Individual Differences and Development in Organisations

Edited by Michael Pearn
Chartered Occupational Psychologist, Dublin, Ireland

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Individual Differences and Development in Organisations
Wiley Handbooks in the Psychology of Management in Organizations

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Individual Differences and Development in Organisations

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Michael Pearn
Chartered Occupational Psychologist, Dublin, Ireland
This Handbook is dedicated to my parents Barbara and Harry
who, in 2002, the Handbook’s year of publication,
celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary
Contents

About the Editor ix
About the Contributors xi
Series Preface xvii
Preface xix

PART I  APPROACHES, CONCEPTS AND THEORY

1 Learning Theory and the Construction of Self: What Kinds of People Do We Create through the Theories of Learning that We Apply to Their Development? 3
John G. Burgoyne

2 Who Am I? Self-development in Organisations 17
Monica Lee

3 Cognitive Science and Individual Development 35
Jane Henry

4 Individual Differences can both Facilitate and Limit Individual Development 53
Kevin R. Murphy

PART II  INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

5 Old and New Models of Cognitive Abilities: the Assessment Conundrum 73
Bruce Torff and Edward C. Warburton

6 Personality, Style Preference and Individual Development 89
Adrian Furnham

7 To Use Competencies or Not to Use Competencies? That Is the Question 107
Paul Sparrow

8 Emotional Intelligence and the Development of Managers and Leaders 131
Victor Dulewicz and Malcolm Higgs

PART III  ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND PROCESSES

9 Assessing Individual Development Needs 155
Karen van Dam

10 Individual Assessment as an Integrated Tool in a Systematic Management Development Process 175
Jörg Iten

11 Development Centers: a Neglected Perspective 187
Jac N. Zaal
PART IV DEVELOPMENT METHODS AND PROCESSES

12 Choosing a Development Method 207
   Alan Mumford

13 Teamworking and the Implications for Individual Development 229
   Roger Mottram

14 Informal and Incidental Learning in the New Millennium: the Challenge of Being Rapid and/or Being Accurate! 249
   Victoria J. Marsick, Karen E. Watkins and Jacqueline A. Wilson

15 Individual Development and Self-managed Learning 267
   Ian Cunningham

16 Using Social Networks in Organisations to Facilitate Individual Development 285
   Rob F. Poell and Ferd J. Van der Krogt

17 Online Networking and Individual Development 305
   Gilly Salmon

PART V ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

18 Developing Individuals for Leadership Roles 321
   Cynthia D. McCauley

19 Developing Innovation in Organizations 341
   Nigel King

20 Diversity and Individual Development 363
   Rajvinder Kandola and Satya Kirtara

Author Index 379
Subject Index 383
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The dictionary definition (Random House, 1987) of ‘handbook’ runs as follows:

- A book of instruction or guidance, as for an occupation; a manual.
- A guidebook for travellers.
- A scholarly book on a particular subject, often consisting of separate essays or articles.

These definitions are placed in the historical order of their appearance in the language. So the earliest use of a handbook was as a set of instructions which members of particular occupations kept to hand, in order to be able to refer to them when they were at a loss as to how to tackle a problem at work. The most recent definition, by way of contrast, refers to a scholarly book consisting of separate essays or articles.

It is the modest ambition of the Wiley Handbooks in the Psychology of Management in Organizations series to reverse the course of (linguistic) history! We want to get back to the idea of handbooks as resources to which members of occupations can refer in order to get help in addressing the problems that they face. The occupational members primarily involved here are work and organisational psychologists, human resource managers and professionals, and organisational managers in general. And the problems they face are those that force themselves with ever greater urgency upon public and private sector organisations alike: issues such as how to manage employees’ performance effectively; how to facilitate learning in organisations; how to benefit from a diversity of employees; and how to manage organisational change so that staff are engaged and supported.

Now the claim to provide something useful for professionals, rather than a set of scholarly articles, is a bold one. What is required if such a claim is to be justified? First, practising professionals need a clear theoretical basis from which to analyse the issues they face and upon which to base their solutions. Practice without underpinning theory is merely applying what has worked in some situations to other situations without knowing why, and hoping that they will work there too. This is blind empiricism.

