

From Vanilla to Vertical Coaching:

*The Powerful Shift from Developmental to Transformative Coaching
to Realise Later Stages in Vertical Leadership Development*

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Abstract

Twelve participants in a multiple case study undertook an average of eight 90-minute coaching sessions over one year. 80% shifted one stage and 20% shifted two stages in vertical leadership development to the post-conventional 4th Person Perspectives of *Catalyst* and *Synergist*. Following a thematic cross-case analysis of >150 coaching hours and 100,000 words, the study identified eight drivers, five active vertical ingredients and three principles of transformative executive coaching, creating an emergent Vertical Development Theory.

Key Words: Vertical Development, Adult Development, Leadership Development, Executive Coaching

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I seek to distinguish *vanilla* from *vertical* coaching to invite and encourage more executive coaches to realise their potential to become more effective, and indeed, to advance the frontiers of coaching to facilitate culture transformation and ecosystemic renewal, by integrating vertical self-development outcomes in their coaching practice. *Vanilla* coaching is intended to ask clean, clear questions of the coachee to invite them to inquire into their needs, concerns, and challenges through developmental coaching with a view to helping the coachee navigate life events and experiences at their current stage of vertical self-development. *Vertical* coaching is intended to invite the coachee to expand their consciousness and leadership capacity through transformative 3rd generation coaching, mentoring, and counselling with a view to realising their aspirational leadership intent, itself pitched at a later stage of vertical self-development.

The research study draws on two nascent fields of scientific inquiry in relation to the nascent yet fast-growing coaching profession (Grant et al, 2010; Peterson, 2011): the effectiveness of executive coaching (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Jones et al, 2016); and vertical adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1982; McCauley et al, 2006; O'Fallon, 2011, 2020; Rooke & Torbert 2005). The paper first sets out a literature review of the two areas of research discussing how the two fields intersect. This leads into the methodology of the research study followed by the outcomes and findings that emerged, the conclusions drawn, and recommendations on how to apply the findings and for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section explores the moderating factors affecting coaching effectiveness, the design of coaching effectiveness studies, and the appropriate measure of coaching effectiveness. It follows with a broader review of Vertical Development in terms of the stages of development, leadership effectiveness at later stages, the measurement of vertical development, the distribution of the executive population, and the factors leading to later stage development. These elements are captured in a simple framework to depict the research question.

COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Five key moderating factors are considered to contribute to coaching effectiveness: the coach, coachee, their relationship, the coaching process, and the organisational coaching context (Rekalde, 2015). These moderating factors are identified in Table 1. Rekalde's (2015) meta-study found the affective factors listed to be the most influential.

| 5 FACTORS | FACTUAL FACTORS | AFFECTIVE FACTORS |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| The Coach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Whether the coach is an external consultant or internally employed (Jones et al, 2016) - Coach's academic background in psychology (Bozer et al, 2014) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to transmit and generate trust in the coachee (Rekalde, 2015) - Commitment to the coachee and the client organisation - Vocation and genuine interest in understanding human nature |
| The Coachee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The careful selection of appropriate coachees (Wasylyshyn, 2006) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their desire and need for change (Rekalde, 2015) |
| The Coaching Relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The working alliance rated by the coachees (Baron & Morin, 2009, 2010) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The quality of the coaching relationship (Wasylyshyn, 2006) - The level of trust developed (Armstrong et al, 2007) |
| The Coaching Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The inclusion of multi-source 360 feedback (Jones et al, 2016) - The length of time and number of sessions within the coaching program (Jones et al, 2016) - Face-to-face versus blended e-coaching methods (Jones et al, 2016) - Confidentiality (Jones & Spooner, 2006) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The provision of both empathy and challenge (Armstrong et al, 2007) - Asking open questions, listening and offering feedback (Jones & Spooner, 2006) - The type of coaching interventions employed e.g. psychoanalysis, solutions-focused (Jones et al, 2016; Wasylyshyn, 2006) |
| The Organisational Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The social desirability of the coaching program due to its promotion as a developmental rather than remedial intervention (Wasylyshyn, 2006) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The engagement of internal stakeholders to offer and monitor the leadership effectiveness of coachees (Wasylyshyn, 2006) - Support from their managers (Baron & Morin, 2009) |

Table 1
The Moderating Factors in Coaching Effectiveness

Various researchers have since ranked the importance of these five moderating factors in relation to each other. Rekalde (2015) ranked their order of importance as the confidential trusting **relationship**, the **coach's** commitment, the **coachee's** commitment and the **organisational** guarantee of confidentiality. De Haan's (2016) research study examining coach and coachee self-reported scores of coaching success suggested that the longer the **coaching relationship**, the more effective the coaching, and the stronger the **coaching relationship**, the higher the self-efficacy of the coachee. Cavanagh's (2006) dynamic dialogical 8-step model of coaching conversation emphasized the momentum implicit in the recurring **coaching process** of storytelling, meaning making and reframing, as the engine of growth and change.

A third avenue of inquiry in coaching effectiveness relates to the self of the **coachee** in relation to Aristotle's view of human growth as a natural and innate human tendency to seek out new experiences, discover new horizons, integrate new perspectives, and transform the self to realise their latent potential (Laske, 1999). Examples are self-congruence (Rogers, 1961), self-actualization (Maslow, 1962), self-regulation (Baumeister, 1986), self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017), and intentional change in self-identity to one's ideal aspirational and purposeful self (Boyatzis, 2008). This latter distinctive focus on the ideal self led to a 67% behavioral improvement in self-awareness and self-management, and a 40% improvement in social awareness and social skills for MBA students, in contrast to a 2% improvement from other above-average MBA Programs and 11% from industry and government programs (Boyatzis, 2008; Taylor et al, 2019).

Bachkirova (2016) has given close attention to the fourth factor where the self of the **coach** is primary. "Clients often bring for coaching the issues that affect their whole lives. I would argue that the interventions of the coach are initiated not only from the knowledge and understanding of the clients' situation, context, psychological makeup, and goals but also from the personal resonating with all of these in the moment and, therefore, from the self of the coach. These interventions are the expression of the coach's life experiences, current worldview, and the stage of his or her personal learning journey. On this basis it is possible to say that the coach is the main instrument of coaching." (Bachkirova, 2016, p.144)

This primacy of the **coach** may be enhanced in the shift from developmental, co-active coaching to 3rd generation coaching (Stelter, 2014) which adjusts the role of the coach from focusing on coachee inquiry alone to holding an expansive field of consciousness that invites new insights to arise on the part of the coach and coachee (Wahl et al, 2013). 3rd Generation collaborative coaching encourages deeper mutual reflection in meaning making and soul awareness (Stelter, 2014; Wahl et al, 2013). If the **coach** is at a stage of vertical self-development beyond the coachee, they are confidently able to inject greater breadth and depth into the level of consciousness present in the coaching conversation (Bachkirova & Borrington, 2018; Berger, 2012; Wycherley & Cox, 2008).

