

# Leadership and Adult Development Theories: Overviews and Overlaps

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## Abstract

Until relatively recently most developmental psychologists assumed that "development" ends with adolescence, and that, like the physical self, one's cognitive self then begins a long and steady decline. Only in the past 30 years or so has the term "adult development" been taken seriously, and the insights gained from this burgeoning research have implications for the development of leaders. The authors focus on the work of Erik Erikson (1959), Daniel Levinson (1977), Paul Baltes (1998), Albert Bandura (1977), and Robert Kegan (1982). Along with a description of each theory, the authors examine potential linkage to leadership development, and conclude with implications for leadership development programming.

## **Adult Development Theory & Leadership Development**

How people change and develop during their adult years is of fundamental importance to leadership development. As Bass (1990) suggests, “The need to learn more about what contributes to the self-confidence, self-determination, and freedom from inner conflict of the charismatic leader is apparent. These quests for greater understanding of personality and the personality dynamics that affect leaders’ performance transcend situational considerations” (p. 898). What seems like such an obvious truism has not always been so obvious, however. Until relatively recently most developmental psychologists assumed that “development” ends with adolescence, and that, like the physical self, one’s cognitive self then begins a long and steady decline. Only in the past 30 years or so has the term “adult development” been taken seriously, and the insights gained from this burgeoning research have huge implications for the development of leaders. Architects of leadership development opportunities are asking leaders to expand their world views, become aware of their biases and prejudices, and develop a wiser and more nuanced perspective of the problems they face. As we will show in this article, meeting these challenges successfully is remarkably similar to what developmental psychologists have indicated is key to leading a fulfilling and productive life.

Exploring the links between adult development and leadership development is important for at least three reasons. First, because participants in leadership development programs enter the process at different points in their life trajectories, their diverse experiences suggest diverse learning needs. Second, most developmental theorists would agree that reflection on the people, events and opportunities that have shaped us is a valuable and important activity as we look forward. And third, leaders themselves need to understand that the forces which motivate people – and by implication the leadership strategies likely to be most effective – are a function of followers’ developmental histories.

Several authors have linked the adult development theory to leadership, including Kuhnert & Lewis (1987), Zaleznik (1992), and Avolio (1999, 2005). In contrast to the work of these authors, who have linked only one or two theories of adult development to leadership and leadership development, a primary goal of this article is to survey the relationships more broadly. Specifically, we will focus on the work of Erik Erikson (1959), Daniel Levinson (1977), Paul Baltes (1998), Albert Bandura (1977), and Robert Kegan (1982). We will describe each theory, discuss its potential linkage to leadership development, and conclude with implications for leadership development programming.

### **Erik Erikson and Daniel Levinson**

Erikson’s theory of identity development (e.g., 1959) was the first to suggest that adults can, in fact, “develop” – that is, change in ways that lead to greater complexity or quality of life. Erikson asserts that for adults to achieve an

optimum quality of life they must face these three dilemmas, in order: (1) *intimacy vs. isolation*, (2) *generativity vs. self-absorption and stagnation*, and (3) *ego integrity vs. despair*. *Intimacy vs. isolation* is the dilemma typically encountered in late adolescence: it focuses on the individual's ability to establish deep and meaningful relationships with other human beings. The second stage of adulthood is *generativity vs. self-absorption and stagnation*. Generativity is the "interest in establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1959, p. 103). *Ego integrity vs. despair*, usually encountered late in life, is the acceptance of one's life cycle and all that has comprised the journey.

Daniel Levinson's theory (*The Seasons of a Man's Life*, 1978, and *Seasons of a Woman's Life*, 1997) is similar to Erikson's in that he suggests that adults move through stages (or "seasons"). Levinson proposed ten stages.

1. Early adult transition 1-22
2. Entering the adult world 22-28
3. Age 30 transition 28-33
4. Culmination of early adulthood: settling down 33-40
5. Midlife transition 40-45
6. Entering middle adulthood 45-50
7. Age 50 transition 50-55
8. Culmination of middle adulthood 55-60
9. Late-adult transition 60-65
10. Late adulthood 65+

Like Erikson, Levinson asserted that an underlying order exists in the life course. But whereas Erikson suggested that happiness depends on one's ability to negotiate these stages successfully, Levinson simply viewed the seasons as common difficulties associated with a certain age: "the tasks of one period are not better or more advanced than those of another, except in the general sense that each period builds upon the work of earlier ones and represents a later phase in the cycle" (1978, p. 320).

The work of Levinson and Erikson has two important implications for leadership development programs. First, the way an individual responds to a particular program strategy may depend upon the stage or "season" that person is in and how he or she is dealing with its associated challenges. Someone who is in Levinson's "entering the adult world" stage, for example, is more likely to look to program leaders as potential mentors, while those who are in "midlife transition" are more likely to want a program that will help them reflect on where they've been and where they want to go next. Second, individuals who are "stuck" at a particular stage may need help working through that stage before they are able to learn anything new very effectively. For instance, participants who are stuck in *self-absorption and stagnation* may need to develop the power of *generativity* before they are able to appreciate their potential leadership gifts.

