An examination on the study scope and theoretical principles of managerial intellectual learning (MIL)

JOSEPH KIM-KEUNG HO
Independent Trainer
Hong Kong, China

Abstract:

   In the process of developing the subject of managerial intellectual learning (MIL) over the last 2 years, a number of papers have been published on a number of key MIL topics. The time is now ripe to synthesize the topics involved into a conceptual map on MIL study to make the whole subject more coherent and comprehensible to interested readers. This synthesis exercise is carried out in this paper. The MIL study is further illustrated with an updated account of MIL practices by the writer. Finally, the paper makes explicit the underlying critical systems thinking (CST) commitments of MIL as well as clarifies these commitments by drawing on the notions of Critical Pedagogy (CP) in the discussion.

Key words: A conceptual map on MIL Study; Critical Pedagogy (CP); Critical Systems Thinking (CST); Managerial Intellectual Learning (MIL); The Multi-perspective, Systems-based (MPSB) Research

Introduction

Managerial intellectual learning (MIL) is not simply about learning management theories and concepts; otherwise, the term is quite superfluous. The very notion was proposed by Ho (2013). Since then, it has undergone further theoretical development, which has been elaborated on by Ho (1995a;

1995b; 1995c; 1996a; 1996b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d; 2014e; 2015a; 2015b). This paper offers a summary of the basic ideas of managerial intellectual learning and examines its underlying theoretical principles. By doing so, it mainly tries to answer two questions:

Question 1: What is managerial intellectual learning (MIL) and its scope of study?

Question 2: What are the theoretical principles of managerial intellectual learning?

The two questions are associated: by answering question 2, the nature of MIL (question 1) is made clearer.

Basic topics in the Managerial Intellectual Learning Study

To start with, the managerial intellectual learning (MIL) notion originates from the writer's research project of the multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) Research[1] as well as his own reflection on how to learn management theories for personal development, including continuous professional development. Such reflection is based on the writer's own learning experience and teaching experience as well as his research findings on various management subjects. There is, by now, quite a substantial amount of published academic works on the MIL Study. So, instead of repeating the discussions in the works already published, the writer offers an updated list of the topics in MIL study, grouped into primary and secondary domains, as follows:

Primary MIL study domain (with 9 topics):
1. *Multi-perspective, Systems-based (MPSB) managerial intellectual learning*: The Multi-perspective, Systems-based intellectual learning by people of management concepts to

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[1] The *MPSB Research* was launched by the writer in 1992 (Ho, 1996b).

be employed to inform real-world management practices (Ho, 2014c; 2014d).

2. *Enlightening management education (EME)*: Management education that embraces critical systems thinking and makes use of MPBS Research as a main method of management learning (Ho, 2013c)[2].

3. *Multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) knowledge compilation*: An intellectual exercise of using a set of critical systems thinking-based techniques to examine a management discipline or one of its concept, resulting in the construction or enhancement of MPBS Frameworks that make the management disciplines coherent and understandable from the critical systems perspective (Ho, 1995c; 2013c).

4. *Managerial intellectual learning (MIL) process*: The process framework for MPSB managerial intellectual learning that comprises four phases: (i) Data Management, (ii) Absorbed reading, (iii) the MPSB knowledge compilation, and (iv) Practice-based intellectual learning (Ho, 2014c; 2014d).

5. *Managerial intellectual learning capability-building mechanism (MILCBM)*: The self-sustaining energy acquisition and consumption function to drive the managerial intellectual learning process (Ho, 2014c; 2014d).

6. *The Multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) cognitive filter for management*: A set of inter-related MPSB concepts that are used by managers to make sense of the various management approaches and management viewpoints that they come across in the world of management practices (Ho, 2013c; 2014a).

7. *Multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) scholar-practitioner*: People who engage in Business Management-

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[2] Due to such commitment to critical systems thinking, the proclaimed benefits of EME are beyond those offered by a typical MBA program, i.e., "opportunities to improve management practice", "increases confidence levels in the workplace" and "provides extrinsic benefits of increased pay" (Gander, 2015).

related scholarly activities and management practices based on MPSB thinking (Ho, 2014c; 2014e).