Theory without practice, on the other hand, is mere indulgence. It is indulgent because theories in applied science can never be properly tested except by application, i.e. their attempted use in solving problems in the real world. A handbook in the original sense of the word will therefore contain elements of practice as well as statements of theory. The Wiley Handbooks in the Psychology of Management in Organizations seek to demonstrate, by descriptions of case studies, methods of intervention and instruments of assessment, how theory may be applied in practice to address real organisational issues.
It is clear that Work and Organisational Psychology is a core discipline for addressing such issues as those listed above, for they are all issues that depend for their solution upon an understanding of individuals’ behaviour at work, and of the likely effects of various organisational interventions upon the stakeholders involved. These latter include employees, customers, shareholders, suppliers, and the wider community (Hodgkinson & Herriot, 2001).

The success criterion for these handbooks, then, is a simple one: will professionals find them useful in their practice? If they also help in the development of apprentice professionals, e.g. by being used on training courses, then so much the better. The field of Work and Organisational Psychology is currently at risk from a failure to integrate theory and practice (Anderson, Herriot & Hodgkinson, 2001). Theory and research often seem to practitioners to address issues of interest only to academics; practice appears to academics to lack careful empirical, let alone theoretical, underpinning. These handbooks will help to bridge this divide, and thereby justify the title of ‘handbook’.

What is clear is that if we psychologists fail to impact upon the urgent issues that currently crowd in upon organisations, then those who claim to address them better or faster than us will gain power and influence. This will happen even if the solutions they provide offer little longer-term benefit to clients. The Wiley Handbooks in the Psychology of Management in Organizations provide a resource to help professionals serve their clients more effectively.

This second handbook in the series is edited by Michael Pearn, and addresses a highly important current issue. The increasing rate of organisational and technological change requires employees to develop new skills and knowledge and new ways of relating to colleagues, customers and clients. How do people differ in terms of their capacity to develop in these ways? To what extent do we have to accept that certain capabilities and characteristics are simply not amenable to development? And how do we best facilitate the development of those that are? Some would argue that the answers to these questions are close to being provided by scientific research. The different perspectives on development taken by the distinguished contributors suggest, on the contrary, that a wide variety of assumptions, values and practices currently populate this area. Perhaps this is just as well, since a similar variety characterises the organisational clients we seek to serve.

REFERENCES

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN INCREASINGLY CONNECTED WORLD

The world as a whole is becoming increasingly connected, which creates both opportunities, and challenges, for individual development in organisations. Ever since the exploratory voyages of discovery from Portugal in the fifteenth century, instigated by Henry the Navigator, the world has become increasingly connected and at an ever faster rate. Before the voyages of discovery the recorded and the unrecorded journeys and migrations of people from one part of the world to another made connections, but it is over the last 500 years the world has increasingly become more interconnected. Now the speed, multiplicity, interactivity and diversity of connections are growing at an accelerating rate, especially in the last two decades with the advent of the internet, e-commerce and e-learning.

Opportunities for access to information of all kinds, the ease of interactions across traditional boundaries, the sheer speed of developments, and ease of communications for individuals and for organisations, all combine to create a different and more complex world in which organisations, made up of individual and diverse human beings, seek to go about their business and achieve their goals.

Paradoxically, the very connectedness of the world as we know it today with its potential for becoming a global village and for universal understanding and cooperation, brings with it a heightened sense of differences between groups, cultures and traditions. Exposure to and awareness of individual and group differences are enhanced with the rapidly evolving technologies of information and communication. The increased capacity, speed, and ease of access to communication across diverse groups brings with it an increased potential for mutual understanding and tolerance. Yet the same technologies make it easier for diverse groups (some feeling marginalised and alienated from others) to assert their identities and strike at the heart of more powerful and dominant groups. Never has it been more important for us to seek to understand, accommodate, and harness individual differences (often used as the basis for group attributions and stereotypes) we find in the people who comprise the political, public, commercial and voluntary organisations in society.

