

# THE SIX INGREDIENTS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

HOW LEADERS CAN MAXIMIZE THEIR  
PERFORMANCE IN TIMES OF CHANGE



## INTRODUCTION

### THE LEADERS DILEMMA

#### Managing today and predicting tomorrow

Companies need to manage today's business and efficiently respond to all on-going changes to maintain their current business. But it is not enough. At the same time, they need to predict tomorrow's changes and proactively adapt to new demands.

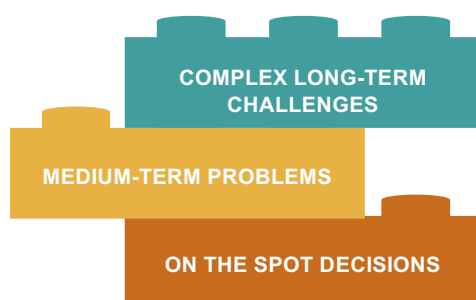
Change management efforts have become more and more challenging. The world is changing so fast that as soon as companies design where they want to go, the reality is they can move in a completely new and unexpected direction.

That's why making decisions can feel like looking for answers in a crystal ball.

#### Leaders and managers are under greater pressure

With stress coming from uncertainty, unpredictability and complexity, you as a leader can feel like you need to have super-human abilities to sustain such a fast-paced, demanding environment.

In times of change leaders and managers must make three types of change-related decisions:



1. **Complex long-term challenges** such as accomplishing a complex strategic project, succeeding in a new high-stake role.
2. **Medium-term problems** such as defining a new strategy, dealing with resistance, holding team members accountable.
3. **On the spot decisions** such as managing conflicts or handling sudden out of control events.

## STRESS AND SELF-MANAGEMENT

### Everybody perceives changes differently

To some people change and uncertainty create only a little stress. Whereas some other people get extremely stressed by any change. It may not matter whether it is a change of a meeting or a company-wide reorganization.

A study by Psychologist Suzanne Kobasa shows that stress resistant professionals exhibit The Three C's.

### The Three C's of stress resistant people are: Control, Challenge and Commitment

If you exhibit The Three C's, you encounter fewer negative effects of the stress.

**Control:** You believe that you are in control of your life, you focus on what you can influence instead of what is out of your control.

**Challenge:** You perceive difficult situations as a challenge – an opportunity to learn and grow. You genuinely enjoy challenges.

**Commitment:** You create a sense of purpose in what you do, therefore you feel good about what you do and you are committed to it.

Self-management is the ability to take responsibility for your own behavior and well-being. In times of change, self-management plays a substantial role in managing stress.

**Self-management is about demonstrating behaviors that induce feeling of control, challenge and commitment in time of change and uncertainty.**

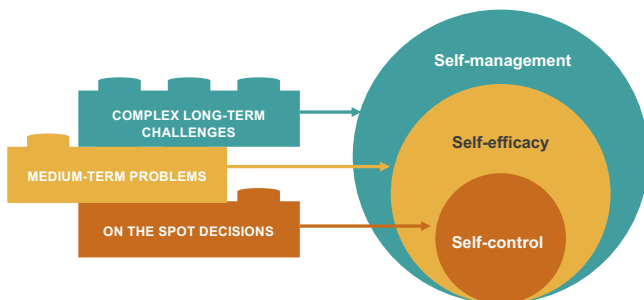
### THREE LEVELS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

From work and study in this field I have identified three levels of self-management that feed into each other:

**Self-control:** the ability to manage emotions when on the spot decision is necessary.

**Self-efficacy:** the ability to assess, plan and maintain steady progress of medium-term projects. Hold yourself accountable to deliver results on time.

