

Leadership Coaching Leads to Later Stage Development

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Abstract: This paper explores a multiple case study based on the effects of a developmentally informed, transformative leadership-coaching methodology. After an average of eight 90-min coaching meetings over 12 months with a Synergist executive coach, 83% of the 12 strategic executive leaders in the case study shifted a full stage, mostly from Achievist to Catalyst; the other 17% shifted two stages from Achievist to Synergist. The paper presents the eight drivers emerging from a thematic analysis of >100 hours of coaching conversations (>100,000 words) that enabled universal later stage development. It draws on the STAGES model to explain the significance of transforming the organisational context and undertaking shadow work. The dynamics of development led to an emergent Vertical Development Theory.

Keywords: Executive coaching, leadership, Stageshift, Synergist, vertical development theory.

Introduction

This paper first explores what is known about later stage development in terms of the structure and pace of development, and the factors thought to stimulate later stage development. ‘Later stages’ are defined as the postconventional stages of development. The paper then articulates the coaching interventions or drivers of development that led to shifts from Achievist to Catalyst and onto Synergist distilled from the executive coaching case study. This is followed by an exploration of why and how these drivers were effective in relation to the dynamics of vertical development with reference to the STAGES model. The paper concludes with an emergent Vertical Development Theory, a set of implications for executive coaches and facilitators of advanced leadership development programs and makes a number of recommendations for future research.

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Table 1. Key for use of Stage Terms in this article (author’s perspective).

Cook-Greuter (1999)	3 Diplomat	3 / 4 Expert	4 Achiever	4 / 5 Individualist	5 Strategist	5 / 6 Alchemist	
O’Fallon (2011)	2.5 Conformist	3.0 Expert	3.5 Achiever	4.0 Pluralist	4.5 Strategist	5.0 Construct-Aware	5.5 Transpersonal
Braks	Conformist	Specialist	Achievist	Catalyst	Synergist	Constructivist	Alchemist

The stage terms chosen by the author were selected based on their corporate audience, and their “-ist”-ness. In particular, Synergist was chosen instead of Strategist as the word strategist has its own meaning in the corporate world. It denotes a person fluent in devising corporate strategy which is best categorised as an Achievist-level capability. It also fails to incorporate the collaborative synergy that is a distinctive and valuable emergent capacity at this stage of development to enable more sustainable, empowering and equitable foundations to be built. Achievist, a term originally used by Beck and Cowan (1996), was adopted for the same reasons. In the corporate world, a high performing Achiever is seen as the pinnacle of an executive’s leadership capacity. By altering the term to Achievist, the stage development lens can be encountered and interpreted more objectively.

Factors Related to Later Stage Development

Later stages have been correlated with increased leadership effectiveness. Evidence indicates that executives at later stages with more complex meaning-making systems are more effective leaders (Eigel, 1998; Eigel & Kuhnert, 2005; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). A deeper appreciation of themselves, their interactions and strategic context, in other words intrapersonal, interpersonal, systems and cognitive skills and capabilities, help leaders to be more effective. Furthermore, the capacity to lead and sustain transformative organisation-wide change, emerges at Synergist (Rooke & Torbert, 1998).

The Pace of Later Stage Development

The two later stages of development with which this research study was primarily concerned are the first two postconventional stages of Catalyst and Synergist. While the proportion of the executive population at Catalyst has been increasing by 11% in each of the last two decades to rise to a total estimate of 33%, the proportion of Synergists amongst the executive population – has stalled at 8% increasing by just 1% in each of the last two decades (Cook-Greuter, 1999; PwC Report, 2015). Half of senior leaders believe that their investment in leadership development does not build critical capabilities despite the \$164b annual investment in leadership development in the United States alone (Beer et al, 2016; Moldoveanu & Narayandas, 2019). There appears to be a deficiency in current leadership development methodologies to enable vertical development to Synergist.

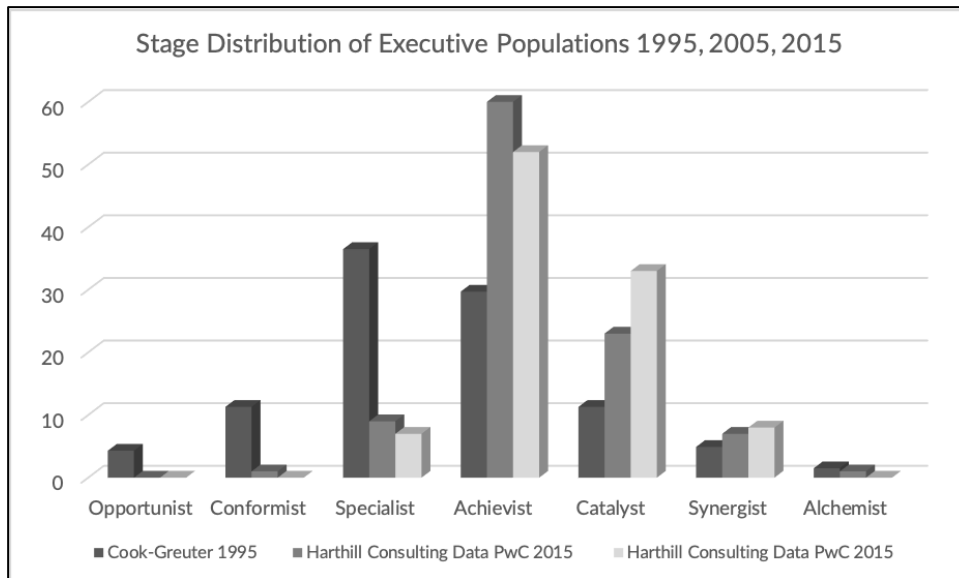


Figure 1. The Distribution of Executives across the Stages of Development.

Torbert (personal communication, March 11, 2015) suggested that vertical development from Achievist to Synergist would take as many as six years with a Synergist coach. His view was inevitably based on an early study of MBA graduates, where Torbert & Fisher (1992) found that the six who participated in a reflective action inquiry group every 3 weeks over 5 years had shifted a full stage to Synergist in contrast to the other nine graduates who only developed their leadership capacity by 5% during that time. Rooke & Torbert (2005) further advised that, in addition to one individual making the shift from Specialist to Synergist over a period of three years, “[w]e have had only two other instances in which a leader has transformed [two stages] in less than four years” (p. 73).

Vincent (2015) undertook a more recent study of 335 adults with an average age of 40 who were undertaking a 12-month Community Leadership Program (CLP). She found that the enhanced 25+ day CLPs including psychosocially disequilibrating events, were more effective in triggering later stage vertical development than the standard CLPs. Of those who attended the enhanced CLPs, 29% (46/157) shifted from Achievist to Catalyst, and 23% (9/40) from Catalyst to Synergist. In total, 28% (55/197) shifted one stage to one of these two later stages after attending the one-year intensive and enhanced leadership program.

Brown (2014) suggests that executive leadership programs based on integral theory focused more explicitly on expediting vertical development to transpersonal stages, such as Pacific Integral’s Generating Transformative Change Program, are significantly more effective. “Typically, it takes five years for a leader to shift a full action logic, or developmental stage, if they shift at all. Leaders in these programs [MetaIntegral Assoc, Pacific Integral, JFK University] shifted as much as an entire stage or two in vertical learning programs lasting 1–2 years.” (Brown, 2014, p. 25) Pacific Integral programs involve four 5-day residential retreats over a period of nine months.

