

Reassessing the Value of Leadership Experience

Bound for doom...or back from the depths of Hell?

Two Perspectives on Experience

A Hypothesis Shot to Hell

- *“Leadership experience appears to have no salutary effect on group and organizational performance.”*
– Fiedler (1970)
- *“The amount of leadership experience seems to have little effect on performance...”*
– Fiedler (1972)

Reason for Hope

- Experience → job performance (McDaniel et al., 1988; Quinones et al., 1995)
- Manager experience → restaurant performance (McEnrue, 1988)
- Mixed evidence linking CEO/TMT experience to firm performance (Henderson et al., 2006; Miller, 1991)

Limitations of Prior Research

Our understanding of experience and leadership is limited in several important ways...

Lower Level Employees

- e.g., military crew, cooks (Schmidt et al., 1988)
- e.g., chess, figure skating, musicians (Deakin & Cobley, 2003; Ericsson et al., 1993)

Quantity vs. Quality

- Quantity (e.g., # of years) and quality of experience not the same (Tesluk & Jacobs, 1998)

Boundary Conditions?

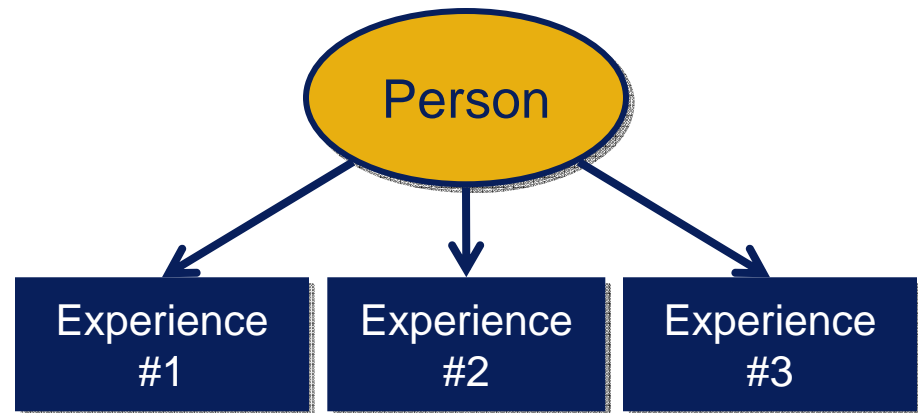
- More challenge – but to what extent?
- For who, under what conditions?

Limitations of Prior Research (cont.)



Unclear how experiences enhance key leadership skills...

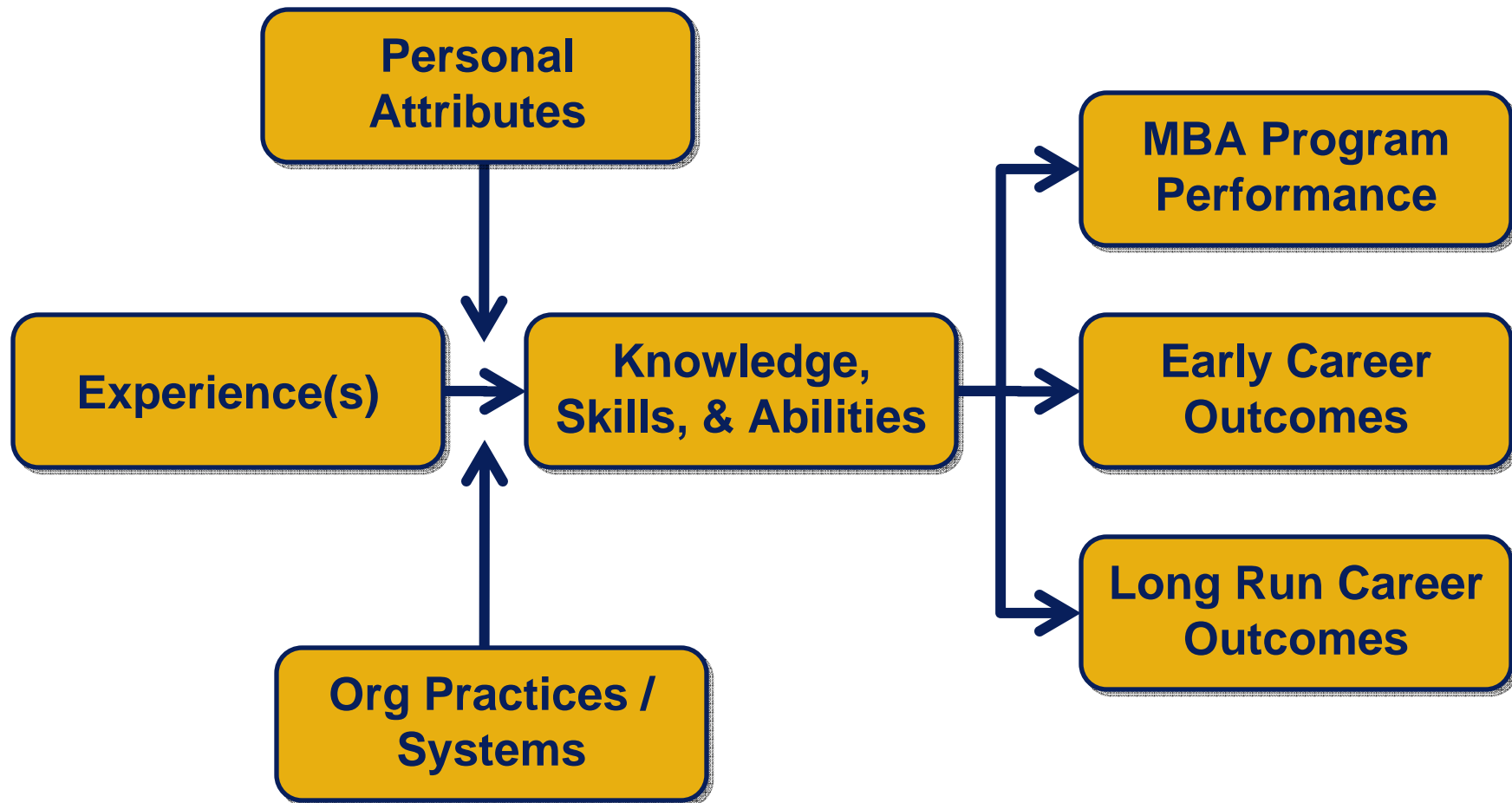
Job-level experiences and person confounded...



