

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The executive leader in the postcrisis era

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This article describes psychological challenges that executive leaders of companies face nowadays. The study of the social context is based on changes that took place with the development of information technologies. The analysis touches upon such phenomena as virtualization, involvement in the external sociocommunicative environment, and the emergence of multiple identity. It is suggested that in order to adapt to changing conditions one should follow the path of self-development—in particular, to develop attention, imagination, and willpower. In connection with the traits generally attributed to executive leaders, the article emphasizes self-adjustment; common sense as an integral part of intuition, emotions, and imagination; and the readiness to make choices in fifty-fifty situations.

Keywords: executive leader, virtualization, multiple identity, attention, imagination, will

The postcrisis-era executive leader should possess such important traits as self-adjustment; common sense in combination with intuition, emotions, and imagination; and the readiness to make choices in fifty-fifty situations. The most general definition of “self-adjustment” is the building of functional interconnections between (1) a subject’s actions and state and (2) the actions and state of the surrounding setting. Building such interconnections allows for introducing relevant and purposeful changes in the subject’s actions, depending on the feedback from the previous step. In other words, this is an algorithm of changes based on feedback. All living things follow this algorithm. Self-adjustment serves as a pillar for one’s actions and interpersonal relations and for companies and society. Control without feedback is nothing but a delusion. According to Leontyev (2003), those who do not consider the results of their own actions ought to be diagnosed as paranoid.

Understanding the state of one’s immediate surroundings means comprehending a situation with multiple variables. In a situation of crisis, it is important to

update the present bridge between the past and the future and to build a new, more reliable one. It is important to come up with more thorough, strategic, determined, flexible, rational, and topical plans for life (to decide which programs to pursue and which to avoid). Kronik believes that such “bridge-building activity” usually starts with the client’s “realization of reality and consolidation of the sense of reality” (Golovakha & Kronik, 1984). And it continues with reconsidering plans for life and resetting these plans; at this point new features can be found in the image of a new life.

Ermakov tried an interesting experiment: he made his students (masters of karate) do the impossible. They were used to routinely breaking wooden boards 1inch thick with their bare hands: he suggested they should try to do the same with 2-inch boards. While doing so they had their brain activity registered by means of electroencephalography. The students accomplished the task successfully only if the right cerebral hemisphere became dominant. The left one (the common-sense one) was telling them, “This is impossible; you’ll break your arm. Do you really want to? What for?” The right cerebral hemisphere was responsible for generating emotions: interest, thrill, rage, excitement —and the thick board shattered (Ermakov, 1991).

Accepting one’s emotions is somewhat part of romanticism; it involves regarding one’s own freedom as a unique emotional state that allows one to act responsibly. But what is a “free-to-decide” action? Where does a sensible decision come from, what is it based on? If my sensible decision is based in reality as I see it, then my personal attitude will most probably be built on the same base. Here lies the cause behind my real deeds and actions. Does decisiveness belong to the category of irrational (as opposed to rational, not in the sense of insanity)? And can it be that decisiveness is the key to the infamous contradiction between affect and intelligence? But in this case psychological advice would have an esoteric character. My inner certainty in understatement is my freedom; it’s a unique condition that precedes a one-time, spatiotemporally precise action. Why is it a one-time action? Because any action, just like any event in a person’s life and just like a person’s life, is a one-time occurrence. Such an action has never been taken before and will never be taken again. Why is it a precise action? Because I will never have an opportunity to undertake this action again.

A. Blatner, a psychologist, noticed two initiations in the lifetime of every person (2003). The first one usually occurs in adolescence, when one realizes that something in the world is depressing; this stage is hard to go through. The second one is connected with the midlife crisis, when one realizes that many things in life are depressing. This stage is even tougher. Adulthood is associated with harmony in dealing with both initiation stages and with harmony in accepting responsibility and humility. A crisis contributes to the arrival of the second initiation. In this connection, the key factor for the psychologist is the psychological crisis—the mismatch between reality and expectations, the failure of one’s usual approaches, the inability to meet expectations, the “24-hour problem” (there are only 24 hours in a day), the inability to clearly read one’s own deep feelings and desires. Being ready to make choices in a fifty-fifty situation means being ready to decide everything for oneself and to being ready to act accordingly. Here one comes to under-

stand that sometimes making choices is more important than the self-reflection that follows.

