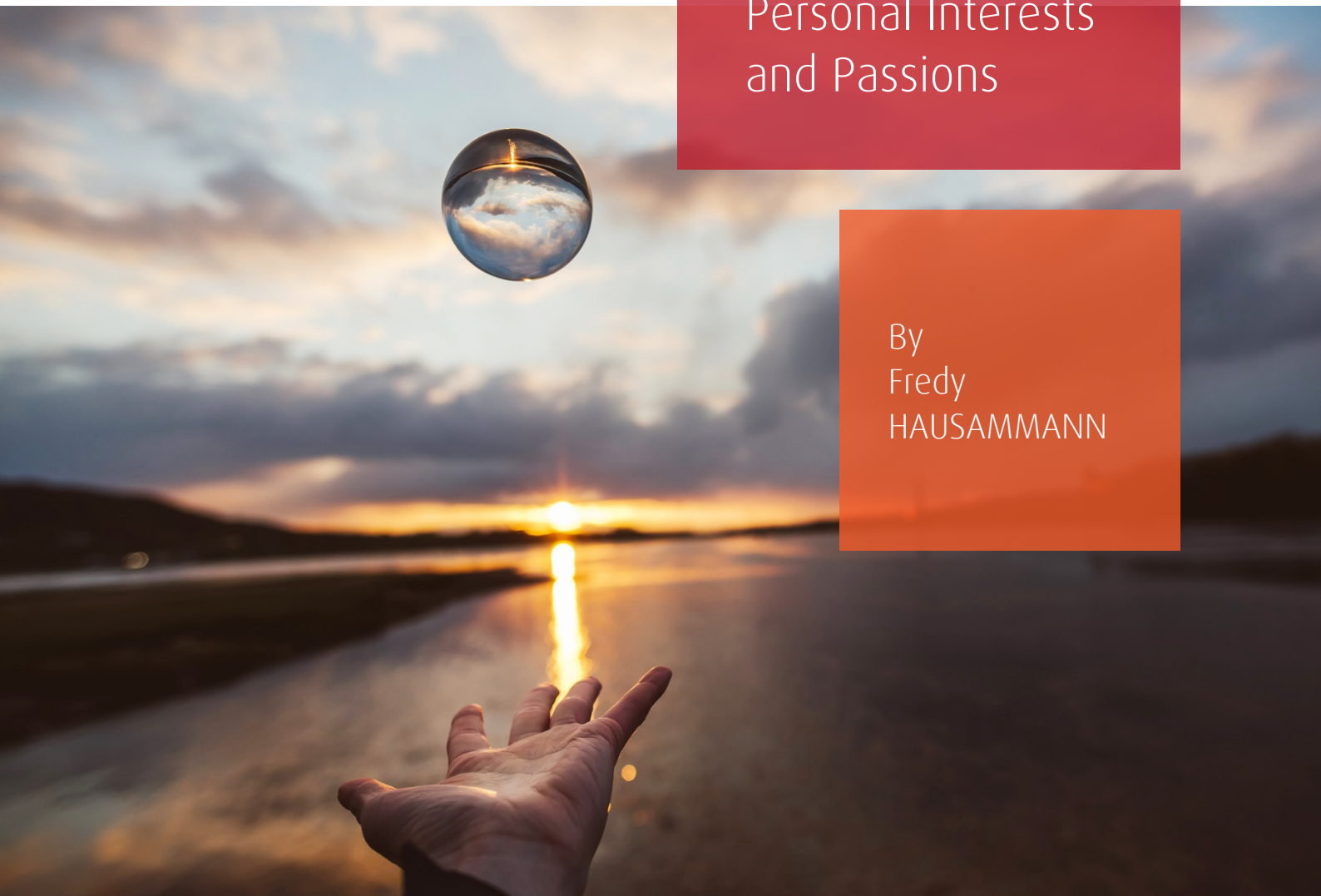


Leadership

Personal  
Governance – 7  
Principle VI

Personal Interests  
and Passions

By  
Fredy  
HAUSAMMANN



**Amrop**

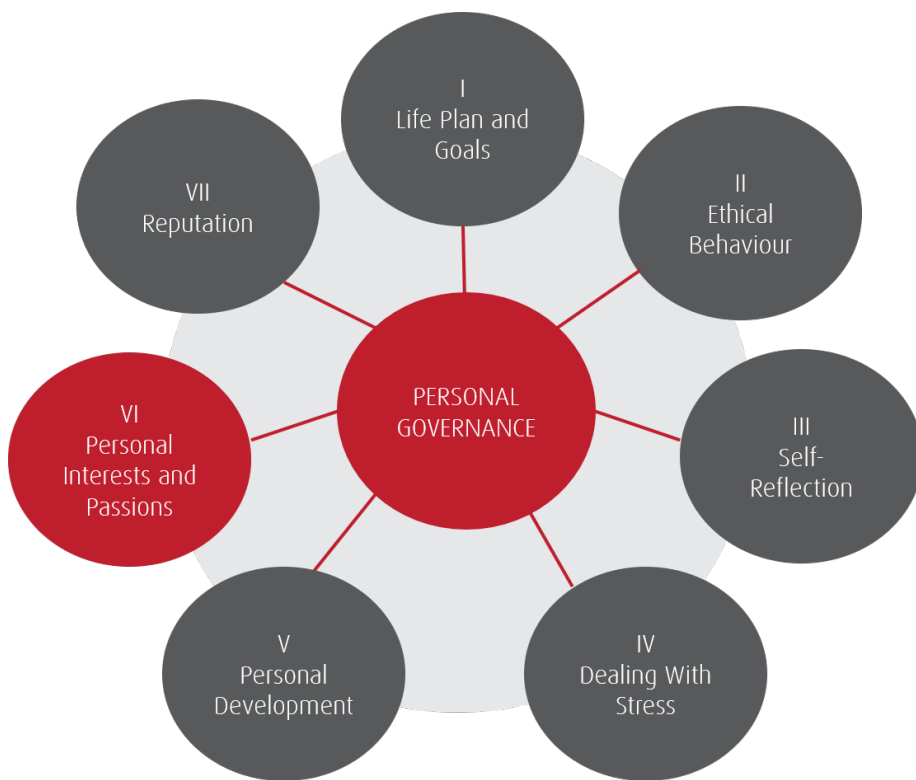
Leaders For What's Next

# Personal Governance - 7

## Principle VI – Interests and Passions

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## Executive Summary

Leaders with good Personal Governance cultivate strong interests and passions beside their professional commitments. Yet, outside their demanding professional framework, too many leaders set aside too little time for families and social circles. Above all, they they barely seem to have any real passions outside work. It follows that few leaders are structuring their private time in any conscious way.

### **Personal Interests and Passions are a Professional Must-have**

Interests and passions walk hand-in-hand with our Life Plan. They fascinate, enthuse and drive us. They can also be political, social, cultural, or linked to our profession. They act as a counter-weight to the professional commitments that all too often dominate our lives. They should be considered in addition to fundamental human necessities such as families, health and fitness. And as interests evolve into passions, we feel absolutely compelled to make time and space for them.

### **Personal Interests and Passions Are Part of Professional Risk Management**

Good Personal Governance means being able to shift our emotional focus towards personal interests and passions when things aren't running well on the work front. And if we cultivate at least one deep interest or passion to a high degree, it could even provide us with an additional – or even alternative - career track.

### **An Early Start is Your Best Guarantee of Later Excellence**

Becoming proficient at an activity implies years of practice. So we should ideally start to cultivate our extra-professional interests and passions as early as possible in life. Yet for many leaders, personal interests and passions lie neglected at the bottom of the in-tray until retirement day. Still, even if we leave it late, there is still hope. We can re-discover former interests and passions, re-ignite them, and re-integrate them into our lives. This can be an

exciting journey and a powerful de-stressor. It's like falling in love with something new for the very first time.

### **The Competition Between Private and Professional is an Inspiring Dynamic**

Just as competition catalyzes business, professional and extra-professional interests can be set up to dynamically compete with each other. Managed well, both fields can work to our advantage. They can be handled in a balanced way, one which feeds creativity and innovation: experiences and signals from one world inspire approaches and behaviors in the other. Either consciously or unconsciously.

*In the full article you can find Self Check Opening Questions for Extra-Professional Interests and Passions.*