In summary, vertical development to the later stages of Catalyst and Synergist is probable for participants in a peer group, potentially inclusive of later stages, undertaking developmental action inquiry over a period of 5 years. Based on Vincent's (2015) research, perhaps a quarter of participants could be expected to shift to later stages after attending a 25+ day 12-month comprehensive leadership program that includes psychosocially disorientating experiences (Manners & Durkin, 2000) yet is not explicitly designed to enable vertical development. However, all participants attending 20-day 9-month Pacific Integral programs which are explicitly designed to foster vertical development to indeed transpersonal stages, often shift one, and sometimes two, stages during this short time.

Factors Driving Later Stage Development

There are a number of factors that may contribute to enabling later stage vertical development. Torbert & Fisher's (1992) study of MBA graduates described above, suggests that reflective action inquiry with peers is useful. Laloux (2014), famed for his work in organisational evolution, suggests that creating the opportunity for self-expression, revelation, feedback and reflection amidst diverse perspectives including *later stage peers* is conducive to later stage leadership development. Indeed, facilitators of the highly effective Pacific Integral Leadership Programs are renowned for their transpersonal perspective.

Another key factor included in Vincent's (2015) study above, was the notion of disorientating dilemmas first espoused by Mezirow (2003) as having the power to invite transformative learning. Piaget (1954) suggested that disorientating dilemmas demanded an adaptation of the meaning-making frame to make sense of new perplexing information, signifying vertical learning beyond one's current perspective. He called this an accommodation process. This was in contrast to new data that could be assimilated i.e. understood within one's current frame of reference, suggesting horizontal learning within the person's current stage of development (Kegan, 1982).

In their research study, Manners & Durkin (2000) found that having a personal disposition that was curious and open to attracting personally salient life experiences that were emotionally disorientating, was likely to generate stage development to Achievist. This was based on a brief research study where 76% (16/21) of adult participants advanced one stage from Specialist to Achievist following a 10-week group program of one 90-minute workshop per week. Vincent's (2015) study suggests that 29% of participants might develop to later stages as a result of engineering this type of psychosocially challenging intervention.

Geoff Fitch, Founder of Pacific Integral, believes that the intimate collective holding space co-created during Integral Leadership Retreats is significant in liberating later stage development (Ch 4, Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016). Perhaps it is not the disorientating dilemmas or "heat experiences" (Petrie, 2015) themselves that enable later stage development, but the deeper inquiry into interpreting the experience of the participants. A transpersonal facilitator has the power to hold a psychologically safe, supportive and sacred space for this inquiry and the insight to invoke deeper meaning-making for the participants.

The exploration and integration of identity is thought to facilitate vertical development. Petriglieri et al. (2011) found that revisiting life stories and navigating existential puzzlement with

the support of individual psychotherapeutic counselling was both in high demand and highly valued by MBA students. Pfaffenberger (2011), on comparing the written narratives and interview transcripts concerning the growth process of 22 postconventional participants with those of a control group of six conventional participants, also found that interiority, alongside intentionality and complexity, was one of three key themes that distinguished later stages.

‘Interiority’ reflected taking a personal inquiry into one’s inner awareness. The second theme, intentionality, referred to the commitment to prioritise personal growth despite the discomfort and increasing sensitivity. Interiority and intentionality appear to be developmental drivers associated with shaping a coherent inner identity and the intentional resolution of challenging tensions and paradoxes at a deeper level. Quatro et al (2007) also advise that a person develops to later stages by integrating the analytical, conceptual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of their holistic self.

The exploration of identity is connected to shadow work. Kilburg (2004) described shadow as “unconscious material in the form of past experience, emotional responses, defensive reactions, underlying and unresolved conflicts, and dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behaving [that] can contribute to poor leadership and consequently to decreased organisational effectiveness” (p. 249). By bringing these elements into conscious awareness, a person can more easily adjust otherwise disruptive behaviours and alleviate significant distress and anxiety, leading to enhanced wellbeing (Kilburg, 2004). Shadow work is also thought to advance a person’s meaning-making patterns to realise later stage development (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006).

Other ways of expanding meaning-making are: the integration of polarities (Sharma & Cook-Greuter, 2012); the resolution of tension between espoused and lived values (Rooke & Torbert, 2005); consciously working with an open mind, open heart and open will while suspending voices of judgement, cynicism and fear (Scharmer, 2007); mindfulness, meditation, contemplative and reflective practices that serve to deepen inner awareness.

A further aspect of vertical development is that a person can generally only develop up to the level of evolution supported by the organisation they are a part of. For instance, the competitive, high-performance structure and culture of an orange organisation would largely contain development to the associated stage of Achievist. Innovative organisational practices at later stages of development i.e. green and teal, suggest that the evolutionary level of the organisation is a highly influential factor in either prohibiting or encouraging later stage development (Hamel, 2007; Laloux, 2014). Kegan et al (2014) recommend prioritising deliberately developmental practices within organisations to stimulate vertical development.

In summary, vertical development can be accelerated by regular reflective action inquiry, especially with later stage peers, and by making deeper meaning of disorientating experiences at integral retreats with transpersonal facilitators. Intentionally taking a holistic view of all dimensions in one’s inner world, potentially with the help of a psychotherapist, can also lead to the development of a more integrated identity. Working with values, polarities and mindfulness in deliberately developmental, contemplative ways may stimulate later stage development, and working in conventional organisations is thought to inhibit development while engaging in green to teal organisations stimulates associated personal development to the equivalent evolutionary level.

Quantitative Findings in Later Stage Development

The Motives that Led to the Research

There were a number of interconnecting factors that led to the research project. I had been working as an executive coach for about three years. While most clients appeared to gain substantial value from the coaching, I wondered if I was actually making a real difference. Was my coaching genuinely effective as well as providing clients with a purposeful and valuable time to reflect, rewind and reframe? The outcomes of my work as an executive leader of People and Culture and business transformations, had been more explicit and tangible.

I had become aware of stage leadership development by undertaking a workshop with Susanne Cook-Greuter in 2010. I discovered that I was operating as a Synergist with 72% of sentence completions at post-conventional levels and 42% at Synergist and Alchemist. I also discovered that only a small proportion of executives operate as later stage leaders, particularly at Synergist when they become able to lead and sustain organisational transformations (Rooke & Torbert, 1998). At that time, only 10% of leaders operated from Catalyst and 5% at Synergist and beyond (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). I felt that the world was urgently in need of transformation to become more sustainable, healthy and equitable, and therefore in urgent need of more leaders operating from the Synergist perspective.

I enrolled in a PhD and three years later began my research project. I was involved as a management assessment consultant and executive coach in the Leadership Development Program for the 400 most senior executives in the New South Wales (NSW) public sector. Following an initial plenary assessment, debriefing and short coaching process, they were individually funded to undertake a psychological assessment followed by more coaching. I took the opportunity to launch my research study.

My research question morphed over time to become:

How might Executive Coaching with a Later Stage Executive Coach at Synergist enable vertical leadership development for strategic leaders predominantly at the conventional stage of Achievist to the less commonly held later postconventional stages of Catalyst and Synergist?