Social Context and the Challenges of the Present Time

The world as we knew it had gone through a considerable number of changes by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Most of these changes involved the development of information technologies. For an individual such changes reveal themselves in constantly expanding virtualization, involvement in the external sociocommunicative environment, and the emergence of multiple identity (Bazarov & Shevchenko, 2010). Let us consider some features of these phenomena in detail.

Virtualization is a general term used to describe the process by which real things and actions are replaced by their images, by simulations. Through the Internet some actions can be performed as virtual analogues of real social interactions. For example, an online store is analogous to a real-life store, while virtual communities simulate the availability and proximity of people to talk to. Because of virtualization a person deals with an object's simulation instead of the object itself. We can "live" in virtual reality, being totally aware of the fact that it's conventional, that its parameters can be modified, and that one can always leave it. Some researchers believe that the community we live in becomes similar to virtual reality; in other words, this community can be described using the same characteristics (Ivanov, 2000). For example, a virtual economics would be one in which stock-exchange speculation is greater than production output.

At the same time, nowadays, unlike previously, a person is constantly in contact with other people. Thanks to mobile devices we are available 24 hours a day. And the act of communication has become as brief as possible. Very often key decisions are taken right in the process of communication; it is not possible to separate the idea-generation process from the idea-communication process. Social interaction on the Internet can be aloof, as happens when a text starts living its own life not in any way connected to its author. One of the peculiarities of a communicative environment is the constant process of interpreting. The object of interpretation is the text—the text seen as the whole system of language meanings used for communication. Sometimes we witness a person being reduced to the text. Only those things that are written, or typed, make a person existent because those written things determine that person. This kind of reduction brings a few problems, one of them being the problem of creating a universal descriptive image in the constant process of interpretation.

The current situation also brings up the problem of self-identity in the social environment. According to researchers, an identity is the feeling of personal continuity, equivalence, and certitude resulting from being a part of the whole that stands above the identity (Andreeva & Dontsov, 2002). The modern world does not have even a single universal wholeness to offer; that is why a person has no feeling of personal equivalence, or, in other words, self-identity. Everyday reality encourages easy role change and a corresponding change of identity. Being tolerant of the lack of self-identity becomes a key step in overcoming the "non-continuity," the "fragmentariness," of the social world. With the development of

humanistic values a human being starts to enjoy increased freedom in demonstrating the inner self. A person can choose the type of behavior depending on the situation. But when the criteria for decision making are uncertain, the problem of choice comes forward. For example, if in one situation a person accepts something that seems unacceptable in other circumstances, then the following problem arises: Can a person's principles and norms be universal? The multiple-identity situation may be hiding inner conflicts that come out when the actions do not match the inner views of the person. The above-mentioned conditions and other circumstances of the modern era cause a person to engage in an active adaptation process. Such adaptation implies mainly developing one's own psychic abilities. In general it can be understood as improving one's attention, willpower, and imagination.

Adapting to New Realities

Extra-voluntary attention

“To be interested in interesting things.”

S. S. Averintsev, philologist and culturalist (1937–2004)

Any activity can be easy to do and engaging if the person performing it is interested in it. You will never be bored with something that is interesting for you. Very often the interest we develop is a natural reaction: we can get interested in a conversation that concerns us in one way or another; we can become totally absorbed by a movie with a catching plot, or we can participate in a sport. We do not push ourselves to do it; it just works out by itself. We admire those people who are “destined” to do their work; they are always passionate about their job, although the word *job* seems to be a bad fit for describing what they are doing. A way of life is beautifully intertwined in these professionals. It is impossible to divide their life into the time they are working and the time they are not. They can use every one of the 24 hours in a day to do something interesting. No boundaries separate their jobs from recreation. The strategy to achieve such an attitude has two variants. You may understand the field of your interest from the beginning and start doing what you enjoy. Stories of prominent entrepreneurs show that their early interests turned into businesses and eventually turned to their advantage against their competitors. Steve Jobs was fond of calligraphy and eventually developed new fonts for PCs. Or you may gain an interest in what you are doing now. But how do you get interested in something that is of no interest to you at the beginning? And how to maintain this attitude?

A child can play with one toy for hours by coming up with new ways to employ it. Why is it so interesting to look into a kaleidoscope? Because every time new combinations of colors and patterns present themselves. To give an example of how to maintain interest by constantly learning something new, let us look into the problem of sleepy truck drivers. It turns out that listening to a radio station where people talk keeps them more awake than listening to music does.