### **Flow Activities Can be Tapped Any Time By Skilled Practitioners**

A deep interest or passion has a high chance of taking us into a state of 'total dedicated immersion' (TDI) in a 'flow' experience. Such experiences absorb us so powerfully that we no longer think about ourselves or anything else when we are performing them. This is a highly regenerative state, and what's more, when we learn to re-create it, it's one which we can access whenever we need to. In this way, a true interest or passion becomes a reliable personal resource.

*In the full article you can find Self Check Questions to help you detect the vital signs of an activity that brings TDI – and build on it.*



## It's Time to Plant the Flag

Senior managers who take time for their interests and passions, (and state openly that they do), act as an inspiration to their professional entourage and staff to follow in their footsteps. A skilled, healthy and permanent relationship with personal time is as essential to leadership as professional time. It deserves to be taken just as seriously. It's not enough to squeeze our interests and passions into an annual vacation or other rare windows of opportunity. As senior managers, we actually enjoy relatively high autonomy in the way we plan our personal time. And when an interest becomes a passion, it's even easier to keep it on our radar.

## Digital Appendicitis Needs Surgical Intervention

As a leader, how often do you slip into a mode of 'can't not be reachable' or 'can't not look'? As communication modes go viral, switching off is getting more difficult than ever. Voicemail and email have now been joined by WhatsApp, Messenger and a host of other Apps, all fighting for our attention every minute of every day. Just as it can take an appendectomy to deal with an inflamed appendix, Appendicitis needs dealing with. Disciplining our mobile devices, rather than being led by them, is a pre-condition for Personal Governance. There was a life before the smartphone – the office didn't burn down.

*See the Full Article for Self Check questions to assess how well you claim your personal space and time.*

## Socio-political Engagement and Business Leadership are a Vital Symbiosis

Leaders have a wealth of knowledge and experience that politics and social organizations are in serious need of. In turn, for those who engage socio-politically, (and who are intrinsically motivated to do so), multiple benefits await. The perspectives, experiences and contacts gained from socio-political engagement enrich leadership, personal governance, and by association, corporate governance. Abstaining from organizations that do good could even compromise the ability of leaders to do good in business, blinding them to societal engagement and wise decision-making. Many are understandably cautious about taking on socio-political engagements. Yet there are numerous ways of engaging in local or regional associations and organizations. And a gradual approach can make the journey manageable.