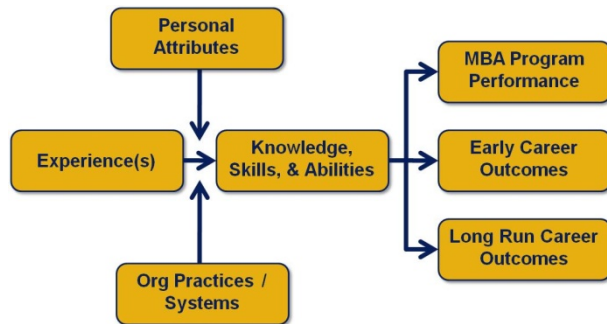
Today's Discussion

- Review a program of research aimed at reframing and reassessing experience as a predictor of leadership performance and development
- Present one study designed to examine the relationship between experience and leadership development
- Discuss early stages of new theory aimed at explaining the psychological processes of experiential learning and development

Research Program



Research Program



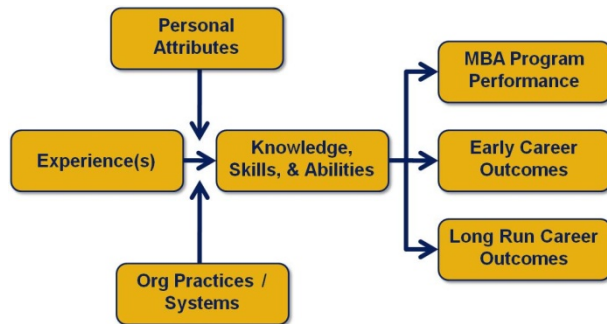
SOCIETY FOR
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1. Career experience → MBA program, early career performance
2. Reflection practices to support experience-based leadership development
3. Career experience → U.S. presidential nominations
4. Career experience → leadership performance, compensation
5. Developmental experiences → leadership skill development

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5. **Developmental experiences → leadership skill development**

Today's Discussion...

Developing Leaders via Experience: The Role of Developmental Challenge, Learning Orientation, and Feedback

Purpose: Understand the nuances of how job challenge enhances or threatens the developmental value of experience, and what individuals and organizations can do to overcome potential threats

Goals for this Research

- Test the impact of challenging work experiences on leadership skill development
- Examine the potential for diminishing returns, and overcoming those diminishing returns
- Develop an event-based approach to studying developmental work experiences

Theoretical Base

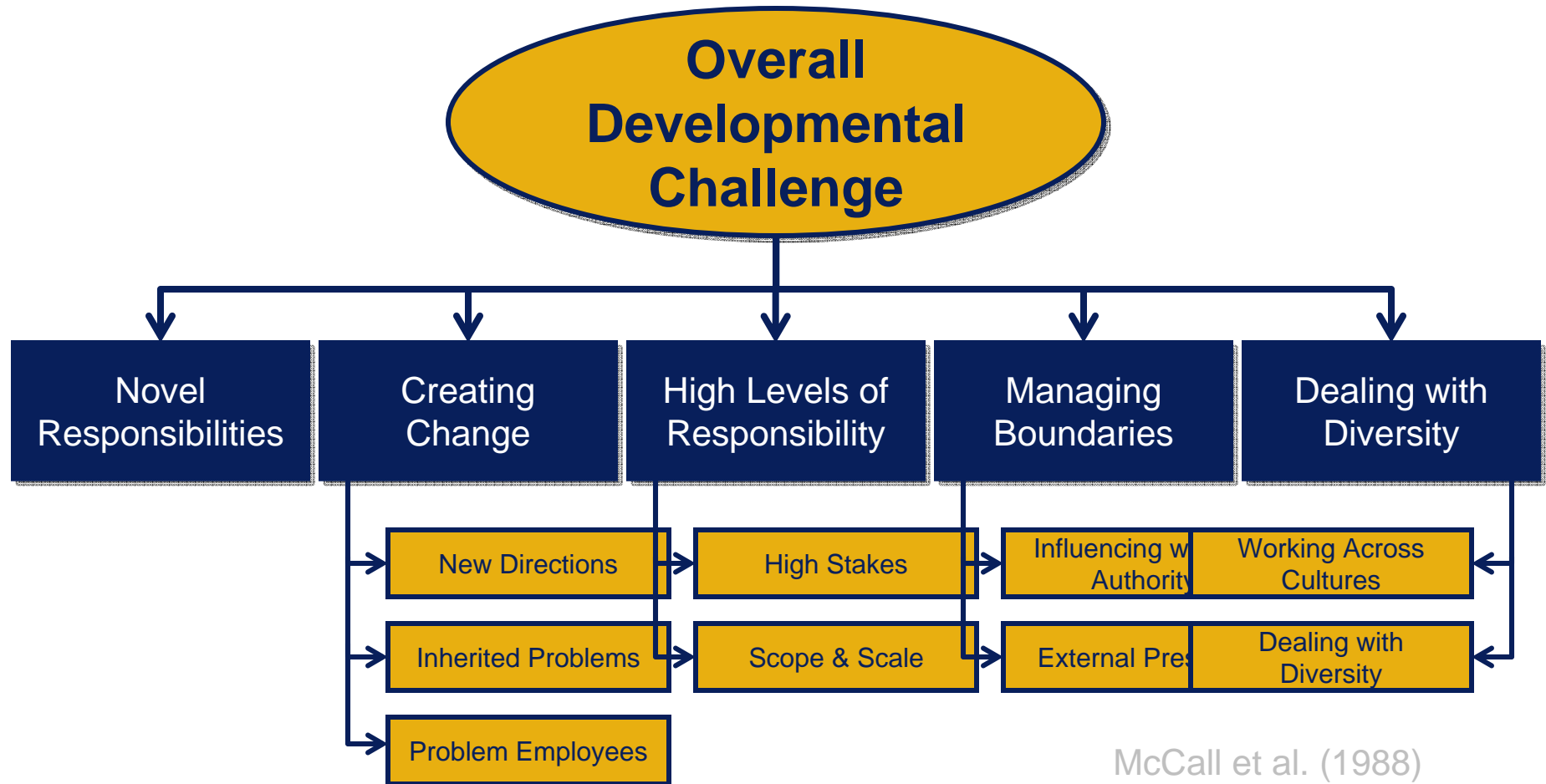
Drawing from literature on job challenge and human cognition...