Setting up the Multiple Case Study Research

I invited 25 strategic leaders with divisional, functional or regional responsibilities in the NSW public sector to undertake the highly validated stage assessment instrument, Cook-Greuter's Mature Adult Profile (MAP) (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). This requires a person to independently complete 36 sentence prompts. In this way they project their thoughts and ideas on a wide range of life and work concerns. Susanne Cook-Greuter herself kindly agreed to score the assessments.

Of the 25 strategic leaders invited to take the assessment, 12 scored with more than 80% of their profile up to and including Achievist. To focus the research on the shift from Achievist to later

stages, these 12 were invited to participate in the research study. Of the 12 invited, nine agreed. They formed an initial purposive sample of conventional strategic leaders. Three participants were added to the project later, one more from the public sector making a total of 10 (83%) and two from the financial services sector (17%).

The average age of the 12 participants was 50, ranging from 36 to 56. There were seven men and five women. They were all graduates, and six had postgraduate degrees including one doctorate. Their roles included Deputy/Assistant Secretary/Commissioner, C-suite, Head of Agency, Executive Director, Program and Operations Directors. They worked across the agriculture, education, environment, financial services, health, justice, premier's office, rescue services, trade and industry, and transport sectors.

The proportion of their average aggregate stages profile up to and including Achievist at the beginning of the research project was 88%. Thus, their average aggregate later stage profile was just 12%. They committed to attending a 12-month coaching program. They also agreed to an explicit intention to realise later stage leadership development. They were not involved in any other organised leadership development activities.

The 90-min coaching meetings were set up for the same time and day each month over the ensuing 12-month period. The participants could reschedule meetings during and beyond the 12-month period at their discretion. During the year, they attended an average of eight (8.4) coaching sessions, ranging from five to 12 each. The three who attended fewer coaching meetings tended to meet bi-monthly instead.

My coaching preparation consisted of revising past coaching notes, meditating briefly to become centred, calm, caring and present, ensuring that there was water and mint tea ready, and setting intentions to co-create an insightful and valuable coaching dialogue for the coachee. All of the meetings took place in person in large corporate meeting rooms on the upper floors of centrally located buildings with panoramic views over Sydney parkland and harbour. A whiteboard stretched across a wall was used regularly to capture new ideas and explain emergent concepts to facilitate development and understanding.

My coaching approach was non-prescriptive and unstructured. I had undertaken little formal coaching qualifications at that time and simply drew on my experience, expertise and Synergist perspective of life and business to inquire, respond and generate an uplifting transformative dialogue on whatever was raised by the coachee. I also intervened purposefully if I encountered a blind spot in the coachee's reflections or general chit-chat. In offering feedback, one coachee remarked:

I remember one day I began a coaching session by describing how irritated I had been by a hygienist cleaning my teeth. ... I just wanted to vent and remove this experience from my state of mind. Little did I know that Antoinette would turn this into a teaching moment for me. She provided a life-changing reflection back to me – did I want to be reactive to situations? She told me that my reaction was as much about me as it was about her. Did I want to be an irritable or irritated person, or did I want to be a different type of person in the world? I did not believe it was possible to change my personality, and then I realised I could. I wasn't that type of person; I could be whoever I wanted to be. I've never forgotten that moment.

Measured Outcomes Post the Coaching Program

After 12 months, nine of the participants undertook a second MAP assessment. These assessments were sent to Cook-Greuter anonymously without any identifying data for her second assessment. Of the additional three participants, one undertook a Global Leadership Profile (GLP) assessment and two others undertook a STAGES Profile assessment. These alternative stage assessments followed my studies with Bill Torbert, creator of the Global Leadership Profile, and Terri O'Fallon, creator of the STAGES Profile. The scoring systems of these three assessments have been shown to be highly correlated, particularly up to Synergist (O'Fallon et al, 2020; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009). By 2018 my stages assessment was at 5.5 (STAGES) with 100% of my profile at Synergist and beyond. The coaching programs with the three additional participants took place from 2016-2018.

It was found that ten (83%) of the participants had shifted a full stage, eight from Achievist to Catalyst. One participant shifted from Specialist to Achievist and one participant shifted from Catalyst to Synergist. The two remaining participants (17%) shifted two stages from Achievist through to Synergist.

Table 2. Pre- and Post-Coaching Stage Assessments.

Participants	Total Weighted Score (TWS)			Total Protocol Rating Primary Stage		% Profile at Postconventional		
	Pre-	Post-	Change	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Change
A	242	278	+36	Achievist	Synergist	19%	64%	+45%
B	244	265	+21	Achievist	Catalyst	6%	36%	+30%
C	245	293	+48	Achievist	Synergist	11%	81%	+70%
D	232	266	+34	Achievist	Catalyst	6%	50%	+44%
E	233	260	+27	Achievist	Catalyst	3%	31%	+28%
F	212	241	+29	Specialist	Achievist	0%	6%	+6%
G	242	265	+23	Achievist	Catalyst	0%	39%	+39%
H	247	261	+14	Achievist	Catalyst	11%	31%	+20%
I	244	271	+27	Achievist	Catalyst	17%	50%	+33%
J	231	261	+30	Achievist	Catalyst	6%	37%	+31%
K	244	266	+22	Achievist	Catalyst	17%	39%	+22%
L	265	298	+33	Catalyst	Synergist	47%	93%	+47%
MEAN	240	269	+29	T = 9.7E-08	p < 0.0001	Aggregate Profile Shift		
Std Dev	12.55	15.21	8.7	t = 1.7959		12%	46%	+34%

The mean of the difference in the before and after scores was 28.7, approximately the ambit of a full stage. The difference in the before and after scores ranged from 14 to 48 points. There were no outliers (Tukey Fence). The standard deviation of the difference was 8.7. A matched sample

paired t-test showed that there was a highly significant statistical difference between the before and after Total Weighted Scores (TWSs). The R^2 of this shift was 0.519 with a single tail p-value of 0.00001 at a 95% confidence interval.

In summary, all participants shifted a full stage (100%). Two navigated a double shift from Achievist to Synergist (17%). These are significant findings from a practical perspective. An average of eight 90-minute coaching sessions or 12 hours (2-days) of executive coaching spread across a year with a later stage executive coach at Synergist, accomplished the degree of stage shift that had otherwise only been known to have taken place following 20-day intensive group Integral Leadership Programs.

Three of the first group of participants agreed to undertake a third GLP assessment three years later. They were all assessed at Synergist. They increased their average aggregate later stage profile by 72% from 16% in Year 0, to 65% in Year 1 and onto 88% in Year 4. This indicated that the earlier results achieved were sustainable and that the coaching could activate the integration from Catalyst to Synergist.

The Hedges g score showed that the number of coaching sessions undertaken by the participants during the research project, had no significant effect on the scope of the shift in each participant's profile. Some coaching sessions were also taken prior to the research project, and those that undertook the third assessment had continued with an average of six coaching sessions following the project. The Hedges g score showed that the total number of coaching sessions undertaken had no significant effect on the results. The average number of coaching sessions undertaken by those who shifted two stages in one year from Achievist to Synergist was eight.

