Área Temática: Gestão de Pessoas e Comportamento Organizacional

**THE STRATEGIC SIDE OF EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT: WHY STRATEGIZING IS SO DIFFICULT?**

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**Abstract**

Executive Development is a complex process that occurs throughout one’s career over time. It involves the systematic improvement and the broadening of knowledge, experience, and skills, and enabling the cognitive structure and personal qualities needed for performing an executive position. The programs’ main responsibility is to teach strategy to participants and to develop their strategic competence, who are expected to apply their competencies in the real world of strategic business management. To succeed executives need to be creative and skilled and to have a high level of strategic competence. When one analyses the many Strategic Management Development programs, it becomes easy to say that the many programs, whether presented in formal academic settings (like MBA) or within enterprises, emphasize analytical techniques and tools for guiding executives’ decisions, and do not address the strategic competence development. This paper proposes a definition and discusses the strategic competence under the Mental Model proposition. It presents the results of research on preferred jobs and their relationship to the Mental Models and discusses the crossing over from the operational mental model (OMM) to the strategic mental model (SMM) based on neurocognition development.

Keywords: Executive Development Programs; Strategic Competence; Mental Models; Crossing over from Operational to Strategic Mental Model.

**O LADO ESTRATÉGICO DO DESENVOLVIMENTO EXECUTIVO: POR QUE FORMULAR ESTRATÉGIAS É TÃO DIFÍCIL?**

**Resumo**

O Desenvolvimento Executivo é um processo complexo que ocorre ao longo da carreira de uma pessoa ao longo do tempo. Ele envolve a melhoria sistemática e a ampliação do conhecimento, experiência e habilidades, e habilita a estrutura cognitiva e as qualidades pessoais necessárias para desempenhar uma posição executiva. A principal responsabilidade dos programas é ensinar estratégia aos participantes e desenvolver sua competência estratégica, que devem aplicar suas competências no mundo real da gestão estratégica de negócios. Para ter sucesso, os executivos precisam ser criativos e habilidosos e ter um alto nível de competência estratégica. Quando se analisa os muitos programas de Desenvolvimento de Gestão Estratégica, fica fácil dizer que os muitos programas, sejam apresentados em ambientes acadêmicos formais (como MBA) ou dentro de empresas, enfatizam técnicas e ferramentas analíticas para orientar as decisões dos executivos e não abordam o desenvolvimento da competência estratégica. Este artigo propõe uma definição e discute a competência estratégica sob a proposição do Modelo Mental. Ele apresenta os resultados da pesquisa sobre empregos preferidos e sua relação com os Modelos Mentais e discute a transição do modelo mental operacional (OMM) para o modelo mental estratégico (SMM) com base no desenvolvimento da neurocognição.

**Palavras-chave**: Programas de Desenvolvimento Executivo; Competência Estratégica; Modelos Mentais; Passagem do Modelo Mental Operacional para o Estratégico.

**INTRODUCTION**

As it comes to Executive Development programs, HRD professionals’ first responsibility is to ensure opportunities for learning strategy and for developing the trainees' strategic competence that is then expected to use their skills and competencies out in the real world (Graetz, 2002; Ellis, Margalit & Segev, 2012). For this paper, competence may be defined as knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bohlander &Snell, 2010) and also includes attitude, motivation, values, and self-confidence. Self-confidence is the ability to perform a task or objective without supervision. Competence also refers to the task of finding and solving problems (Francis & Bessant, 2005), taking initiative, decision-making, and being creative and innovative (Jeffrey, 2006) in an environment of respect for the rules of democratic coexistence.

Despite that the word strategy may mean different things to different people (Mintzberg, 1987), these differences in the meaning and conceptualization of strategy affect both HRD practitioners as well as HRD academics (Duffy & Roehler,.1989; Mukherji & Mukherji, 2003). Moreover, one thing the literature points out is that today business and the organizational environment are changing rapidly (Helfat & Winter, 2011). In this environment kind, successful executives are able to envision a coherent future that does not exist today (D’Argembeau et al 2010). Their ability to see beyond tomorrow has its roots in strategic competence and the strategic thinking process. These executives embrace a broad perspective of their organization, make strategic choices and decisions, and are acutely aware of the trends and developments that impact the present and future business realities. They not only manage the daily objectives of the organization but also strategically position the organization (Guo, 20016) and themselves for the future.