- More challenge, more development (McCauley et al., 1994)
- Cognitive resource theory (Fiedler & Garcia, 1987) and cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988)
 - ~ Development $\approx f$ (# of cognitive inputs)
 - ~ Anxieties re: performance failure and evaluation uncertainty



Must model the cognitive inputs of an experience

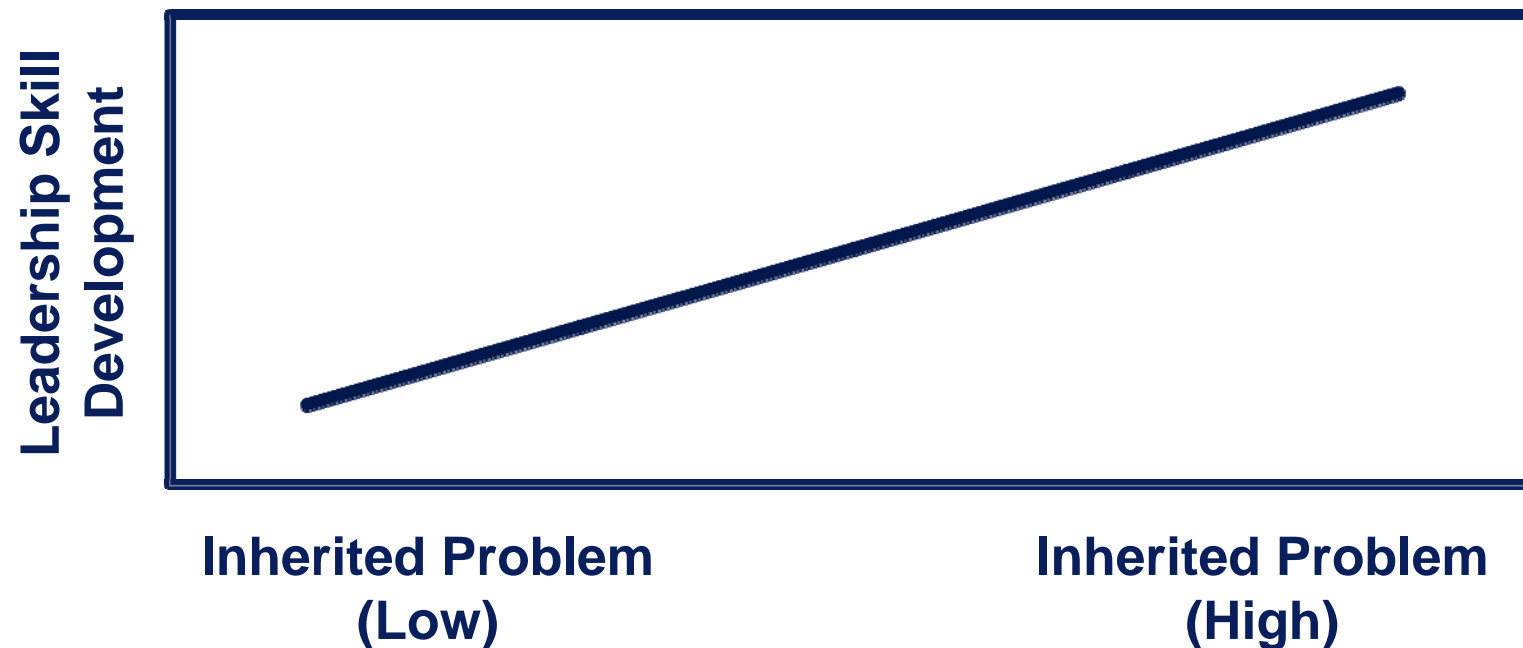
Developmental Challenge



McCall et al. (1988)
McCauley et al. (1999)
Ohlott (2004)