*In the Full Article you'll find Self Check Questions to break down socio-political engagement into manageable steps.*



# Personal Governance – 7

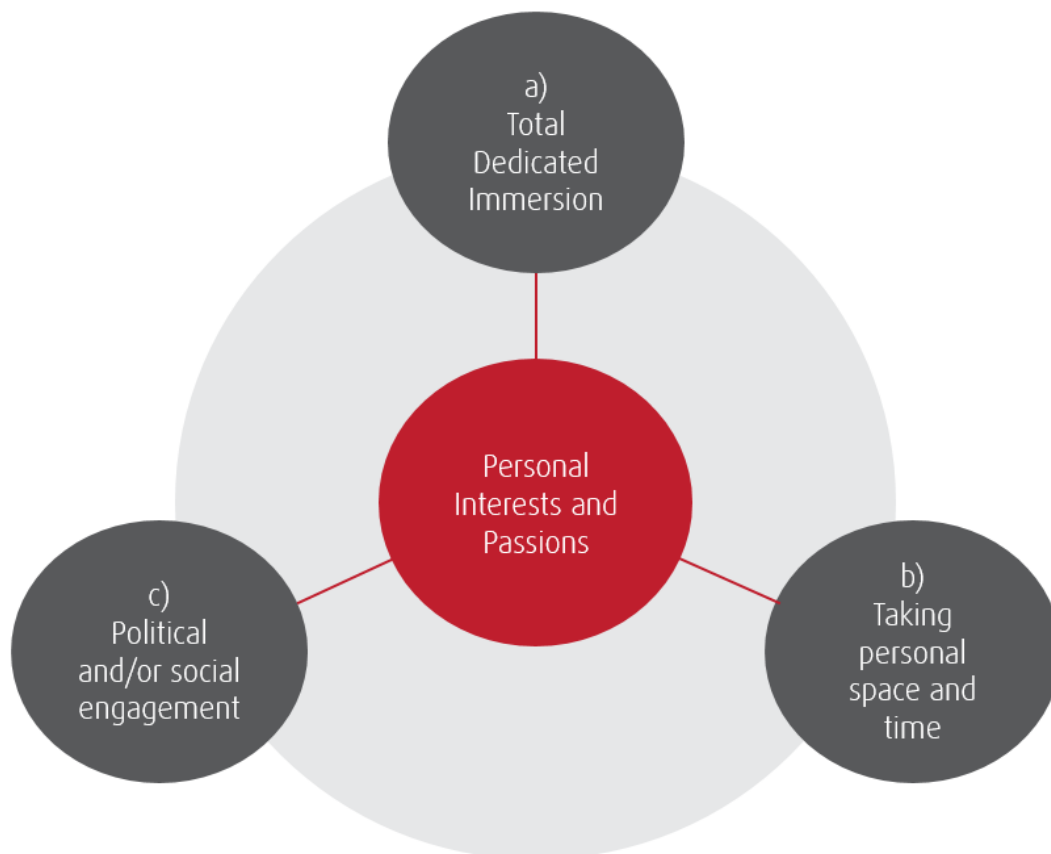
## Principle VI – Personal Interests and Passions

Executives with good Personal Governance cultivate strong interests and passions outside the framework of their professional commitments.

Aside from their heavy professional commitments, too many leaders have too little time for their families and social circles. Above all, they barely seem to have any real *passions* outside work.

It follows that few are structuring their personal time in any conscious way.<sup>1</sup>

When I ask senior managers to tell me what their passions are, they tend to talk about family or sport (and sport is often practiced on and off, as a counterweight to work). They have little time for much else. To find deeper points of reference I have to dig further back in their biographies, to the interests they cultivated in their early years.



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<sup>1</sup> See Personal Governance 4, Principle III, Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation

For 20 years the Swiss politician and Managing Director of UBS, Ernst Mühlemann, played a key training and development role for the bank. He said that everyone should cultivate at least one extra-professional interest- to the point of being able to imagine it as an alternative career.

This Principle looks at the importance of having strong interests and passions outside our professional commitments. They accompany our Life Plan, fascinate, enthuse, and drive us. They don't need to focus purely on the private domain.

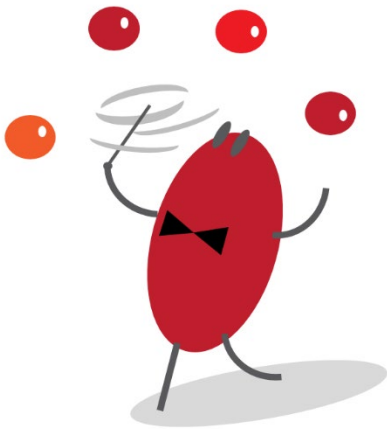
They can be political, social, cultural, or somehow linked to our profession. They should enable us to diversify our range of perspectives, and balance out our professional commitments. The latter all too often dominate our lives; they become omnipresent, and can seduce us to the point of exploiting us. Few other thoughts or activities seem to find breathing space, and for many people the idea of changing the status quo doesn't even enter the picture. Yet true extra-professional interests and passions have a way of imposing themselves on us. They compete with our professional lives in a positive way, confirm and complete those lives. We have to *want* to pursue these interests – so much so that we will repeatedly find a way to devote ourselves to them, to make time and space for them.

### Extra-professional Interests and Passions

Real, deep interests are thematic and experiential fields. They constantly spur us on to further exploration and examination. The effect of cultivating them over time is one of high enthusiasm and identification with them. They evolve into passions and become an important element of our Life Plans.

Yet in the course of a managerial career, the opposite typically happens. Far from being coping sources that bring vital respite and relief, our extra-professional interests become increasingly repressed. Instead of being stabilized or broadened, our 'palette of interests'<sup>2</sup> is reduced or eliminated from our lives. This is even more surprising when we consider that cultivating extra-professional interests can actually *broaden* our professional perspectives.

For many years the Swiss politician and Managing Director of UBS, Ernst Mühlemann, played a key training and development role for the bank. He said that everyone should cultivate at least one extra-professional interest - to the point of being able to imagine it as an alternative career.