It is not the aim of this paper to address the differences that currently exist, nor do we make suggestions about how strategy should be imparted. Rather, it seeks to analyze some of the difficulties that beset the executive development programs under the mental model proposition. For this task, we will present some considerations on the executive development programs and strategic competence and strategic thinking, and Mental Models and their relationship with the preferred job, and the research on executives attending some MBA programs. The paper will end with a discussion section that presents some considerations on the crossing over from the Operational Mental Model (OMM) to the Strategic Mental Model (SMM) as a way to develop strategic competence and the competence for strategic thinking as a competence for successful executive business management.

**1. EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: TEACHING STRATEGY**

The main objective of an Executive Development Program (or Master in Strategic Business Administration Program – MSBA) (Jardon & Catalina, 2015) is to facilitate employee’s advancement to executive careers (Hamori, 2010) and positions and to provide benefits to the corporation when there are needs for fulfilling executives’ positions in the corporate cadre. When it comes to teaching strategy, the first program’s responsibility is to teach strategy to attendees who are then expected to use their skills in the real world. In this way, the first issue to be addressed is: what strategy is?

The word strategy has different meanings and conceptualizations (Mintzberg, 1987) for different people and programs and affects both academics and practitioners (and HRD professionals). There is neither a consensus on the definition of strategy, nor on the methodology for teaching the strategy content and process, and on how to develop strategic competence (Kling, Mayer & Richardson, 2011). The many programs adopt entirely different methods of teaching strategy, like workshops, case discussions and problem analysis (PBL), and interviews with business top executives for broadening the knowledge and perspective on strategic issues that are critical to the continuing success of your company.

Many times, programs engage participants in activities to explore and reflect on topics such as the global macroeconomic and geopolitical outlook and its impact on corporate business, digital disruption, and the importance of developing a digital mindset Lund, Manyika & Robinson, 2016), strategies for growth and sustained competitive advantage, leadership and the nurturing of high-performance teams, innovative business models, and what is needed to ensure a successful implementation of your vision (Kuratko & Hornsby, 2001).

On the other side, almost all textbooks on strategic management have typical contents and usually do not pay any or enough attention how to think about the strategic thinking process itself and the development of strategic competence (Goldman & Scott, 2016) These programs put reliance on teaching on mastering analytical techniques. In this way, these professionals may tend to take into account and consideration that business strategy can be conceptualized in some frameworks and on an inaccurate and incomplete vision of the business environment (Miyamoto, 2015).

They may become unable to correctly take into account and decipher the many variables needed to understand the fast-paced and complex business environment that bears little resemblance to the organized, simplified, and stable business world proposed by the strategic business textbooks and programs (Smith, Binns & Tushman, 2010). As a result, many of the participants may have imparted a simplistic vision and knowledge about how strategic management works (Hynes & Richardson, 2007). This may mean that they will have troubles when in executive positions that demand executives to lead the corporate business in a world that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, changing, challenging, and ambiguous with the incumbency and responsibility to lead the organization during the blue ocean as well as turbulent times.

By analyzing the trainees’ performance and behavior, one may observe that not all of them obtain the same degree of development. There are very interesting differences between trainees who are exposed to the same program (Konrad, Yang, Goldberg & Sullivan, 2005). Some learn from the first experience they are exposed. Once they are exposed, heard, and/or read something, it becomes familiar to them; it happens that they suddenly learn the many factors, variables, and functions and their relationships in a subject they have encountered. Others (most of them) will not learn these functions and relationships despite the many programs they are exposed. For these trainees, a rose will be ever a rose.

So, some intriguing questions may arise: What makes some individuals able to learn from the exposure to the program whereas many others don’t learn at all, despite a great deal of exposure to the same program content? Why some can go beyond the program content and become more strategically prepared for the strategic business demands? The answer to these questions may be done by understanding what strategic competence and strategic thinking are and the mental model proposition as a way for delving into the executive’s mind.