Our interest is conditional: the object of our attention needs to be constantly enriched. Try to think for 10 minutes only about the sun. You will notice that after

some time your attention will become less concentrated. And then suddenly you will notice that you are thinking about something absolutely different. Only by continuous thinking of more and more new details about the sun will you keep your concentration manageable and well maintained. Attention is like fire—it needs a combustible, which in our case is new information. If you do not add wood to the fire, very soon it will be out.

Let us imagine attention as a projector that directs light to a specific area. Unfortunately, its power resources are limited. Thus, the wider the area to be lit, the worse the visibility. The secret of maintaining an interest in something is the ability to concentrate and to direct the projector onto a specific spot. Kahneman (2006) conducted remarkable experiments to prove that the power of our attention is limited. Those who participated in one of the experiments were mastering the skill of performing two actions at the same time while their attention was divided between the major and secondary objectives. It was found that attention capacity could be easily determined by the success in performance of the secondary-objective task. At those moments when a participant became distracted, mistakes could be found in the secondary-objective performance. When not enough resources are present, the major task will be the first to receive a sufficient amount of power, and the secondary task is geared to secondary power. As a result, one task is performed better than the other. Thus, a reliable indicator of attention involvement was found in the degree of success in the secondary-task performance.

The obtained results were used in real life to supervise flight-operations officers and dispatchers in airports. They are required, from time to time, to perform one simple action without being distracted from their major duty: for example, pushing a button. The forgetfulness of a flight-operations officer can be taken as a signal that the attention resource is coming to an end.

Another subject worth deep consideration is broadening the span of attention through a search for weak signals. Living in the modern world, a human being is bound to process incredible amounts of information and thus may lose the ability to detect weak signals that indicate approaching danger or a possible success. Let us draw an analogy between such signals and a water lily in a pond. The leaves of the lily start from one cell, which doubles itself on daily basis. Claiming the surface of only 1% of the pond on the first day, the cells will completely cover the surface in just one week. In other words, it is important to anticipate an innovation before it becomes clearly visible, while it is still beyond our general comprehension. Such an ability is of essential importance for network economics because observations show that initially small units can grow into prevalent unions (Bazarov & Shevchenko, 2010).

A leader's ability to search for weak signals is also related to the perception and evaluation of the behavior of followers. Respect and attention to their needs are directly related to the effectiveness of leadership (House & Podsakoff, 1994; Yukl, 1998). The level of a leader's empathy can play a crucial role in this process. Empathy allows leaders to build a strong relationship with followers, to respond to their needs, and to influence their positive attitude to work (Clarke, 2010).

The more detail we want to see and to understand, the lower the distinction barrier and the higher the ability to distinguish, to differentiate between, objects.

Medical practice has a special term, *irradiation*, to define the pain that goes beyond the malfunctioning organ and echoes in another part of the body. The doctor's task is to examine what kind of pain it is and where it comes from so as not to mistake a heart attack for a nerve pain. In a case like this, in order to avoid a mistake the doctor needs to apply knowledge of the relevant medical fields. The details of pain description will be important only once they make sense, once the doctor has this knowledge of relevant medical fields. For example, sometimes in conversation it is important to hear something that has not necessarily been said. Another example is nonverbal communication. Along with the information one conveys through language, a lot can be learned through one's body movements and the intonation, rhythm, high/low pitch patterns, speed, and conciseness of one's speech.

Take, for instance, two people having a dialogue. You can judge whether they are on good terms with each other just by looking at whether their postures and body movements are identical. Bad relationships intensify compensatory reactions and multiply the number of body movements that are blocking the contact: bringing hands and elbows forward, stretching legs forward or to the side, leaning back, turning to the side, avoiding eye contact, or challenging the partner with excessive eye contact.

A Russian psychology specialist, P. Ya. Galperin, has suggested that attention can be perceived as reaching the perfectionism level when the control function is generalized and reduced to a minimum (initially the control function reveals itself in different forms in different people) (Galperin, 1957). First, the control function can be performed as follows: one person is doing the task, and the other controls his performance. Second, the person who is doing the task can later on check the result of his performance himself. And, third, the controlling process can be carried out by the performer himself while the task is still being done. Therefore, initially attention is present only as an external feature, and it is only with persistent self-adjustment that it becomes an integral, internal part of a person's life. For this reason, developing one's attention goes hand in hand with checking and counterchecking performance results. At an early stage of self-development this checking should be done by the means at hand; for example, a person could write down everything she has accomplished in a notebook.