Yet in that 500-year period of accelerating world connectedness, and for that matter the tens of thousands of years that preceded it, we have shared the same physical apparatus that makes us distinctively human. In particular, we possessed the same brains and bodies that are recognisably similar across tens of millennia. The physical attributes include the ability to walk upright, and to put finger and thumb together, but above all it is the, still little understood, human brain that makes us distinctive as human beings. The physical human brain has been described by Greenfield (2000) “as weighing only some three pounds and with the consistency of a soft boiled egg” and yet has the capacity to give
each and every human a unique sense of themselves as individuals, separate from the outer world, distinct from all other human beings, and at the same time with a sense of belonging to groups of one kind or another. Ultimately it is the brain that gives our sense of ourselves as individuals and our identities as members of groups of one kind or another, and enables a sense of humour and also spirituality. We still know very little about how the brain achieves these things.

In my view, the increasingly integrated discipline of the new neurosciences (see for example, Gazzaniga, Ivy and Mangan, 1998; Rose, 1999) which seek to combine the concerns and contributions of biology with psychology, and also philosophy, anthropology and sociology without the myopia and restraints that result from disciplines when they see themselves in competition with each other, will ultimately lead to significant breakthroughs in our understanding of how we develop our sense of ourselves as individuals, how we learn, create meaning, and a sense of belonging, and well-being. Psychology has an important role to play in devising frameworks and theories to aid the understanding that leads on to the creation of tools and processes that are empirically tested and proven and which result in genuine individual development.

As the world becomes increasingly connected and individuals are better and/or more educated the balance of power between the individual and the employing organisation has changed. Formerly, confident and domineering large organisations could not only offer jobs or careers for life, they could also dictate how their employees behaved. In essence, it was largely a relationship of dependency and compliance on the part of the individual employee, resisted in places only by collective action but not always with satisfactory outcomes. In general, the large employers, or any employer in periods of excess labour supply, maintained the upper hand. But with the decline and fall of once seemingly invincible organisations (Kanter, 1989), and the advances of the new technologies the change in the power relationship between individual and organisation has accelerated with the advent of e-business (Schwarttz, 1999; Kelly, 1999; Kanter, 2000) and even virtual organisations (Hedberg et al., 2000). Bridges (1998) has described the de-jobbed organisation, Cooper (1999) the short-term contracting culture, and Hakim (1994), in an aptly entitled book *We Are All Self-employed Now*, argues that we must all take full responsibility for our career mobility and job productivity and that without a “self-employed” mentality many people will not be able to cope with the rapid changes in the world of work.

One symptom of the changes in the world of work in the last few decades has been manifested in changing concepts of careers, and the nature of the psychological contract between employer and employed (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995), and Hirschorn (1998) has examined the implications of leadership and followership in the post-modern organisations with new concepts of authority relying less and less on command-and-control and more and more on cooperation, shared interests and psychological identity as individuals.

But what are the implications for individual development in organisations? There is a sense in which individual development is always occurring, in that to varying degrees learning and developing is continuous, even when we are asleep, (the possible exception being when someone is in a coma). By individual development, *from an organisational perspective*, I mean the planned and unplanned activities, which can be the conscious and unconscious basis for changes in individuals that result in them being better equipped to perform current and future roles within the organisation, and more prepared and ready
for effective execution of future roles. By contrast, individual development from the person’s point of view could be anything that leads to an increased sense of well-being, satisfaction and fulfilment, which may or may not overlap with the organisation’s needs.

Individual development in an organisation at its worst is ad hoc, inconsistent, reactive to short-term needs, and bears little or no relation to the core purposes of the organisation, or where it does, is mechanistic and authoritarian. At its best, individual development in organisations is comprehensive, closely allied to the prime purposes of the organisation, is strategic, and recognises the dignity and as well the diversity and complexity of human beings, including the capacity for self-management and self direction.

Both the individual and the organisation have a stake in the outcomes of individual development activities and processes in organisations. The individual wants improved, or sufficient, performance capability, and the associated sense of well-being (from whatever source, be it spiritual or material or psychological or any combination). The organisation wants motivated and committed employees (or members) whose contribution to the goals of the organisation is improved as a result of activities associated with individual development, whether or not the individual or the organisation is the prime instigator.