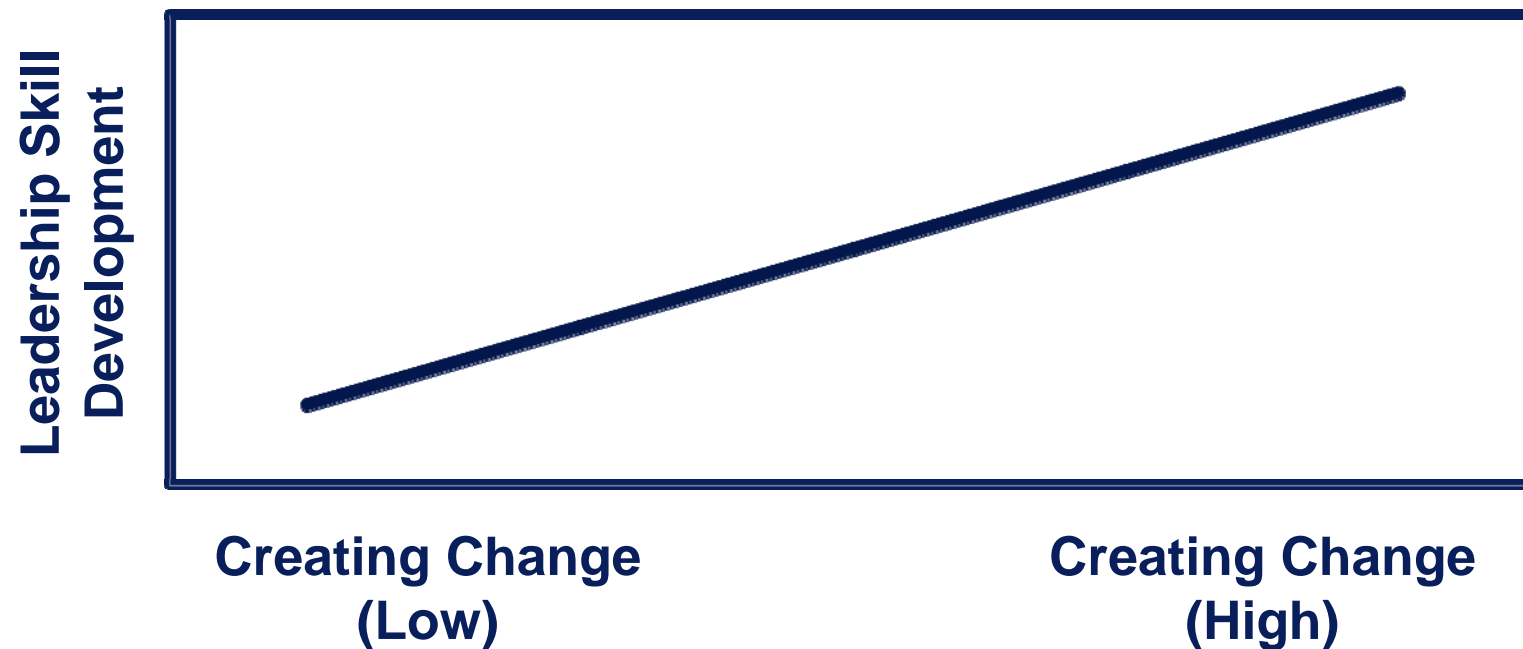
Hypothesis #1

1. Sub-facets of developmental challenge
→ leadership skill development (positive, linear)



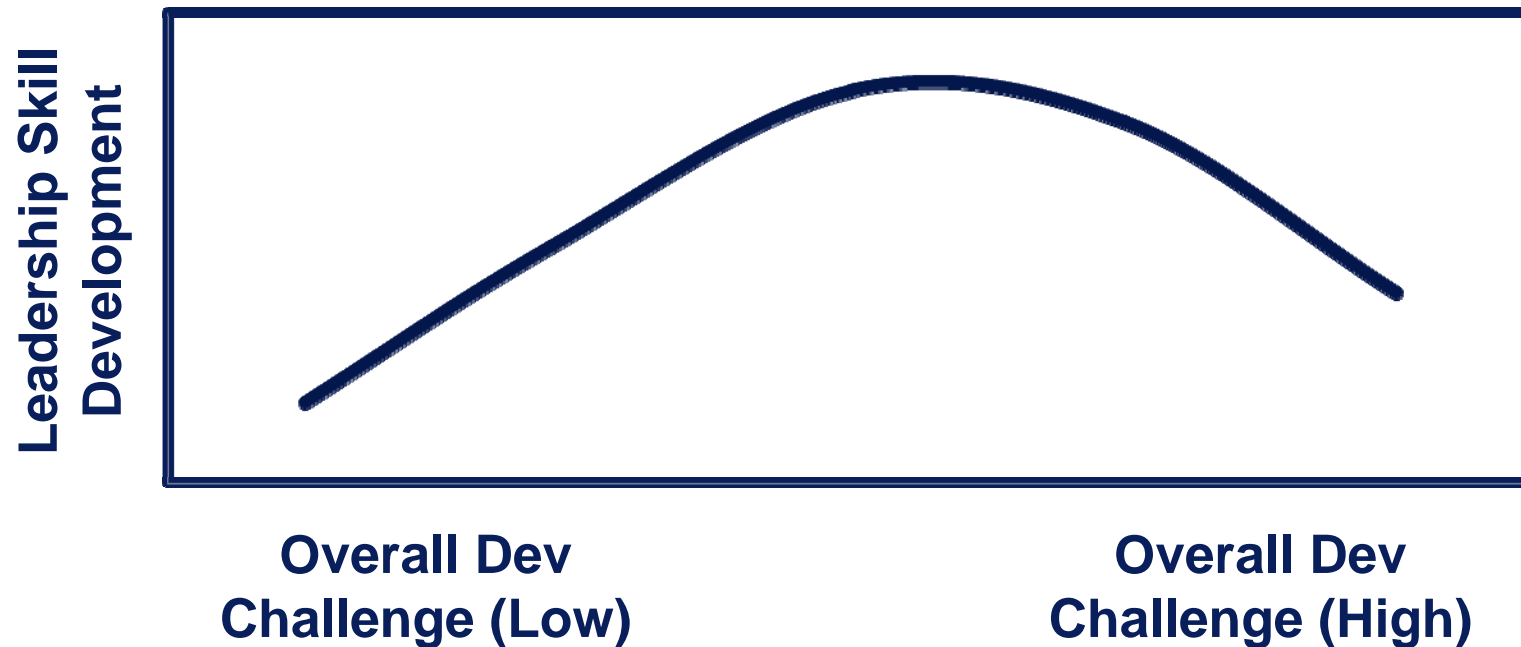
Hypothesis #2

2. Facets of developmental challenge → leadership skill development (positive, linear)



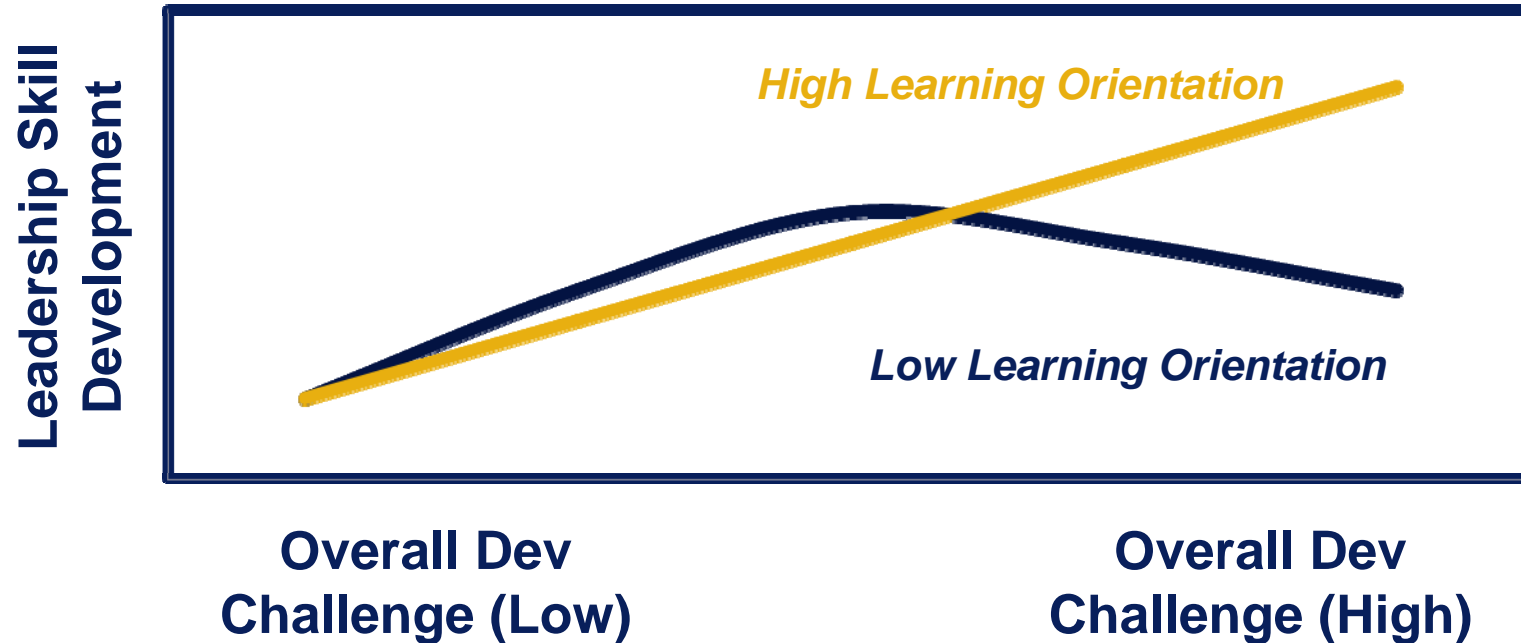
Hypothesis #3