The Structural Nature of the Stage Shift

The structural nature of the average aggregate profile shift was curious. It was calculated based on the average percentage of sentence completions at each stage of development. In the initial shift predominantly from Achievist to Catalyst, the proportion of sentence completions at Achievist remained relatively stable, while the neighbouring stages increased and decreased around this centre of gravity. It was curious because I had anticipated more of an incremental increase across all developing stages and a similar decrease across all earlier stages. I wondered if this might point to a new insight, at least for me as an experienced practitioner, in the nature of vertical development. To explore this further, notwithstanding the tiny sample size for this type of analysis, I looked at the data only for those shifting from Achievist to Catalyst, and the data only for those who had shifted onto Synergist.

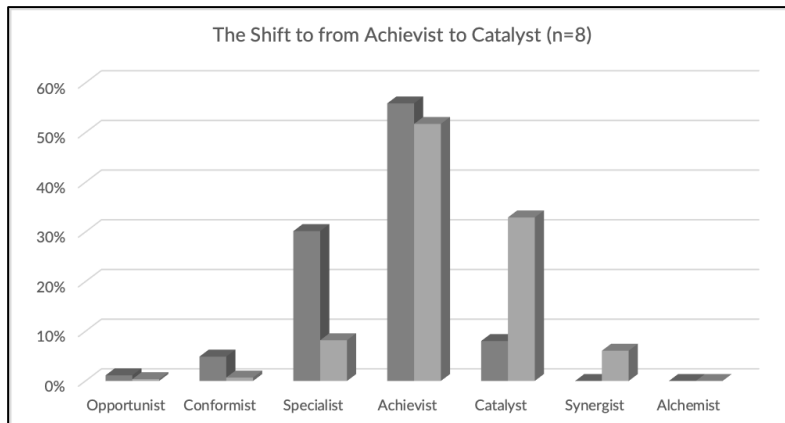


Figure 2. The Structural Nature of the Stage Shift to Catalyst.

In the shift to Catalyst (n=8), the proportion of sentence completions at the previous slight leading edge of Catalyst increased significantly from 8% to 33% (+25%) to become their primary stage. The previous primary stage of Achievist stayed largely stable (-4%) and defaulted to secondary due to the growth in their leading edge at Catalyst. Simultaneously, the previous secondary stage and trailing edge declined substantially (-27%), leaving their previous secondary stage at Specialist as their new trailing edge. They had a new leading edge at Synergist (+6%).

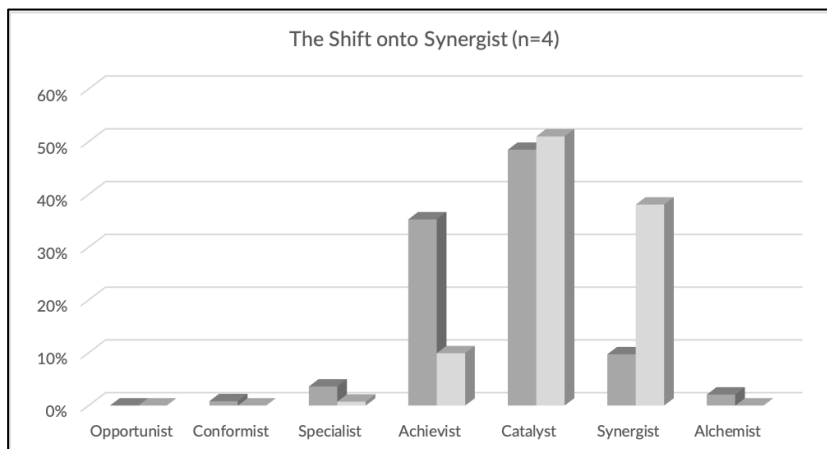


Figure 3. The Structural Nature of the Stage Shift onto Synergist.

Similarly, in the shift onto Synergist (n=4), the new primary stage of Catalyst remained relatively stable increasing by only 3%. The percentage of sentence completions at their leading edge of Synergist flourished by 28% while their profile at Achievist diminished by 25% to become their new trailing edge. The profile changes surrounded, rather than affected, their previous new primary stage at Catalyst.

These indicative findings on the structure of stage development suggest that cultivating the next person perspective at their leading edge while eliminating or reducing their regression to earlier stages by undertaking shadow resolution work related to them, is the key to later stage vertical development. The current integrated stage of development is sustained during the process of vertical growth until the next integrated stage of development has been experimented with,

understood and become embodied. This way a person can continue to rely on their primary way of making sense of their world while actively nurturing vertical development. It appears that it is not until both steps in the individuation/integration process (Cook-Greuter, 1999) are completed and the person has matured into a new integrated stage of development, that the previous primary stage of integration is released.

This supports O'Fallon's (2011) revelations of the structure of stage development in the Inner and Outer Zones. During the x.0 individuation stage of development in one's inner world, the previous (x-1).5 stage in the outer world continues to prevail. The findings add credence to my observations from my coaching experience in vertical development to Synergist, that a person only arrives at this stage once they can confidently express and demonstrate their personal transformation by leading transformation of their organisation.

This insight perhaps partly explains the fact that while executive leaders have been increasing to the stage of Catalyst by 11% in each of the last two decades, the transformation to Synergist has stalled (PwC, 2015). These postconventional executive leaders would appear to still have their centre of gravity, albeit their secondary stage, at Achievist. It seems that unless developmental interventions deliberately encourage active experimentation in the outer zone of integration at Synergist while intentionally releasing the hold of the Achievist and earlier stages through shadow work, vertical development to Synergist cannot ensue.

Summary of Quantitative Research Findings in Later Stage Development

1. The motives for the research project were to explore my effectiveness as a coach and the potential for executive coaching with a later stage executive coach to expedite later stage vertical development to Catalyst and Synergist.
2. Twelve strategic leaders with substantial divisional responsibilities, seven men and five women with an average age of 50, half graduate and half postgraduates, participated in the research. They started out with 88% of their average aggregate profile up to and including Achievist.
3. They undertook an average of 8.4 (range of 5-12) 90-min (12.6 hours) face-to-face one-to-one coaching sessions with a Synergist coach, monthly or bi-monthly over the course of a year.
4. Ten (83%) of the participants shifted a single stage, eight from Achievist to Catalyst; one from Specialist to Achievist and one from Catalyst to Synergist. Two (17%) shifted two stages from Achievist to Synergist.
5. The mean of the difference in the before and after TWSs was 28.7 (range of 14-48) and the standard deviation of the difference was 8.7.
6. A paired t-test showed that there was a highly significant statistical difference between the before and after TWSs. The R^2 of the shift was 0.519 with a single tail p-value of 0.00001 at a 95% CI.

7. Three of the participants undertook a third stage assessment three years after the second and were all assessed at Synergist. They increased their average aggregate later stage profile by 72% from 16% in year 0 to 65% in year 1 and onto 88% in year 4.
8. In the transition to the next stage, the primary stage remained stable. The leading edge grew to become their primary stage and their secondary stage and trailing edges dropped away.
9. The research findings suggest that a person's Centre of Gravity is better understood as being in their latest integrated stage, primary or secondary, rather than in their primary stage if it is in an individuation stage.