<sup>2</sup> See Personal Governance 5, Principle IV, Pressure and Stress, Coping and Coaching  
\*1972-1992

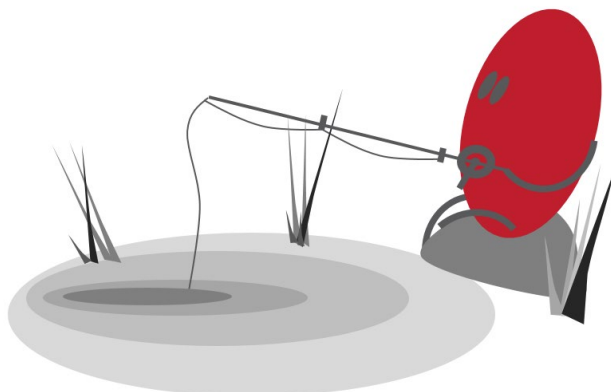
Having a wide range of interests and perspectives is also part of *risk management*. When we focus exclusively on professional interests we are essentially putting all our eggs in one basket - and this can lead to frustration and depression when things aren't running smoothly on the professional front. At times like this, good Personal Governance means that we can shift our emotional focus towards extra-professional interests and find relief on a personal level.

As mentioned, 'strong interests' does *not* mean recreational sport or family. As a form of movement, a certain level of sport is a human necessity. Together with family, it is one of our fundamental needs, like breathing, eating and drinking. Of course, for many people, sport is a strong interest, a passion, even. Assuming this degree of enthusiasm, there's no questioning its relevance to Personal Governance. This said, it is highly recommended to cultivate *other* deep personal interests or passions besides sport - ones that can fascinate our intellects and psyches all our lives, no matter how physically fit we may be. So it can make sense to cultivate several interests in parallel (even if we're unlikely to practice all of them with the same intensity). This way we can substitute interests, creating a palette that has as much flexibility and variety as possible. Diversification should never become a constraint, however. It should be joyfully and greedily savored.

As far as possible, extra-professional interests and passions need to be cultivated early on in life. Pensioners are classic examples of people who focus on them for the very first time upon retirement – arguably rather too late in the day. It's an almost paradoxical demand – “*I have to have other interests now*”. Of course it remains perfectly possible to live the dream. However, to have a truly passionate encounter with new interests, we need to have learnt specific abilities over the years, whether we're a musician, art collector, cabinet-maker, tech specialist... or mushroom-grower.

This acts as a clear signal to secure the space for extra-professional interests and passions early on in our Life Planning.

To have a truly passionate encounter with new interests, we need to have learnt specific abilities over the years, whether we're a passionate musician, art collector, cabinet-maker, tech specialist... or mushroom-grower.



If it's a well known fact that competition enlivens business, this also applies to the rest of our lives. Professional interests may be positioned in competition with extra-professional interests in such a way that both fields work to our advantage and can be considered in a balanced way.

This leads to several interesting questions: what motivates people to build up extra-professional interests and passions? What kind of people tend to do this, and what are the triggers? Whilst we can't answer these questions here, further research would be interesting and helpful for Personal Governance. One obvious hypothesis is that personal interests and passions are often formed in childhood via parental influence. Other important factors are friends, acquaintances, references from our schooling and our careers. (And interests discovered actively or passively in the family circle remain key).

For executives, it's often a question of re-discovering our former interests and passions and re-integrating them into our lives. Even if we don't have easy access to biographical points of reference that we can concretely make use of, we can wake up our dormant interests and activate them in a purposeful way. This can be a very exciting process, one which acts as a powerful de-stressor - especially during the early euphoria we experience when we fall in love with something new. During this phase, we'll likely start to take some perspective on our formerly one-sided professional focus.

### **Professional Activity Needs Tough Competition**

As mentioned, Personal Governance is not just about complementing our professional activity with extra-professional interests, but having them compete with each other.

Professional activity must never take an uncontested, central position in an executive's life. If it's a well-known fact that competition enlivens business, this also applies to the rest of our lives. Professional interests may be positioned in competition with extra-professional interests in such a way that both fields work to our advantage and can be considered in a balanced way. The important thing is to skilfully interact with our 'internal team' – the voices of the different interests, *'two hearts in one breast'* - both of which must maintain a healthy pulse<sup>3</sup>

A person who regularly navigates between the world of work and other fields has as a goal the fundamental effect of building up his or her bank of resources, and this in turn generates a quest for creativity and innovation.

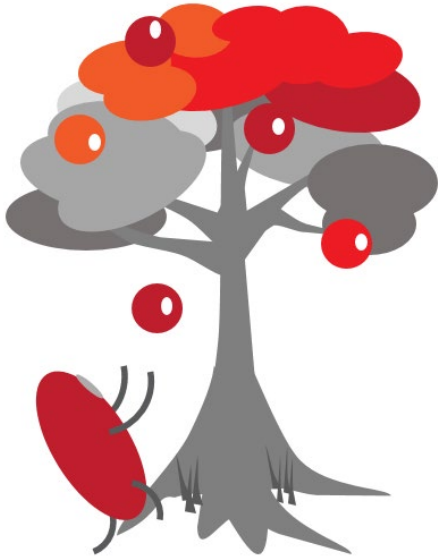
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<sup>3</sup> See Personal Governance 4, Principle III, Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation





Experiences and signals from one world consciously or unconsciously inspire thinking patterns, approaches and behaviors in another – they cross-fertilize. From systems theory, we know that all parts of a system influence each other, and the Manager-Life system is no exception. Those who fail to make constructive use of this interchange are neglecting an invaluable resource for their private and professional lives.



### Balanced Resources For Flow and Fulfillment

Why are extra-professional interests so often assigned such a small space in the life of executives? This has been the topic of wide discussion. One interesting possibility is that extra-professional interests make some people less 'happy' and produce less 'flow' than professional ones do. In line with the saying: *'go with the flow'*, work then takes a natural precedence over extra-professional activities.