3. Overall developmental challenge → leadership skill development (inverted-U pattern)



Hypothesis #4

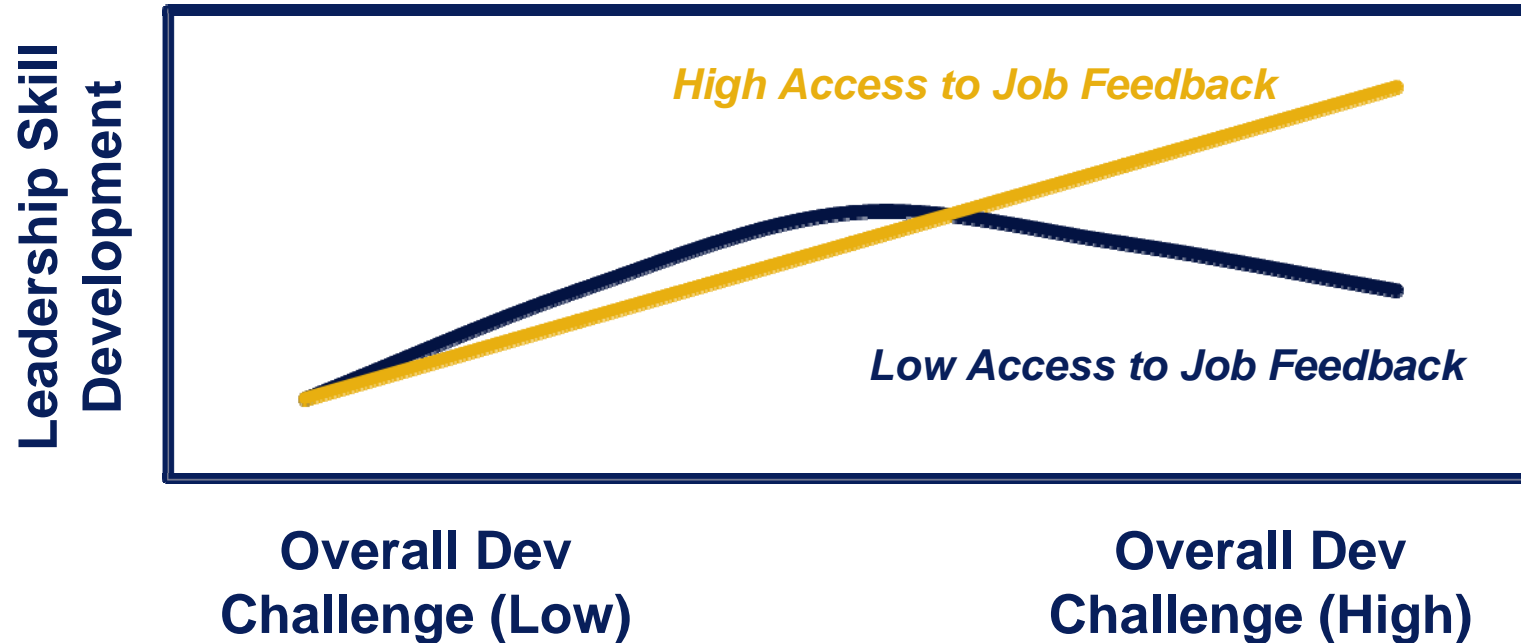
4. Learning orientation will offset pattern of diminishing returns



* Drawing from existing theory and research on learning orientation as a resource for learning from challenging situations (Dweck, 1986; Vandewalle & Cummings, 1997)