Recruitment, selection, induction, training, performance management, organisational culture, values and the daily experience of people all play a part, but the organisation that seeks to harness and develop the potential of its members, and thereby increase their capability of contributing successfully to the achievement of organisational goals, is likely to increase its organisational effectiveness and, where appropriate, its organisational competitiveness.

THE MORAL DIMENSION

Ideally, there should be congruence between the individual’s needs and the needs of the organisation. The relationship between individual and organisation raises many issues at a moral, philosophical, and practical level. To what extent should organisations seek to change the attitudes and behaviour of their employees? How much conformity with organisationally defined norms is it reasonable to expect? How much freedom to differ is the individual allowed or expected to have? Who decides what is best for the individual? What are the rights of the individual vis à vis the organisation? The answers are not straightforward and are dependant on contextual factors.

Some organisations require or condition their members into thinking and behaving alike, and to refrain from thinking for themselves beyond tightly defined limits, at least in their role as employees. Call centre operatives have little choice in the way they behave and speak to customers. The individual chooses or declines to be a member of such an organisation and to accept its rules. Other organisations encourage individualism, as do some cultures, as opposed to those who favour collectivism (Handy, 1991; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997). The latter organisations could be said to be suppressing the individual in the interest of the greater good of the organisation and what it stands for. This was the prevailing attitude adopted by many organisations, especially in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The power of the organisation to dictate to the individual how he or she should behave (and even think) is declining rapidly, but probably more slowly in more traditional, hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations.
THE SOCIAL DIMENSION TO INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

It is all too easy to disregard the social dimension when thinking about individual development in organisations. Ultimately all learning and development occurs in the brains of individuals but almost all learning takes place in a social context. It is by sharing with, interacting, and confronting others that we learn. There is always a social context defined by reference to others, though some go so far as to say that being individual is illusory and that we have evolved a “social brain” (Ratey, 2001) that is dependent on interaction with other brains, a view that is not inconsistent with the idea of the selfish gene (Dawkin, 1978) or the argument that the traditional focus on the individual self is misleading (Pinker, 1998; Blackmore, 1999).

It is misleading to regard individual development in organisations as though it is either totally individualistic or for that matter context free. Many of the chapters in this handbook make the point that context and interactivity of factors are crucial considerations. This applies to leadership development, innovation, emotional intelligence, competencies, and indeed to almost all topics in this handbook. It is not difficult to build specific skills and abilities in individuals, but if this is not done in a way that is integrated with the context and the core purpose of organisation the investment it is likely to be limited in value. It is relatively easy to watch videos and read books as isolated individuals, but unless there is dialogue with others and joint attempts to apply the learning then the scope for individual development is restricted.

Does this mean that it is meaningless to talk about individual development in organisations? Would we be better off focusing solely on social, group, team and collective development? The answer is probably not, because at the end of the day we all feel we are individuals, and we know that common experiences can be differently interpreted by individuals simply because individuals differ. It is difficult to escape from our sense of individuality. It would seem that, as individuals, we need to function and learn collectively, while at the same time retaining our sense of being unique individuals.

RATIONALE FOR THE HANDBOOK

This handbook is about the psychology of individual differences and development in organisations. It does not seek to provide simple answers to complex issues. It is not the kind of handbook that offers prescriptive solutions. It does, however, seek to provide insight and greater clarity on issues and on areas of research, thus enabling more informed choices to be made. The handbook is not primarily aimed at either academics or at practitioners, or both in parallel, for I believe the distinction is artificial and unhelpful in organisational and work psychology, as an applied branch of psychology. The distinction between academic and practitioner can only be clearly differentiated at the extremes and tends to result in caricatures. This handbook is aimed equally at what I like to call academically-minded practitioners and at practice-orientated academics.