An underlying reason for this is that the parameters for extra-professional life are not so clearly defined. We are less primed to deal with the demands of our private lives (which we sometimes find diffuse) than for the professional side. This can make it easier to find satisfaction and flow in the professional context.

My hypothesis: it's exactly this *lack* of true extra-professional interests and passions that causes the predominance of one-sided, work-oriented flow situations. With a *'more of the same'* focus on professional interests, we try to get more flow. Yet this mode of thinking doesn't allow us to deal effectively with heavy professional factors.

### Self Check Questions for Extra-Professional Interests and Passions

- 1 Which activities (professional or extra-professional) produce most flow and satisfaction for me?
- 2 What are my most important extra-professional interests?
- 3 Which of these interests and passions do I cultivate most enthusiastically?
- 4 Which of my interests have the potential to become passions?
- 5 Which dormant interests would I like to cultivate in the future?
- 6 How much time do I set aside each week (or month) for my interests and passions?

**Good Personal Governance means actively cultivating personal interests and passions.**

# 1

## Total Dedicated Immersion - a state facilitated by Personal Governance



The German philosopher (1900-2002) Hans-Georg Gadamer described the concept of *'selbstvergessenes Weggegebensein'* (which we can translate as total dedicated immersion in an activity).

In Personal Governance, Total Dedicated Immersion (TDI) applies to activities that so powerfully absorb us that we no longer think about ourselves or anything else when we perform them. We forget time and all other constraints and fully devote ourselves to the here and now. Under normal circumstances, a key part of Personal Governance is our ability to 'think about thinking' or, otherwise put, exercise 'reflection in action'<sup>4</sup> TDI disables that ability (specifically in this case it's desirable and energizing *not* to reflect in action). However we *can* reflect afterwards about what took place. We can identify and recognize the reasons that brought about this state of flow, and create the conditions for more.

In general, managers still know little about the highly-regenerative value of this state of flow, and under-use it as a constructive resource.

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<sup>4</sup> See Personal Governance 4, Principle III, Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation

A passion is something that we want to practice without disturbance and with our undivided attention. Depending on how physically and mentally demanding the task is, and how complex it is, we will switch off from other noise more or less quickly (especially when it comes to solitary activities). Any reference to time disappears too, as long as we have set enough time aside.

Total Dedicated Immersion (TDI) is a 'flow' experience. Some effects are:

- Limitless attention to the task in hand
- Total disconnection from other 'noise' such as stressful thoughts
- Thinking and acting in the here and now
- Highly-motivated dedication to the other/others
- Acting in a way that is free of time constraints – assuming we have set enough time aside
- High productivity and learning potential, thanks to the total focus on a task
- High quality experience with a regenerative character

In such situations, these effects make us behave in such a way that we even forget that we are subjects performing a task. We subordinate ourselves to the task.

TDI can also be experienced in *professional* situations. However, in this Personal Governance principle, we are primarily talking about regular experiences that arise from our *extra-professional* interests and passions.

Passions facilitate TDI, because they often involve most of the effects described above. A passion is something that we want to practice without disturbance, and with our undivided attention.

Depending on how physically and mentally demanding the task is, and how complex, we will switch off from other noise more or less quickly (especially when it comes to solitary activities). Any reference to time disappears too, as long as we have set enough time aside. Even when we haven't, most of the above effects can be achieved.

The level of physical and above all *mental* demands a task makes on us, and as such, its complexity, are key to determining how easy it is for us to reach and sustain TDI. Of course, we can also get its effects by contemplating a painting or a garden, or listening attentively to a piece of music. However, in these cases it's more likely that noise, thoughts about something else and other distractions will surface and drown out our attention after a certain (short) time. This is because such activities occupy a smaller proportion of our senses, skills and thought processes.

A further important factor is also worth mentioning: the conditions of TDI, once we have experienced them whilst practising our passion, must not lose their effect when we repeat the activity. It should be possible to experience them again and again in a similar form. In this way, they remain a *reliable* personal resource.

An important step to better using this resource is to be aware about which moments are specifically related to TDI. The following snapshots and questions can help.



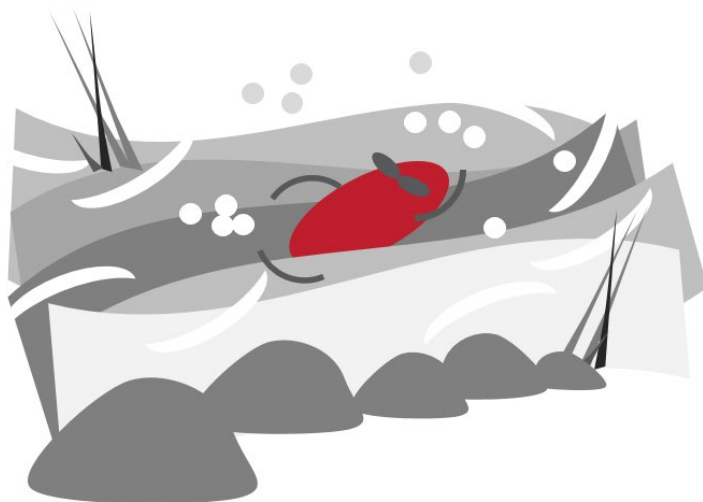
Snapshots of some situations with high TDI potential:

- A musician performing a demanding piece
- A collector assessing and acquiring a new object
- A mountain climber in action
- A painter or cabinet-maker carrying out important steps in his or her work