Hypothesis #5

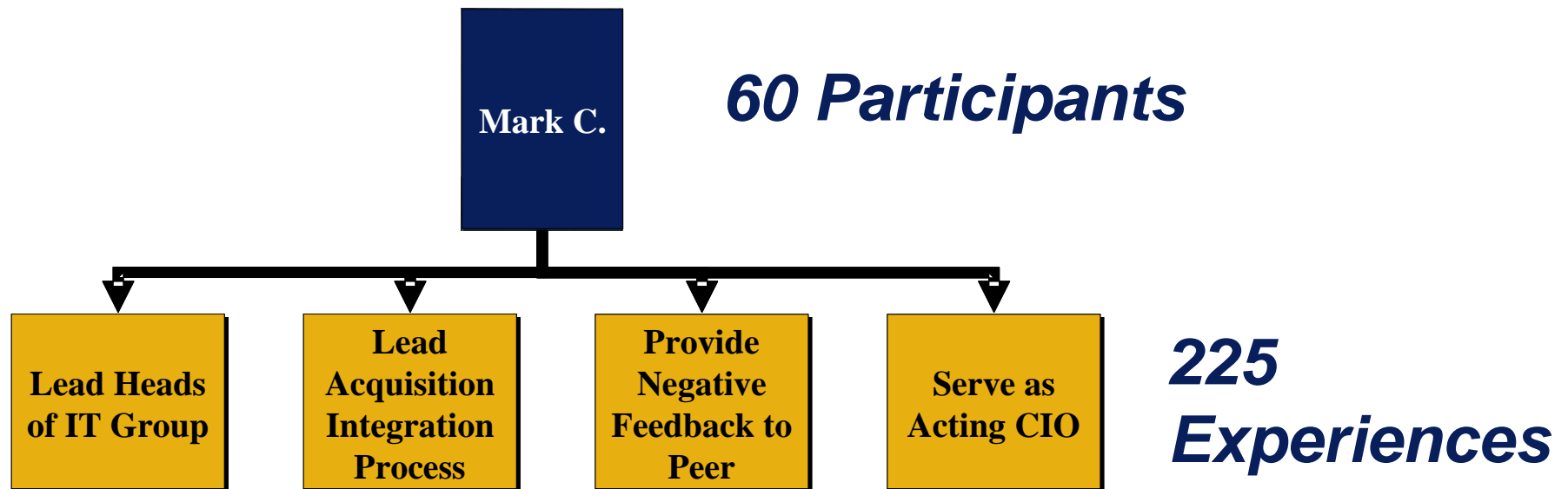
5. Access to feedback will offset pattern of diminishing returns



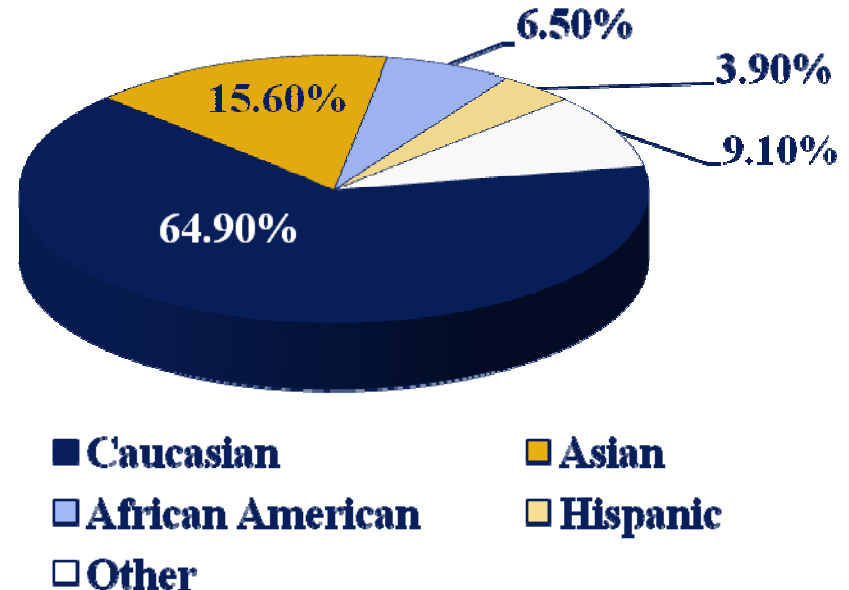
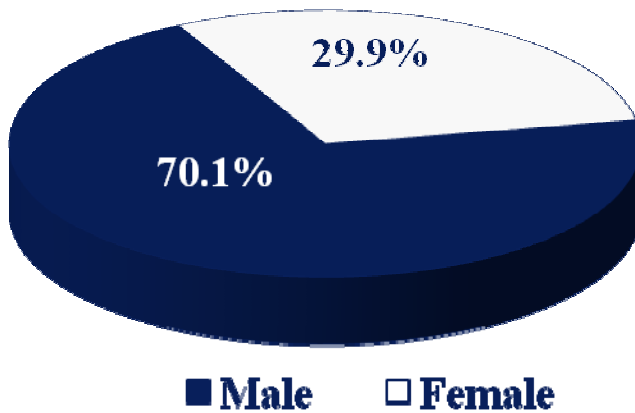
* Drawing from existing theory and research on how feedback reduces uncertainty and focuses attention in challenging situations (Ashford, 1986; Avolio, 2004; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979)

Research Setting

225 experiences across 60 middle and senior-level managers



Sample Characteristics



- **Age:** 33.4 years (SD = 5.5)
- **Organizational tenure:** 5.4 years (SD = 3.4)
- **Job tenure:** 2.5 (SD = 1.8)

Research Process

Phase	Source	Method	Measures
1	Participant	Survey	Learning orientation (Vandewalle, 1997) Job feedback (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) Control variables (e.g., tenure)
2	Participant	One-on-One Interview	Critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954)
3	Participant	Survey	Developmental challenge (JCP; McCauley et al., 1999)
4	Manager	Survey	Leadership skill development (Mumford et al., 2007)