**2. THE STRATEGIC COMPETENCE AND THE COMPETENCE FOR STRATEGIC THINKING**

Strategic competence may be defined as the capability to see the enterprise as a whole, and how a change in any one part affects all the others; It extends to visualizing the relationship of the individual business to the industry, and sociopolitical, and economic forces. Strategic competence enables an executive to distill the significant elements in any situation, make sound decisions, and act in a way that advances the overall welfare of the whole enterprise (Katz, 1991) and establishes the whole future direction in which the company should grow.

Drawing on the many definitions in the literature, for this paper, strategic thinking or "strategic mind" (Barner & Berland, 1999, p. 120) may be related to the ability to collect and process a very high amount of information and, from this mass of details, to select what is really important and necessary to make effective strategic decision that may be differential for the company success. Looking at this way, strategic thinking may be summarized as the capability for thinking in terms of importance and priorities, between divergent objectives and criteria, relative tendencies and possibilities but not the certainty, correlation, and imprecise patterns between elements instead of exact cause-effect relationships and as the ability to “understand the global scene – past, present, and future – for defining possibilities and alternatives, associated with the capability for considering simultaneously a long range of factors inside-outside the organization in the problems solving and decisions making and action implementing” (Davis, 1992, p. 710) for defining critical and high return strategies for consistently driving the team efforts according then, in a way that decisions have their focus adjusted to attend to the business critical strategic questions.

Strategic thinking is, by its definition, a highly creative, innovative, and unconventional mode of thinking, and it should be viewed as a core competence for creating and sustaining competitive advantage (Liedtka, 1988). It is the tool to get what is needed to move an organization forward and innovate. As “nothing can come of nothing” (Shakespeare, King Lear), it may be said that strategic thinking is also general knowledge-based and instantaneous, because it just happens in the strategic thinker’s mind.

**3. BEHIND THE EXECUTIVES’ MIND: THE MENTAL MODEL PROPOSITION**

To succeed as an executive, one needs to understand a broad variety of emerging drivers of change in the external environment ([Eisenhardt,](http://search.proquest.com/docview.lateralsearchlink%3Alateralsearch/sng/author/Eisenhardt%2C%2BKathleen/%24N?t:ac=215863050/Record/1355EABBBEA1115D457/3&t:cp=maintain/resultcitationblocks) 2008). He or she needs to understand the nature of opportunities, uncertainties, and risks, and their possible consequences for the performance of the firm (Luoma, Paasi & Nordlund, 2008), and to be able to act more proactively. In facing these challenges, many executives and managers will have different perceptions and will use perceived information in different ways.

By considering these differences, two main questions arise: "What are the factors that lead executives and managers to different perceptions and different decisions facing the same situation or business environment?" and “How one can explain executives’ job preferences?”

The answer to these questions may be found in the Mental Models (many times called cognitive style) approaches that are widely recognized as an important determinant of individual behavior. Mental Models are the usual working mind patterns of one person, derived from the combination of his or her perception pattern with her or his mental data arrangement and her or his decision-making models. They are neither wrong nor right, but Mental Models, particularly their way of taking and using information, affect the jobs they tend to prefer. Differences in perception - **concrete** or sensorial and **global** or intuitive (Jung, 1991) - are the first to be considered because perceptions are the ways people collect information about the world which influences the other functions.

The preference for concrete perception mode points to a preference for collecting factual and concrete information and then deciding what to do: organize them or continue to look for more information. The preference for the global perception mode means that an executive will prefer to collect abstract or conceptual data and then organize this information in a rational way or by considering the values, ideas, and interests of other people. According to the theory of mental model, there are differences in the ways executives perceive the business environment and the ways they make choices and decisions. According to the proposition, there are two basic mental models: the operational mental model (OMM) and the strategic mental model (SMM).