The Drivers Leading to Later Stage Development

The Matrix of 8 Key Coaching Interventions

The coaching conversation notes from the first nine participants comprised >75,000 words. They were compiled into one large word document. First, they were analysed using Leximancer's online content analysis tool. Two overarching themes emerged: People and Strategic, together with eight other topics. These were crystallised into categories and the conversations within the transcripts were coded accordingly. The coded conversations were then captured in a large excel spreadsheet by category (row) and coachee (column).

After many recurring cycles of reflection and analysis on the substance and nature of the data over a period of two to three years using inductive thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), it was found that the two key themes held: Strategic and Holistic Leadership Development. Strategic coaching conversations related to the coachees' roles as organisational business leaders. They focused on the Collective. Holistic coaching conversations concerned them more intimately as individual people navigating life, both at work and at home. They focused on the Self.

After further consideration and following study of the STAGES model (O'Fallon, 2011), I realised that some of the subcategories related to inner work such as exploring identity, developing self-awareness, diving deep to understand and resolve shadow, and articulating aspirational intent and strategic direction. This type of work seemed to be more closely associated with the Inner Zone work at the Reciprocal stage of Catalyst, potentially also reaching towards the aspirational intent of Constructivist. The other subcategories were concerned with active application, engagement with others and the implementation of what had been learnt, reminding me of the Outer Zone work at the Interpenetration stage of Synergist.

As a result of this iterative process of reflection, sorting, analysing and resorting, eight different coaching interventions were identified. These eight drivers formed a matrix. Four drivers were Strategic, and four Holistic. Four related to inner work and four to outer work with others.

It was also found that the drivers were introduced in a similar order across all the case studies. As time went on, the coaching became more personally and interpersonally challenging, as well as more expansive in terms of proactively engaging larger groups of people beyond their immediate role. Here is the StageSHIFT Matrix of Later Stage Vertical Development showing the order from

1 to 8 that enabled the participants to integrate the 4th person perspective from Achievist to Catalyst and onto Synergist.

SELF	FROM WITHIN	WITH OTHERS
HOLISTIC	1. Set Evolutionary Personal Aspirations	2. Positive Kindness and Open Mindfulness
	5. Release Shadow Psychodynamics	6. Hold Courageous Caring Conversations
STRATEGIC	3. Shared Purposeful Strategic Direction	4. Distribute Time to Orchestrate Flow
	7. A Unique Signature Living Presentation	8. Collaborate Widely to Generate Synergy

Figure 4. The StageSHIFT Drivers of Later Stage Development.

Driver 1: Set Inspiring Evolutionary Personal Aspirations

Coaching programs often begin with setting developmental goals. My preference was to set personal leadership aspirations in the form of a declaration. Each coachee articulated the type of leader they would like to become and completed their statement with their highest intrinsic purpose. This took time to develop and refine, and invariably involved developing the coachee's self-awareness of their unique strengths, passions, potential, purpose and personal aspirations. This is similar to the first step in the Boyatzis (2008) Intentional Change Theory although I would add that a later stage Synergist/Constructivist perspective tends to uplift coachees' aspirations.

The rationale was to attract the very experiences that would both challenge and bestow the person with the opportunities to realise their highest potential – that was my intrinsic purpose. By setting a strong guiding affirmation, I believed that the power of the mind, heart and spirit would set up the opportunities and obstacles in life's pathway to fulfil this declared intention. This was based on the writings of philosophers such as the following quote by Indian sage Patanjali, and to some extent, reflected in my own life experience.

When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds; your mind transcends limitations; your consciousness expands in every direction; and you find yourself in a great new and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

Driver 2: Sustain a Positive, Kind, Open and Compassionate Mind

A key element that arose repeatedly across all the case studies was the common criticism and judgement of others. Calling other people “idiots” and “useless”, or otherwise venting about their annoying qualities is prevalent amongst people at the stages of the defensive Specialist and competitive Achievist. In integral speak, this element was about ‘showing up’ in a positive, kind and balanced state to minimise and indeed eliminate any negative ripple effect on other people.

This Driver incorporated positive psychology (Seligman, 2011), the use of only positive language, deletion of negative thoughts, heart-based reflective practices, mindful reprogramming and the development of a growth mindset and new wellbeing habits such as meditation and journaling. The Interpenetrative nature of the Synergist in the STAGES Model also fuelled this driver. By taking on board that all vengeful criticism was really transference, the coachees learned to lift their level of conscious self-awareness on an everyday basis.

One of the coachees shared their experience of this driver as follows:

I was always intolerant of fools and cranky, idiotic people behaving badly ... Realising that whatever happens in their life, they are trying to do the best they can - maybe a bit more understanding from me rather than creating relationship issues with them would be better ... Huge shift ... Biggest shift of all!

Driver 3: Engage Everyone in Setting Shared Purposeful Strategic Direction

This was the first strategic driver focused on generating transformative leadership by each coachee of their division as a Collective. The timing was perfect to set strategic direction for the years ahead as the coaching programs began at the beginning of the financial year. The nature and structure of setting strategic direction involved many empowering models and liberating frameworks I had used effectively as an Organisation Development consultant. They had lifted people engagement by 30% in six months and had the power to lift an organisation to green.

This driver included working with each coachee on setting a purpose, vision, set of values, strategic outcomes, annual themes, strategic shifts in culture and performance, and key strategic initiatives to set up a second operating networked system as recommended by Kotter (2014) to accelerate business evolution and innovation. The coachees were also coached on how to effectively engage and empower their people in the process of generating and agreeing to a Strategic Business Charter and cascading this throughout their division.

Eleven of the 12 coachees implemented this driver and many found the process highly engaging and rewarding. They were proud of their final A3 masterpieces setting out the ‘big picture’ and were recognised by their managers and government Ministers for their transformative views of the future. It is interesting to note that the two coachees who did the most work co-creating, implementing and continuously engaging their people on the Strategic Charter, moved most rapidly to Synergist. This driver was highly empowering for their teams who could then be held accountable for achieving the goals freeing the coachees to be more strategic leaders. A coachee explained:

[My purpose is] to set higher order strategic outcomes . . . and advance a strategic, scientifically based perspective along with effective and accountable probing governance with greater integrity . . . in such a way that everyone feels engaged, identifying with and owning a longer term strategic vision so that the return on the investment for the Australian public and industry sponsors generates tangible, breakthrough solutions that create a healthier environment for life and future generations.

Driver 4: Distribute Time to Generate a Dynamic Flow

This driver operationalised Driver 3. A Dynamic Operating Rhythm was created during coaching meetings to reduce time pressures, long hours and stress levels. Rather than managing time, the focus was on optimising energy levels and brain wave activity and distributing time to allocate the flow of the important streams of work that a strategic leader was responsible for e.g. strategic direction, oversight of key initiatives, stakeholder engagement, people and culture, and overall governance in relation to the effectiveness of the business model.

It included an iterative cycle of meetings for their teams, direct reports, projects and stakeholders, and liberating meeting agendas to enable full engagement, embed accountability and encourage collaboration. The weeks of the month, days of the week and the hours of the day were orchestrated 18-months ahead to optimise strategic performance and governance, and individual productivity, creativity and wellbeing in accordance with a person's natural ultradian rhythm and brain processing agility.

This driver confronted many typical organisational norms. One of the most pervasive was the ever-changing meeting schedules of senior executives. The Dynamic Operating Rhythm regulated this and ensured attention was given to their own strategic priorities and people first and foremost, while freeing them to then engage more strategically externally. It conserved their conscious energy otherwise depleted by navigating a changing schedule day-by-day and enabled the coachees to move into a more emergent flow state.