The fifth factor is the organisational **context**. This has received less attention in the coaching effectiveness literature and is more prominent in vertical development research. For instance, Jones et al (2020) found that if the organization's leadership development mindset focused on core principles rather than values or skills, and on vertical rather than horizontal development, this led to more favorable developmental outcomes.

In addition to the five moderating factors which would all seem to play a vital part, coaching effectiveness has been considered in terms of how best to measure objective outcomes beyond coach reporting and coachee feedback (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; De Haan et al, 2013; Jones et al, 2016; Grant et al, 2010; Peterson, 2011). Enhanced coachee capabilities, career advancement, organisational performance, and financial measures (Grant, 2003; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Wasylyshyn et al, 2006) have each been proposed without arriving at a firm conclusion on the most appropriate measure. The most immediate outcome-based measure of coaching effectiveness that is also surveyed by many organisations (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018) and rises beyond singular capabilities, is the increased leadership effectiveness of the coachee.

Recent meta-analyses of executive coaching effectiveness (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Ely et al., 2010; Jones et al, 2016; Theeboom, Beersma & van Vianen, 2014) sought scientifically informed studies with either a 'within-subjects' (before and after) or 'between-subjects' design (coaching and control group). The main changes evaluated amongst qualifying research studies were the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, individual resilience, self-efficacy, and wellbeing. These elements reflect leadership capabilities which, if considered holistically, could together also result in a measure of leadership effectiveness.

VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

The theory of vertical development arose from Piaget's (1954) articulation of a child's cognitive development based not on accumulated knowledge and experience, but on the mindful act of constructing knowledge from that experience. This cognitive constructive capacity transformed during childhood. Kegan (1982) extended Piaget's model to adults, advising that adults also observe, interpret, and make meaning of what they perceive as their reality, according to the sophistication of their underlying mental model. He identified five orders of mind: impulsive, sovereign, socialized, self-authoring and self-transforming. The implicit proposition is that a person constructs their perception of their world from their inner mental model i.e., the world is not an objective reality, but a subjective perception. Just like beauty, reality is in the eye of the beholder.

Kohlberg (1981) distinguished phases of adult development – preconventional, conventional, postconventional and transpersonal – and, amongst other developmental theorists, articulated single lines of development related to morals, ethics, values, and faith (Fowler, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Graves, 1970; Kohlberg, 1981). Loevinger (1976), a pioneering developmental psychologist, expanded the definition of vertical development as a holistic construct of the ego or self-identity, and identified an invariant sequence of nine stages of vertical development. Cook-Greuter (1995, 1999, 2000) extended this series to include later stages, identified the 2-step process of realising each new level of maturity, and defined these progressive levels as explicit Person Perspectives from 1st to 6th.

O'Fallon (2011) has since clarified three distinctive Tiers of Development distinguished by their Concrete, Subtle and Metaware objects that become perceptible within them. She also ascertained an alternating shift within each Tier from Individual to Collective concerns and elaborated on Cook-Greuter's (1999) two-step process. O'Fallon (2011, 2020) thus enriched the systemic structure underpinning the stages of psychological development. Table 2 offers an estimated correlation of the above models. The terms used for the stages in this article shown in the table in the final column labelled Braks, also draw from the work of other vertical practitioners (Joiner & Josephs, 2007) using terms more easily understood in the workplace. Note that Kegan's (1982) self-transforming mind is considered equivalent to mature Synergist.

| Adult Development Kegan | Phases Kohlberg | Tiers O'Fallon | Quadrants O'Fallon | Learning Styles O'Fallon | Stages O'Fallon | Braks | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Trans- personal | MET- AWARE | Collective | Interpenetrative | 6.5 | Illumined | Holist |
| | | | | Reciprocal | 6.0 | Universal | Ironist |
| | Individual | | Active | 5.5 | Transpersonal | Alchemist | |
| | | | Receptive | 5.0 | Construct-Aware | Constructivist | |
| Self-Transforming Mind | Postcon- ventional | SUBTLE | Collective | Interpenetrative | 4.5 | Strategist | Synergist |
| Self-Authoring Mind | | | | Reciprocal | 4.0 | Pluralist | Catalyst |
| | Conven- tional | | Individual | Active | 3.5 | Achiever | Achievist |
| Receptive | | | | 3.0 | Expert | Specialist | |
| Socialised Mind | Precon- ventional | CONCRETE | Collective | Interpenetrative | 2.5 | Conformist | Conformist |
| Sovereign Mind | | | | Reciprocal | 2.0 | Rule-Oriented | Rule-based |
| | | | Individual | Active | 1.5 | Egocentric | Opportunist |
| Impulsive Mind | | | | Receptive | 1.0 | Impulsive | Impulsivist |

Table 2.

An Estimated Correlation of Vertical Development Models

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

This research formulates a sequence of 12 stages of development, two for each level or perspective. The series of stages form an invariant sequence, where each new level builds on the strengths of earlier foundational levels and exposes new shadows from earlier stages to be integrated (O'Fallon, 2011). A person operates from a spectrum of generally four neighboring stages, which mutates to incorporate later stages as earlier stages are released in favor of the broader perspective held at later stages (Braks, 2020; Torbert et al, 2004). Later stages support an increasingly comprehensive and insightful understanding of growing intersystemic complexity, psychodynamic subtlety, and the recurring patterns of human events over longer periods of time (Cook-Greuter, 1999). The more a person is aware of, the more they can explain, explore, reform, and transform to realise better systemic, sustainable, synergistic outcomes for the benefit of all stakeholders and future generations (Torbert et al, 2004). This increased capacity to deal with complexity leads to the hypothesis that leaders at later stages are more effective. Notwithstanding that each person is a composite of a spectrum of stages, Table 3 outlines the strengths, shadow, and roles of executives at progressive stages of development. Each stage is most evident when it predominates an executive's mental model.