Results: Hypothesis 1

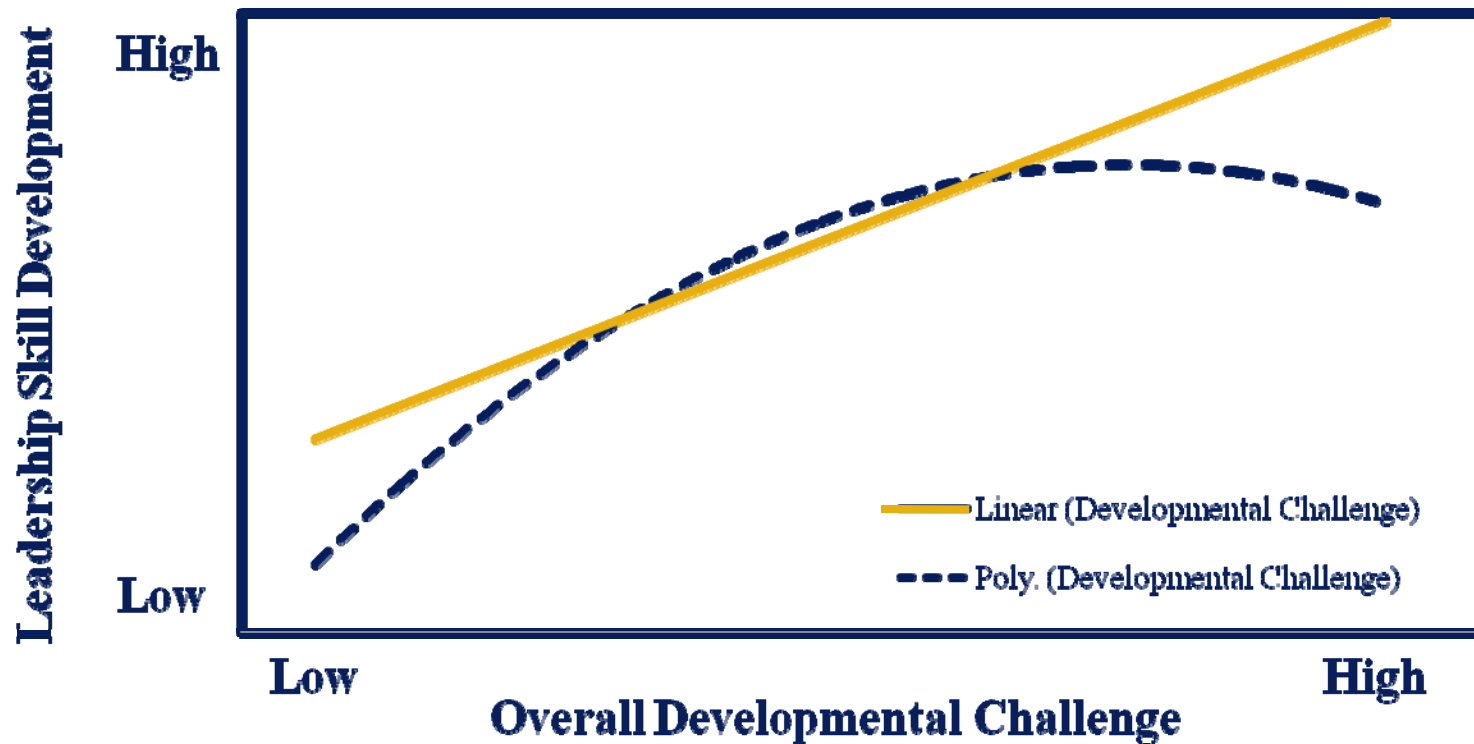
Leadership Skill Development				
Predictor	Model 1: Main Effect	Standard Error	Model 2: Curvilinear Effect	Standard Error
Intercept (γ_{00})	3.36	.06		
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Gender (γ_{01})	-.28*	.14		
Age (γ_{02})	.00	.01		
Ethnicity (γ_{03})	.00	.04		
Organizational tenure (γ_{04})	.06**	.02		
Job tenure (γ_{05})	.10**	.03		
Cognitive ability (γ_{06})	.00	.00		
<i>Sub-Facets of Developmental Challenge (γ_{10} – via separate HLM models)</i>				
Unfamiliar responsibilities	.17**	.05	.03	.03
Developing new directions	.32**	.04	.01	.04
Problems with employees	.17**	.05	-.01	.04
Inherited problems	.12*	.05	-.04	.04
High stakes	.38**	.06	.08	.05
Scope and scale	.39**	.04	.02	.03
Influencing without authority	.28**	.04	.03	.03
External pressure	.27**	.05	-.05	.04
Working across cultures	.20**	.04	-.04	.04
Work group diversity	.37**	.07	-.01	.03

Results: Hypothesis 2

Leadership Skill Development				
Predictor	Model 1: Main Effect	Standard Error	Model 2: Curvilinear Effect	Standard Error
Intercept (γ_{00})	3.36	.06		
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Gender (γ_{01})	-.28*	.14		
Age (γ_{02})	.00	.01		
Ethnicity (γ_{03})	.00	.04		
Organizational tenure (γ_{04})	.06**	.02		
Job tenure (γ_{05})	.10**	.03		
Cognitive ability (γ_{06})	.00	.00		
<i>Facets of Developmental Challenge (γ_{10} – via separate HLM models)</i>				
Unfamiliar responsibilities	.17**	.05	.03	.03
Creating change	.36**	.06	-.11	.05
High levels of responsibility	.49**	.05	.04	.05
Managing boundaries	.36**	.05	.01	.06
Managing diversity	.35**	.07	-.07	.05