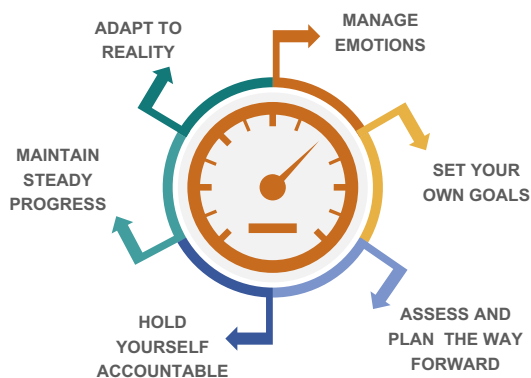
**Self-management:** the top level, building on self-control and self-efficacy. On top of these, you are also able to hold yourself accountable for your own goals (you maintain steady progress even if nobody else is holding you accountable). And you are able to adapt your behaviors to reality.



## THE SIX INGREDIENTS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT

Different resources define self-management in a variety of ways. The repeating themes are emotional management or self-control, setting goals, planning and organizing together with perseverance.

I have structured the ingredients of self-management in a way that contains those themes together with one important element on top of that: “adapting to reality”.



1. Manage emotions
2. Set your own goals
3. Assess and plan the way forward
4. Hold yourself accountable
5. Maintain steady progress
6. Adapt to reality

**Emotional management is the steppingstone for each and every component of self-management.**

In the next section I will cover each ingredient in detail.

### 1. MANAGE EMOTIONS

#### Emotions impact your decision making

Emotions are a powerful driver of your actions, but have a significant impact on your decision making. Human brain consists of several parts. One of them is prefrontal cortex (rational brain) where you process information, analyze, sort and decide. Another part is a limbic system (emotional brain) which creates emotional response. The neuroscience shows that when the emotional brain (limbic system) gets highly active, it reduces sources for the rational brain (prefrontal cortex).

#### When emotions are high, you are unable to think clearly

You probably know the feeling. You got angry, and said or did things you regretted the day after. Research shows that different emotions impact your decisions. For example, anger instils confidence, so when you feel angry you tend to take more risks and minimize the negative consequences of those risks.

#### Change triggers automatic responses

In times of change, the emotional brain (limbic system) can get highly active. The human brain is programmed to seek certainty and avoid uncertainty. Change can be perceived by your brain as a danger if it is uncertain whether the change is for good or bad.

The uncertainty triggers automatic reactions called 3F response: Fight, Flight, Freeze. These automatic

reactions impact how you feel and how you act in the moment of change, without you thinking too much. Fight response triggers aggressiveness and opposition, Flight triggers active avoidance and Freeze triggers no-action and standing still. These reactions in the moments of change slow down the ability to decide and make progress.

**The more you understand and manage your emotions the better your decisions will be**

## **ACTION POINT**

Being aware of emotional reactions, having the capacity to manage them and process them in a healthy manner, ensures more mental resources are available for the prefrontal cortex (rational brain). It helps you to better respond to changes and take higher quality decisions on how you should move forward.

## **2. SET YOUR OWN GOALS**

As a leader and a manager, you need to respect the expectations and goals of the company, but you must be also a driver of changes within the organization. That includes shaping on-going changes in a way that is beneficial to the company and to the employees.

**Ensuring your own goals will support the company's goals**

When you take a step back from what is required from you and lean into your own ambitions and desires, you will usually define goals that are not only intrinsically motivating, but also aligned to the company's goals.

**Intrinsic motivation as a driver**

Why does that happen? Intrinsically driven professionals unconsciously or consciously reframe professional objectives into an intrinsically motivating activity. E.g. Your work goal may be to "Define a strategy for your department", and to make it intrinsically motivating you will naturally convert the activity into something you enjoy.

If you like to learn, you will reframe it into "a learning experience", if you like a challenge you will reframe it into "a new challenge to tackle". The feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction will not come from completing a strategy for your department, but from learning something new or accomplishing a challenge.

When you set their own goals, you will increase your own drive, clarity and focus.

**Setting your own goals gives a feeling of control**

## **ACTION POINT**

In times of change, you can perceive a strong lack of control. But if you keep reframing external events into your own goals that are inspiring and make sense, you will have a stronger feeling of control and a greater emotional stability.