| STAGE | STRENGTHS | SHADOW | ROLES |
|--|--|---|---|
| Opportunist (Mature 1 st) | Sees opportunities; uses initiative; attacks to defend. | On the take; offends others; takes advantage. | Individual |
| Conformist (Mature 2 nd) | Obeys the rules; complies with authority; takes zero-risk; follows instructions; focuses on individual familiar tasks. | Complains about others; is disengaged; takes zero initiative due to high risk of failure; feels downtrodden. | Individual contributor or Team member |
| Specialist (Early 3 rd) | Builds their talents, focuses on continuous improvement of their craft; becomes expert in their field; thought leader. | Perfects their work; micro-manager; procrastinates as work is not adequate; inner belief of Not Good Enough | Individual contributor or Team member; expert skills coach. |
| Achievist (Mature 3 rd) | Makes plans with a 3-year time horizon; sets priorities and achieves goals; focuses on results and customer needs; delivers on deadlines; uses initiative; motivates others; enjoys being a team player. | Transactional relationships of exchange; on the treadmill of being busy, always doing; little work/life balance; can be dogmatic; agrees to disagree to get on with work. | Team leader; project manager; change manager; conventional CEO; performance coach. |
| Catalyst (Early 4 th) | More authentic; innovative; intuitive; genuinely respects others; inclusive; desire to engage and understand others. Begins to look into underlying causes and assumptions. | Can feel a little rudderless and uncertain; dissatisfied if values are not demonstrated; roundabout protracted decision-making. | Change leader; cross-boundary engagement role; facilitator; developmental coach. |
| Synergist (Mature 4 th) | Unconscious self-awareness; intervenes effectively in complex adaptive systems; strategic visionary leadership; collaborative and synergistic; ethical. | Can seem directive and overly confident; demanding of others' contribution; highly aspirational, transformational intent can seem impossible; can be arrogant. | Large company C-suite; divisional and regional leaders; transforming coaches and consultants. |
| Alchemist (Mature 5 th) | Transpersonal awareness; wise; solemn and jester-like; joyous and compassionate; engineers evolution. | Other-worldly; scary; fanciful; esoteric; in a myriad of places at once; difficult to pin down. | Global leaders; 'Out-of-the-box' coaches and consultants. |

Table 3.

Stages of Development (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Merron et al, 1987; Torbert et al, 2004; O'Fallon, 2011)

Various research studies have identified that executives at later stages understand themselves, others and situations with greater depth and breadth, and are more effective leaders (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2005). In a study of 41 executives across five role levels from Manager to C-suite, Harris and Kuhnert (2006) found that their stage of development was positively and significantly correlated to their overall 360 leadership effectiveness ratings. A bivariate linear regression analysis showed that 360 scores could be predicted based on their stage of development. In further studies of 74 and 67 leaders across the same five role levels, stage development could also predict leadership effectiveness ratings (Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). These findings are considered provisional given their sample size (Lawrence, 2017), yet the research studies are quite expansive in scope (multiple role levels), took place over a period of years, and were overseen by Professor Karl Kuhnert, formerly with the University of Georgia.

In 10 longitudinal studies of organisational transformations lasting on average 4.2 years, involving multiple mergers and acquisitions with an average of 485 employees in each organisation, Rooke and Torbert (1998) found that the seven which prospered greatly to go on to become industry leaders were either led by a CEO at *Synergist* or built a high level of trust with external consultants at *Synergist* and *Alchemist*, treating them as close confidantes. The three unsuccessful CEOs were all at earlier stages of development without this type of relationship.

Given the larger sample size and the measurement of external performance indicators over a significant period, these findings are more compelling. They suggest that *Synergist* is the first stage of leadership that can transcend the type of critical challenges we face such as global warming, social inequity, and the widening poverty gap. Brown's (2012) study of later stage leaders endorses this finding of *Synergist* capacity to transcend complexity and lead the realization of sustainable intersystemic outcomes. This is also affirmed by the two-step process of vertical development. At *Catalyst*, a leader first becomes aware of the complex 4th Person Perspective followed by mature *Synergist* from where they can take decisive action to transform the systemic context to realise improved outcomes for all (Torbert et al, 2004).

VERTICAL MEASUREMENT

There are several ways of measuring vertical self-development. Two of the most common (McCauley et al, 2006) are the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970; Murray, 2020) and the Subject/Object Interview (Lahey et al, 1988). The focus of this paper is on the WUSCT which invites the participant to complete 30-36 open sentence prompts such as: "Education ...", "I feel sorry ...". While the research into language construction at progressive stages is substantial (Cook-Greuter, 1995; O'Fallon, 2020), a person's level of verbal fluency and educational and social background may affect the accuracy of these assessments (Lawrence, 2017; McCauley et al, 2006; Manners & Durkin, 2001). While the Sentence Completions are objectively assessed by qualified certified scorers based on a comprehensive scoring manual (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970) and inter-rater reliability has been shown to be high at 94% (Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009), studies have also identified inconsistent assessments using alternative vertical assessment methods (Hirsch, 1988).

The WUSCT has been validated over time (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Manners & Durkin, 2001; Redmore & Waldman, 1975; Torbert & Livne-Tarandach, 2009) and while it would be valuable to continue to increase the quality of vertical assessments, the complex nature of human being as both the subject and object of analysis, may point to diminishing returns. Perhaps at later stages, only estimations of vertical development are realistic. Each Sentence Completion may incorporate signals pointing to different stages, so the scorer must weigh the evidence as objectively as possible while heeding their intuitive 'fast brain' (Kahneman, 2011) in their overall assessment of an individual's spectrum of stages. Holding the assessment lightly (Berger, 2004) while appreciating the fullness of a person's operating spectrum, and the complex nature of vertical development interweaving multiple stages, suggests that

vertical assessments, even if not entirely consistent, offer valuable assessments of and for self-development. If there is more evidence that leaders at later stages are indeed significantly more effective, especially to transform complex intersystemic networks during turbulent times, then the WUSCT may prove to be a useful measure of leadership effectiveness and, by extension, coaching effectiveness.

EXECUTIVE POPULATION

The majority of executives have their Centre of Gravity, a term used to describe their predominant stage, at *Achievist*, a mature 3rd Person Perspective. As noted in Table 3 above, *Achievists* are motivated by goals, deadlines, and profits. They are the high performing heroic leader who espouses a bold vision for others to follow - the archetype of the capitalist system. They prioritize individual success and company profits and are less concerned about exploiting the earth and other stakeholders although the support for more conscious business ethics and practices is challenging their mental model.