Self Check Questions for TDI

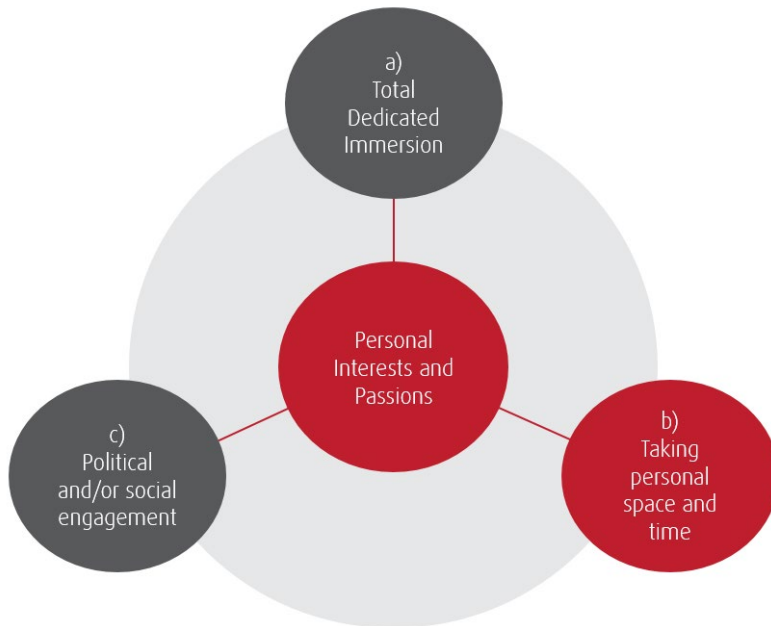
- 1 When did I last experience TDI – can I think of a professional and extra-professional example?
- 2 During which specific tasks did I reach TDI?
- 3 What made the TDI state possible? What conditions were necessary for it?
- 4 What effect does this have on my satisfaction and ability to perform?
- 5 What could I do to build the TDI state more frequently into my activities?
- 6 What effect would a distinct rise in TDI experiences potentially have on me?

**Good Personal Governance means finding room for activities that facilitate Total dedicated Immersion.**



# 2

## Executives with good Personal Governance visibly claim their personal space and time – and are good at organizing it



This is all about our ability to admit to our need for personal time and recreation. Executives who take time for activities outside the scope of their professional engagements also make it legitimate for others to do so. Just as executives need to be competent in the way they work and lead, and to do so with integrity, a skilled relationship with personal time is essential.

And yet, how many executives open a time window for their extra-professional activities, declare it, communicate it, and expect their staff and colleagues to do the same thing?

Isn't it far more common to neither open this time window, nor visibly declare it (and the higher the position, the greater the professional presence/time investment). They may even see it as 'inappropriate to their position' to, for example, leave the office earlier to devote themselves to other things in life.

However there are exceptions. Some prime examples of what is commercially/socially accepted are 'golf-type' personal spaces. In the golf handicap listings of some management magazines, well-known managers are depicted as passionate players. This suggests that they regularly claim the personal space to cultivate this area of interest in a way that has passion potential.

It raises the question, *when* are these time windows taken? *How* are they structured and communicated? *Golf as 'status- and business-essential part of omnipresent and ever-competitive managerial life', or golf as 'enjoyable TDI?'* This doesn't call golf into question as a passion, it merely begs the reflection that people have different motivations for socially-prestigious leisure activities.

## Fundamental Aspects of Private Time

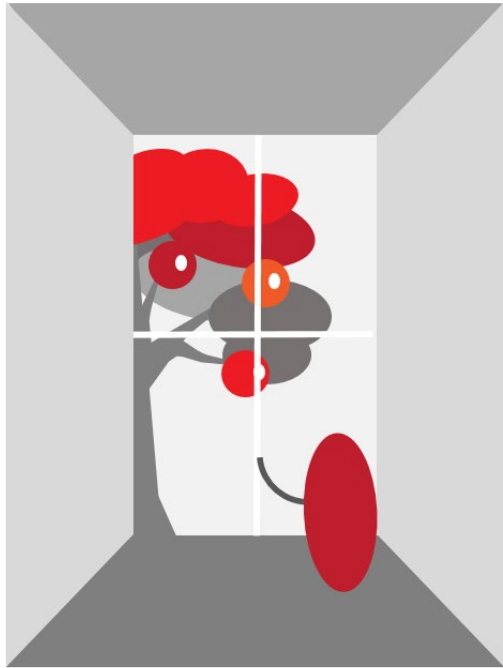
Previously, we've discussed the Foundation Model for Time Structure and Time Investment<sup>5</sup>. This outlines the use of social and personal time – with an emphasis on the latter. Personal time can be spent on *activities* and *passivities*, and each need their place. Passivities such as watching TV, listening to music, chatting with friends and so on clearly have a lower potential for flow-experiences and TDI than interests and passions do.

In Personal Governance, personal time needs to be a permanent fixture of our time investment. It can't be limited to a vacation, or other infrequently-dedicated time windows. All living things have their own rhythm, so work time and personal time cannot be arbitrarily portioned up or bundled into snippets, however short or long. Different people and their tasks have productive and less productive moments. Productivity and recreation cannot be arbitrarily programmed or summarily postponed.

Shaping our personal time in a way that builds up our personal resources, creating a sense of purpose, meaning and happiness, demands the same attention and skill as our professional time management.

In Life Planning, we need to give personal time equal weight and importance as we do work time. It goes without saying that we plan out our careers. Less so, that we plan out our personal time.

In Personal Governance Principle I – Life Plan and Goals, we looked at the dissolving boundaries between work and personal time. Accepting this implies that it is now possible for managers to assign equal legitimacy to both. Not primarily in the quantitative sense (investing the same amount of time), but in the qualitative sense (giving it equal status and attention).