Coachees were able to shift from being reactive to proactive, from the detail to the engagement:

Setup time on Monday is proving to be very valuable . . . Feeling of being more effective and more productive. . . I now have time to synthesise; what's my position going to be in the next meeting? . . . Really present, not absent. Articulating point of view on Exec Team. Now paying attention to the human dynamics, interesting drama playing out in front of me.

Driver 5: Explore Psychodynamics to Heal Shadow & Eliminate Triggers

This is the first of the second set of holistic drivers focused on deepening self-awareness and resolving shadow (Kilburg, 2004). Emotional triggers were seen as a signalling system for healing. Rather than focus on self-regulation in terms of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), the emotion that was being triggered was sourced back to the original similar psychodynamic situation as a child and dealt with there. This transformative approach tunes into spiritual intelligence.

The coach had learned that by inquiring into her own emotional triggers and traumas, navigating a cognitive process to understand the psychodynamics and a heart-based process to forgive all involved in the situation while embracing the inner child, enabled situations to be healed at source. This process eliminated both the reoccurrence of similar psychodynamics and the voices in the mind that were associated with the trauma or drama in the past. In the coach's experience, when this 'GRIEF' process was applied to all emotionally charged events, regrets, resentments, prejudices and grievances were released, one's identity became integrated and the mind emptied to become calm and clear. This shadow resolution process released mindsets associated with earlier stages.

The underlying principle that supported this approach was again the concept of Interpenetration in the STAGES Model (O'Fallon, 2011). In my words albeit not necessarily original expression: Life doesn't just happen to us, it happens through us, as us. The self and life are interpenetrative. The healing of egoic wounds from the past also resonated with the shadow crash orientation of the STAGES Model. These wounds inhibited a more robust construction of character at earlier stages. If triggered, a person generally reacts or suppresses the emotional charge. Either avenue is unproductive. However, if the shadow crash is illuminated and resolved, character foundations can be rebuilt in a more stable fashion to support ongoing later stage development.

"How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side if I am to be whole."
(Jung, 1931)

Driver 6: Sustain Standards with Courageous Caring Conversations

This final holistic coaching intervention involved demonstrating courageous and authentic integrity in a gracious, compassionate way. This coaching driver was the most common across all case studies. All coachees felt intimidated, threatened and/or distressed due to corporate politics or others' abusive behaviour during the 12-month coaching program. The fear of speaking out in the face of powerful authority figures and employment risk, is associated with the reptilian amygdala response of fight, flight or freeze, and the emotional limbic brain.

Coaching sessions were an ideal opportunity to gain perspective and discern the standards, boundaries and priorities that were potentially out of synch in relation to the mutually respectful collaborative power that is demonstrated at Synergist. The coach invited and helped coachees to script an appropriate TIP – Truth-Implications-Point - conversation that could then be held in the workplace to address difficult situations.

The capacity to express oneself truthfully, openly and assertively with vulnerability and grace, while *holding* the other person's self-esteem and feelings in mind, rather than simply *having* the conversation, is relatively rare. To be able to do so in the moment that it is called for, is even rarer still. Holding these types of conversations left a lasting impression on many of the coachees. One said:

The things that I've been working on, me tuning into me, has really allowed me not to balk at these situations. I can have an open conversation with any one of my team members, team members have been in tears because they are learning things that are fundamental to who they are, gaining

in self-awareness ... It allows me to help others become more authentic, authenticity breeds authenticity ... Me growing is causing or generating their growth! because I'm empowering the team to grow.

Driver 7: Articulate an Inspiring Unique Living Signature Presentation

This is the third strategic driver. It arose in response to the many demands on the coachees to make presentations at Conference events, special gatherings such as farewells, important family events, invitations from Universities to honour graduates or to mark a new strategic direction for their industry sponsors and community interest groups. Rather than be descriptive or playing it safe, the coachees were invited to create an authentic, transformative, inspiring and compelling signature presentation for their audience.

It was 'unique and living' in that the coachee was the centre of their presentation. It concerned their purpose, their passion and their aspirations. It was intended to be continuously enhanced with every presentation opportunity so that it could evolve and develop new momentum and influence with each outing. The driver evolved to incorporate 12 P's which became the focus for open questions during coaching sessions to provide the coachee with the opportunity to share their greatest aspirations and deepest sense of what mattered most to them in a very human yet strategic way.

I believe this driver leans into Constructivist leadership capacity of the fifth person perspective. It was exciting to see new presentation opportunities arise as coachees developed and built on their signature presentations. The expression of one's authentic voice in a courageous, committed and convincing manner with eloquence and presence is an outstanding hallmark of a leader at Synergist. Coachees were enthralled:

Speaking can be a bit of a struggle, 35 on Friday, 150 next week. ... Once in the groove, speaking from the heart ... Very passionate ... So exciting ... Envisaging what is going to be happening in 10 years' time today. ... I've been advised that I was the top speaker at the conference.

Driver 8: Collaborate Widely with Stakeholders to Generate Synergy

The final driver was focused on proactive engagement first with internal stakeholders and then with external stakeholders taking a complex adaptive systems interventionist approach (Cavanagh, 2013). The coachees who had responsibility for resolving conflict and collaborating with a variety of external stakeholders or had accountability for new business development, valued discovering how to gain in influence, market presence and proactively win the engagement and support of others in their communities and industry.

This driver involved stakeholder relationship mapping and taking a strategic approach to building relationships with others individually and in groups in a purposeful campaign-like manner. Synergists are able to hold the space for diverse, disconnected, conflicting stakeholders to release their anxieties and trust in the process of dialogue to realise mutually beneficial outcomes. This

type of interaction had the potential to lead to integration. Coachees enjoyed the results that flowed from building flourishing partnerships and co-creating transformative outcomes.

My approach is successful, meeting every timeframe to the day. Tear down the transactional framework, get away from the contract to the relationship, it's unheard of to hit deadlines like this as consistently as this. Met every single deliverable on time every time, 15 June for X, 17 August for Y, and with really strong partnership relationships with suppliers and stakeholders ... Our key supplier relationship has evolved into a real partnership.

Summary of the Drivers Leading to Later Stage Development

1. There are eight key drivers of later stage development. They are:
 - i. Setting inspiring evolutionary personal aspirations
 - ii. Sustaining a positive, kind, open and compassionate mind
 - iii. Engaging everyone in setting shared purposeful strategic direction
 - iv. Distributing time to generate an orchestrated yet organic flow
 - v. Exploring psychodynamics to heal shadow and eliminate triggers
 - vi. Sustaining standards with courageous caring conversations
 - vii. Articulating an inspiring unique living signature presentation
 - viii. Collaborating widely with stakeholders to generate synergy
2. They form a matrix of which four (3, 4, 7, 8) are related to strategic business development and four (1, 2, 5, 6) to personal holistic development.
3. Two within each set of four drivers are related to inner awareness and aspirational intent (odd numbers: individuation), and two to application, engagement and implementation (even numbers: integration).
4. The coaching included explicit mentoring in vertical organisational development to transcend the amber and orange conventional norms and generate new empowering and collaborative norms.
5. Holistic stage development combined realising and embodying one's higher aspirational self while releasing embedded shadow and reactive patterns that otherwise stall one's vertical development.