The distribution of executive populations in 1995, 2005 and 2015 is displayed in Figure 1 below. The proportion of executives at *Achievist* reached its peak in 2005 and is now declining, while the proportion of *Catalysts* in the new 4th Person Perspective, has been growing at the rate of an estimated 11% per decade (PwC Report, 2015). This is encouraging. Based on O'Fallon's (2011) model, it signals a shift in the primary orientation of executives from the Individual to the Collective, i.e., from 'me' to 'we'. Enabling community wellbeing while incorporating sustainable shared prosperity through a circular economy is becoming the new benchmark for business. The fullness of this trajectory represents a shift from navigating a single complex adaptive system to transforming global ecosystemic networks.

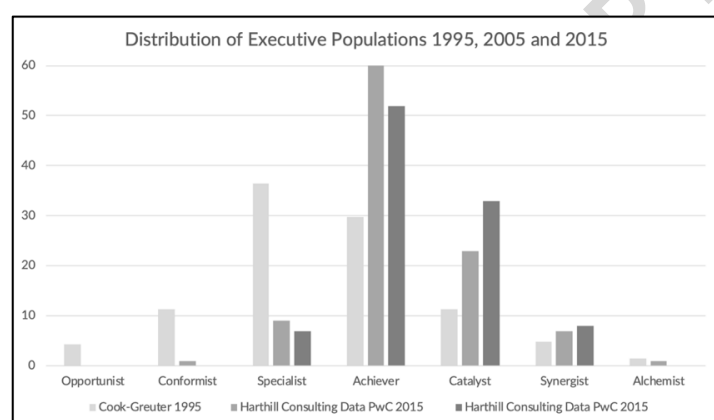


Figure 1

Distribution of Executive Populations 1995, 2005, 2015 (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; PwC Report, 2015)

Given that *Catalysts* are the initial individuation stage in the development of this new perspective, they are increasingly aware of the need but not yet able to lead transformation. This requires a leader to have their Centre of Gravity at *Synergist*. The rate of growth at this stage of development unfortunately seems to be stalled at 1% per decade (Cook-Greuter, 1995; PwC Report, 2015). Contemporary leadership development interventions would appear to be inadequate (Beer, 2016). This dearth of *Synergist* leadership capacity to overcome global dilemmas during the ever-increasing rise in turbulence, places humanity in greater jeopardy.

VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

Vertical development to later stages, is thought to be a relatively slow process. It has been found that developmental action inquiry over a period of five years leads to stage development to *Synergist* (Torbert & Fisher, 1992), and Torbert (by email 11 March 2015) suggested it would take 5-6 years to shift to *Synergist* with a coach embodying at least *Synergist* leadership capacity. However, participation in intensive 20-day Integral Leadership Programs leads to stage shifts to later stages in one year (Brown, 2014). In a study of 10-month 25-day enhanced Community Leadership Programs, Vincent (2015) found that 27% of *Achievists* and *Catalysts* shifted a stage to *Catalyst* and *Synergist* respectively.

There are a range of factors that are thought to facilitate vertical development to later stages such as *Catalyst* and *Synergist* that might strengthen developmental initiatives including executive coaching. Valuable avenues to realising later stages of vertical development are thought to include disorientating dilemmas (Manners & Durkin, 2000), heat experiences and colliding perspectives (Petrie, 2015), revisiting life stories (Petriglieri et al, 2011), comfort with interiority, complexity and intentionality (Pfaffenberger et al, 2011), integrating analytical, conceptual, emotional and spiritual development (Quatro et al, 2007), shadow resolution (Kaiser & Kaplan, 2006; Kilburg, 2004), integrating polarities (Sharma & Cook-Greuter, 2012), resolving the tension between espoused and lived values (Rooke & Torbert, 2005), and contemplative and reflective practices (Cook-Greuter, 1999).

Vertical drivers of development in the organisational context have been shown to include increased environmental complexity (Brown, 2012), a deliberately developmental mindset (Kegan et al, 2014), accomplished facilitators (Scharmer, 2018), expert therapists (Petriglieri et al, 2011), later stage peers (Laloux, 2014), the safety of an intimate holding space (Delizonna, 2017; Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2006; Scharmer, 2018; Torbert & Fisher, 1992), a principles-based vertical leadership development mindset with openness to vulnerability and risk-taking (Jones et al, 2020), and more evolved, purposeful, liberating, community-oriented, peer-networked organisations (Hamel, 2007; Kotter, 2014; Laloux, 2014). The organisation is seen as a container that either encourages or inhibits vertical leadership development depending on whether a person's stage is up to or beyond the level accommodated by the enterprise.

SUMMARY

In relation to Coaching Effectiveness, there are five moderating factors, a desire for a more objective measure of coaching effectiveness and the design of more research studies utilizing 'within-subjects' or 'between-subjects' methods. The increased leadership effectiveness of coachees could be a useful measure of coaching effectiveness. In terms of Vertical Development, there is a sequence of leadership development where leaders at later stages seem to be more effective, particularly at the mature 4th Person Perspective of *Synergist*. The WUSCT vertical assessment instrument is widely used yet still subject to quality assurance concerns. Given the nuanced nature of later stages, it may still be a useful measure of leadership effectiveness. While there appear to be many and varied factors that ignite vertical development to later stages such as *Synergist*, they are largely untested while development to this level, urgently needed to surmount current complexity and volatility, is stalled.

This research study was designed to discover how a transformative **coaching relationship** with a *Synergist* executive **coach** might expedite vertical leadership development for conventional **coachees** to these later stages to gain greater clarity on the **process** drivers and principles of later stage development to *Synergist* in an organisational **context**. These elements are presented within a conceptual framework to depict the research study in Figure 2 below.