**OMM**: this mental model is characterized by an executive focus on what is going on and by the search for precision, reliability, efficiency, prudence, discipline, and conformity. She or he is practical and demonstrates a high focus on problem-solving rather than finding it and tends to reduce problems occurrence by improving and maximizing the process efficiency, under the existing conditions; she or he has a preference to make plans and is happy with its accomplishment. OMM managers seem to not have the capability or to be unprepared to question assumptions, postulates, and theories they embrace, ascertain the validity of past theories and past results, and be open to new ways of thinking about the business environment and business strategy. In this way, they are not prepared to deal with strategic challenges because strategizing is a dynamic process dealing with possibilities and an unknown, ambiguous, and indeterminate set of variables that will have an impact on the organization in a possible, but uncertain, future.

**SMM**: this mental model takes information through her or his sixth sense focusing, not on what is but on what may be, and looking for meaning in all things. A person with this mental model will probably choose to describe herself or herself as innovative. She or he may be characterized as a disorganized person by the low adherence to norms, rules, and structures. He or she is able to think strategically and bring innovative solutions to daily problems and issues. This executive is a visionary and architect of change. She or he is imaginative and analytical, exploring all possibilities inherent in any situation and directing their energy toward building systems for the future. She or he is a visionary and works on ideas with ingenuity and logic.

So, by knowing one's mental model, it may be possible for the HRM and HRD to make predictions about the preferred job, and by knowing this preference make previsions about results to be obtained with the executive development programs.

**4. MENTAL MODEL AND THE PREFERRED JOB**

Bressan (2003) researched the relationship between the Mental Model and preferred job. The survey used two questionnaires: the questionnaire for job preferences and the Personal Inclinations Questionnaire (QIP - Questionário de Inclinações Pessoais) (SILVA, 1992). The QIP, drawing on The Keirsey Temperament Sorter (KEIRSEY & BATES, 1978), provides a useful measure of temperaments and mental models by looking at eight preferences that all people use at different lifetimes (SILVA, 1990). Silva (1990) reports that qualitative and quantitative testing conducted during the development of the temperament indicator – QIP – suggested the questionnaire had good content validity and adherence to the population. The questionnaire for the job preference (BOSS – Bressan Operational – Strategic Sorter) was developed and validated at the Universidade de São Paulo Doctoral Program. Composed of 30 variables the questionnaire shows an Alpha Cronbach 0,86, and the factor analysis (appropriateness) shows that each variable is related only to a single factor. Results indicate the relationship and correlation between the Mental Model and preferred job (Table 1)

**Table** 1. Relationship and correlation between mental model and preferred job



Source: Bressan, 2003.

The results sign an interesting research field because, by proposing the mental model approach, they present a model that may help to explain executive job preference. They also sign that, by knowing one’s Mental Model, it may be possible to make previsions about her or his chance to succeed in the strategic management of running the enterprise. According to the proposition, it may be said that if an executive presents an operational mental model, her or his preferred job will be focused on operational and daily issues of managerial process, planning, and managing for budgeted results. He or she will demonstrate a high focus on problem-solving rather than finding it and will tend to reduce problem occurrence by improving and maximizing the process efficiency.

Figure 1. Proposed Relationship Between Mental Model and Preferred Job



**Source**: Author’s mental model proposition

An operational-minded executive will expect business environment strengths and opportunities and competitive issues to be understood, explained, and controlled through the repertoire of the frameworks and models that he or she has assimilated. More importantly, he or she seems to develop a blind spot or is unable to correctly decipher those aspects of the business world that reside outside of their mental model. (Mukherji & Mukherji, 2003). When dealing with strategic issues, her or his way of thinking is that “in the future things are going to be like in the present”. Paradoxically, (Dunbar et al 1996) when an operational manager faces turbulence in the business environment, the Mental Model lets him or her assume contextual stability and a preference for incremental adjustments in keeping with this assumed stability

On the other hand, it may be said that if an executive presents a strategic mental model, she or he takes the information through a global perception process by focusing not on what is, but on what may be, and will look for meaning in all things. As a natural strategic thinker, her or his choices and decisions will have strategic management as the main focus. She or he probably will look for and bring new and innovative solutions for business daily problems and issues. This executive tends to be visionary, imaginative, and analytical, exploring all possibilities inherent in any situation and directing their energy toward building systems for the future. She or he will work on ideas with ingenuity and logic.

