

Micromanagement and Poor Self-Control

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Abstract: According to a familiar and entrenched philosophical paradigm, poor self-control amounts to diminished control by the self. While some cases of poor self-control may fit this paradigm, many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control, including cases involving individually trivial effects, do not; they are better understood as cases in which the self controls behavior, but does so poorly. As such, philosophical research on poor self-control needs to go beyond research aimed at locating and empowering the self, and into research on what it takes for selves that are already in control to qualify as managerial successes rather than managerial failures. This article focuses on certain pitfalls associated with micromanagement and on the paradoxical connection between micromanagement and poor self-control in cases involving individually trivial effects. The article ends by advancing an approach to managerial success that provides a promising route to avoiding micromanagerial pitfalls while also promoting responsible resilient agency.

Keywords: cyclic preferences, intrapersonal and interpersonal dilemmas, micromanagement; procrastination, self-control, temptation

JEL Classification: D01, D19, M12, M53

I. INTRODUCTION

Consider the following familiar case: Agent A values staying in shape and believes that staying in shape requires regular exercise and good eating habits; but, day after day, A fails to do any exercise or to show restraint when it comes to indulging her sweet tooth. Suppose A's problem is that she has poor self-control. How is this verdict to be understood?

According to a familiar and entrenched philosophical paradigm, poor self-control amounts to diminished control by the self. Metaphorically, the idea is that the poorer one's self-control, the less one's self is in the driver's seat and the more one's behavior is controlled by some force that is alien to the self. Although the force that is in control is part of one's psychology, it is external to the set of motivating forces with which one

identifies, and is thus in an important sense a foreign force.¹ In light of this paradigm, henceforth ‘the foreign force paradigm’, there is an extensive literature dedicated to figuring out what constitutes the self and how its control over behavior can be hijacked.²

While some cases of poor self-control may fit the foreign force paradigm, many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control are not plausibly cast as cases of domination by a force that is alien to the self; they are better understood as cases in which the self controls behavior, but does so poorly.³ Cases of this latter sort often take the form of intrapersonal dilemmas in which an agent is prompted to realize a series of actions or omissions each of which is individually trivial in relation to some goal she has but which collectively defeat her goal, as in A’s case of procrastination with respect to goal-directed action (described above).

If the foreign force paradigm of poor self-control is indeed off base with respect to many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control, then philosophical research on the topic needs to go beyond research aimed at locating the self and figuring out how it can be empowered, and into research aimed at figuring out what it takes for selves that are already in control to qualify as managerial successes rather than managerial failures. This article will begin by elaborating on the foreign force paradigm and then expanding on and reinforcing the suggestion that, although (and as I will explain) it may seem like poor self-control *must* take the form of diminished control by the self, the paradigm is off base with respect to many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control. It will then focus on (1) certain pitfalls associated with micromanagement, which aims at comprehensive control, and on (2) the paradoxical connection between micromanagement and poor self-control in intrapersonal dilemmas of the sort described above. After relating poor self-control to failures associated with micromanagement, my article focusses on what I put forward as an especially constructive approach to managerial success. The approach provides a promising route to avoiding micromanagerial pitfalls while also promoting responsible, resilient agency.

¹ For foundational discussion concerning the ownership of desires, see Frankfurt (1971) and Watson (1975).

² Note that the use of ‘self’ here is meant to be compatible with different possible conceptions of the self, and, in particular, does not presuppose a homuncular account. The self might, for example, be nothing over and above a collection of appropriately related cognitive and conative attitudes. For a prominent non-homuncular account of the self, see Bratman (2003).

³ See Andreou (2022, especially 1.9) and, relatedly, Andreou (2012).

II. THE FOREIGN FORCE PARADIGM

A vivid, extreme, and famous illustration of compromised self-control due to subjection to a force that is alien to the self is Harry Frankfurt's case of the 'unwilling addict'. As Frankfurt (1971, 12) describes the case, the unwilling addict

hates his addiction and always struggles desperately, although to no avail, against its thrust. He tries everything that he thinks might enable him to overcome his desires for the drug. But these desires are too powerful for him to withstand, and invariably, in the end, they conquer him.