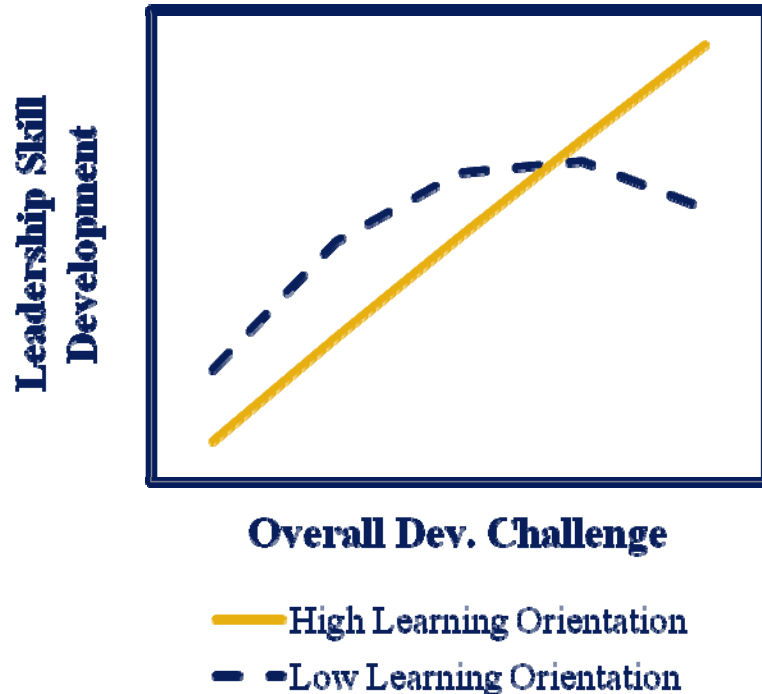
Results: Hypothesis 3

Relationship Between Overall Developmental Challenge and Leadership Skill Development



Results: Hypotheses 4 & 5

Hypothesis 4: Learning Orientation Moderates the Relationship between Developmental Challenge and Leadership Skill Development



Hypothesis 5: Job Feedback Moderates the Relationship between Developmental Challenge and Leadership Skill Development



So What? Why Do We Care?

Implications for theory and practice...

Managerial Implications

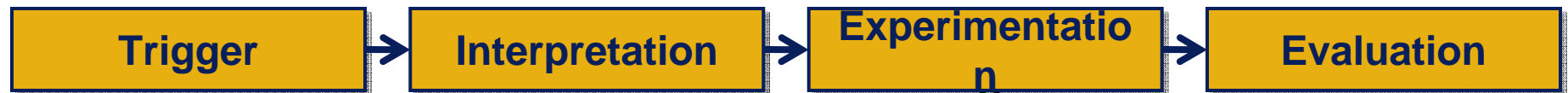
- Talent deployment
- Framing of developmental work experiences
- Organizational support practices

Theoretical Implications

- Dynamic models of experiential learning over time? Sequencing experiences?
- The psychology of experiential learning and development?

Moving Forward...

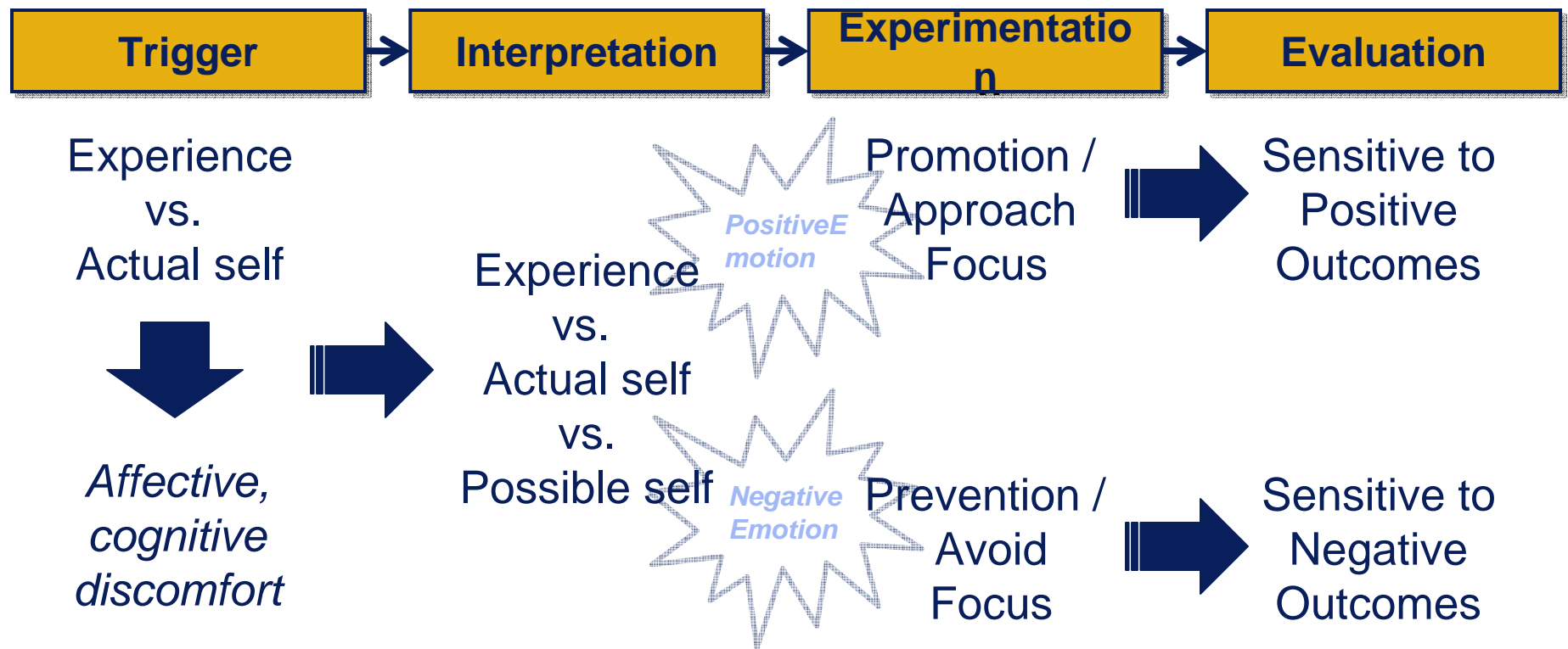
Understanding the psychological processes that explain variation in experiential learning



What are the cognitive and affective processes that explain variation in this process?

Developmental Discrepancies

Drawing from self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) and possible selves (M&N, 1986)



***Questions? Comments?
Reflections?***