Moreover, attention needs some rest. The key strategy in recreation and recovering one's energy resources lies in changing the type of activity one is engaged in. It's common knowledge that when antagonistic muscles tighten up, major muscles relax. But what do we need to change or switch to in order to regain attention? One of the variants is the three circles of attention span distinguished by Stanislavski (1994). The big circle includes all the settings one can observe and perceive. The medium circle includes face-to-face communication with partners. The small circle includes the person and the immediate setting he or she is acting in. Attention setting always depends on the activity. Outside is the big circle; the office is the medium circle; eating lunch is the small circle. If you have been working in front of your PC all day (in the small circle), then reading a book (also the small circle) as a recreation activity would be less effective than switching to a medium or big circle (e.g., watching a movie or going out to a concert hall).

One of the problems in expanding one's attention span is connected with the ability to accomplish several tasks simultaneously—that is, to disperse one's attention. Neisser's research work proved that successful dispersion of one's attention is possible through an exercise routine (2001). But a few conditions must be met to facilitate the development of dispersed attention: (1) different perceptive organs must be engaged in the action (e.g., drawing or listening to music), (2) anticipating schemes are required, (3) the first task signals should not camouflage the signals of the second task.

Anticipating cognitive schemes serve as an orientation and are responsible for our readiness to perceive specific information. For example, you are waiting for a specific flight in the arrivals section of a crowded, noisy airport when you hear a public announcement: "Attention passengers. Flight number [indistinct speech] is to land in [again indistinct] minutes." Why did you not hear the most crucial words, assuming they were pronounced in the same distinct manner and in the same loud voice? We are good at recognizing the words we anticipate, but we have difficulty distinguishing the words we cannot anticipate, especially in a noisy setting. Therefore, the less we expect one or another signal, the more distinct the signal should be for us to recognize it correctly.

The anticipation impact can be shown on a higher level, the level of semantics. It's night, and everybody in the house is asleep. Suddenly someone knocks on the door. The sleepy homeowner asks, "Who is it?" And the voice behind the door asks back, "Do you need firewood?" The homeowner says, "No!" When he wakes up next morning and goes to the backyard, he discovers his firewood stack is gone.

Another story is connected with Pavlov. During one of the conferences in Pavlov's memory a presenter was going though evidence in support of Pavlov's atheism. The presenter was trying to argue that Pavlov's affection for some religious ceremonies was nothing but a stereotype feature having nothing to do with his actual outlook. The memoirs of a young employee in Pavlov's laboratory were presented as a proof to support this theory. The employee recalled staying late one night in the laboratory with Pavlov and addressing him with a question he had always wanted to ask: "Ivan Petrovich, do you really believe in God?" Pavlov responded: "What do you take me for—a fool?" The presenter was sure that this "evidence" supported his theory about Pavlov's atheism (Pavlov, 1967).

It is difficult sometimes to concentrate on something, and it is also not easy to switch from one thought to another, to stop thinking about the problems that seem to be already rooted in our consciousness. Try not to think about a white monkey, and you will see that the harder you try not to think about it the more you do. Our attention is not familiar with the word *no*; it sticks to positive thinking instead. Imagine you are carrying a tray full of dishes, and someone gives a friendly reminder to be careful with it: "Don't drop it!" Suddenly something goes wrong with your motion coordination and you feel you are losing your balance. Why? Once we hear the message "Don't drop it," we clearly perceive the word *drop*. We then somewhat imagine what *drop* means. And for a moment our attention is caught by this idea, and our response consists of several parts, including spasms corresponding to the action "drop something."

To switch to another thought means to find another object of attention and to create a positive response to it. It has been determined that our attention is rhyth-

mic in nature. We can easily keep an object in the center of our attention once we find the ideal, best-fitting rhythm. And if we follow the rhythm, we will feel how easy it is to manage the attention. To master attention management one should follow an exercise routine consisting of concentrating and switching attention, frequently by using meditation.

One efficient means of enhancing attention is sticking to orderliness, the sequence of actions that helps us reach the goal. From their own experiences people have a series of procedures, recipes, or scripts that they prefer to follow. But the majority of us are not aware of the existence of these scripts, and so we keep following the behavioral patterns that previously proved effective. But situations undergo constant modifications, and one must learn how to create structure and order from scratch. To do so, one should study various existing behavioral and organizational patterns and learn how to work with them. The history of humankind is full examples: people were resolving billions of problems long before us, and their successful solutions contribute to structuring our cultural experience.

Construct imagination

“We are what we pretend to be.”