## **3. ASSESS AND PLAN THE WAY FORWARD**

Assessing and planning the way forward in times of change is not only a necessary strategic step, but also a method of how to deal with uncertainty.

**Planning helps to deal with uncertainty**

As mentioned earlier on, human brain craves certainty. It deals with uncertainty by creating hypothesis on how things will go in the future. Often your brain will create several scenarios, including both negative and positive outcomes. If there is no clear vision of how the future could go, the brain tends to switch among these options. When you cannot predict the outcome of the situation, the brain is in emergency mode and you get extremely stressed.

Creating a plan for what the journey could look like, calms the neuro-system and it feeds your brain with certainty.

**A plan decreases complexity and creates focus**

By breaking the journey into small parts, you can prioritize which step comes first, which second.

Then, in a calmer state of mind, you can better delegate and focus on each step without overthinking what will come after.

Without a plan, you cannot know whether you are on the right track and whether you are maintaining steady progress.

#### **A plan helps to deal with challenges in a new way**

By taking time to assess and plan the way forward, you are able to get out of automatic reactions that happen in times of change. Human brain likes to simplify things and likes to solve situations in patterns based on the past experience. Human brain is designed to resolve problems quickly. The problem is that by trying to get a quick solution, you end up doing things in the same way over and over (your habits take over).

#### **ACTION POINT**

Taking time to assess and plan the way forward enables doing things differently and therefore getting different results. This is a very important, probably essential, skill in today's world of new complex challenges, for which yesterday's solutions do not work anymore.

### **4. HOLD YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE**

When you hold yourself accountable, you take a full responsibility for your actions, your decisions, your promises, and also for your well-being and professional satisfaction. You do not only stay committed to your goals, but also to the goals of the organization.

#### **You are accountable for your reactions**

When you as a leader hold yourself accountable, you understand for what you are accountable and for what you are not. You understand that the external environment is only a trigger, and you choose your own reaction. You take a full responsibility of what is happening inside – your thoughts, emotions and how you express those in your behaviors.

#### **To hold yourself accountable, you must find motivation to do difficult things.**

If you hold yourself accountable you are not mindlessly pushing yourself to do what you need to do or what you promised to do. As Dorie Clark says: “to hold yourself accountable, you must find motivation to do difficult things.”

As a leader, or manager, it is an ongoing challenge to find new ways how to motivate yourself. You must find ways to structure and organize yourself, in order to be accountable, so you deliver on your goals and promises.

#### **Holding yourself accountable creates more results and thus more confidence**

Holding yourself accountable creates a sense of control and commitment in the 3C's theory. The self-accountability generates more results and more confidence to pursue new challenges without getting stressed over them.

#### **Great leaders and managers create a positive example**

#### **ACTION POINT**

Being a great leader means creating a positive example by holding yourself accountable – you hold high standards for others by holding high standards for yourself.

Leaders who hold themselves accountable, build the credibility and trust that are necessary when change is happening. No-one wants to follow a loose cannon into the unknown.

### **5. MAINTAIN STEADY PROGRESS**

When the enthusiasm of a new initiative fades away and the reality hits, it is not always easy to maintain steady progress and keep going. Doubts can kick in and maybe the results are not visible as quickly as you hoped for.

### **Changing directions too quickly will waste time and resources**

An extremely important component of maintaining steady progress is that you pace yourself. It can be easy to “lose your nerve” and start taking erratic actions. Running in all different directions will not create steady progress. It might feel good and give a feeling of “handling things” or “being responsive”, but will end up in wasting time and resources.

Change management theories claim that quick changes are usually the ones which fail the most. Successful changes are changes that build slowly, allowing people time to absorb the changes and adapt to them.

### **Failures open the right way forward by closing the wrong doors**

When going into the unknown, there will be moments where reality will be different than what you imagined, which may be experienced as a failure of some sort. To maintain steady progress, is important to have a system in place on how to deal with failures, how to learn from them and keep progressing towards the big goals.

### **ACTION POINT**

By pacing yourself, you can maintain steady progress and sustain the change.