He is, in short, "helplessly violated" by desires that, although they are clearly in some sense "his own", he does not identify with (Frankfurt 1971, 12). The unwilling addict can thus "meaningfully" claim "that the force moving him to take the drug is a force other than his own, and that it is not of his own free will but rather against his will that this force moves him to take it" (13).⁴

Let's assume, at least for the sake of argument, that an agent can be 'violated' by a force that, though part of her psychology, is nonetheless foreign. The question remains: Should poor self-control be understood in terms of the foreign force paradigm? My answer is 'not exclusively' because, even if we assume that cases like that of the unwilling addict are cases of poor self-control that fit the foreign force paradigm, there are other paradigmatic cases of poor self-control that do not fit that paradigm but are instead better understood as cases in which the self controls behavior but does so poorly. I turn next to illustrating my view after addressing a challenge that threatens to cast the view aside as a nonstarter.

⁴ Without venturing into terminological questions about the use of 'weakness of will', it's worth noting that, insofar as the unwilling addict is 'violated' by a foreign force, he is not to be understood as someone who acts contrary to his better judgment of his own free will; there is thus no need for someone who accepts Frankfurt's description of the unwilling addict to provide a synchronic or diachronic story as to how the unwilling addict could be doing that (if doing that is indeed possible, which might be doubted, though some potentially relevant models associated with giving in to temptation will be discussed below).

III. THE ALTERNATIVE OF POOR SELF-CONTROL AS CONTROLLING THE SELF POORLY

A challenge for my view that there are cases of poor self-control that do not fit the foreign force paradigm is to explain the idea that the self is (fully) controlling behavior, but doing so poorly, without bringing in standards that seem to have nothing to do with self-control. If the self is actually managing to control behavior, rather than just trying but failing, how can it be falling short *with respect to self-control*, as opposed to falling short with respect to some other ideal? Falling short with respect to self-control seems like it *must* take the form of diminished control by the self. But this is an illusion, since paradigmatic cases of poor self-control can take the form of what I call ‘self-defeating self-governance’ (Andreou 2012). In cases of self-defeating self-governance, an agent fails to achieve what is most important to them despite being guided by preferences that they identify with. Importantly, while some cases of self-governed behavior can be well-orchestrated, and, in this sense, figure as exemplars of self-controlled behavior, other cases fall short precisely because they exemplify a lack of orchestration (even though the self is in charge the whole time).

Return to A’s case and suppose that A values enjoying tasty treats but, as already indicated, also values staying in shape and believes that staying in shape requires regular exercise and good eating habits (which are compatible with *some* culinary indulgences). Yet, day after day, A fails to do any exercise or to show restraint when it comes to indulging her sweet tooth. In the most familiar cases of this sort, A correctly sees herself not as out of control, but as procrastinating. She is controlling her behavior, but failing to do so well because she is exhibiting poor managerial skills: she is not managing her behavior over time well. But, how, it might be wondered, could she fail to manage her behavior over time well if she is not being ‘assaulted’ by unwelcome motivating forces set on diverting her from her goal?

Here it is helpful to appeal to the cyclic-preferences model of procrastination, which makes it clear that action directed at achieving a long-term goal can be thwarted not just by ‘alien’ forces, but also by the self’s own preference structures. According to this model of procrastination, procrastinating agents often struggle with *cyclic* preference patterns that can be represented as in figure 1 (where ‘acting at time x’ is shorthand for ‘initiating goal-directed action at time x’, and where the agent’s pairwise

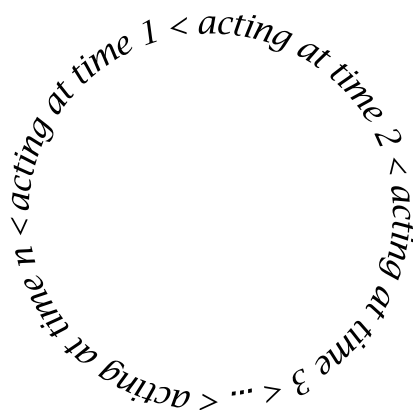


Figure 1: '<' is to be read as 'is dispreferred to' and 'acting at time x' is shorthand for 'initiating goal-directed action at time x'.

preferences are stable over time, even though which options are available to her change over time).⁵

This cyclic preference structure naturally occurs in cases where putting off goal-directed action in relation to a long-term goal for one more time period is trivial in terms of achieving one's long-term goal and has the advantage of allowing one to avoid a current cost (which, for example, might be the loss of enjoyment that would go along with getting off the cozy couch and, after swapping out one's beer for some water, doing