**5. MENTAL MODEL AND EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS**

Based on the appointed results, it was made possible to point out the same correlations between both mental models and managerial job preferences. As an alternative approach, by emphasizing the role of the perception process, this study proposes the mental models (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), as having a great influence on executives’ job preferences.

Theoretically, this proposition signs an interesting research field because, by proposing the mental model approach, this study presents a model that may help to explain how an executive perceives the business environment and, in doing so, how she or he uses his or her mental model to manage and for running business. As the business environment requires executives to bring forward or react to challenges and threats and the opportunities that appear and disappear, by knowing one’s Mental Model, it may be possible to make previsions about the difficulty of dealing with strategic issues in running the enterprise.

This is especially critical because the fast-paced and complex business environment does not fit the operational mental model that perceives the business environment as organized, factual, and stabilized. Changing business environment imply that executives must be ready to consider new choices, take risks, make decisions, and develop and implement new strategies and different ways of running the business. Paradoxically, (Dunbar et al 1996) when an operational manager faces turbulence in the business environment, the mental model lets him or her assume contextual stability and to a preference for incremental adjustments in keeping with this assumed stability

The relationship between functional and executive jobs and operational and strategic mental models may be an indication that these jobs maintain an orthogonal relationship and that they are not part of a continuous gradient of management behavior. This relationship may be indicative of the fact that the preferred job can be derived from the mental model.

This relationship can also be an indication of the reasons why the results of the executive development programs are as poor (Mooney; Brinkerhoff, 2008). Similarities between preferred jobs and Mental Models may be an indication that, like Mental Models, these job behaviors are orthogonal (Laureiro-Martínez et al., 2014). These similarities raise the question if these managerial jobs demand distinct patterns of managerial behavior, or if both cover the ends of the same continuum in antithetical directions (Keller & Weilbler, 2014).

In doing so, results emphasize the Mental Model's influence on the preferred management job and managerial style. This influence may be a reason for the low level of employment of the new capabilities developed in Executive Development Programs in a way that improves job performance and leads to worthwhile results for the company. This proposition is aligned with Mooney and Brinkerhoff's (2008) proposition that many programs underestimate executives’ and managers’ mental models and that changing behavior also means adjusting underlying leaders' mental Models.

Under the propositions done in this paper, emphasizing the importance of Mental Models as a way of understanding the foundation of the executive development process makes intuitive sense. Every HRD and organizational intervention in management practice necessarily relies on some implicit or explicit model of human behavior and beliefs about the determinants of individual and organizational performance. To develop effective executive development programs and interventions, mental models must inevitably be an important focus of attention. In other words, for developing an operational manager it is supposed to develop his or her strategic mental model. This development raises two main questions: “Are human beings modifiable?” and “How to cross over from an operational to a strategic mental model?”

**6. CROSSING OVER FROM AN OPERATIONAL TO A STRATEGIC MENTAL** MODEL

**6.1 Are Human Being Modifiable?**

One main objective of the Executive Development Program is to have the trainees reach higher potential functioning, or functioning at the strategic level. A person is capable of acquiring for him/herself not only quantities of knowledge or skills but also new cognitive structures, by which are opened new areas that are not previously included in the stockpile of knowledge and abilities. This is the human being's modifiability (Feuerstein, Falik & Feuerstein, 2014).

Human being modifiability enables the acquisition of additional abilities that are not previously present or accessible. We are not referring to abilities that are the result of developmental age, mental maturation, or the response to developmental experience. These relatively direct learning experiences enable trainees to use their accumulated experience to repeat successful actions and to avoid mistakes. Here we are talking about changes that lead one to interact with the world differently than what had been previously experienced. This type of substantial change requires a whole array of thinking strategies and perspectives about the manner of it taking place: how to attend to the stimuli, and how to operate (manipulate, sequence, compare, and so forth).