Kurt Vonnegut, American writer (1922–2007)

The development of leaders' imaginations boosts the creativity of their teams. Creativity potential is the ability to create new products, services, ideas, procedures, and processes that have value for the organization (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). The need to connect creativity to the value of the final product is emphasized in contemporary research (DiLiello & Houghton, 2008).

The process of imagination is closely connected with memory and attention. Attention is needed to identify an object's details and to imagine it. Try to imagine a one dollar bill—an object you see almost every day—and you will realize that the image you have in your head is not at all complete. The preciseness of an object's image depends on how well you have studied the object and not on how often you come across it. Being attentive and obtaining a comprehensive image of an object serve as the basis for the enhancement of visual thinking and visual imagination. In this respect it is important to learn as much as possible about the objects around you. Do your best to create whole images of everything you hear, see, smell, taste, and sense. Preserving the image is a memory task. And the starting point for imagination is an object's image actualization. Some people are capable of imagining a vivid three-dimensional picture of an object (if they so desire), but others cannot produce any image at all. Some people think in images all the time, while others argue that “the mind's eye” is only a metaphor intended just to make our speech sound eloquent.

The more vivid the images in our head, the more intense our emotions and the more deep their motivation function. People have different sensor systems that they use during the process of thinking or reasoning. Visual learners work with images; audio learners work with words; and kinesthetic learners work with tactile senses. Once you find out which one is your priority sensor system, you will be able to enrich the images by using other channels as well. Try having a fresh view

of the world by alternating the sensor channel. First have a look at the colors, their vividness, the hues; then listen to the sounds; and, finally, listen to what your other senses say. Try creating images of events that you read or hear about. For example, when reading a novel choose a part to imagine in detail. Imagine the setting and the characters' temperaments and actions. Pick a specific observation spot and let the events proceed right in front of you. And then check how much more you are able to remember after reading a part in such a way.

Sometimes when you recall an image you may notice that a line of associations is connected with the image. As a rule, these are not random associations: they are reflections of your previous experience. There is a close correlation between visual images and emotions. Negative images can be devastating for your mood and may serve as distractions. Check which images make you feel sad and which ones give you inspiration. Try managing your emotions by imagining cherished events. The free-association test frequently used in psychoanalysis can be of much help when developing an idea. Just take a pen and a piece of paper and put down all the thoughts you have. During this time, you may not criticize; you need to temporarily disable your inner censorship program and just follow the thoughts going through your head.

The key feature of a well-developed imagination is active anticipation. Being prepared for the future depends on our ability to project, forecast, and anticipate the future (Bazarov, 2012). And it does not matter if our forecast is true and precise (it matters, of course, but not that much). What really matters is that we have a number of scripts for the future. Making probability prognoses is something we do not learn at school from solving math problems, to which there is always an exact, correct answer. Reality shows that we need to have an ability to envision future possibilities. Take doctors, for instance. If they do not start treating patients before the whole diagnostic procedure is fully complete, they often find that their prognosis is proved correct only when an autopsy is performed on the patient, who died because of the delay in treatment. A medical doctor starts acting when one of the diagnostic possibilities becomes more probable than another. And having made a decision and acted in accordance with this decision, a good medical doctor continues to investigate deeper, comes up with a narrowing choice of diagnostic possibilities, and introduces changes in treatment accordingly.

However, all our attempts to anticipate the future are not possible without goals. If people do not have goals, these goals cannot become a subject of inspiration for others. To illustrate the point, here is the example of John Kennedy, former president of the United States. In May 1962 he gave a speech that was broadcast by television to the whole country. At that time the U.S. economy had seen better days. Everybody was expecting him to dwell on fighting the economic recession and unemployment. But he, smiling as always, said that the goal of the United States was to have astronauts on the Moon by the end of the decade. This was a demonstration of a fabulous skill to set a goal that is hard to achieve on the one hand and very realistic on the other. Setting similar motivational goals is typical not only of political leaders but also of managers and executive leaders at any level.

In order to develop your skills in goal setting, try creating an image of yourself in your own head—an image of you doing or possessing something that

you'd really love to do or to have. You can imagine yourself wearing a new blazer or working over a new project or having dinner in your favorite restaurant. There are three crucial elements in this brain exercise: first, be attentive to detail by applying all your senses; second, imagine yourself getting pleasure while experiencing these imaginative situations; and, third, imagine a specific situation happening on a specific day. The image you create makes you concentrate on the goal, stimulates motivation, and provides additional stimuli. Start with small goals that are easy to achieve, and then move to more significant and more general ones.