The handbook contains only twenty chapters and therefore represents a trade-off between depth and breadth. Accordingly some topics are not expressly covered in this book. A guiding principle has been: what is likely to be of interest and/or practical benefit to readers over the next three to five years. The whole area of personal growth and personal effectiveness has not been included on the grounds that there is a huge
“be a better or more successful person” literature (c.f. Covey, 1989; McCormack, 1990; Smith, 1994) which has little to do with the complex relationships between individuals and organisations. Training and formal education are not specifically included because the emphasis in this handbook is on developmental processes that lead to change within the individual rather than on the management of formal organisational processes.

I also decided to exclude any topic that is evolving so rapidly that what is written in 2001 (up to a year before publication date) would be obsolete by the time of publication or shortly afterwards. On balance, topics have been included where practical implications from conceptual analysis of an issue, or where summary and analysis of empirical research, point to practical implications; and where the case for or against a particular approach, or even partisan exposition of a particular approach, would help practitioners and academic researchers make more informed choices and decisions.

**SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS**

The handbook is divided into five parts. **Part One** is titled Approaches, Concepts and Theory. There are differing views about the nature and possibility of development and learning. In chapter one, **John Burgoyne** in a cerebral analysis, raises some fundamental questions about the differing concepts of self that are implicit, and sometimes explicit, in the varying approaches that have developed over the last 100 years. As he puts it: “Whatever else these do in terms of aiming at specific or general learning outcomes for the learner they make a ‘pitch’ at the learner as a certain kind of self. In some cases this may help to create the learner as the kind of self assumed by the learning approach—for example as an employable commodity to fit an organisational machine, or as an autonomous self asserting the right to self creation.” He goes on to argue that the asserted “self” may be in conflict with some pre-established learner identity and self and that this conflict or clash may explain some of the “difficulties” that can occur in events to facilitate learning.

The main practical consequence of Burgoyne’s analysis is that “acceptable constructions of the self” should be negotiated between learning facilitators and learners as part of the relationship. He argues that both theorists and practitioners can be more aware of the variety and alternatives, including those that may be different from their current beliefs and practices. He goes on to say that this is pivotal to the reproduction and revision of our social, economic and political lives. Burgoyne asserts that there is a clear sense of progression in the approaches that he summarises and distils into brief summaries and metaphors, which range from individual passive and active learning, through the social to a more fully integrated concept of learning. The message here is that inappropriate or undifferentiated concepts of the individual result in development initiatives that at best are not effective and at worst alienating.

**Monica Lee** in chapter 2 presents a more impassioned and experiential argument. Just as John Burgoyne showed that different concepts of the self are implicit (consciously or otherwise) in different theoretical and methodological approaches to developing the individual, Monica Lee reminds us that developing the self involves the whole person as a sentient, sense-making, enquiring individual. There is a need to understand oneself, and to understand that the other is different from oneself, and the nature of those differences,
but this is a dynamic, co-regulated and often sub-conscious process. Other people might catalyse it, and in the longer term it is about relationships with others but other people cannot specify it, control it or manage it. It is not a quantifiable thing to be specified, controlled, or managed in any way—it cannot be prescribed for, mapped out, or planned. However, organisations can foster self development.

She describes a range of tools and processes that help foster self development, which tend to be those that help understanding, reflection and behaviour change but there is no clear relationship between different tools and different aspects of development. A culture is needed that supports self development which requires challenge and thus, risk. The culture of the organisation also needs to foster courage and support. By establishing a true open environment of co-regulation, resisting conceptual closure and capacity for “negative capability” the organisation is likely to foster self development in those who engage with it.

In chapter 3, Jane Henry describes how cognitive science now pictures how mind, brain, body and environment interact. In particular, she draws attention to the centrality of intuitive know-how and the limitations of rational thought and the part played by tacit processes and the development of the system within which individuals practice. Cognitive processes such as perception, thought, and memory and cognitive behaviour such as problem solving, learning, decision marking and creativity all have implications for individual development in organisations. Cognitive science has revealed how much information is processed tacitly and how little of this reaches the surface. This means most information processing, learning and decision making appears to happen below conscious awareness. She describes approaches or tools for individual development that are congruent with the findings of cognitive science. Perhaps the most important implication of recent developments in cognitive sciences is recognition of the limited capacities and fallibility of the conscious mind, and the importance of implicit learning and tacit knowledge, as opposed to the pre-occupation with rationality and logic. The author argues that development strategies should take greater account of intuitive ways of knowing and that we need to shift the balance of individual development away from reflection, analysis and competency towards more focus on well-being with greater attention to social support, physical involvement and “quietening”.