⁵ See Andreou (2007). I there relate my cyclic-preferences model of procrastination to a decision-theoretic model that appeals to discounting-induced preference reversals (see Ainslie (2010) and his related, earlier work in Ainslie (2001)). As I explain (in Andreou 2007), my model does not appeal to discounting-induced preference reversals but instead helpfully complements the preference-reversal model. (See, relatedly, footnote 6 and the final paragraph of this section.) Notably, based on the 'money-pump argument', developed by Donald Davidson, J. McKinsey, and Patrick Suppes (1955), cyclic preferences are often dismissed as irrational. See, however, Warren Quinn's case of the puzzle of the self-torturer for reasoning aimed at showing that cyclic preferences need not be irrational (Quinn 1993). Settling this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, which assumes only that cyclic preferences prompted by the accumulation of individually trivial effects are familiar, understandable, challenging, and at least seemingly rationally innocent in that, if there is an optimal option (such as, to illustrate in terms of a concrete example, an ideal number of chocolate callets—or potato chips, if one prefers savory treats—that one should eat before putting the bag away, given one's valuing of culinary delight and one's long-term goal of maintaining or achieving decent health), it is practically infeasible to figure out which option is optimal (see, relatedly, footnote 10). Significantly, if (as I argue in Andreou 2015) Quinn's reasoning is on the right track, then it can be rationally permissible to have certain preferences cycles even if it is irrational to invariably act on one's cyclic preferences. For related follow-up discussion, see, for example, Arntzenius and McCarthy (1997), Voorhoeve and Binmore (2006), Tenenbaum and Raffman (2012), Tenenbaum (2020), and Andreou (2023).

some circuit training instead).⁶ Given the preference pattern in figure 1, it is clear that, at each choice point from time 1 to time $n-1$, the agent *herself* is motivated to pass up the option of performing an individually trivial action directed at achieving her long-term goal. And yet—as is also clear from the pattern in figure 1 and, in particular, from the agent’s favoring initiating goal-directed action at time 1 over delaying until time n —the agent will also be disappointed with her overall pattern of choices if she invariably acts according to her preference at each choice point from time 1 to time $n-1$. This is presumably because enough procrastination in relation to her long-term goal can leave her in a position to do too little too late, even though no single delay was itself make or break.⁷ Given that the agent’s cyclic preferences reflect not only her understandable desire to put off burdensome but individually trivial contributions toward the achievement of her long-term goal, but also her understandable aversion to the failure she will face if she puts off goal-directed action for long enough, the agent’s cyclic preferences incorporate her long-term goal, rather than simply abstracting from it. Still, if the agent just proceeds based on her pairwise preferences as pairs of options present themselves, without any exercise of managerial skills, the agent will keep putting off action directed at her long-term goal and fail to promptly or adequately realize it. (This is because, by hypothesis, the agent will keep being faced with pairs of options in which selecting the goal-directed option will have no more than a trivial impact on achieving her goal but will require incurring a current cost; relatedly, her preference for initiating goal-directed action at time 1 over delaying until time n , which, by hypothesis, persists over

⁶ For empirical research detailing the conditions under which cyclic preferences are easily generated, see Tversky (1969). It is important to keep in mind that cyclic preferences can be stable over time. In particular, A’s preferences can remain the same at all times, with A prospectively, retrospectively, and at the time of action, having all of the pairwise preferences in her preference cycle. She can thus encounter the problems associated with cyclic preferences even if she does not experience any preference reversals over time (discounting-induced or otherwise). For accounts that complement my account by showing how preference reversals and the resulting fragmentation of an agent over time can thwart the achievement of long-term goals, see Ainslie (2001) and Holton (2009).

⁷ For a closely related interpersonal dilemma, see, for example, Derek Parfit’s “Drops of Water” case (1984, 76). Here is an adjusted, compact variation of that case: each individual in a set of altruists can spend some time to go make a trivial donation of water to a supply that will go to a large number of thirsty individuals, but each is motivated to save her efforts for an individually more significant altruistic act (such as playing catch with her ‘little’ from the *Big Sister Little Sister* program); each altruist will, however, be mortified if every altruist acts accordingly and the thirsty perish of thirst. For related discussion, see Glover (1975), Kagan (2011), Temkin (2012), Nefsky (2012), and Budolfson (2018).

time and which would motivate her if she ever directly faced a one-shot choice between those two options, will not generate any action directed at her long-term goal if the agent just proceeds based on her pairwise preferences as pairs of options present themselves.) The agent's enemy in this case is not some alien force, but a susceptibility to acting without sufficient managerial insight or skill. No foreign impulse or automatic process figures as the dreaded hijacker.

