

## **[Metizo publishes the first definition of Personal Development in Wikipedia](#)**

[Prof. Bob Aubrey](#), Founder and CEO of Metizo, explains why he wrote the Wikipedia entry based on his 35 years' experience in the field.

View the article on Personal Development in Wikipedia (the most consulted resource worldwide) [here](#).

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### ***Why I wrote the article and what it means for the field of Personal Development***

*by Bob Aubrey*

Personal development means many things to many people. In some countries the term is negative and it generally is not recognized in education as a legitimate subject of study or in business as a management competency. The first thing to note about personal development is that it is not only about developing oneself. It includes developing others and that is really where it has its place in education and management.

Defined and explained in Wikipedia, the world's most consulted resource the term gains legitimacy, personal development is moving from a soft, informal activity to an institutional one.

Personal development is already the most common term used in institutions, thanks to the personal development plan. The article explains why: in UK education, universities are required to provide students with personal development plans. In companies, millions of workers discuss personal development plans with their managers as part of their performance review. What I did not know when I wrote the first edition is that in France it is a right: employers are required to provide feedback from management on their performance and development.

Perhaps the most important point made in the article is that personal development has its place in business schools rather than in education or psychology departments. That is because it has economic value, building on the economic concept of human capital, and not just the subjective personal value of satisfaction or happiness. Since in companies performance and development objectives are set in strategic plans, the economic value of personal development is constantly changing and will be different from one company to the next. Personal development may even part of the corporate brand since ranking of admired companies include people management, innovation, social responsibility and quality of management. Economic value is thus linked to the stock price.

What follows is the original Wikipedia article posted in November 2008.

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**Personal Development** refers to activities that improve self-knowledge and identity, develop talents and potential, build human capital and employability, enhance quality of life and realize dreams and aspirations. Personal development is not limited to self-development or [self-help](#); it also includes developing others and by extension refers to the methods, programs, tools, techniques, and assessment systems used in personal development.

At the level of self-improvement, personal development includes the following:

1. Becoming the person one aspires to be; integrating social identity with self-identification
2. Increasing awareness or defining of one's priorities, values, chosen way of life or ethics.
3. Strategizing and realizing dreams, aspirations, career and lifestyle priorities.
4. Developing professional potential and talents; developing individual competencies, learning on the job
5. Improving the quality of lifestyle in such areas as health, wealth, culture, family, friends and communities.
6. Learning techniques or methods to expand awareness, gain control of one's life or achieve wisdom.

The personal development of others may be a function within the role of teacher or [mentor](#), a personal [competency](#) such as a manager's ability to develop the potential of employees, or a professional service such as providing [training](#), assessment or [coaching](#).

Personal development is an industry with two distinct markets, business-to-individual and business-to-institution. The business-to-individual market<sup>[1]</sup> includes books, motivational speaking, e-learning programs, workshops, individual counseling, life coaching and techniques such as [yoga](#), [martial arts](#), meditation and fitness programs. Business-to-institution markets reach tens of millions of students in higher education and hundreds of millions of employees in companies through training, employee development programs, development tools, self-assessment, feedback, coaching and mentoring. Some consulting firms are specialized in personal development<sup>[2]</sup> but generalist firms in<sup>[3]</sup> human resources, recruitment and organizational strategy have recently entered this growing market, not to mention a large number of smaller firms and self-employed professionals who provide consulting, training and coaching.

At whatever level of development -- economic, political, biological, organizational or personal --- a framework is needed in order to know if improvement has actually occurred. Personal development frameworks consist of [goals](#) or [benchmarks](#) that define the end-point, [strategies](#) or plans for reaching goals, measurement and [assessment](#) of progress, levels or stages that define [milestones](#) along the development path, and a [feedback](#) system to support progress.

## Origins

[Philosophy](#) and [religion](#) have always been concerned with questions about the [meaning of life](#), what constitutes a good life and how best to develop oneself. Techniques and methods have existed since time immemorial: music, song, dance, poetry, sport, martial arts, and writing are universally practiced as personal development activities.

Historian Michel Foucault described in *Care of the Self*<sup>[4]</sup> the techniques of “epimelia” used in ancient Greece and Rome which included diet, exercise, sexual abstinence, contemplation, prayer and confession—some of which became the key practices of Christianity. Traditional Chinese techniques include breathing and energy exercises (Qi), meditation, martial arts (Wu Shu and Tai Qi Quan) as well as practices linked to traditional Chinese medicine such as diet, massage and acupuncture. In India, Yoga techniques make up a number of personal development disciplines including meditation (Prajna Yoga) stretching and postures (Hatha Yoga), breathing (Prana Yoga) sexual mastery (Tantra yoga) and others. In the Islamic tradition, techniques are classified into *dhikr* (mindfulness of the presence of God) which includes prayer, recitation of the Quran, and contemplation, and *muraqaba* (care of the spiritual heart) which includes music, dancing, singing and the unique technique of whirling done by Sufi dervishes.