The Dynamics of Later Stage Development

The Blend of Strategic Holistic Executive Coaching

An executive leader tends to feel constrained by their list of role responsibilities, their levels of delegation, their accountability for budgets and deadlines, and their need to comply with the conventional norms that prevail in amber and orange hierarchical organisations. By reshaping the strategic context and operating system for their organisation in empowering uplifting ways, each participant was challenged to step up in vertical development.

While the coaching was in response to the coachees' need to create a strategic plan, the coaching response was of an evolutionary order of later stage vertical development. The new strategic context broke through Specialist and Achievist paradigms of excellence and performance, to create a new 4th-person-perspective playing field where higher aspirations, authentic engagement, radical accountability and emergent collaboration were integrated into the strategic planning, team engagement and performance governance processes and practices.

In terms of the holistic coaching, the value of setting aspirational intent beyond developmental goals to cultivate the person's evolution even beyond their leading edge seemed to stimulate their later stage evolution. The deeper and more intimate focus on resolving and healing shadow to release negative and punitive mindsets that related to earlier life events when at earlier stages, went well beyond the more standard coaching approaches of self-regulation and the development of emotional intelligence. In combination, setting aspirations, cultivating self and resolving shadow expedited later stage development.

This concept of vertical stage development was depicted to the coachees as a Spectrum Stage Shift in their operating system from a Centre of Gravity at Achievist to a Centre of Gravity at Synergist². The Figure-8s, illustrated in figure 5, present both the overlap and quantum shift in the spectrum of stages a person with a mature person perspective profiles with at these stages. While anchored at Achievist, they could still develop Catalyst leadership agility as their primary stage, but it takes a greater quantum shift to fully transform to a 4th person perspective at Synergist.

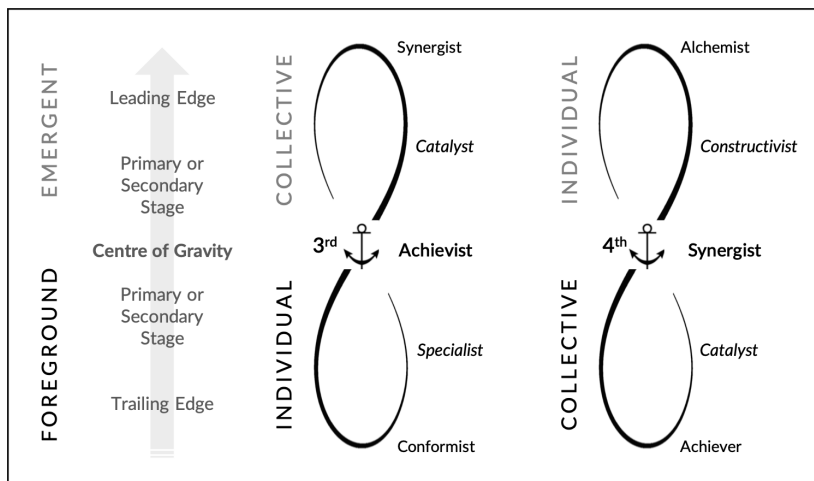


Figure 5. The Spectrum Stage Shift from Achievist to Synergist.

Coaching in Awareness and Mentoring in Application

A key dynamic in the coaching conversations was the intention given to both raising self-awareness as well as learning to actively express oneself and engage others from a Synergist 4th person perspective. Qualities such as wisdom and compassion, embracing all people despite their

² The Figure-8 Operating System concept is further enhanced by a correlation with human faculties and the energy fields of a person's life experience in the author's book, *Executive Coaching in Strategic Holistic Leadership* (2020) McGraw Hill.

idiosyncrasies and inability to meet all performance goals, thinking through second and third feedback loops in relation to generating new ways of approaching situations, and ultimately thinking synergistically and focusing on the people over and above immediate performance outcomes, trusting that these would ensue, were all embedded in the coaching conversations.

The coach's mentoring in empowering Organisational Development methods that the coachees were aware had worked very effectively for the coach earlier in her career, significantly reduced the career risk a senior leader tends to associate with experimentation. The success and increased confidence they enjoyed following the implementation of proven practical engagement processes, encouraged further experimentation.

The executive coaching morphed into mentoring in organisational development that was vertically informed. The instructive mentoring nature of the executive coaching is not typical of developmental coaching which is characterised by the art and science of asking clean open questions. Indeed, the executive coaching in drivers 3 and 4 went well beyond the person to focus almost exclusively on re-engineering the organisational context. This suggests that expediting later stage development to Synergist demands a coaching and mentoring approach with a view to uplifting the leader's collective context. One coachee said in hindsight:

Antoinette guided me in a strategic sense and gave good advice yet didn't tell me how to do my job. I involved everyone, listened to everybody and people felt that they were important, and their contribution was valued. I tried to do the things a Synergist would do and be seen to do.

Transformative Coaching with a Later Stage Executive Coach

While performance coaching is highly process-centric focused on achieving specific goals e.g. the GROW process (Whitmore, 2009), and developmental coaching is highly person-centric (Rogers, 1961) and focused on the art of asking open questions, transformative coaching is a term used to reflect the latest thinking in transformational coaching and 3rd generation coaching (Stelter, 2014). It is a more collaborative process that invites both the coach and coachee to reflect and offer insights on situations and challenges the coachee is occupied with.

The transformative coaching approach provides a later stage executive coach with much greater discretion to share deeper and more expansive meaning-making frames and insights to interpret events, reconstruct narrative and integrate identity. Given the level of guidance that can be offered graciously in this way to expedite vertical development, it suggests that transformative coaching may also have played a significant role in expediting the shift from Achievist to Synergist. Further exploration of the coaching approach is beyond the scope of this paper.

Generating Trust & Confidence by Holding Psychologically Safe Space

The interplay of the four drivers in holistic leadership development reminded me of 'waking up, showing up, cleaning up and growing up'. Together, imagined as four concentric propellers, they created safe, secure, supportive and sacred emergent space around the self and inclusive of others. This is precisely what the Google Aristotle research project discovered about its highest performing

teams. The key factor that distinguished them from the rest was their sense of psychological safety (Delizonna, 2017).

Setting an Aspirational Leadership Brand Declaration was cognisant of ‘waking up’ to one’s aspirational self. Exercising positive kindness and demonstrating mindfulness was a way of ‘showing up’ consistently as one’s best self. Resolving emotional triggers and personal shadow issues was a way of ‘cleaning up’ one’s past. And holding high standards, clear boundaries and strategic priorities with Caring Courageous Conversations (CCC) exemplified ‘growing up’. By living the four holistic drivers, the coachees generated the psychologically safe, supportive and sacred space to liberate the human potential of others to develop vertically and together generate strong performance outcomes. Thus, the interplay of the four factors had a much greater effect than the sum of the parts.

The space that was effectively held by the emerging 4th person leader in the outer zone of the collective synthesises the manifestation of the Synergist. This is extended to the broader organisation and wider community of stakeholder interests through the strategic drivers bringing people together to set evolutionary direction and work together in empowering and heartfelt ways (Drivers 5 and 6) with an aspirational unique living signature presentation (Driver 7) to encourage listening, learning, discovery, healing and collaboration (Driver 8).