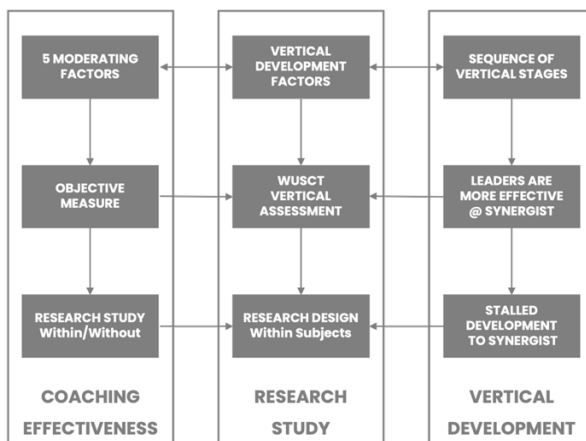


Figure 2

The Conceptual Framework of the Research Study

METHODOLOGY

The research project was a multiple case study (Yin, 2018) of 12 research participants who each undertook a 12-month coaching program with the coach/researcher/author. This section describes the process of participant selection, and the approaches taken to complete the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The initial participants in the research study were drawn from the Executive Development Program for 400 of the most senior leaders in the Senior Executive Service of the New South Wales government in Australia. The researcher invited 25 executives to undertake the WUSCT; 19 accepted. Cook-Greuter (1999, 2000), a key researcher advancing our understanding of vertical leadership development and founding trainer of scorers in the WUSCT-based Mature Adult Profile, personally agreed to score the assessments as she did for Brown in his study of later stage leaders (2012).

Twelve of the 19 executives had more than 80% of their profiles at the conventional stages of development, largely at *Specialist* and *Achievist*. They therefore met the research study's purposive sampling criteria as conventional leaders, and were invited to join the research study. Nine agreed. 92% of their average aggregate profile was at conventional stages. The preponderance of their current meaning-making capacity at conventional stages suggests that they had minimal access to meaning-making at the postconventional 4th Person Perspective.

They were employed in C-suite, general management and executive director roles concerned with billion-dollar infrastructure program management, state and federal stakeholder and community engagement, substantial customer-centric services reform, strategic policy formulation, and technology innovation, across eight different governmental departments. All nine research participants (three women and six men) were graduates, five held Master's degrees and one, a doctorate. Their average age was 52. An additional three participants, two from the financial services sector, subsequently joined the study to test the repeatability of the initial findings. The 12 research participants were comprised of five women and seven men with an average age of 50 ranging from 36-56; all were graduates, six with a Master's degree.

QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Participants undertook the WUSCT before and after the coaching program (Jones et al, 2016). The second round of assessments was undertaken anonymously to ensure there was no possibility of comparison with their assessments a year earlier. The WUSCT Total Weighted Score based on the weighted average of all completed sentence stems for each participant was used to complete the overall quantitative analysis. The Average Aggregate Profile for the group i.e., their average aggregate score for each stage of development given that people range across a spectrum of stages in their WUSCT assessments, was used to explore the nature of stage development from *Achievist* to *Synergist*. The overall quantitative findings are presented here; further detail on the nature of the shift can be found in Braks (2020).

The research participants undertook an average of eight 90-min coaching meetings over the 12-month period. This amounted to more than 150 coaching hours and over 100,000 words documenting the coaching conversations. The qualitative analysis of this data was instigated by Leximancer Word Analysis Software to identify key themes and categories. This was followed by a cross-case inductive thematic analysis of the empirical research data (Boyatzis, 1998). A final set of 8 drivers were identified based on their frequency and intensity in the coaching conversations with participants (Yin, 2018). An iterative approach to interpretive sense-making (Cavanagh & Lane, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Nije & Asimiran, 2014) led to an understanding of the dynamics of vertical development, the five active vertical coaching ingredients (De Haan et al, 2019), and the three underlying principles of vertical development.

FINDINGS

This section sets out the initial quantitative coaching outcomes in vertical leadership development using the WUSCT assessment instrument in the 'within-subjects' study. This is followed by the findings that emerged from the thematic cross-case analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to discover *how* the executive coaching program may have expedited vertical development. The section completes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for coaching and vertical development to clarify a number of potential concerns that merit attention.

The quantitative analysis of the before and after WUSCT Total Weighted Scores showed that 83% of the first nine participating strategic executive leaders shifted a full stage, mostly from *Achievist* to *Catalyst*; the other 17% shifted two stages from *Achievist* to *Synergist*. Their average aggregate postconventional profile at 4th Person Perspective – *Catalyst* and *Synergist* - shifted from 8% to 43% in one year, an increase of 35%, a third of their profile. A matched sample paired t-test showed that there was a highly significant statistical difference between the before and after assessments. The R^2 of this shift was 0.519 with a single tail p-value of 0.00001 at a 95% confidence interval.

The magnitude of development of the additional three research participants was similar to the first nine. Two shifted one stage and one transformed twice from *Achievist* to *Synergist*. Their average aggregate postconventional profile also shifted by a third, 33%. Three of the original participants undertook the WUSCT a third time three years later to add a longitudinal element to the study. Their average aggregate postconventional profile had shifted to 88% with 40% at and beyond *Synergist*. The shifts in the average aggregate profile for all 12 participants are shown in Figure 3.

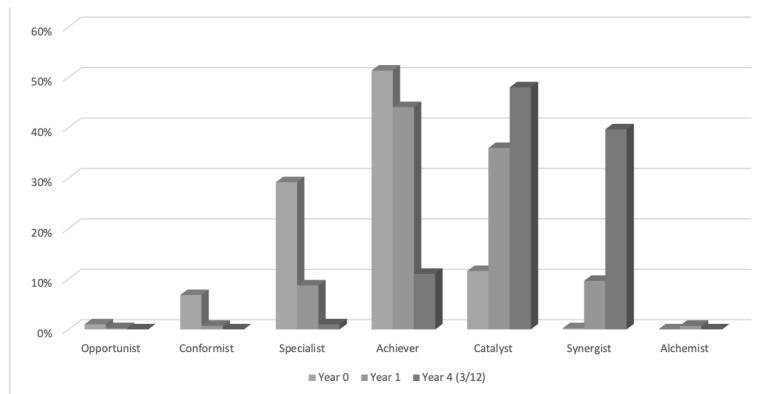


Figure 3

Aggregate Profile Shifts of the 12 participants in the Research Study

On more of an anecdotal level, the coachees accomplished career goals and realized unprecedented external success. One was promoted to a general management role and was recognized with the Career Achievement Award by their industry association. Another received an Industry Award for the most outstanding Infrastructure Project of the Year, a \$1+ billion program of work having consistently realized demanding milestones. Another was promoted to Deputy Secretary and was later honoured to receive a Public Service Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honors List for outstanding service. Many received invitations to make numerous conference presentations to large audiences and one was honoured as the most outstanding futuristic speaker in their industry.