Notably, unlike complementary models of procrastination that concern agents who are fragmented by preference reversals over time (see, for example, Ainslie 2010), the cyclic-preferences model of procrastination allows that action directed at achieving a long-term goal can be thwarted by the self's own preference structures even when the agent's pairwise preferences are stable over time, with no reversal wherein, with respect to the exact same pair of options, one option is preferred at one point in time but dispreferred at another. This is important because it might be suggested that, in cases involving preference reversals over time, we are dealing with a collection of distinct time-slice selves that sometimes disagree on how to rank the same pair of options rather than with a single enduring self; but then failures of control in such cases might not be failures of self-control but failures of one time-slice self to control another time-slice self (see, relatedly, Andreou 2012 and Andreou 2022, 2.3). The cyclic-preferences model of procrastination thus seems particularly relevant with respect to my view that many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control do not fit the foreign force paradigm. With the cyclic preferences model of procrastination on the table, I turn in the next section to the challenge of acting with sufficient managerial insight and skill, even when there is no foreign force running interference with agent's choices over time.

IV. MANAGING AND MICROMANAGING

Strong managerial skills are essential for the success of any complicated enterprise, which must be effected via coordinated action over time. Success can normally be achieved in a variety of ways and effective management is required to ensure that individual actions are coordinated so that they collectively add up to the achievement of the sought-after ends. This requires the manager (that is, the agent that must exercise managerial skills) to have a vision for how the end will be achieved and to use the resources available to her to realize her vision. This will normally involve efficiently distributing or delegating tasks. In distributing or delegating

tasks, the manager must strike a balance that allows her to remain accountable for the implementation of her vision while distancing herself from certain details regarding its implementation. This balancing act allows for two ways of going wrong: the manager can be under-involved or overinvolved. In cases of under-involvement, success is threatened because the manager may fail to catch serious hitches in the implementation of her vision. In cases of overinvolvement, success is threatened because the manager may, in failing to adequately distance herself from certain details regarding the implementation of her vision, get caught up in the details and fall short with respect to the higher-level responsibility of ensuring that individual actions are coordinated so that they collectively add up to the achievement of the sought-after ends. The latter way of going wrong, often labeled micromanagement, is the way of going wrong that is of particular interest in this paper.

Micromanagement often occurs due to a failure to trust in the person or process that a task has been delegated to. In some cases, there is good reason for the lack of trust, as, for example, when one discovers that the person or process is unreliable. In other cases, the lack of trust is unwarranted. The manager has no reason to believe that the task is not being executed properly. Her intervention is thus counterproductive.

Discussion of the harms of micromanagement has focused on micromanagement in interpersonal cases, including in corporate contexts and with respect to parenting strategies. In both contexts, the counterproductiveness of micromanagement has been clearly analyzed and illustrated via dramatic relationship failures. But the problems of micromanagement arise in mundane intrapersonal cases as well. I turn now to three highly discussed problems of micromanagement in interpersonal cases and to a discussion of how, contrary to initial appearances, they can apply in intrapersonal cases as well.⁸

The first problem is the development of low morale and reduced confidence on the part of the micromanaged. In interpersonal cases, the micromanager's persistent interference and distrust can lead the micromanaged to question his competence or at least the point of exercising his skills if he will invariably be second-guessed and what he does will invariably be picked apart and overhauled. This relates to a second problem associated with micromanagement, namely the instillation of a feeling of powerlessness and a corresponding learned helplessness and

⁸ For a few introductory discussions regarding problems associated with micromanagement, see, for example, Bobinski (2009), Lahey (2015), and Lythcott-Haims (2015).

lack of independence and autonomy on the part of the micromanaged. This can completely undermine the point of delegating tasks and amount to a substantial waste of resources. And this relates to a third problem associated with micromanagement, namely, poor results wherein attempting to optimize ultimately interferes with realizing even a satisfactory result.

Consider the parent that micromanages their child's behavior, attempting to ensure optimal results. The parent attempts to ensure that every moment is well spent and that bad decisions and setbacks are avoided. This constant interference with the child's autonomy may, however, be the perfect recipe for thwarting both confidence and a high level of achievement. The child may come to rely on his parent's judgment even when the child would proceed perfectly competently if he were just given some credit.

