes are more likely to happen preventively and not just remedially. Vaillant (1977) conceived of the development process as an apprenticeship in which the focal person grows by means of a close relationship with one's spouse or friends (or, for that matter, a therapist) who themselves employ more mature coping mechanisms. In our terms, these people do less splitting of themselves and the world; they and their relationships are more integrated.

When professionals get involved, their role is to arrange for data to surface (or to provide it themselves), for support to become available (or to provide it themselves), and for pressure to be applied (or to provide it themselves). The stakes are no higher than when executive development happens on its own, except that professionals are more often called in when the executive resists development and is in a state of tension internally and with his environment. But to intervene in a person's life in this way is to exercise considerable power, so the professional bears a heavy responsibility

to use that power cautiously, conscientiously, competently, and caringly.

As a safeguard and as a means of promoting growth, our present practice typically uses a combination of a clinician who specializes in the inner work with an eye toward the leadership issues and a management specialist who specializes on the leadership issues with an eye toward the inner work. It helps also for the service to be performed in part by a person within the organization who knows the executive's world well and who can perhaps be more available than an external person. The internal person also serves as an advocate, letting the world know that the executive's learning is "for real." It goes without saying that the thornier the emotional issues, the more important it is to use a clinically well-equipped professional. But clinical work per se is not a condition when the executive has the ego strength to make the adjustments with support of significant others, whether professional or not.

The professional who assists an executive's personal growth takes a role described in exaggerated terms by Herman Hesse (1968) in his novel *Narcissus and Goldmund*. Narcissus, the young teacher, said to Goldmund, the teen-aged student and friend:

"Look," he said, "I am superior to you only in one point: I'm awake, whereas you are only half awake, or completely asleep sometimes. I call a man awake who knows in his conscious reason his innermost unreasonable forces, drives, and weaknesses and knows how to deal with them. For you to learn that about yourself is the potential reason for your having met me. You've forgotten your childhood; it cries for you from the depths of your soul. It will make you suffer until you heed it.

... Being awake, as I've already said, makes me stronger than you. This is the one point in which I am superior to you, and that is why I can be useful to you. In every other respect you are superior to me, my dear Goldmund—or, rather, you will be, as soon as you've found yourself.

My use of this excerpt has misfired if the reader sees it as an arrogant portrayal of the professional's superior role. Instead the passage is meant to highlight an important aspect of the professional's superiority, which is greater acquaintance with inner life—"the innermost forces, drives and weaknesses." In general, for executives to develop significantly they must enter into a complex, demanding process of reappraisal and readjustment. Genuine

movement occurs when the requisite ingredients are present: (a) a demonstrable need or opportunity for change, (b) a sufficient priority placed on the change, and (c) adequate resources, especially support and validation of the person. The executive must get involved personally, not just by making a concerted and sustained effort but also by being willing to take stock of self. He or she must invite or let other people into the process as critics, confidantes, nurturers, guides, and goads. The executive, together with this loose collection of developmental helpmates, must elect to divert energy from involvements in the external world to the exploration of the self.

CONCLUSION

The person is integral to leadership and leadership development. Just as effectiveness is enlightened self-deployment, or the aware use of self as an "instrument" to meet the demands of the job, so development often means not just outer adjustment but also inner evolution. Even in those cases when behavioral change by itself is enough, it helps for managers at least to consider the inner significance of the behavior, so that they know better what they are up against in making the change. In this way managers can keep from making facile assumptions about their ability to manipulate their behavior. A better appreciation of their own internal properties enables them to manage themselves better as they attempt to manage others. At the back end of the assessment process one senior manager observed: "I'm seeing the competing factors in my psyche better than ever before. I'm not sure I'll change them but maybe I'll cope with them better."

If this paper has achieved its objective, it has demonstrated that for significant development to occur intervention must generally take place on both the inner and outer planes. I would, however, classify this as an investigation into the process of characterological change and not a definitive study of outcome. Our data is not at the point where we can draw conclusions about how frequently executives can make characterological shifts and in turn how often these shifts translate into improved performance on the job.