A well-developed imagination allows for searching for objects' subtle characteristics. And the discovery of new, previously unknown characteristics brings about the invention of new objects. Percy Spencer, an American engineer, was the first to notice that microwave radio signals can warm up food, and sometime later he received a patent for a microwave oven. At the time of his discovery Spencer was employed by Raytheon, a radar-equipment manufacturer. Legend has it that while he was standing in front of an operating magnetron, a chocolate bar in his pocket melted (if it is not a legend, it is a pure miracle he did not get a deadly dose of microwaves). According to another version, he noticed that a sandwich warmed up after he left it on a working magnetron.

Another important skill based on construct imagination is visual thinking. The general approach to developing visual thinking is to refrain from studying existing cultural images and to start experimenting with the development and realization of new images. A wonderful source of visual-thinking development is life drawing, drawing from memory, or picturing abstract ideas. The creation of images is connected with a series of combinations and with applying accents. Combining means putting together separate elements of various subjects' images in a new, more or less unusual combination. Combining is not just relocating or regrouping elements, and it is not a mechanical matching of different objects' sides; instead, it is a process of making drastic changes to elements that are used to build a new image. The technique of applying accents is outlining one or another feature of an object (take an image of a giant, for instance). Applying accents can be done by means of highlighting, abstracting, and transforming some characteristic features of an object or phenomenon.

Creative imagination also enables one to take one of several features of an image and to apply this feature to another image. Many inventions were based on the creative transfer of an object's features. Leonardo da Vinci started by studying a dragonfly—its anatomy and its movement patterns in the air—and then he came up with a waving wing. A Polish architect, A. Karbowski, applied the bees' technique of building honeycombs in his residential constructions because honeycombs are an ideal shape for solid-cast constructions such as honeycomb panel walls, barriers, and radiators. And English inventor Percival Everitt designed a vending machine for matches that was an analogue of the "holy-water" vending machine invented by Heron of Alexandria (first century AD). Velcro—a hook-and-loop fastener working on the same principle as burdock—was invented in 1948 by a Swiss engineer, George de Mestral.

Willpower under Control

“Willpower is determination combined with the right reasoning.”

Plato, Greek philosopher (427–347 BC)

Previous researchers have argued that an effective leader has high intrinsic motivation. In other words, leader make their own choices based on criteria of pleasure or meaningful purpose. Teachers with stronger intrinsic motivation exhibit leadership more often than teachers with less intrinsic motivation: they support independence and responsibility in students, provide more content and organizational information, help students, and thereby increase their involvement (Taylor, Ntoumanis, & Standage, 2008). The presence of motivation in leaders allows us to suggest that the component of “willpower under control” can make a significant contribution to the efficiency of management.

Willpower is a human ability to achieve a consciously set goal while overcoming inner and outer obstacles. An act of will is an act that is performed in conditions where different stimuli, both positive and negative, are present. For example, a conscious rejection of food during a diet period is marked by hunger discomfort. During the process of making choices another inner process takes place, and this process is defined as an act of will. Experiencing willpower can be connected with the sensation of overcoming something, which can be prevalent in people who practice skydiving. At the moment before jumping out of the plane it is difficult for them to raise their arms; they barely move up and seem to exist just by themselves.

If there is no hierarchy of motivations and goals, then a person's willpower may be influenced by unconscious instincts. Such situations should be carefully considered on the level of consciousness, and a clear vision of one's values and corresponding goals should be reached. In order to understand the possible acts and goals, it may be helpful to answer a few questions:

- (1) What are the factors (forces) that influence my actions?
- (2) What here-and-now possibilities do I have for my actions?
- (3) What may be the consequences of these or other actions?
- (4) What are my desires and goals?

An act of will starts with the emergence of a motive expressed as an aspiration. While the corresponding aspiration-related goal is being perceived, aspiration transforms into desire; once there is a desire people find out what object can satisfy this need, based on their own experiences. And when the goal is clear, when a task is set to attain this goal, when a person is sure it is possible to attain it and is determined to master all techniques necessary to attain it, then this desire transforms into a real act of will, which in psychology is called a “wish.” Wishing is not aimed at the desired object in itself; wishing is the determination to get the desired object, to achieve the goal. Wishing is possible only when not only the object but also the action leading to getting the object is desired.