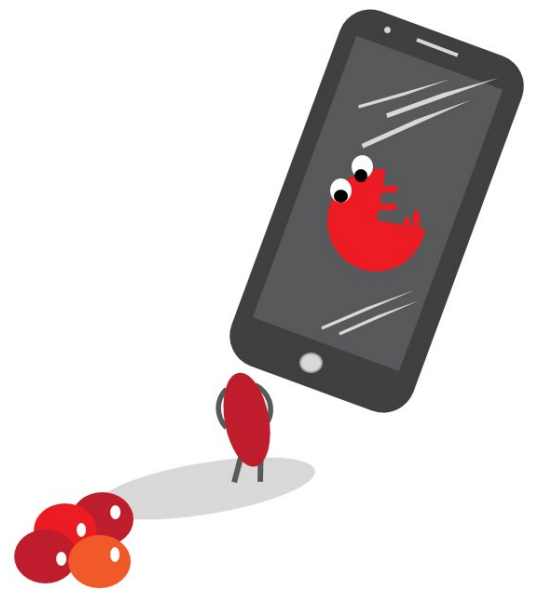
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<sup>5</sup> See Personal Governance 4, Principle III, Self-Reflection, Self-Assessment, Self-Regulation

## Owning Your Agenda

Senior managers are able to create space for personal time because they enjoy relatively high autonomy in the way they plan their professional activities. Resisting the urge to stack all our priorities on the professional side is a pre-condition for investing in our personal time. The stronger our desire to cultivate extra-professional passions, the higher the probability that we will make time for them. On the other hand, we'll always quickly and easily find reasons to put professional tasks at the top of our 'urgent and important' lists. Even more so, when the absence in our lives of compelling extra-professional interests and passions only allows us limited amounts of extra-professional 'flow'.

It follows that managers who are able to use their *personal* free time can better recognize and structure their *professional* time. One effect can be that they address the resource management of their companies with more care, taking a more considered view. This also means that they can ringfence their personal reachability and mobility - and admit as much to others.



## Relationship With Mobility and Reachability

Closely linked to autonomy in terms of time, is our autonomy in terms of how mobile and reachable we are. Again, senior managers have quite high autonomy in this area.

If we don't make use of this autonomy (more the rule than the exception), then we end up reachable whenever and wherever (also when engaging in our passions). We are permanently on stand-by to travel anywhere in the world - even when this doesn't fit our personal plans, and when there could be other ways of communicating with and understanding each other.

Reachability can be addictive – executives in particular tend to slip into a mode of '*can't not be reachable*'. Related to this is '*can't not look*' behavior - checking whether someone has tried to get in touch. Voicemail and email have been joined by WhatsApp, Messenger and a host of other apps. Chronic appendicitis, an uncomfortable digital inflammation, is something that many suffer from and which probably requires surgery. It can become a kind of communication ecstasy, always-available, action-orientated, super-informed and reaction-ready, by smartphone, by e-mail, by calendar app. Of course, we can always switch off our smartphones, but their developers don't seem to have envisaged that. Even in sleep mode, the things buzz and vibrate, camouflaged and quasi-unnoticed, to ensure they make contact with us. However, smartphones can be very helpful. Using them in a disciplined way is even a pre-condition for Personal Governance. The Personal Governance equivalent to Corporate Governance jargon (comply or explain) could be *comply or abstain*. Let's also remember that there was life before the smartphone; the office didn't burn down.

A well-reflected relationship with mobility and reachability is an important pre-condition to create free spaces and practice good Personal Governance.

### **Making Free Time Visible and Legitimate**

On one hand it's important to claim our personal time and use it in a meaningful way. On the other hand, managers should openly demonstrate that they are doing this – so allowing colleagues and staff to do the same.

In many corporations, *who* is working, for *how long* and *doing what*, has become ever more transparent over recent years: e-agendas can be viewed by all for planning purposes. Empty slots can be seen - and booked – by others. The more transparency executives create, the easier it is to see how competently they deal with their professional and personal time investment. In this way, the direction will be set, and implicitly, personal time will be legitimized.

As far back as 1998, an article published in the Harvard Business Review: *Work and life: The End of the Zero-Sum Game*, stated that a small but growing number of managers “operate under the assumption that work and personal life are not competing priorities but complementary ones. In essence, they’ve adopted a win-win philosophy. And it appears they are right: in the cases we have studied, the new approach has yielded tangible payoffs both for organizations and for individual employees.” The authors go on to say that “these managers recognize and support their employees as “whole people,” open-mindedly acknowledging and even celebrating the fact that they have roles outside the office. These managers understand that skills and knowledge can be transferred from one role to another and also that boundaries — where these roles overlap and where they must be kept separate — need to be established.” This raises the necessity to make space and time for these interests.

**A competent and transparent relationship with free space and free time is a core element of a successful coping strategy. Executives have the chance to tap into an under-used dimension.**

### **Self Check Questions : The Competence of Claiming Free Space and Time**

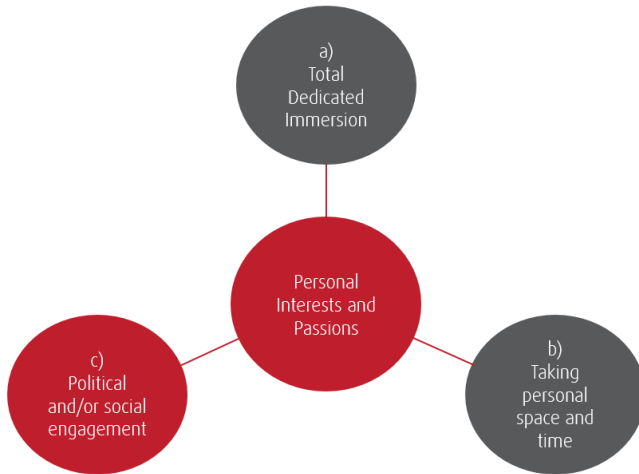
- 1** How would my business colleagues and personal assistant assess my competence in this domain?
- 2** On a scale of 1-10 (where 10 is very high and 1 very low), how good is my ‘compliance’ with this Personal Governance Principle?
- 3** How do I feel when I leave the office once a week at 16h or 17h to take some personal time for myself?
- 4** How do I feel when when my smartphone is switched off for 4-5 hours?
- 5** How do I communicate personal time windows with my professional entourage?
- 6** Under what circumstances could I improve my competence in this domain?