COACHEE IMPROMPTU IMPRESSIONS

It feels sometimes like I'm floating a bit, re this development I'm doing. It feels as if I was quite attached to what I was doing, and it was all stable, cause and effect and it will happen. And then to come up that notch, it's like being in water where you can't touch the bottom, I'm still floating, and it's ok, yet I feel nervous sometimes when I can't touch the bottom. Treading water is reinforcing that I'd better get used to this feeling. Even enjoying the process, it's not a painful process, just disconcerting, I think I've got more energy because of it, I'm feeling great!

Now surfing the chaos. Starting to get it, a very different person from what I used to be ... Confident, relaxed, calm and self-assured... Giving up control, giving up striving, surrender is a key thing to progress. There are no limits to what a man can do as long as he doesn't mind not getting the credit, rejoicing in someone else getting the credit. Much more effective ... Restructure and empowering others means that you have done this for yourself, new architecture internally, and empowered them so they can do this for others. No fear. Life is completely taken care of. New way of being ...

We've had conversations for around a year now, there are places I've gone to as a leader, that I wouldn't have gone. I wouldn't be having conversations that I needed to have with my team, things that I would've been blind to in the past ... Ability to have conversations. Leadership is a lot of things, that's one of them. The things that I've been working on, me tuning into me, has really allowed me not to baulk 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 their growth!

I seem to have a new presence, mana, spiritual heart energy that radiates; I'm more balanced, understanding, empathetic of others; more credible, trustworthy, believable, visionary; I'm more articulate, I explain what it is they are creating; I've become more compassionate, I look into the soul and understand others better.

Even in terms of being authentic, that word resonates with me really strongly, even if I'm feeling a bit fake ... I tend to speak of myself now. For instance, my son's friend asked me on the weekend while we were at an art gallery, "What do I do?" I said, "I'm a leader, of about 400 people". A really different answer from what I would've said before. I would've described myself as technical expert, project manager or program director, or a leader of a community-wide strategic initiative.

8 DRIVERS OF DEVELOPMENT

Two super-themes became apparent from the Leximancer Word Analysis Software: strategic business leadership and personal holistic leadership. Eight drivers of development were then distilled from the iterative thematic analysis for their frequency and potency (Boyatzis, 1998) and placed into context. Four involved strategic business leadership and four, personal holistic leadership. Four were largely reflective processes, and four involved external engagement. The 8 drivers are presented in Table 4, identified in the general order they took place in the coaching conversations. Because the commencement of the coaching programs coincided with the beginning of a new financial year, setting strategic direction was top of mind for the coachees.

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

Table 4.

The 8 Drivers in Vertical Leadership Development to Synergist

The first two drivers began with the **organisational context** to lead strategic direction and distribute time very consciously to orchestrate the flow of engagement, and increase productivity and creativity for all people in their division. The strategic scaffolding engineered by the coachees demanded leadership at *Synergist* level and expanded the space for the vertical leadership growth of the people they led. This liberated the organisational context to enable enterprise evolution and created the opportunity for vertical development for everyone reporting to the coachee.

The second set of two drivers focused on the development of the self of the **coachee** working with the Aristotelian notion of self-advancement, Maslow's (1962) self-actualization and Boyatzis' (2008) concept of the ideal self. However, rather than focusing on capability-based gap analysis or strengths-building, the coaching shifted to cultivating the self and embodying spirit leveraging the power of positive psychology, mindfulness, and heartfelt intentions.

This was followed by a continued focus on the self of the **coachee** with a view to resolving, healing, and releasing shadow psychodynamics signaled by criticism of others and emotional reactions arising within the self. This coaching intervention was designed to eliminate as well as regulate sabotaging reactive patterns to realise a calm, clear, self-transforming mind.

The accompanying 6th driver was the scripting and rehearsal of Courageous Caring Conversations in the workplace to hold values-based standards that had the power to create psychologically safe space for all employees and uplift the culture. It was found that only executives operating from mature *Synergist* could assert their leadership presence within the organisational context in the moment to hold standards, boundaries and priorities with grace and integrity.

The fourth set of drivers were designed to consolidate the strategic leader's presence in their outer **organisational context** of stakeholders and community members, leaning into 5th Person Perspective. The 7th driver, articulating a unique living Signature Presentation brought their purpose and passions to life with presence and promise. The 8th driver offered an orchestrated systemic method to collaborate widely across their organisation and externally to build the trust and momentum needed to generate ecosystemic synergistic solutions over time.

5 ACTIVE INGREDIENTS

The 8 drivers ranged across the **coachee**, the **coaching process**, and the wider ecosystemic **organisational context**. The depth of content incorporated in the drivers was taken from the transforming mindset and embodied experience of the **coach's** mature Synergist perspective (Jones et al, 2020). The coach had also previously successfully led strategic culture transformations, undertaken significant personal shadow resolution work and, as a result, was very comfortable in taking their coaching role across the spectrum of coaching, mentoring, consulting, and counselling. The nature of the **coaching relationship** was that of a dialogical partnership engaged in 3rd generation transformative coaching.

Table 5 extends the five key moderating factors portrayed in Table 1 at the beginning of this paper with the key active vertical ingredients identified in the multiple case study. All five active vertical ingredients that accelerated the vertical leadership development of strategic leaders to *Catalyst* and *Synergist* are considered to be vitally interconnected.

| 5 FACTORS | FACTUAL FACTORS | AFFECTIVE FACTORS | ACTIVE INGREDIENTS |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| The Coach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External/Internal - Business/Psychology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to create trust - Coach commitment to coachee/org'n - Curious about human nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coach is at the later stage of mature Synergist or beyond |
| The Coachee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coachee selection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coachee desire for change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coachee is explicitly committed to vertical leadership development |
| The Coaching Relationship | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working alliance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality of coaching relationship - Level of trust - Freedom of disclosure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative approach of 3rd generation symmetrical partnership: Transformative coaching |
| The Coaching Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of 360 feedback - Length and number of sessions - Face-to-face/E-coaching - Confidentiality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empathy and challenge - Inquiring, listening, offering feedback - Range of coaching approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultivating one's aspirational self - Resolving shadow at source to empty the mind - Implementing liberating consulting frameworks |
| The Organisational Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social desirability of coaching as developmental, not remedial | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal stakeholders monitoring the leadership effectiveness of coachees - Managers supporting coachees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Integrated strategic holistic leadership development combining simultaneous enterprise evolution to generate mutual transformation. |

Table 5

The 5 Moderating Factors Extended to the 5 Active Vertical Ingredients

3 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The findings led to an emergent Vertical Development Theory shown in Figure 4 below that underpins the 8 drivers in relation to 3 fundamental principles of later stage transformation. They are the **INTENTION** to set purposeful, evolutionary aspirations; the **INTERACTION** to enable open respectful, orchestrated engagement to build self and other awareness; and the **INTEGRATION** of self, other and system that arises from shadow resolution and caring courageous collaborative conversations in the organisational context and beyond it.