8. *Multi-perspective, Systems-based (MPSB) Frameworks*: These are knowledge structures of management disciplines that are constructed out of the review of management disciplines with critical systems thinking (Ho, 1995a; 2013c).

9. *An MPSB e-learning support system*: The human activity system of provision of virtual learning space and support to students based on MPSB thinking (Ho, 2013a; 2014c).

Secondary MIL study domain (with 3 topics):

10. *Multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) Research*: A research programme that apply critical systems thinking to review management discipline so as to produce knowledge structures of management disciplines and make theoretical advancements in Systems Thinking (Ho, 2013c; 2014f).

11. *The Multi-perspective, Systems-based (MPSB) Research sub-Systems Movement*: It is a development cycle in the Systems Movement that also possesses the characteristics of the Systems Movement (Ho, 2014c).

12. *A Multi-perspective, Systems based (MPSB) knowledge supply chain framework*: A knowledge management-cum-supply chain process-view of all the MPSB Research activities, whose output is relevant, actionable and usable management knowledge (Ho, 2014f).

Figure 1 synthesizes the 12 MIL topics to form a conceptual map on MIL study. It delineates the intellectual landscape of the study by indicating how the various MIL topics are related as well as highlighting the primary and secondary domains of its study. Such an exercise is useful because the whole project of multi-perspective, systems-based (MPSB) research (Ho, 1996b; 2014f), of which the MIL study makes up a part, is a quite broad research theme itself. Now, with Figure 1, the scope

of MIL study[3] is clarified, which answers the first question of this paper. Since the research work on the MIL topics is ongoing, additional published works on them will be available periodically. The next section presents an updated account of MIL practices by the writer as illustrations on the MIL topics in the primary study domain (re: Figure 1).

Figure 1: A conceptual map on Managerial Intellectual Learning (MIL) Study
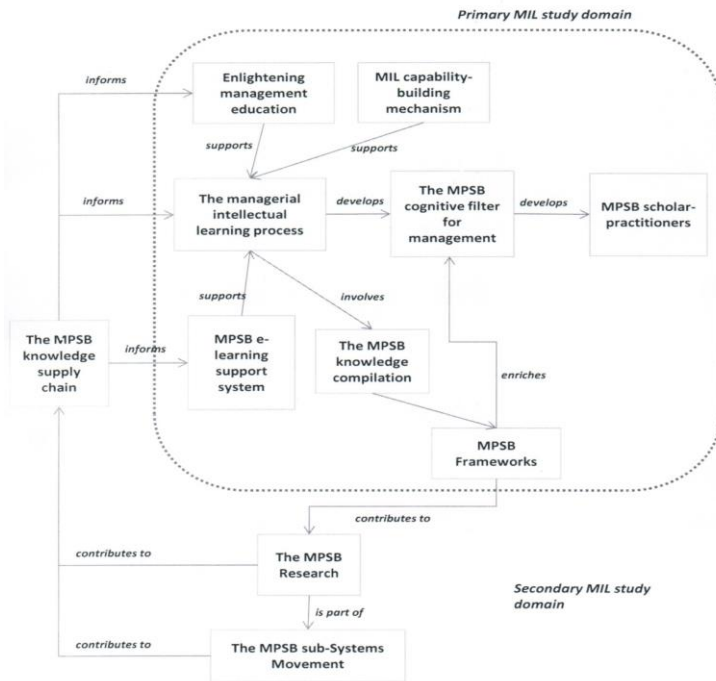
A personal account on current practices of managerial intellectual learning

Preferably, the literature of the MIL study should be studied and reflected on by those who are interested in this subject based on their own personal life-experience in work and study. This personal reflection on their own study and experience, at

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[3] By default, the *MIL study* as proposed by the writer is multi-perspective, systems-based.