**Good Personal Governance means openly declaring our practice of different interests.**



# 3

## Executives with good Personal Governance make time for political or social engagement



### Dissolving Barriers Between Politics and Business

Executives have a treasure trove of knowledge and experience that politics shouldn't deprive itself of. And yet, how many get involved in political or social responsibilities? Very few, I argue - a small and unrepresentative proportion of the business world's intellectual capital. This longstanding phenomenon has many different causes, of which only a few can be named here:

- Many potential candidates view the path from local, to regional or national political activity as laborious
- The time investment can be seen as disproportionate – shrinking work, social, and personal time
- The high time investment can also have financial consequences, as less gets taken on professionally
- Today's dominant business leadership style leaves very little room for investing time in political and social engagements
- Influencing change in political and social functions takes a long time, deep breaths and patience. It also has a high potential to frustrate
- Internal party politics and trench warfare can be counter-productive and off-putting.

Despite these possible obstacles, the resources that managers have to offer are something that today's politics and social organizations shouldn't deprive themselves of.

Executives in turn can benefit from the perspectives and experiences that political life offers, enriching their leadership with political and social knowledge. Viewpoints and insights gained in this way all work in favor of good Personal – and Corporate - Governance.

Political and social activity can be a complementary source of flow, personal development, and extra-professional interest. Respecting all Personal Governance Principles, it must be possible – at least in certain life phases – to play an active socio-political role.

### Socio-political engagement as part of Life Planning and an extra-professional interest

Socio-political engagement can emerge unplanned; entering our field of vision more or less by chance on the basis of our professional or private actions or relationships.

This said, executives can and should plan their entry in a purposeful way, and foresee assigning the space. The advantage of planning is that the preparation – however latent – fine tunes our antennae for opportunities, making it more likely that we will actually take advantage of them when they come our way.

For Personal Governance I suggest viewing socio-political engagement as an ongoing option that we should not allow to lapse. Social and/or political engagement is a cornerstone of extra-professional interests, one that will strengthen our portfolio of coping strategies for all areas of life.

When we blind ourselves to societal engagement we remain a spectator to what should be a central influence in our existence and wellbeing. What's more, abstaining from an active role makes it difficult to bring social and political perspectives into corporate leadership and governance. As a spectator, you can never gain the same knowledge as when you are a participant.

Societal engagement also smooths the path to introducing social perspectives into our thinking, forming relationships via membership of associations, and encouraging ethical behavior. It acts as an opposing pole to the tendency towards transitory, temporary relationships.

### Socio-political engagement and ethics

In a previous article in this series, I referred to the fact<sup>6</sup> that executives can establish sets of ethical behavioral norms. Failure to follow them can lead to expulsion from a fictitious, so-called Norm Club.

Socio-political engagement can be a meaningful part of this kind of self-regulation. The manager who engages politically and socially also gains a more public profile (according to the function) and will be observed and judged on ethical behavior.

The effect of all of this has to be that executives align their professional and extra-professional behaviors. They are almost forced to anticipate conflicts of interests and role-conflicts, to make these transparent, and to work on them, something that good Corporate Governance demands.

### Does socio-political engagement automatically lead to overload?

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<sup>6</sup> See Personal Governance 3 – Principle II – Ethical Behavior

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In my experience, there is a tangible interest for senior managers to engage in this field. At the same time, many are very sceptical about finding the time, or having any real influence – especially when it comes to political office. Neither do many managers consider societal engagement, mainly for time reasons.

Admittedly this Personal Governance Principle and its call for socio-political engagement make Personal Governance more complex. Without it, and the disturbance from outside our private and professional contexts, good Personal Governance would certainly be easier.

Yet this aspect of Personal Governance is important. To make it seem more manageable, we need to consider that:

- Political and social engagement doesn't just have a useful contribution at the highest level (national parliament, charring organizations, etc)
- The time investment is lower in less high-profile posts, and can be structured more flexibly
- Political and social engagements must not be seen as yet another badge of dignity and recognition in a career. Any engagement has to be intrinsically motivated. Power and influence should not be a central driver, nor should the primary goal be a second, parallel career in the extra-professional domain. (Whilst this can be the case, it cannot be the core motivation).
- There are multiple possibilities for engaging in local/regional associations and organizations that work towards the common good.

### Self Check Questions on Political and Social Engagement

- 1 How have I engaged politically and socially in the past, if at all?
- 2 What kind of plans do I have in this area?
- 3 What fields and what kind of political or social engagements would interest me?
- 4 How would I organize my time investment?
- 5 How and when can I undertake such an engagement?
- 6 How will my professional and social entourage react to the step I'm taking?
- 7 What kind of professional and private advantages and disadvantages do I envisage?
- 8 What long term perspectives do political and social engagement have in the context of my Life Plan?

**Good Personal Governance takes socio-political engagement into account.**



### About Amrop

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