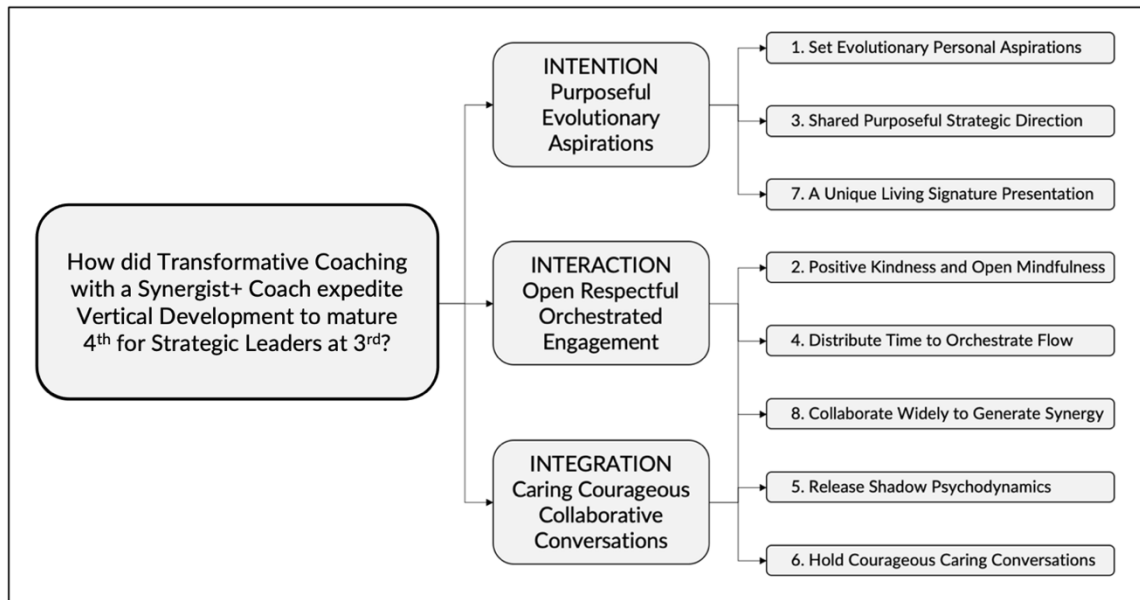


Figure 4.

The Drivers underpinned by 3 Fundamental Principles of Transformation

The power of **intention** was activated by setting aspirations to become a more inspiring leader leading a purposeful organisation to generate beneficial ecosystemic outcomes. This intention was pitched at the level of a mature Synergist leaning into 5th Person Perspective.

Coaching from a mature 4th Person Perspective invited each coachee to trust emergence. The power of concerted **interaction** with open liberating agendas enabled everyone to flow with emergence, and collaborate on ideas, insights, and solutions. The synergy of mutual collaborative inquiry into new possibilities and initiatives generated high people engagement.

The power of **integration** emerged from listening and learning, caring and healing, advocating and responding, while in dialogue with each other. The deliberately developmental context provided the supportive avenue for shadow resolution, team cohesion and systemic evolution.

In summary, the research study illuminated:

- 8 drivers of vertical development to Synergist
- 5 active vertical ingredients extending the 5 moderating factors in coaching
- 3 fundamental principles that expedite vertical development
- An emergent Vertical Development Theory
- The nature of the shift from one perspective or level to the next (Braks, 2020)
- The non-linear 2-Step Square Dance of vertical development (Braks, 2020)

- 20 later stage cultural memes embedded in the coaching (Braks, 2020)
- The distinctive nature of Transformative Coaching (Braks, 2020)
- The dynamics of vertical leadership development refining and enhancing The Holistic Energy Operating System (Braks, 2020).

The emergent Vertical Development Theory to *Synergist* is depicted in Figure 5.

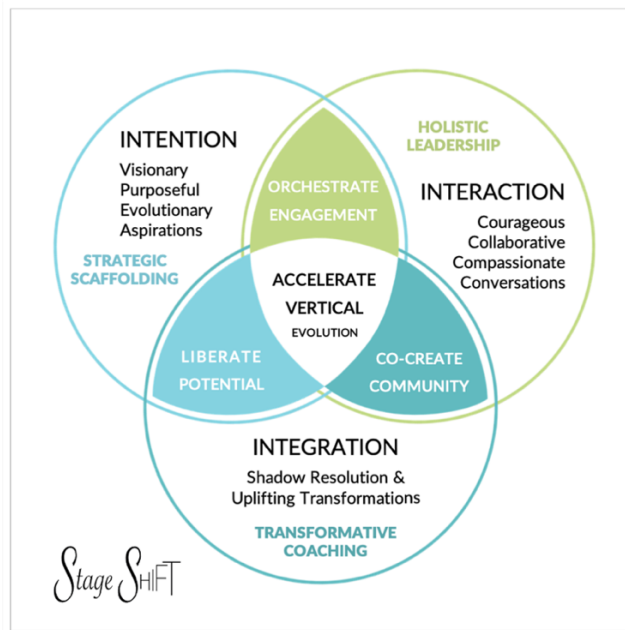


Figure 5

Emergent Vertical Development Theory in the Stage Shift to Synergist

COACHING IMPLICATIONS

While the coaching context was deliberately developmental i.e., vertically orientated (Kegan et al, 2014), there was no goal to shift participants vertically despite the use of the term 'driver' above. Rather, an explicit aspirational intent was set by each participant as to the type of leader they wished to become, a 4th level construct, similar to the articulation of the ideal self in Boyatzis' (2008) Intentional Change Theory. The coach trusted that the more complex meaning-making leadership capacity at the 4th level would emerge over time. In other words, the intrinsic development of the coachee was honoured without any attempt to 'move' the coachee (Bachkirova, 2011; Berger, 2006; Kegan, 1982).