The Emergent Three Principles that Underpin Vertical Development Theory

On revisiting Boyatzis’s (2008) Intentional Change Theory and, in particular, its focus on the Ideal Self, the Dynamic Dialogical Model set out by Cavanagh (2013) and the importance of psychologically safe space as set out above, a new Vertical Development Theory emerged. It sets out the three distinctive audiences: the self, the organisation and the wider community, the drivers of development extended to number 9, the 6 active ingredients that enlivened the operating frameworks, and the shared sacred space of mutual inquiry and meaning-making between coach and coachee, were interconnected by three prevailing principles:

INTENTION Purposeful evolutionary aspirational intent for self, organisation and community;

INTERACTION Proactive open respectful orchestrated engagement as a consistent priority with internal and external stakeholders in the spirit of appreciative inquiry; and

INTEGRATION A process of engagement that invited listening, liberated voices and caring courageous collaborative conversations, enabled healing and integration within self and with others.

The concerted attention given to these audiences to courageously collaborate on aspirational endeavours and purposeful initiatives, was held by a sacred space of mutual inquiry, trust and transcendent meaning making led by the perspective and presence of a later stage executive coach. They combine to expedite and extend vertical transformation, as shown in Figure 5 picturing the emergent Vertical Development Theory.

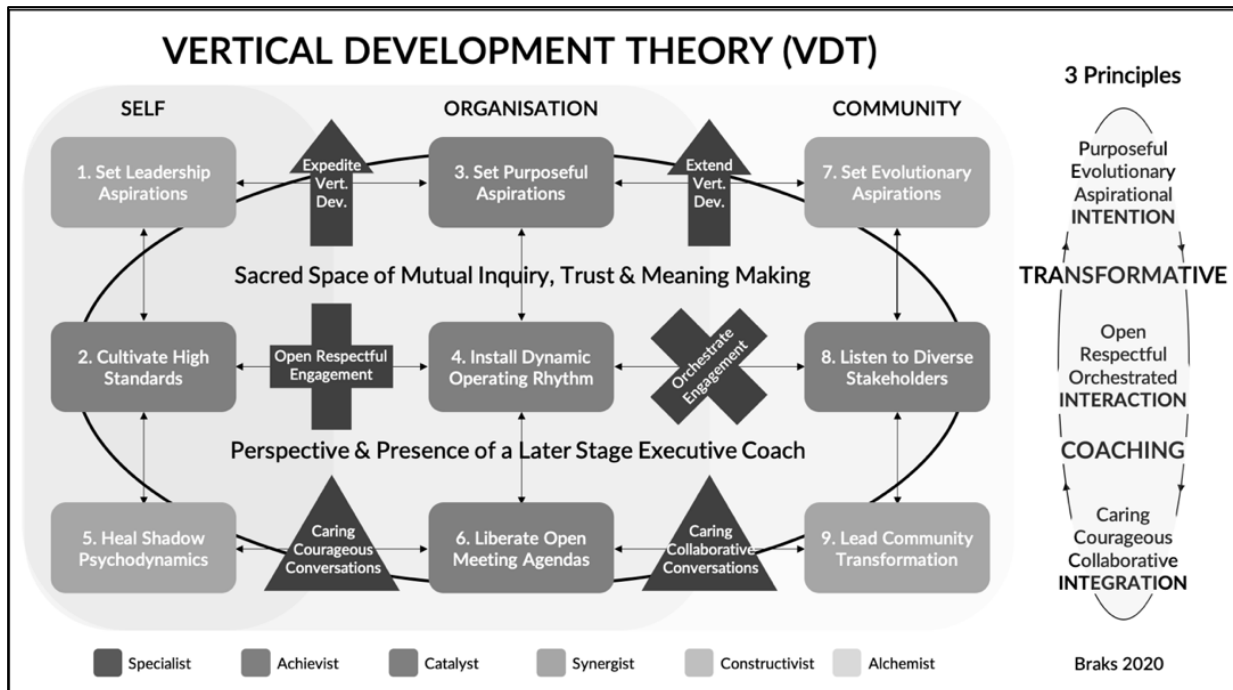


Figure 6. The Emergent Vertical Development Theory.

Implications and Research Recommendations

Implications of the Research Study

The paper concludes with a set of implications for executive coaches and facilitators of advanced leadership development programs with a view to utilising the research findings to expedite the shift of many more strategic leaders to the stage of Synergist.

The active experimentation, demonstration and consolidation of Synergist leadership capacity happens in the workplace. The shift in consciousness takes place in the Outer Zones in the Collective (O'Fallon, 2011) and therefore is a matter of experimentation and implementation in the workplace itself. Designers of advanced strategic leadership programs often held offsite over intensive periods of time, should therefore consider extending their programs to include transformative coaching with later stage executive coaches to support their evolution.

Secondly, transformative executive coaching with a later stage executive coach is able to expedite the quantum shift from Achievist to Synergist in ways that developmental coaching cannot. Without the transformative insights and illuminating leading questions posed from a mature Synergist 4th person perspective or beyond, the coachee is not able to receive the gracious guidance of wisdom gained from a person who has already navigated the equivalent developmental pathway, ideally also in a corporate environment.

There is some argument in the coaching literature as to the comparative advantages of having a corporate business background or a background in psychology in relation to coaching effectiveness. It would seem that to expedite the shift to Synergist, a combination of the two is

most useful. A mentor with proven knowhow in organisational evolution to green and teal would also support the shift to Synergist provided the holistic leadership development was also taking place with the guidance of a coach with an understanding of shadow integration.

The effectiveness of executive coaching and leadership programs can be objectively measured in terms of vertical development. Coachee perceptions and 360 assessments are mostly associated with horizontal learning capabilities up to Catalyst. If strategic leaders are to evolve to a level where they can transcend and transform conventional paradigms, it is essential to measure coaching effectiveness in terms of vertical development.

The emergence of Vertical Development Theory offers new insights into how a strategic leader might effectively and even expeditiously navigate their journey to a 4th person perspective. This theory can inform advanced leadership development programs of the power of purposeful, evolutionary and aspirational intention; open, respectful and orchestrated interaction; and caring, courageous and collaborative integration to enable evolution.

Future Research Recommendations

While coaching techniques or interventions have not been found to be highly influential in coaching effectiveness previously (De Haan et al, 2013), this case study suggests that a particular spread (strategic and holistic) and range (awareness and application) of coaching interventions with a later stage coach were critical to expedite later stage shifts to Catalyst and Synergist. More research into the type of coaching interventions and the self of the coach as the primary instrument of development, could prove to be very valuable.

It is time to relinquish executive coaching as a one-size-fits-all approach and begin to explore more closely the types of executive coaching, performance, developmental and transformative, and the coaching techniques and approaches that are most useful in relation to the transformations in vertical development. It would be very useful to research how different types of executive coaching impact the transformations in vertical development and the evolution of organisational culture (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018). They may well be inextricably connected.

Further exploration of Vertical Development Theory and its application to executive coaching could enable advanced leadership development programs to be more effective in ushering in more visionary, inspiring, transformative, aspirational leadership in organizations and indeed, in national and international political systems.

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