She also concludes that the evidence for the part played by genetics in certain aspects of cognitive style is strengthening, reinforcing the need to allow for diversity in development. In addition there has also been a shift to a greater recognition of the part played by social systems in the way we think and an appreciation of the need to address the systems in which individuals develop in addition to their individual needs.

In chapter 4, Kevin Murphy provides a synoptic survey of one of the traditional fields of enquiry in psychology, viz. individual differences in the areas of cognitive ability, interests, and personality. His conclusion is that individual characteristics, particularly cognitive ability, will have a substantial influence on whether individuals will in fact benefit from training and development. For the author, the clear implication of the research is the dilemma: should training and development activities be offered to those individuals who are most clearly positioned to succeed or those who need it the most? He concludes by arguing that we cannot and should not ignore the findings from research on individual differences, but that there is no clear consensus at this point about how to use information about individual differences in making decisions about who gets access to which sorts of developmental opportunities. The answers do not lie within the realms of
psychology, but in recognition of differing contexts and the application of policy, values and moral principles.

Part Two of the handbook, Individual Differences, contains more detailed summaries of what we currently know about individual differences in key areas of human functioning and the implications for individual development in organisations. There is a sense in which development is synonymous with learning. Part two focuses on individual learning within a team context, the critical role of informal or incidental learning, and the power of self-directed learning as embodied in Self Managed Learning.

Bruce Torff and Edward Warburton (chapter 5) examine old and new models of cognitive abilities. Akin to the argument presented by Burgoyne on the relativity of concepts of self, Torff and Warburton argue that there is no such thing as theory-neutral assessment of human abilities. As they put it, most old and new theories are packaged part-and-parcel with an assessment scheme, and each of these schemes assumes the existence of some sort of cognitive ability. They describe “intelligence-fair” assessments that encompass all of the individual’s cognitive abilities, rather than solely linguistic or logical-mathematical intelligence. According to Torff and Warburton, a true assessment can be made only by evaluating the individual over time in context, using multiple measures. Torff and Warburton describe what they refer to as an assessment conundrum: it is impossible to evaluate candidates on what they have not learned, yet it is inadvisable to place too much confidence in de-contextualised measures. The theory of multiple intelligences (MI) has provided psychologists and educators with a way to think about human abilities, but the corresponding assessment revolution, according to Torff and Warburton, never materialised, and MI’s popularity with educators and other professionals has been waning. Since no ability theory is dominant and all raise measurement problems, he argues that it is best to forsake the goal of assessing human cognitive abilities directly and focus instead on the evaluation of performance of authentic activities in particular domains and that the unit of analysis will be the context, not the person, at least initially. As they put it, for assessment, to tell the whole story, it must get beyond the one-shot-deal administration of a test. Needed are ongoing assessments that allow repeated measures over time, so that the development of the person’s knowledge and skill can be charted. Assessment in context not only provides real-world tasks, materials, and settings; it also requires repeated measures. Torff and Warburton’s position is opposite to that offered by Murphy and by Furnham in other chapters.

Adrian Furnham provides a major overview of research on personality and style preferences in chapter 6. He concludes that it is “certainly obvious that personality traits, cognitive and learning styles are fundamentally implicated in the whole business of development in organisations”. He goes on to assert that there are systematic individual differences which in part predict every aspect of behaviour at work whether it be choice of occupation; productivity and satisfaction; absenteeism and accidents; turnover and training; decision making and development. He draws attention to the differences of emphasis of style researchers and trait researchers. He argues that style researchers are more interested in, committed to, and optimistic about change and development than trait researchers, but the renowned interest of organisational psychologists in trait measurement may mean all this is changing fast. He concludes that it is an exacting time for those interested in the topic of individual development in organisations. He also raises the question whether it is morally justifiable, sensible, even possible for an organisation to attempt to change an employee’s personality or work style and examines both sides of the argument. As he puts it, the two schools of thought have different ideas, read
different literatures and can, over time, be dismissive of one another. Thus just as the trait and style academic research grew apart so practitioners for-and-against individual development tend more to ignore each other than argue or research the case for their different positions.