Based on the data available, we can begin, however, to appreciate the possibilities and limitations of growth in expansive executives. It is clear that extremely negative expansives have a poor prognosis for change. Executives whose essential leadership posture is highly defensive or highly aggressive, when presented with information to that effect, characteristically respond very defensively or aggressively. One such executive who tended to take an embattled stance toward people outside his organizational unit had put his relationships with key superiors in jeopardy, even though he had performed admirably in a new corporate venture. The problem arose because he walled off his organization to protect it from outside invasion, some of it real and some of it imagined. He had great

difficulty seeing this about himself because his leadership strategy resided in his personal strategy of vigilant self-protection, with the underlying vulnerability and pain that that strategy suggests and that he at one point made poignantly explicit to us. Unfortunately for them and their organizations, executives like this one represent classic cases of self-perpetuating cycles that are extremely difficult to break.

At stake for executives like these are the constructions they long ago adopted to organize their life experience (Kegan, 1982). Consisting of beliefs about themselves, other people, and the world, these concepts of self and the world took shape as a workable response to early experience. As maladaptive for present circumstances as they may be, the individual resists changing these concepts because they were learned too well initially. The extent to which an adult clutches a self-defeating construction and its associated pattern of behavior seems a rough and ready measure of the pain suffered at the time the person made the original adjustment. In the case of the executive described above, we never learned—because it remained inaccessible to him—what childhood experiences led him to adopt his beleaguered view of the world, but it was evident from indirect data that he must as a child have found the world a most unsafe place psychologically. For him and other executives like him it seems that the pain was so intense that they put in place exceptionally strong defenses designed to prevent a recurrence. When threatened, these individuals become so rigid and the measures they take to pursue the cause of protecting their esteem so extreme that they unwittingly sacrifice another good cause—their continued growth and adaptation.

For expansive executives whose early experience stopped short of branding them irrevocably the prognosis is better. If, like Larry Cerone and Chris Cramer, they open themselves up to discrepancies between their self-construction and their present experience, and if they in fact place themselves in situations designed to give them fresh experience that may challenge their self-concept, then their constructions of themselves and their conduct will continue to evolve. These executives can reform themselves; they can temper overdeveloped patterns and bring up previously latent ones. But, it seems to me, once an expansive, always an expansive. To the

extent that the drive to mastery is so powerful as to be "addictive," then even after significant growth these executives, like the recovering alcoholic, are never free of the "addiction" and must always consider themselves "recovering." To take an example, Larry Cerone will never free himself completely of the dictates of his "orderly world" (nor would he want to), and he will always need to work at making other worlds salient by having inner dialogues and by creating structures that support alternatives. Mind you, I am speaking to the excessive portion of an executive's drive and not to the essential organizing patterns that give meaning to their lives and work. Further, my assessment of the extent of change possible in expansive executives assumes that they remain in jobs and organizations that support and require expansiveness.

Therefore, I believe that the fears of executives and their organizations that personal growth will hurt an individual's effectiveness, perhaps by decreasing his or her investment in work, are exaggerated. No executive in our sample has, upon understanding himself better and undertaking growth, lost his dedication to work. Those individuals who have learned to moderate their heretofore enormous drive to accomplishment on the job and off the job have discovered fulfillment in relationships and the restorative effects of relaxation that, if anything, enhance their effectiveness.

In the challenging times we live in, it seems to me that organizations will profit from having their leaders get over developmental humps that otherwise make them a decidedly mixed blessing or that keep them from making the fullest contribution possible.

Notes

¹I am aware of the potentially sexist use of pronouns when referring to executives in general, and I have considered several ways of dealing with this problem, including: doubling pronouns, as I have done here (but this can be very clumsy in those sentences in which several pronouns are required); using the plural instead of the singular form (but this is still considered incorrect usage by most people); resorting to hybrid formulations such as "s/he" (but, in addition to its barbarity and unpronounceability, this has no corresponding form for him and her, his and her); alternating the use of masculine and feminine forms (but this can get complicated, as well as result in strange formulations); using the masculine or feminine form exclusively, making it clear that it should not be understood as indicating one sex. This last approach is basically the one I will take in the remainder of this paper. I have chosen the use of the masculine form because the group I have studied and, regrettably, the class of executives in general are largely male. On occasion, however, I will add feminine pronouns as an added precaution against inadvertently promoting sexism. It should go without saying that when referring to a specific executive I use the appropriate pronouns.