Sometimes the aspiration and the goal setting are not followed by an action. Before an action takes place there may be doubt about the set goal or about the means

needed to attain it; and sometimes there are a few simultaneous competitive goals, or a person may think about the undesirable consequences of the actions needed to reach the goal, and as a result we have a stoppage. Reasoning and a struggle of motivations wedge in between the aspiration and the action. The problem of choice arises because one does not want to see alternative solutions or does not want to give preferences; doing so means setting aside other possibilities, which can be difficult for those individuals who never say “no” to anything and want to implement all possibilities at the same time. The problem of choice may also be exacerbated by the fact that many things can seem unpleasant. This is exactly the case when we put off making a decision and hope everything will work out by itself and we will not need to take any action. But, as a rule, nothing works out by itself, and given the time we have lost, it may be too late to undertake any actions. But is it true that we cannot anticipate the result of such a delay? Sometimes it is enough to seriously consider the probable consequences of the delay, and the desire to put off the errand vanishes.

The analysis of one’s job from the perspective of negative emotional impact shows that only a small number of activities cause such a disturbance. If you make it a rule to deal with these unpleasant types of activity in the beginning, you will drastically reduce the number of work-related responsibilities that are piling up. It is best to deal with them in the morning. In this case you will no longer follow “the road to Calvary”; you will have a sense of accomplishment for the whole day, together with pride in yourself for your strong willpower. Finally, if a task is unpleasant to you, promise yourself a reward for successfully accomplishing it on time. The reward can be a movie, a walk in the city, or anything that gives you pleasure. It is important to follow two rules in this connection: first, you should not reward yourself if the terms and conditions were not met in full; second, you should not allow external factors to deprive you of a reward you have honestly earned.

Moreover, the inability to make choices can be exacerbated by a person’s goal to always make everything right. Such a goal deprives you of the right to make a mistake. The desire to ensure that nothing bad happens leads to a never-ending process of gathering information, consultations, meetings, and deferrals. You should not forget that in the end you need to take action. The right time to take action is when no new information can have an essential impact on the quality of the decision. It is useful to develop the habit of choosing the best solution you can at the moment and to consider it satisfactory. An efficient cure for indecisiveness is to make a “list of concerns” in which you include all the obstacles that you may encounter on the way to achieving the goal. Have a look at this list from time to time and mark what has really happened. Probably most of your concerns were mere products of your imagination, and remembering this exercise will help you take new, more risky steps in the future.

An important aspect of an act of will is fighting bad habits. All people have their own bad habits. But changing these habits is a long and complicated process. To start working on the habits that impede successful performance of your task make a list of errands and responsibilities you are used to postponing both at work and in everyday life. Usually, studying such a list will reveal some consistent patterns in your behavior. In addition, when we undertake a new task, we have to overcome a more or less powerful urge toward nonaction. But we should remember that ac-

tions have momentum. It is much easier to continue a task you have started than to just start. Hence, a piece of practical advice: when undertaking a complex and not-so-pleasing task, start with the easiest step, the one requiring the least amount of effort, and then tackle harder steps.

Big gains can be achieved by overcoming your habits through competing with yourself by means of game. For example, you can have a look at how many different tasks that you are prone to postponing you can complete in just one day and where you can find some time to do so. Gradually, this game can become a habit; your personal score will start growing, and there will be a moment when you realize that coping with your job has become much easier and more interesting than before and that you are more tranquil when finishing a project. Moreover, you are now using your time in a more efficient manner than before, and you are much less tense.

Executing a decision requires such qualities as a clear and firm understanding of the goal, single-mindedness in pursuing the goal, vigor, persistence, and self-restraint. By “self-restraint” we should understand the readiness and the ability for some time (and sometimes for a long time) to abandon other goals and plans; and we also should not be carried away by the means used to reach the goal so that the means do not become goals in themselves and so that we do not become committed to one means only. The amount of energy used to achieve a goal can generally be maintained through confirmation and command of oneself (“so be it”), while persistence can be developed through the technique of keeping the center of our attention on a clear mental picture or image. It is here that all three psychic components meet: willpower, attention, and imagination.

According to research studies, the feeling of overcoming something when accomplishing an act of will is connected with muscle tension. It lies within the nature of the effort. It explains why after accomplishing an act of will we feel as though we have done an immense amount of work even though in fact it may have been a relatively easy task. It's because the work was done in our muscles without preparatory toning; it was done contrary to toning. Adaptation encompasses not only rational, mental activity but also physical activities that allow us to stimulate the groups of muscles necessary to accomplish a willpower action.