Cox and Jackson (2014) advocate that it is essential to focus on the agenda defined by the coachee rather than on any one partial model of vertical development. This research study encompassed both. The entire agenda of the coaching conversation was set by the coachee, with the exception of inviting them to articulate their aspirational leadership intent. The model of vertical development developed by the author was shown to the participants at the beginning of the coaching program and thereafter served as a backdrop. While the later stage of the coach was also consciously and consistently present in the background, it is thought to have influenced the new attitudes adopted by the coachees and generated the Green-Teal nature (Laloux, 2014) of their interventions in the workplace. Nevertheless, the coachee set the agenda at the beginning of each coaching meeting, and the nature of the conversation to best serve and honor the coachee in relation to their concerns and challenges, remained in the foreground.

There was also no overt creation of disorientating dilemmas or heat experiences to create temporary disequilibrium in the coachee or intricate them in colliding perspectives (Palus & Drath, 1995; Manners & Durkin, 2001; Petrie, 2015). There was ample potential in the coachee's ordinary work life and occasionally home life, to facilitate deeper meaning-making and offer new approaches for them to experiment with. The coachee was invited to foster a deeper connection within their sense of their emerging self and to resolve and heal shadow as it became evident, to realise their aspirational self. This three-part strategy captured in Figure 6, is articulated as embodying spirit, cultivating self and healing shadow. By being consistently mindful of one's thoughts, feelings, and self-expression, and releasing or integrating shadow parts of oneself from earlier stages, vertical self-development is a natural emergence.

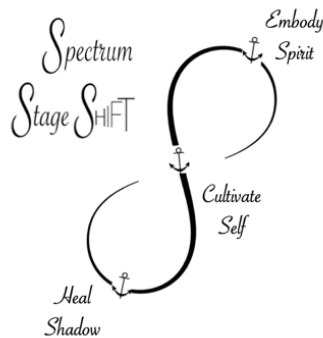


Figure 6

The Three-part Strategy to Holistic Vertical Development of the Self.

The coach held an expansive coaching space of emergent consciousness to invite insights and revelations to arise. This type of psychologically safe space included confidentiality (Rekalde et al, 2015), and the embrace of vulnerable authenticity (Kegan et al, 2014), as well as encompassing courage, compassion, and curiosity with an open will, heart and mind (Scharmer, 2018) in communion with spirit. Thus, the coaching space could be described as a psychologically safe and sacred space for the emergence of expanded consciousness. The shift to later stages is an inner shift that can only rise intrinsically from within the coachee's own realm of consciousness.

The nature of 3rd generation dialogical coaching (Stelter, 2014) was also embraced to enable the coach to share insights and deeper meaning arising from within their consciousness, not immediately accessible by the coachee due to their earlier stage of self-development. By offering these thoughts in a form of inquiry as part of the conceptualization, thinking phase in Kolb's (1984) learning cycle during the coaching conversation, the coachee was exposed to and invited to construct systemic meaning-making. This served to expand the consciousness of the coachee and influenced their attitude and approach to events on return to their workplace. This coaching met the coachee where they were at, and who they were becoming (Kegan, 1982). Thus, the term 'transformative coaching' in relation to vertical outcomes.

Given the strategic leadership roles of the participants, the coachees naturally raised concerns on providing strategic direction for their division of the organisation. Given the coach's expertise and proven track record in leading the transformation of corporate cultures, the coach also coached participants in the use of liberating strategic frameworks and engagement processes so they could develop their strategic leadership capabilities to build a more engaged organisation with a more empowering culture (Hamel, 2007; Laloux, 2014). This fits more closely with the roles of mentoring and consulting, rather than coaching. The integration of enterprise evolution effectively freed the coachee from being hindered by the typical constraints of organisations at earlier stages of evolution (Torbert et al, 2004), and, based on coachee reflections, had the effect of lifting the engagement, development, and performance of the coachee's division as a whole.

On reflection, maturing as a transforming *Synergist* appears to demand the simultaneous evolution of the organisation. It is in the act of leading such a transformation that the emerging *Synergist* leader embodies the mature 4th person perspective. Thus, coaching across the spectrum from consulting in strategic frameworks to mentoring in engagement processes and counselling in shadow resolution i.e., a blend of business, psychology, and consciousness, may be prerequisites for the coaching effectiveness of strategic leaders to mature at *Synergist*.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The confluence of these two interwoven threads, coaching effectiveness and vertical development, hold the potential to expand the capacity of coaching to realise more of our human potential. If the presence and practices of executive coaches reached out to new frontiers of later stage vertical leadership capacity at *Synergist* and beyond, alongside the transformative 3rd generation coaching approach applying the drivers identified in this research study, executive coaching could have a more significant influence and impact on enabling strategic leaders to realise more of their latent potential.

Considering humanity is in jeopardy as we are catapulted into an increasingly VUCA world, coaching could advance its frontiers to play a more active partnering role with clients. Coaches, partnering with leaders, have the opportunity to be pioneers while also holding responsibility for honoring coachees and integrating the emergent research that continues to bolster the foundations of our nascent profession. Coaching strategic leaders to *Synergist* to facilitate our capacity to surf the waves of complexity and ultimately sail out to calmer waters could be a significant contribution we could make as a profession to creating a better world for all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Coaches may wish to consider realising their own potential as later stage leaders at conscious *Synergist* and beyond, and integrating the outcome of vertical self-development into their coaching presence and practices. For executive coaching to become more effective and advance its frontiers, there is an opportunity for coaches to step up as partners by sharing accountability for coachees' aspirational intentions and evolutionary business outcomes.

Additional research using both a 'within-subjects' before-and-after mechanism, and a 'between-subjects' control group to measure increased leadership effectiveness and coaching effectiveness relative to vertical development, would test and advance current provisional findings. While further validation of the WUSCT may seem valuable, an increased awareness of human potential is perhaps more valuable than the absolute consistency of the WUSCT as a measuring instrument.

Buyers of coaching services who wish to realise transformative outcomes, would benefit from including the vertical stage of the coach and the nature of the coaching relationship, distinguishing transformative from developmental coaching, in their eligibility criteria. Further, this study suggests they would benefit from more consciously integrating vertical leadership development to later stages with enterprise evolution to Green and Teal accommodating all stages of self-development while supporting everyone to grow to their next stage.

For the coaching profession, the boundaries of ethical considerations in the coaching process and relationship may need to be honed to take account of the dialogical partnership that emerges from 3rd generation coaching and the explicit backdrop of vertical development. While coaching may have started out as a 'supporting' profession, if the coach's Centre of Gravity is a spectrum stage shift beyond the coachee, then it is also our moral obligation to lead.

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