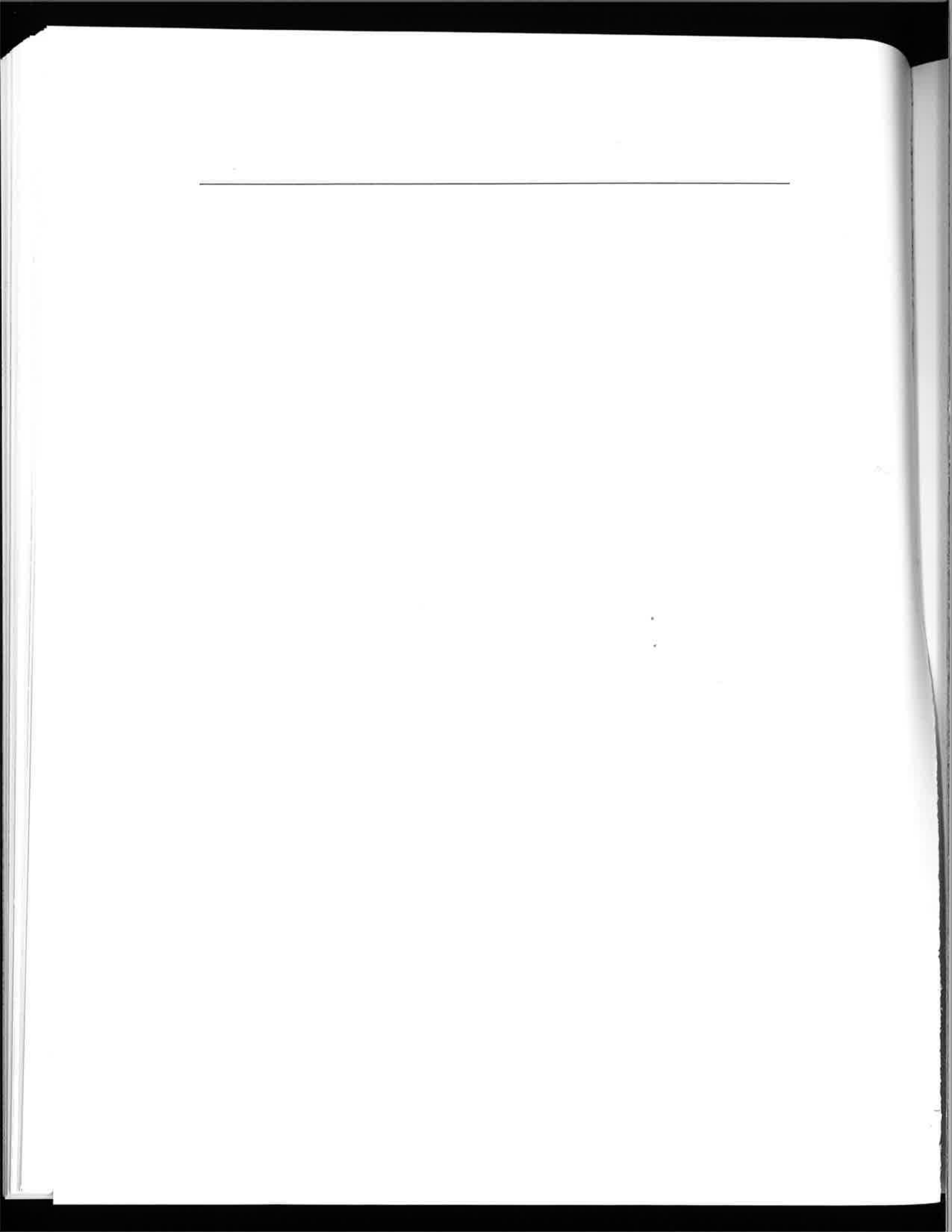
²While this paper is about executive development, it is also—because executives are simply a subset of the managerial population—about management development in general. By the same token, since managers are just a subset of the adult population, this is in a sense also a paper about adult development, especially the development of high-achievers in organizational settings.

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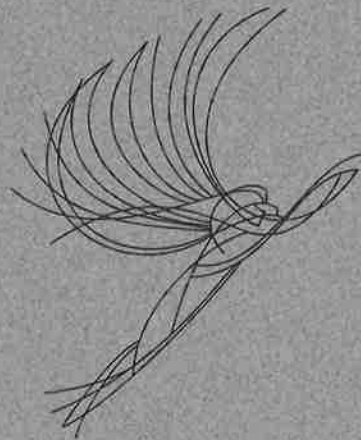
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