When you as a leader learn to accept and deal with your own failures, you will also allow failures within your teams and thus create a powerful learning environment.

## **6. ADAPT TO REALITY**

In the current world you need to quickly adapt to new technologies as well as to the new ways of working (remote work, flexible desks, self-managed teams, virtual teams, etc.) Practically it means, that every day you need to flex your habits, you need to unlearn what you used to know and learn new ways of doing things.

### **Technological changes require that you adapt your behaviors and habits way faster than before**

The more you learn and train yourself to flex your current habits, develop new habits, and adapt to new situations, the easier you will progress and the quicker you will adapt to changes.

### **But what is the reality?**

If you want to better adapt to the reality, you need to pay attention to a false sense of objectivity. Each person has a specific way how to receive, sort and use external information.

### **The four roadblocks to clarity**

The Neuroleadership group defines four roadblocks to clarity of distance that prevent coaches from staying objective during coaching sessions. The same roadblocks prevent you seeing reality objectively in your daily life.

#### **1. Detail**

“When you get too much detail about a topic, you get stuck in the detail and literally cannot hold another point of view in your mind.” If you are an expert can lack the capacity to take a step back, simplify the information and get to a clear conclusion.

#### **2. Filters**

“You all have filters that are like colored glasses”. You basically notice what you want to notice and what is important to you at the moment. If you want your project to be successful and have a theory on how things could go, you might have a tendency to notice only supporting arguments. By being clear on what you want to notice, you can use this filtering system to your benefit.

#### **3. Agenda**

“An agenda is an interest in things turning out a certain way.” In case you want to be perceived as a competent leader, you can only notice and present your actions in the way that support the image of a competent leader.

#### 4. Hot Spots

“It is any topic about which you feel an emotional charge.” For example when a team member gives you a feedback on your project and it feels like a criticism, you might turn it down as irrelevant even though it can point out to an important fact.

By being aware of these perception roadblocks and observing what is happening inside of you, you will build greater self-awareness that enables you to take decisions based on objective facts, rather than subjective perceptions.

**By processing external information objectively, you can take a step back and better decide on the way forward**

#### ACTION POINT

The big challenge is to keep adapting to reality and not to deviate from the big goal. Is it just a matter of time to achieve the goal and you need to persevere, while making a couple of adjustments? Or is it time to stop and completely change direction, because the big idea was not the right idea?

## SUMMARY

**Self-management is a combination of six ingredients representing six behaviors**

These behaviors help you as a leader to grow The three C’s: Control, Challenge and Commitment that demonstrate stress resistant people.

**Self-management requires all six behaviors**

Self-management happens only when you combine those six ingredients. Everybody is different and everybody has different strengths. The key is to leverage behaviors that come more naturally to you and build systems of support mechanisms that reinforce behaviors that are more challenging. Support mechanism can be a good system of reminders to sustain steady progress, reinforcing self-accountability with adding an element of external accountability in the form of an accountability buddy, etc.

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When one behavior is missing or strongly under-developed it will become a barrier to self-management. You may need to address this behavior as a priority and pay extra attention in the long-run to reinforce this behavior.

## REALISER MODEL

Building self-management is a continuous self-improvement journey that never stops. In order to facilitate the journey and speed up the learning process, I created the REALISER model.

**REALISER model facilitates the journey of developing self-management mindset and skills**

REALISER model is an eight step process that helps leaders to progress through changes in a structured way. It brings their focus to the right things in times of change, so that they can easier forge through uncertainty and adapt to changes.

The REALISER model is taught in a self-management program that helps you build a strong self-management mindset and the personal skills necessary to continue the journey on your own.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Lenka Grackova**

Is ADKAR certified Change Practitioner and ICF accredited coach (ACC). She holds an MBA in International Management from Vlerick Management School. She has 20 years of commercial experience in an international environment.

Her professional experience and coaching expertise led her to discover the power of self-management. She is the author of the REALISER Model. As a facilitator of change, she works with leaders and managers to help them sustain their self-management while driving changes in their organizations.