The human potential for modifiability arouses much amazement. It seems to have many ambiguities of feeling concerning this potential for modifiability. Accepting oneself as capable of change involves taking risks—one might not be successful, one might make mistakes, and one is not familiar with the newly modified self. Thus, one enters the unfamiliar. There is a very real fear of being altered from oneself: an existential danger. The developmental experience needs to be aware of and address itself specifically to overcome this fear. The ability of a person to modify her/himself is a personal decision. The option exists for every person, whatever he or she may be, even when barriers and obstacles stand in the way of the implementation. But these barriers can be overcome by developing exercises.

**6.2 Changing the Mental Model: Crossing Over from Operational to Strategic**

Cognition refers to the way one perceives and collects data from the real world, the way one processes the perceived and meanings, and uses the perceived in the decision-making process. Cognition is the mental model substratum, and it is the central factor in shaping human behavior. Cognition processes involve the way whereby new perception, information, and data are assimilated and integrated into the existing cognitive schemata, and remain stable and available, even when it is applied to new situations. When one integrates a new perception in the cognitive schemata, the schemata remain changed.

According to Feuerstein, Feuerstein & Falik (2010, p. 13), “every change that takes place in a part changes the whole which it belongs”. To adapt themselves to new additional situations, the cognitive processes will expand themselves through the assimilation (taking it) and accommodation (integrating it into the schemata) processes. These processes cause modifications in one’s cognitive structure. If the learning has been structurally integrated and a structural change has occurred, it will be recalled with a high degree of accuracy many times following the learning. One will retain and preserve what is learned and will be able to apply the learned to solve problems permanently.

The objective is to obtain the trainee to apply the acquired and integrated knowledge in conditions that differ from those where assimilation has occurred. This process refers to the plasticity of change.

For the challenge of crossing over from operational to strategic thinking, the first subject is perception. The larger underpinning purpose is to bring the strategic mental model into focus and to teach people how to function in new ways, with hopes that they would transfer new perceptual skills to strategic thinking and problem-solving. The program may provide trainees with exercises that cause a cognitive shift from operational to strategic letting the dominant OMM out of the task

Throughout many publications and organizational speeches, there is much talk of the need for innovation, invention, and creativity. There are many suggestions to try this or that. But the nitty-gritty of precisely how to become more creative and to think strategically is seriously lacking. Our educational programs seem bent on eliminating every last bit of creative perceptual training (on the ‘strategic mental model and brain’) while overemphasizing the skills best accomplished by the ‘operational brain’: memorizing dates, data, theorems, formulas, and events (Pink. 2006). We are not teaching them how to see and understand the deep meaning of what they learn or to perceive the connectedness of information about the world.

One main goal of executive education should be to enable trainees to acquire and apply the understanding to what they have learned. Usually, executive education addresses the development of a rational, orderly thinking process - operational thinking -compatible with the investigation, reduction, examination, summary, and analysis. If we also teach global perceptual skills, these skills will help them “see things in context”, “see the whole picture”, and observe and apprehend- in short, to understand and bring meaning to the fragmented world of the operational mind. In other words, it teaches us to think strategically.

According to Edwards (2012), many times perception is set aside because it is not assumed to involve thought. For instance, MBA programs cannot justify the development of an art skills syllabus in the curriculum unless they realize arts as an important and powerful means of strengthening the global perceptual competence without which strategic thinking is impossible. The development of the global perception does indeed impact learning in all disciplines (Lustig, Shah, Seidler & Reuter-Lorenz, 2009). Learning to think strategically, like learning to read, is not dependent on something called “talent”, and, given the proper instruction, every person can improve his or her strategic competence for strategic thinking. Furthermore, given the proper instruction, people can learn to transfer the basic perceptual components to other learning and strategic thinking.

One of the most encouraging new discoveries in the competence for strategic thinking development challenge is that the human brain can physically change itself by changing its accustomed ways of thinking, by deliberately exposing itself to new exercises, ideas, and routines, and by learning new skills. According to Edwards (2012) and Biswal et al (2010), as some scientists have noted, the human brain has the property to observe and study, wonder about itself, try to analyze why it does what it does, and try to maximize its capabilities. One of the most encouraging new discoveries is that it can physically change itself by deliberately exposing itself to new exercises and experiences, and by acquiring new knowledge and developing new skills.