the end of the day, is what informs their MIL practices. These practices are inevitably somewhat idiosyncratic. In this respect, this writer's own account on MIL is by no means to be considered as the only way to go through the MIL process. Nevertheless, it could serve as a real-life example to illustrate MIL practices although it is still evolving. Briefly, this writer is a freelance trainer with educational background in Business Management and Systems Thinking. Further details as related to MIL are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Personal practices as related to the main managerial intellectual learning topics

Main MIL topics (re: Primary MIL study domain in Figure 1)	Personal MIL practices as illustrations
1. *Enlightening management education (EME)*	The self-study EME mode has been solely employed based on personal reflection on life-experience and research works, especially on the MPSB Research.
2. *MIL capability-building mechanism*	The motivator factor (component 1) is the need for self-actualization to become an MPSB scholar-practitioner; The mindfulness and theory-driven reflection (component 2) has been consciously maintained in the MIL process. Personal resource management (component 3) is being done in a tougher local market for part-time teaching. There is an ongoing conscious effort to maintain mental and physical health, work-life balance and quality of life, partly via a gradually revised career development that relies less on part-time teaching.
3. *The managerial intellectual learning (MIL) process*	For Data Management (Phase 1), it relies on academic e-library, online newspapers, Google search and other academic readings. Absorbed reading (Phase 2) has been done from time to time for teaching and research purposes. MPSB knowledge compilation (Phase 3) has been done explicitly for the MPSB Research and academic paper writings from time to time. Overall, the MIL process of the writer is inner-driven/ life-based all along and is an enjoyable experience.
4. *The MPSB knowledge compilation*	It is covered as Phase 3 of the MIL process above.
5. *The MPSB cognitive filter for management*	The MPSB cognitive filter has been enhanced via the MIL process and the MPSB Research to make sense of various management concepts and topics. This is reflected in the improved understanding of

		management subjects as manifested in the writer's published works and skills to supervise his students' final year dissertation projects on various management topics.
6.	*MPSB scholar-practitioners*	The pursuit of the life-goal of being a competent MPSB scholar-practitioner is a prime motivator for the writer to participate in the MIL process and the MPSB Research. The five inter-related scholar-practitioners' activities of writing, praxis, research, sharing, and teaching are carried out with continuous self-reflection based on the MPSB thinking. Nevertheless, being an MPSB scholar-practitioner does not enable this writer to enjoy high employability in the labour market, nor to be able to easily find a satisfying job. Instead, the main life satisfaction comes from the realization of self-actualization need of this writer to be a competent MPSB scholar-practitioner.
7.	*MPSB e-learning support system*	The e-learning support system is operated on the hyperlinked social media platform comprising Facebook, Google +, Blogger, Twitter and the writer's personal website. It makes up a virtual space for supporting the MIL process of the writer and some of his Facebook friends (also see the *Appendix* for the lists of Facebook groups and pages on various management topics as illustrations). Currently, the writer's Facebook has 1,127 friends. Of late, about 400 friends have been unfriended by the writer as they have been found not having participated in any of the writer's Facebook-based surveys for research purpose at all. Very likely, these 400 former students of the writer are not interested in both MIL and the e-learning system operated by the writer.
8.	*MPSB Frameworks*	Via the MPSB Research and the accompanying MIL process, MPSB Frameworks have been formulated and published in academic papers, primarily in *European Academic Research*, every now and then.

While the personal account as presented in Table 1 is brief, it gives some ideas of what can be done by an individual to record and reflect on his/her own MIL practices. References have been provided in the previous section so that interested readers are able to find further evidences on what has been done on all the MIL topics identified in the table. This writer now moves on to

explore more explicitly the theoretical principles of MIL using the critical systems thinking and Critical Pedagogy literature.

Critical systems thinking and Critical Pedagogy commitments for managerial intellectual learning as its theoretical principles

From the beginning of launching the MIL study, it is, same as the MPSB Research as a whole, explicitly anchored on the principles and commitments of critical systems thinking (CST) as elaborated on by Jackson (2003). [There are other important writers on CST, such as Flood (1995) and Flood and Romm (1996).] Though Jackson's (2003) work does examine the implications on management learning when effort to master CST is made, the actual treatment on the topic of management learning is somewhat brief. Here, the writer draws on the theoretical principles of Critical Pedagogy (CP) (notably the works of Dehler *et al.* (2001).) to offer an enriched discussion on the underlying CST commitments for MIL study.   In other words, these commitments from CST and CP are examined here in relation to the MIL study.