In chapter 7, Paul Sparrow provides a series of frameworks that may be used to help position the approach taken to management competency both within organisational practice and academic research. He summarises three main approaches that have been taken in the study of management effectiveness: analysis of classical management functions, observation of behaviour and the study of intelligent functioning. He describes three different models of competency. The best known model, the behavioural competency approach, is then analysed and positioned within these frameworks. He argues that the HR process in organisations benefits from the application of competencies to external resourcing, individual development and internal career systems, generally outweighing any dysfunctions that might exist. He asks of competencies: Are they valid? How are they made more organisationally relevant? Does this make it easy to identify which competencies are best selected for and which may be developed? Are they fair? He examines the decisions that are invoked when competencies are applied in the realm of pay and rewards, and asks are some more important than others? Finally, he argues that we should only view individual behavioural competency in the context of the much larger quest for strategic competency of organisations.

Chapter 8 by Victor Dulewicz and Malcolm Higgs begins with elucidation of the Emotional Intelligence construct, in terms of what it is and why it has become significant for individuals and organisations. The authors assert that Emotional Intelligence can be measured and they describe the development of their own questionnaire, the EIQ. Measurement issues relating to assessment or development and the importance of a broad profile measure, as opposed to a unitary and definitive measure, are also discussed. They then describe the development of a model to explain how Emotional Intelligence adds to our understanding of the drivers of individual success and performance. They conclude that some of the elements of EI are readily developable while others are more enduring characteristics and should be exploited. They describe the relationship between EI and leadership, and with organisation culture, the extent to which EI can be developed, the nature of effective development methodologies, and the relationship to team performance.

Part Three contains three chapters under the heading Assessment Tools and Processes. Just as different approaches to development imply different concepts of self, different frameworks and different types of frameworks for human abilities have direct implications for approaches to individual development.

Chapter 9 by Karen van Dam focuses on methods and tools for assessment of employee development needs. The chapter outlines different objectives and effects of individual needs assessment. Needs assessment is considered an important tool for specifying the directions for future development activities. Critical features of needs assessment methods are described followed by an evaluation of those methods that are most commonly used in needs assessment. In the chapter she discusses several issues an organisation should consider in deciding whether and how to conduct an individual needs assessment. Finally, she reminds us that needs assessment indicates more than only the identification of weaknesses and development needs; it also provides the organisation and the employee with information about strengths and valuable future contributions.
In chapter 10, Jörg Iten, using a concrete case shows that the individual assessment method can be effective not only as a selection tool but also as a component of the individual professional development process. The example described illustrates the importance individual assessment can assume in achieving a balance between the individual’s needs and organisational goals. He argues that effective development is rarely possible without a serious and individualized assessment of the person. He stresses that the goal of the individual assessment is to assess aspirational, intellectual, and social-communicative capacities on the one hand, and on the other, to give the participants the opportunity to gain clarity into their own motives and predispositions. The primary focus is not superficial behavior but the person as a whole. He describes the practical aspects of individual assessments that must be taken into account if organisations intend to conduct management development projects based on individual assessments. The function reserved for the individual assessment in many management development processes is frequently taken over by the assessment or development center but, Iten argues that in most development centers there is too much focus on behaviour and not enough on personality and the fit between the individual and the organisation’s needs.