The conception of neuroplasticity (Kolb & Whishaw, 1998), the capacity for a brain to constantly change itself with experience, for reorganizing and transmuting and even developing new cell connections, is in direct contrast to the previous judgments of the human brain as a fixed ‘hard-wired machine’, with its parts genetically determined and unchangeable except for development in early childhood and deterioration in old age (Feuerstein et al 2014). In this way, plasticity opens new research possibilities and reaffirms the proposition of learning as a way to change the way people live and think and for developing strategic competence as a new goal of executive education.

Now, at least, we can move beyond the ideas of fixed intelligence limits and special gifts for the lucky few, and look for new ways to enhance potential brainpower. Brain plasticity opens the possibility of questioning the concept of creative talent and strategic competence. Nowhere has the idea of the hardwired brain, with its notion of given or not-given talent. Our brain isn't a fixed mass that shapes our behavior. Our behavior also shapes our brains (Feuerstein, 2014). For instance, if a mason takes up a serious interest in engineering, her neurons form new pathways between previously isolated regions. The benefits of practicing one skill are not limited to that skill alone; the benefit will be transferred to others (Fecteau et al, 2010). According to Lustig et al, 2009), "subjects exposed to a variety of motor learning paradigms may be able to acquire general, transferable knowledge about skill learning processes."

And yet we know now, from knowledge of brain plasticity and from decades of research that thinking strategically may be a simple skill that can be taught and learned by someone of sound mind who has learned other skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper, the purpose was to study why strategy is so difficult and why some managers have problems dealing with strategic issues. To address this issue, it proposes the mental model as a way to understand the difficulty for these managers to think strategically. A mental model is the usual working neurocognitive pattern of a person; it is the characteristic model of perceiving, processing, and using information gathered. When the relationship and correlation between the preferred job and Mental Model are established, it becomes easier to understand why for operational-minded executives and managers strategy and strategizing is so difficult: they have trouble dealing with the strategic issues of the executive positions

Every HRD and organizational intervention in executive development necessarily relies on some implicit or explicit model of human behavior and beliefs about the determinants of individual and organizational performance. It seems to be therefore just logical that success or failure is determined, in part, by these mental models or ways of viewing and managing people and organizations. To develop effective executive development programs and interventions, HRD needs to put the mental models on the focus of his or her attention.

There are some straightforward implications of these propositions for HRD professionals. One implication may be that before intervening somewhat less with programs and particular techniques and practices, it is necessary to focus much more on helping managers and executives enhance and improve their strategic mental models. The ability to identify and help others discover their mental models, and the capability to improve or change those mental models, are possibly among the most critical capabilities an HRD professional can have or acquire.

This task is a big challenge because the mental model development may be the actual meaning of the word “development’. To learn to manage in this way, executives and managers must attend executive development programs designed to enhance the strategic mental model. These investments in learning are meant to give birth to new abilities that are required and can be used to improve organizational performance and results. It is a big and auspicious challenge. To face this challenge, HRM professionals will need to be innovative and become strategic thinkers or have this competence in the HRD team. The traditional approach to executive development–often generic skill-building programs using traditional lecture and case study methods–is proving inadequate for today’s business environment.

Many people apparently believe that Mental Models are not a very useful focus for leadership development since this sort of approach is seldom employed. Changing how people think is going to be more difficult than just changing what they do since mental models are often deeply embedded below the surface of conscious thought. On the other side, to some HRD people, this type of intervention seems “softer” than the more typical HRD interventions such as redesigning career management plans, and implementing new performance management programs. But despite the apparent difficulty and its less tangible nature, working on a Mental Model and the way people think and act is the most powerful and useful way to ultimately change executives’ behavior and thereby affect organizational results and success.

In this way, we believe that the proposal made in the study appoints the potential of the Mental Model for future research related to executive development programs. It can be an open door to a new perspective on how mental models may explain executives’ behaviors and create avenues for future empirical investigation on this issue. In this way, we also believe the proposal made will inspire other researchers to design and conduct research projects to address the impact of the mental model on the managers and the executives’ success.

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