Critical systems thinking endorses three commitments, namely, critical awareness, improvement and pluralism (Jackson, 2003: 303).

CST commitment 1: **Critical awareness** is about sensitive to (i) the strengths and weaknesses of different systems methodologies and (ii) the societal and organizational climate within which these methodologies are employed.

CST commitment 2: **Improvement** is about the pursuit of fairness, empowerment and human potential realization.

CST commitment 3: **Pluralism** is about employing dissimilar systems theories and methodologies together.

These three CST commitments are all adhered to in the MIL process and by individuals who aspire to be MPSB scholar-

practitioners. More specifically, they are upheld when management theories and real-world management concerns and practices are reviewed via the CST lenses, so as to (i) formulate MPSB Frameworks and (ii) enhance the MPSB cognitive filter for management. For example, learners become more capable of associating local and personal problems to macro social structural changes (Gold and Bratton, 2014). Regardless, the only way to learn the thinking underlying these three CST commitments is to study CST[4] (e.g., Jackson 2003).

As to Critical Pedagogy (CP), it is a teaching approach that helps "students achieve "critical awareness" (Wikiversity, 2013). Its commitments are more readily transferred to the MIL Study (re: Figure 1) as they are already articulated in management education terms. The following CP commitments are identified from Dehler *et al.* (2001):

CP commitment 1: CP-based management education is transformational and emancipatory via "critical reflection on knowledge, self and the world" (Barnett, 1997). For Kaufmann (2010), critical reflection can be a form of action "aimed toward ending oppression". This CP commitment 1 is related to CST commitment 2.

CP commitment 2: CP-based management education is about "complicated understanding" which tries to: (i) reduce "the complexity of managerial thinking and actions" with "sufficient clarity" for learners' comprehension as well as (ii) increase the learners' capability to grasp its complexity. Point (i) is more associated with the MPSB knowledge compilation in the MIL study while point (ii) is studied under the topics of "MIL capability-building mechanism" and "The MPSB cognitive filter for management" (re: Figure 1). This CP commitment 2 resonates with the Law of Requisite Variety of Ashby (1956).

CP commitment 3: CP-based management education demands both educators and students to embrace "complicated

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[4] There is a substantial literature on CST, which is not further discussed in this paper.

understanding" (i.e., CP commitment 2). In terms of the conceptual map on MIL study (re: Figure 1), this commitment is upheld in "Enlightening management education", "The managerial intellectual learning process", the "MPSB e-learning support system" and by the "MPSB scholar-practitioners". For CST, such "complicated understanding" is explicitly anchored on the Creative Holism notion of Jackson (2003), and not simply on the Law of Requisite Variety of Ashby (1956).

Overall, the three CP commitments are largely compatible with the CST commitments (mainly CST commitments 1 and 2) and serve reasonably well to explain, albeit partially[5], the theoretical CST principles of MIL in management education and management learning terms[6]. Both CP and CST share the academic concern of developing managerial intellectual competence to comprehend complexity very often exhibited in real-world problem-situations. Both CP and CST also favor action research for their theoretical development (Jackson, 2003; Udas, 1998). Nonetheless, one reservation of utilizing CP to enhance the MIL theoretical principles is that there is "a paucity of empirically based research that examines critical pedagogy in general" (Sleeter and Delgado Bernal (2004) as cited by Kaufmann (2010).). Another reservation is that CP does not explicitly adhere to pluralism (i.e., CST commitment 3). All in all, the discussion in this section has addressed the second question of the paper.

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[5] *Critical Pedagogy (CP)* is more in line with Emancipatory Systems Thinking, but not explicitly with Hard Systems, Soft Systems and Postmodern Systems Thinking; as to CST, it embraces all strands of systems thinking (Jackson, 2003).