Bruce Jenner, an Olympic decathlon champion, equipped his room with a bar resembling a jumping bar, and for four years whenever he sat down on the sofa he glanced at the bar and imagined jumping over it. Every time Jack Nicklaus, a golfer, wanted to play a stroke, he imagined the whole process and watched it as if it were in a movie. In his mind he saw not only the spot where he wanted the ball to land but the flight path as well.

There is a story about some tourists who were watching a small animal called a mongoose. They described its weird behavior in the following way: the mongoose would spend hours in a glade practicing some tricks and stunts. The tourists could not understand this behavior and its purpose. Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics, later interpreted this strange behavior, which he called “the mongoose dance.” He suggested that the animal was fighting an imaginary cobra. And it was always fighting in such a way as to win the battle. A real cobra encounter for the mongoose was just one of the battles it had practiced before. That is why a mongoose always wins.

The implementation phase requires planning the action. In the majority of cases we postpone starting a difficult task because we are not sure where to begin. The only solution is to divide the task into several parts, and the more little parts there are, the better. How to divide a difficult task into parts? It is best to start from the end. Analyzing the parts usually helps a lot with finding the first step, which will constitute the base for the final success. Another advantage of dividing the task into parts is that you can plan your tasks in advance and every day pick the time to complete one or another small part without interfering with other tasks. If you decide to follow this method of accomplishing one small part everyday, you should also follow two important pieces of advice: (1) always rank even the smallest and seemingly most insignificant parts in order to complete the most important ones first; (2) while accomplishing an array of small parts, analyze the whole scope of the work once again; this exercise may help find quicker routes to achieving the final goal.

When dealing with unpleasant tasks it is useful to set a deadline: its preciseness will help you to overcome sluggishness and to start working. But do not forget two conditions: first, the deadline should be realistic so that you have enough time to perform an unpleasant task without nervous haste; second, the deadline should always be in plain view—underneath the glass panel of your desk or on a special card in a paper clip or on a special piece of paper attached to the wall in front of your workplace. It may be beneficial to let other people know about the deadline—your employees, secretary, relatives, friends. The fact that they may see you as an unreliable person if you do not meet the deadline will discipline you much better than simply reporting to yourself. When making a decision you feel that the sequence of the events that follow depends on you. Realizing the consequences of your actions and the interdependence of your decision and ensuing events brings about the sense of responsibility typical of an act of will. It is important to feel the responsibility and to get the job done. Accepting responsibility is also a question of morals and ethics: What are you ready to sacrifice in case of misfortune: money, reputation, status?

Experimental research on willpower development in children has revealed some paradoxes (Petukhov, 2002):

- (1) Acts of will take place more often when the object we need (something we want to get for our work) is in our imagination rather than when it is within reach. During the experiment the children performed senseless actions more often when the reward for their behavior (a more interesting game) was hidden in the closet rather than when it was lying in front of them.
- (2) Acts of will take place more often if a person, not a setting, gives the impetus for the actions. During the experiment the children reacted to a request from an adult to perform senseless actions more often than they reacted to the game's rules about performing such actions.

These features, typical of acts of will, can be seen also in adults' behavior. For example, when there are no requests from the immediate surroundings, a self-command is performed.

An officer's valet is dawdling and keeps groaning and whimpering all the time. The officer asks him:

“Ivan, why are you groaning all the time?”
 “I'm very thirsty.”
 “So go and drink.”
 “I don't want to go.”

After some time the officer tells him in a commanding voice: “Ivan.” “Yes, sir?” responds the valet. “Fetch a glass of water.” The valet quickly fetches the glass of water. The officer says: “Drink it.” The valet drinks it up and settles down. (Leontyev, 2001, p. 480).

Lack of time results in a quantitative increase in work, but the quality decreases and attention focuses on vital problems; there is a predominant tendency to follow simplified procedures in making choices. In a situation like this complex forms of activity management may give way to simple ones. A person switches from controlled and sensible judgments to intuition; selectivity in choosing the source of information rises. And actions proceed parallel to each other; hence, “multiactivity” or “multichannel activity” appears.

Summary

The peculiarities of the present-day social situation are virtualization, multiple identity, and total immersion in an external sociocommunicative environment. In order to adapt to this reality, one should develop such psychological skills as construct imagination, extra-voluntary attention, and control of willpower. Among the peculiarities of the “executive view” in the postcrisis era one can discern self-adjustment, common sense and intuition acting as a whole, and the readiness to make choices in fifty-fifty situations.

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