Jac Zaal in chapter 11 refers to Development Centers as a specific application of Assessment Center Methods (ACM) aimed at diagnosing, mostly managerial, skills that need to be developed to meet requirements of a target job. ACM is defined in part by the inclusion of different methods among which are exercises representing job samples. Although it has established its credentials as a valid predictor of management potential and career advancement, serious doubts have been raised about the skills it claims to measure. In this chapter basic characteristics of ACM are examined followed by the specific features of DCs. Generally it takes more effort to customise the design of ACM for developmental purposes and once the Development Center (DC) is ready for operation it takes more time to execute it. Are the extra efforts and cost in fine-tuning DCs paying off? What precisely are the strong and weak points to be considered in evaluating the benefits of DCs? In a critical review of available research the author challenges the construct validity of ACM and recommends ways to improve its validity. He argues that effective diagnosis of development needs can only be achieved when taking into account the situational determinants of managerial competencies. A primary goal of this chapter is to stimulate practitioners to take validity research more seriously in deciding on the use of ACM in different contexts. Depending on the type of use made, the design of assessment methods will have to meet different requirements to sustain its suitability for the purpose at stake.

Part Four, Development Methods and Processes, contains six chapters with a broad focus on tools and processes for development covering the choice of development methods, learning in teams, learning through experience, Self-Managed Learning, and learning through social networks and through electronic networks.

Alan Mumford in chapter 12 outlines four frameworks to help professional developers and advisers in organisations, and also individual learners, to choose development methods that are likely to be reasonably effective for them in a given context, by comparison with alternative development methods. He argues that it is not only the characteristics of the methods that should form the basis of the choice, nor just the characteristics of the learners or the context, but rather the interaction between them, as well as other factors. The four frameworks he outlines are (a) suitability for developing knowledge,
skills and insight; (b) relationship to learning theories; (c) learning to learn potential; and (d) congruence with personal learning style preferences. The four frameworks are then used to assess the potential effectiveness of sixteen distinct development methods divided into three broad categories, viz. at work methods, of the job methods, and other methods.

Roger Mottram in chapter 13 considers the importance of balancing the needs of the team with the needs of the individuals in the team. He describes the increased frequency and relevance of team working in today’s organisations, and the potential of team working to provide individual development opportunities. His main theme is that what is good for the team is not necessarily good for the individual, and that unless best practice is followed, the individual faces significant problems. He concludes that a well-managed, properly composed, relevant and effective team will, by its nature and set-up, encourage and facilitate individual development but that many team working situations do not meet these criteria and pose dangers for individual development and career progression.

In the following chapter, Victoria Marsick, Karen Watkins and Jacqueline Wilson present their model of informal and incidental learning, and the ways that this model can account for more effective use of what we already know, as well as creative, anticipatory learning. They analyse the dilemmas that occur when the demand for speed conflicts with the demand for accuracy and learning, especially in today’s more pressurised world. They identify and illustrate ten strategies that individuals and organisations can use to come closer to meeting conflicting demands, or at the least, to better recognise the trade-offs they are making. Managers play a critical role in this process. They are often the facilitator of debriefing sessions, the questioner challenging assumptions in a planning or problem-solving session, and the coach and teacher when individuals come with a problem for which they do not now have the knowledge or skill to resolve.

Ian Cunningham in chapter 15 makes the case for Self Managed Learning (SML) as a basis for individual development in organisations. He reminds us that, despite attempts to force learning on people, adults in organisations will actually choose what they learn and that learners will interpret any “teaching” in terms of their own mental frameworks and existing patterns of thinking. He explores both research and theoretical support for the use of Self Managed Learning and concludes with speculation as to why SML is not more widely accepted, given what he calls the impressive theoretical and research basis for its practice. He goes on to argue that by locating SML in the social context people have to dialogue with their colleagues in order to plan and implement their own learning activities. In this sense learners decide for themselves what and how they want to learn but they do not decide by themselves and in this way contribute to the development of human and social capital of the organisation.

The next two chapters focus on the role of networks in individual development. Chapter 16 by Rob Poell and Ferd Van der Krogt, addresses the question how social networks in various organisational contexts create learning programmes for individual employee development. The authors use an actor-network approach to describe four models for learning programme creation in social networks, viz. contractual, regulated, organic and collegiate. They then relate the different types of learning programme to the prevailing work and learning contexts in which they take place. They conclude that these contexts have a powerful impact, but that learning networks have their own dynamics as well. They conclude by arguing that employees as learners, with their specific context interpretations and action strategies, should therefore be considered key to learning-programme creation.