[6] It would be another major intellectual exercise to examine CP via the CST lenses.

Concluding remarks

The publication of a number of papers on the MIL study, notably in *European Academic Research* over the past 2 years, attests to the speedy theoretical development of the subject. Nevertheless, it also makes the task of synthesizing and organizing the various MIL notions timely at this point. This synthesis exercise is done here in the form of a conceptual map, which should make the MIL study more comprehensible to readers who are interested in this subject. The new attempt taken up here to examine the underlying CST commitments of the MIL study with notions drawn from Critical Pedagogy is also useful; it clarifies the theoretical principles underlying MIL. Nevertheless, the MIL study needs to be continuously researched on if its long-term vitality as an academic subject is to be maintained.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of Facebook pages (19 items)

1. JKK Ho – training coaching consulting (url address: https://www.facebook.com/Joseph.KK.HO)
2. Managerial intellectual learning (url address: https://www.facebook.com/managerial.intellectual.learning/t imeline)
3. Information Systems Research (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Information-Systems-Research/1654716388096331?sk=timeline)
4. Housing Studies literature (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Housing-Studies-literature/769992736454150)

5. Literature on Management Accounting (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-Management-Accounting/418682984981179?sk=timeline)
6. Literature on innovation studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-innovation-studies/601525926617090?sk=timeline)
7. Literature on leadership studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-leadership-studies/1486899004934634?sk=timeline)
8. Literature on supply chain management (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-supply-chain-management/813202382109065?sk=timeline)
9. Research on health business (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Research-on-health-business/126506637680532?sk=timeline)
10. Literature on global business studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-global-business-studies/855072531238660?sk=timeline)
11. Literature on luxury brands and celebrity studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-luxury-brands-and-celebrity-studies/1665293927038604?sk=timeline)
12. Literature on business ethics and corporate social responsibility studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-business-ethics-and-corporate-social-responsibility-studies/553394598132432?sk=timeline)
13. Literature on corporate governance (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-corporate-governance/1650578425179475?sk=timeline)
14. Literature on Project Management (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-Project-Management/694960770647908?sk=timeline)

15. Literature on sociology (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-sociology/411304872387577?sk=timeline)
16. Literature on Policy Analysis (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-Policy-Analysis/872060816199297?sk=timeline)
17. Literature on urban & communities studies (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-urban-communities-studies/392409774294812?sk=timeline)
18. Literature on Human Geography (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-Human-Geography/892907794105384?sk=timeline)
19. Literature on quality and excellence (url address: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Literature-on-quality-and-excellence/905432996188841?sk=timeline)

Appendix 2: List of Facebook Groups (18 items)
1. General business studies (GBS) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/general.business.studies/)
2. Strategic management (SM) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/strategic.management.jkkho/)
3. Accounting and finance (AAF) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/accounting.finance.jkkho/)
4. Development & education (DAE) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/development.education/)
5. Research methods for business (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/research.methods.business/)
6. Logistics, operations & TQM (LOT) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/logistics.operations.tqm/)
7. Engineering management & Economics (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/engineering.econ.management/)

8. Social sciences (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/social.sciences.jkkho/)
9. Information Technology Mgt (ITM) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/information.technology.management/)
10. Systems thinking in management (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/systems.thinking.management/)
11. Global business mgt (GBM) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/global.business.management/)
12. Company secretaryship & admin (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/company.secretary.jkkho/)
13. Built environment study (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/built.environment.jkkho/)
14. Project, innovation & entrepreneurship (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/project.innovation.change.entrepreneurship/)
15. Independent study/ dissertation group (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/143861262337078/)
16. Marketing management (MM) (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/marketing.management.jkkho/)
17. Hospitality and tourism management (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/hospitality.tourism.management/)
18. Human resource management (url address: https://www.facebook.com/groups/human.resource.management.jkkho/)

Appendix 3: List of personal blogs (2 items)

1. Joseph KK Ho's work diary (url address: http://josephkkhoworkdiary.blogspot.hk/)
2. Joseph KK Ho e-resources (url address: http://josephho33.blogspot.hk/)