Two ancient philosophers stand out as sources of what has become personal development today, constituting a Western tradition and an Eastern tradition.

### Aristotle and the Western Tradition

The theories of personal development in the West have been strongly influenced by the Greek philosopher [Aristotle](#) (384 BC – 322 BC) who defined it as a category of practical wisdom. Aristotle’s concept of the Good Life consisted in developing one’s excellences (arête) to reach [eudaimonia](#)<sup>[5]</sup>, commonly translated as happiness but more accurately understood as “human flourishing” or “living well”<sup>[6]</sup>. Aristotle continues to influence the Western concept of personal development to this day, particularly in the economics of human development<sup>[7]</sup> and positive psychology.<sup>[8]</sup>

### Confucius and the East Asian Tradition

In the Chinese tradition, [Confucius](#) (551 BC – 479 BC) is the founder of an unbroken line of philosophy and his ideas continue to influence family values, education and management in China and much of Asia today. In his [Great Learning](#) Confucius explicitly shows personal development as the source of managing the family and the state:

*The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom, first ordered well their own states. Wishing to order well their states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their persons. Wishing to cultivate their persons, they first rectified their hearts. Wishing to rectify their hearts, they first sought to be sincere in their thoughts. Wishing to be sincere in their thoughts, they first extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things.*<sup>[9]</sup>

In the late 1990s a lively debate over Asian values seemed to oppose Confucius and Aristotle on questions of family values, maintenance of order and individual freedom<sup>[10]</sup>. Although the debate turned political and soon died down, cultural differences stemming from the philosophies of Aristotle and Confucius remain. According to leadership author Frank Gallo it is impossible to impose Western concepts in a Confucian management culture without some modifications:

*There are cultural differences between China and the West in the way workers view their leaders, what they expect from their leaders, and what leaders can expect from their workforce. Furthermore, there are very fundamental differences in how life works in China compared to the West. The values that Westerners hold dear are sometimes looked at disdainfully in China.*<sup>[11]</sup>

### ***Personal Development in Psychology***

Psychology became linked to personal development, not with Freud but starting with his dissident disciples [Alfred Adler](#) (1870-1937) and [Carl Gustav Jung](#) (1875-1961).

Adler refused to limit psychology to therapy making the important point that aspirations are forward looking and not limited to unconscious drives or childhood experiences<sup>[12]</sup>. He is also the source of the concept of [lifestyle](#), which he defined as an individual's characteristic approach to life, in facing problems, and self-image, a concept that influenced management under the heading of work-life balance.

Carl Jung (1875-1961) made early contributions to personal development with his concept of [individuation](#) which he saw as the drive of the individual to achieve the wholeness and balance of the Self<sup>[13]</sup>.

Jung's early concept of life stages was significantly improved by [Daniel Levinson](#) (1920-1994) which included a sociological perspective. Levinson's most important discovery was that personal development is influenced throughout life by aspirations, what he called the Dream:

*Whatever the nature of his Dream, a young man has the developmental task of giving it greater definition and finding ways to live it out. It makes a great difference in his growth whether his initial life structure is consonant with and infused by the Dream, or opposed to it. If the Dream remains unconnected to his life it may simply die, and with it his sense of aliveness and purpose.*<sup>[14]</sup>

Levinson's model of seven life stages has been considerably modified due to sociological changes in the lifecycle<sup>[15]</sup>.

Research on success in reaching goals was undertaken by [Albert Bandura](#) (born 1925) who showed that [self-efficacy](#)<sup>[16]</sup> best explains why people with the same level of knowledge and skills get very different results. According to Bandura self-confidence is a powerful predictor of success because<sup>[17]</sup>:

1. It makes you expect to succeed.
2. It allows you take risks and set challenging goals.

3. It helps you keep trying if at first you don't succeed.
4. It helps you control your emotions and fears when the going is rough.

In 1998 personal development moved from the fringes of psychology to a central position when [Martin Seligman](#) was elected President of the [American Psychological Association](#) and proposed a new focus, on healthy individuals rather than pathology:

*We have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that are the most likely buffers against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance. Much of the task of prevention will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to foster these virtues in young people.* <sup>[18]</sup>

### ***Personal Development in Higher Education***

Personal development has been part of education from the beginning and was a specific goal of the modern university, created in 1810 as the University of Berlin (now Humboldt University), whose President [Wilhelm von Humboldt](#) declared: ... *if there is one thing more than another which absolutely requires free activity on the part of the individual, it is precisely education, whose object it is to develop the individual.* <sup>[19]</sup>

In American universities, the 1960s saw a large increase in number of students on American campuses and researchers studied their personal development needs. Arthur Chickering defined seven vectors of personal development<sup>[20]</sup> for young adults during their undergraduate years:

1. developing competence
2. managing emotions
3. achieving autonomy and interdependence
4. developing mature interpersonal relationships
5. establishing identity
6. developing purpose
7. developing integrity.