Now, on the surface, it might seem like the dynamic of interference involved in micromanagement precludes the possibility of micromanaging oneself. Yet it is no coincidence that the problems associated with micromanagement are also often associated with procrastinating individuals. For the procrastinator's failure to exhibit adequate self-control is often due to persistently second-guessing implementation plans that she appropriately adopted and ultimately allowing this process to thwart her success. Paradoxically, in seeking greater control, the procrastinator can micromanage herself into self-control that is not even passable.

Consider an agent who wants to get in shape and settles on running on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings. Tangential complications aside, this is a reasonable implementation plan relative to the agent's preferences, which can be such that no course of action emerges as clearly optimal, though some courses are deemed satisfactory and others unsatisfactory.⁹ When Monday comes along, the agent may have no reason to second-guess her plan. Still, the idea that she can skip a run this Monday without making it the case that she goes from being in a position to get in shape to not being in a position to get in shape may tempt her to 'meddle' with the plan in the name of realizing a preferred outcome. But, insofar as the agent's preferences are cyclic, such meddling, if it occurs often enough, can actually result in an unsatisfactory outcome. In such cases,

⁹ See, relatedly, footnote 10 regarding 'rationally innocent' cyclic preferences, and note that, regardless of the correct theoretical view about the permissibility or impermissibility of resolute choice when an optimal outcome is available and readily identifiable, it can still be practically necessary and permissible to settle on a satisfactory course of action when no optimal outcome is available or readily identifiable.

the agent is susceptible to losing morale and confidence in her competence. She may come to think that she is helpless and come to rely exclusively on external prompts and constraints. This would have been avoided if the agent was generally disposed to defer to, rather than meddle with, her reasonable implementation plan.

As with any micromanager, the procrastinator cannot gain better control over the situation without refraining from exercising some of the control she is tempted to exercise. This is the paradoxical connection between micromanagement and poor control, including poor self-control. To refrain from exercising some of the control one is tempted to exercise, one must disengage from certain details enough to avoid falling short with respect to the higher-level responsibility of organizing things so that individual actions are coordinated to collectively add up to the achievement of the sought-after ends. This creates a respectable place for actions based on good habits, on non-deliberatively following through on reasonable plans or policies, and on satisficing. Although often taken as the core of rationality, deliberation aimed at optimization can be misplaced and figure as a form of giving in to temptation.¹⁰

V. DISENGAGING

As is perhaps clearest in the case of parenting, the solution to micromanaging is not simply to disengage altogether. Disengaging can get one out of the frying pan and into the fire—one may escape the pitfalls of overinvolvement only to stumble into the pitfalls of under-involvement, which can also lead to poor results. The key is to remain engaged but at the appropriate *level* and to limit interventions based on second-guessing so that they occur only when second-guessing is warranted. This involves both of the following: allowing for the anxiety that occurs naturally if one is invested and senses a potential shortfall; but also regulating one's behavior so that optimizing calculations are not automatically initiated and

¹⁰ Deliberation aimed at optimization is, I take it, misplaced when such optimization is impossible because there is no optimal option, or when, though theoretically possible, it is, practically speaking, infeasible to figure out which option would be optimal (which one might think is what is actually going on in the case of seemingly 'rationally innocent' cyclic preferences). I borrow the phrase "rationally innocent" from Tenenbaum and Raffman (2012, 99), who accept the possibility of rationally cyclic preferences, as do I (though, as indicated in footnote 5, I here assume only that cyclic preferences prompted by the accumulation of individually trivial effects are familiar, understandable, challenging, and at least seemingly rationally innocent). I say a great deal more about the possibility of rationally cyclic preferences and about the sort of satisficing with respect to one's preferences that goes along with that possibility in Andreou (2023). See, relatedly, Tenenbaum (2020).

the default of non-intervention is stable, not as a result of disengagement, but due to well-placed trust in light of appropriate task delegation.

Importantly, managerial monitoring for errors continues, but the search for errors should, as the default, be for *managerial* errors. For example, an invested manager that senses a potential shortfall can ask: Was a task delegated without sufficient thought about the constraints essential for success? Was a task delegated without a proper understanding of the capacities of the one carrying out the task? Worrying about such matters is very much appropriate for a manager and anxiety about a potential shortfall of this sort can lead to helpful preventative measures.¹¹ For example, the manager can check in to make sure that she was clear enough about what needs to be achieved and what constraints need to be respected. If not, she can correct or do damage control for this error on her part. Monitoring and some anxiety about potential shortfalls remain in play because, though she has delegated tasks, she remains accountable for managerial-level errors. (Of course, this is not to suggest that faulty management is always the problem when things go wrong. If the competence level of the managed has been disguised via, for example, fraudulent misrepresentation, there may be no managerial error in play. Relatedly, what might, on the surface, seem like an intrapersonal managerial problem may be a case involving self-deception about what one really cares about or about what costs one is really willing to incur for something that one cares about.) The key thing to keep in mind is that, in focusing on potential managerial errors, evaluation of how things are going continues, but not, in general, in a way that involves micromanagement.

Again, thinking in terms of parenting is helpful. Avoiding the pitfalls of micromanaging one's child should not take the form of cutting him loose. Instead, one might, while thinking carefully and realistically about what one's child can handle, give him certain responsibilities associated with managing his own time in light of certain well-thought-out constraints (such as getting home by a certain time). Remaining invested and allowing for the anxiety associated with sensing potential shortfalls, one might have to revisit the responsibilities assigned in light of errors one might have made about whether the responsibilities were adequately explained and whether one's assessment of the child's competence was accurate. This level of inquiry prompts a perspective that tends to keep the

¹¹ For some helpful discussion on the value of certain types of anxiety, see, for example, Kurth (2018).

parent's high-level responsibilities in view and discourage the temptation to micromanage and its typical pitfalls.

It is worth noting explicitly that the questions 'Was a task delegated without sufficient thought about the constraints essential for success?' and 'Was a task delegated without a proper understanding of the capacities of the one carrying out the task?' are perfectly appropriate not just in interpersonal cases but in intrapersonal cases as well. For example, in the exercising case, one can ask whether, in assigning oneself the task of coming up with a rigorous exercise regimen and following through, one was promoting an ultimately counterproductive disconnect between exercise and pleasure. Perhaps, and one would be better off in the long run by taking time to explore physical activities that one enjoys—even if that means exercising less in the short term. If so then one might, in one's managerial capacity, reject one's original assignment to oneself as short-sighted with respect to controlling one's behavior well over time in relation to one's goal of staying in shape, and replace it with a more well-thought-out assignment.

VI. HEALTHY SKEPTICISM AND ANXIETY

As suggested above, avoiding micromanagement and its pitfalls does not require abandoning skepticism and anxiety, both of which can be very practical, and indeed essential for managerial success. Turning a blind eye to red flags, and ignoring or suppressing anxious thoughts, is recipe for failure. Things can and often do go wrong, especially when one is being ambitious. Being on the alert for potential errors, which goes hand in hand with recognizing that errors are bound to occur sometimes, need not be discouraged in oneself or in others. Of course, pathological anxiety is not to be encouraged, but anxiety need not be pathological and seeking to eliminate it when it is not can prompt detachment and failure.

Avoiding harmful micromanagement is mostly a matter of delegating responsibly and then monitoring for managerial errors. The effects of the skepticism and anxiety associated with this approach are not at all the same as those associated with micromanagement. On the contrary, a manager that responds to potential red flags by first, and by default, looking for managerial errors will encourage the managed to be on the lookout for errors as well and to take responsibility for their errors. Instead of conveying a sense of distrust, encouraging the feeling of powerlessness, or fostering learned helplessness and a lack of independence or autonomy, she will instead convey the conviction that, while everyone should

be monitoring for occasional errors, which are to be expected, the competence of the managed to perform their assigned task(s) is affirmed by her (the manager) having assigned tasks in accordance with her managerial responsibilities and accountability. If, for example, in the intrapersonal exercise case, the agent, in her managerial capacity, questions her original assignment to herself as short-sighted, she is empowering her (managerial) self to correct a newly diagnosed error, and casting her (management-needing) self as capable of proceeding with success based on a more well-thought-out assignment, rather than treating her (management-needing) self as incompetent or unreliable.

VII. CONCLUSION

The foreign force paradigm casts poor self-control as diminished control by the self. There is thus an extensive literature dedicated to figuring out what constitutes the self and how its control over behavior can be hijacked. However, not all cases of poor self-control fit this familiar and entrenched paradigm. Many paradigmatic cases of poor self-control are better understood as cases in which the self controls behavior, but does so poorly, rather than as cases in which the self does not control behavior or has diminished control. As we have seen, this connects poor self-control to managerial failures and, more particularly, to micromanagement. After relating self-control to familiar managerial failures associated with micromanagement, I focused on what I see as an especially constructive approach to managerial success. The approach involves normalizing errors and being on the lookout for managerial errors in particular. This approach provides a promising route to avoiding micromanagerial pitfalls while also promoting responsible, resilient agency.

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