In the UK, personal development took a central place in university policy in 1997 when the [Dearing Report](#)<sup>[21]</sup> declared that universities should go beyond academic teaching to provide students with personal development. In 2001 a Quality Assessment Agency for UK universities produced guidelines<sup>[22]</sup> for universities to enhance personal development as:

- \* *a structured and supported process undertaken by an individual to reflect upon their own learning, performance and / or achievement and to plan for their personal, educational and career development;*
- \* *objectives related explicitly to student development; to improve the capacity of students to understand what and how they are learning, and to review, plan and take responsibility for their own learning*

In the 1990s, Business Schools began to set up specific personal development programs for leadership and career orientation and in 1998 the [European Foundation for Management Development](#) set up the Equis accreditation system<sup>[23]</sup> which specified that personal development must be part of the learning process through internships, working on team projects and going abroad for work or exchange programs. The first personal development certification required for business school graduation was created in 2002 as a partnership between Metizo<sup>[24]</sup>, a personal development consulting firm, and the Euromed Management School<sup>[25]</sup> in Marseille: students are required not only to complete assignments but to demonstrate self awareness and achievement of personal development competencies.

As a field of education and research, personal development has become a specific discipline, usually attached to business schools, with links to other disciplines: [Education](#) for questions of learning and assessment, [Psychology](#) for motivation and personality, [Sociology](#) for identity and social networks, [Economics](#) for human capital and economic value and [Philosophy](#) for ethics and self-reflection.

### ***Personal Development in Management***

The first well-known proponent of personal development in the workplace was [Abraham Maslow](#) (1908-1970) who proposed a hierarchy of needs with [self-actualization](#) at the top, defined as<sup>[26]</sup> : ... *the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.*

Since Maslow himself believed that only a small minority of people are self-actualizers -- he estimated one percent<sup>[27]</sup> -- his hierarchy of needs had the unfortunate consequence that personal development was regarded as limited to the top of the organizational pyramid, while job security and good working conditions would fulfill the needs of the mass of employees.

As organizations and labor markets became more global, responsibility for development shifted from the company to the individual. In 1999 management thinker [Peter Drucker](#) wrote in the [Harvard Business Review](#): *We live in an age of unprecedented opportunity: if you've got ambition and smarts, you can rise to the top of your chosen profession, regardless of where you started out. But with opportunity comes responsibility. Companies today aren't managing their employees' careers; knowledge workers must, effectively, be their own chief executive officers. It's up to you to carve out your place, to know when to change course, and to keep yourself engaged and productive during a work life that may span some 50 years.*<sup>[28]</sup>

Management professors [Sumantra Ghoshal](#) of London Business School and Christopher Bartlett of Harvard Business School wrote in 1997 that companies must manage people individually and establish a new work contract<sup>[29]</sup>. On the one hand the company must recognize that personal development creates economic value: *market performance flows not from the omnipotent wisdom of top managers but from the initiative, creativity and skills of all employees*

On the other hand, employees should recognize that their work includes personal development and: *..embrace the invigorating force of continuous learning and personal development.*

Career management has changed from a process of climbing the corporate ladder to a personal development process: research shows that women's careers show specific development stages <sup>[30]</sup>, that career changes impact an individual's working identity<sup>[31]</sup>, and that work and lifestyle priorities must be continually adjusted and balanced during the span of one's career.

Personal development programs in companies falls into two categories: employee benefits and development strategy.

As an [employee benefit](#), the purpose is to improve satisfaction, motivation and loyalty. Employee surveys help companies find out the personal development needs, preferences and problems and use the results to design benefits programs. Typical programs in this category are work-life balance, time management, stress management, health programs and psychological counseling. Many are the same as programs that employees would pay for themselves outside work: yoga, sports, martial arts, money management, positive psychology, [NLP](#), etc.

As an investment, personal development programs have the goal of increasing [human capital](#) or improving [productivity](#), innovation or quality. Such programs are not seen as a cost but as an investment with results linked to the company's strategic development goals. Access to these programs is by selection according to the value and future potential of the employee, usually defined in a [talent management](#) architecture including populations such as new hires, high potential employees, high performers, key staff, researchers, technical experts and future leaders. Other programs are general and access is offered to many or even all employees. Typical programs are career development, personal effectiveness, teamwork, and competency development. Personal development is also present in management tools such as creating a personal development plan with one's manager, a personal enterprise plan for one's career, assessing one's level of ability using a competency grid, or getting feedback from a 360 questionnaire filled in by colleagues at different levels in the organization.

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