## **Paul Baltes' Lifespan Approach**

Some psychologists, most notably Baltes (1998), have argued that understanding adult development requires a greater understanding of how humans adapt to life circumstances, and that this - not how an individual progresses through predetermined life stages - is what leads (or not) to development. Such an approach would appear to hold promise for leadership development, as the life experiences that shape the development of the person should also, therefore, affect how that person leads.

Baltes and his colleagues theorize that development occurs as a function of what they call "adaptive capacity," or the extent to which an individual is able to make positive changes as a response to adversity. Naturally, the crises in an individual's life are likely to vary according to where that person is in the life span. Up through early adulthood one's ability to deal with environmental hazards are largely a function of evolutionary selection; but as one gets older, one's "cultural" resources become more important. These include cognitive resources, motivational dispositions, socialization strategies, and access to environmental resources such as economic systems and medical technology. Since no one has equal access to all these resources, Baltes, et al. (1999) suggest that effective adult development depends on the extent to which the individual optimizes available resources and uses these to compensate for deficits in other areas.

Some who write about leadership development have at least implicitly adopted Baltes' ideas. For example, Avolio and Gibbons (1989) assert,

the development of charismatic or transformational leaders is best characterized as a life span process of change with early as well as later life events affecting the development of leadership potential...It suffices to say that companies and/or individuals who rely principally on one or even a few developmental strategies for building transformational leaders will probably be disappointed, since the most successful development programs are those that reflect the individual and his or her unique needs and strengths. The critical elements making up the chemistry of a charismatic/transformational leader appear to vary across individual leaders. (p. 291)

One might infer from the above quote that an infinite variability exists in how leaders develop. However, in their research, Gibbons and Avolio (1989) identified seven elements as antecedents to transformational leadership.

1. Leaders are from families that have high expectations of their children. Further, they may have been given a large amount of responsibility in the family and were expected to excel in many different arenas.

2. The “family situation, conditions and circumstances may be difficult and often demanding, but significant resources, both individual and systemic, are available to avoid being overwhelmed” (p. 289). In other words, there are high standards and expectations, but the resources are made available for individuals to succeed.
3. Leaders successfully learn to deal with their emotions and feelings. They are able to work through disappointments and conflict and, if this is not learned early on, it must be learned later in life.
4. The leader must have had a variety of leadership positions in a number of settings and have a strong desire to engage in developmental work, even as an adult. These individuals are always working to improve themselves.
5. They are always learning in a deliberate and conscious way. As Avolio and Gibbons (1989) suggest, “personal development is a primary work goal as well as a life goal” (p. 290).
6. Transformational leaders take advantage of workshops and meetings with influential people or mentors.
7. Leaders view all experiences as learning experiences and show a strong desire to reflect on their experiences and incorporate them into their development. Burns (1978), Bennis and Nanus (1985), and Bass (1985), discuss this attribute in their writing as well and emphasize its importance to leadership and its development.

Avolio (1994) suggests that *invitro* (formal workshop training) and *invivo* (accumulated life events) learning must be distinguished when researching leadership. According to Avolio, the “natural tendencies” which are at times attributed to leaders may not be natural, and simply learned along the way. Avolio & Gibbons (1989), suggest that development is the result of many smaller life experiences that accumulate over time.

The thinking of Avolio and Gibbons has a number of implications for leadership development. First, they emphasize the importance of the experiences an individual brings to leadership development and the need to examine these experiences. Doing so will increase the self-awareness of participants and help them understand what events, people and experiences have brought them to their current point.

A second point of emphasis is the notion that leadership development is a lifelong process, not something occurring over a period of a weekend or even a few years. By viewing leadership development through this lens, one can experience *life* as a leadership development opportunity. Life is the classroom, and helping others “see” this may foster development. A final implication for leadership development is the love of learning. The curious mind loves to learn and will often open itself to new experiences, new ways of thinking and new ways of knowing. The love of learning may be the most important attribute in the development of leaders.

## **Social Learning Theory and Self Efficacy**

Albert Bandura, the founder of social learning theory, suggests that children learn behavior (leadership, aggression, etc.) based on what is modeled in their environment. Bandura (1977) asserts, "Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action" (p. 22).

Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway (2000) found that leadership development can be explained in a social learning framework. More specifically, adolescents tend to mirror what is displayed by their fathers and tend to display these characteristics with their peers. The authors also found that transformational attributes are displayed by adolescents who seem to "be capable of evoking effort from peers and of being perceived as satisfying and effective leaders" (p. 222). Zacharatos and others (2000) found that, if attributes of transformational leadership exist in youth, they may have a major effect on later leadership in adulthood. The authors determined further that children who perceived their parents to be transformational tended to display these same behaviors themselves, and were more likely thought of as "transformational" by their peers and coaches.

Self-efficacy is belief or confidence in one's abilities to work through various situations. According to Avolio and Gibbons (1989), developing individuals' self-efficacy can have a major effect on their growth and development. This can be accomplished by recognizing "previous accomplishment, providing emotional challenges, conveying high expectations, and modeling appropriate strategies for success" (p. 298). Moreover, a leader can develop self-efficacy in followers by building experiences that result in incremental success, providing experiences that are emotionally challenging, communicating and persuading subordinates of the importance of the task and modeling appropriate strategies for attaining successful results.

Social learning theory and self efficacy are important to the discussion of adult development for reasons specific to each one. First of all, by modeling those around them, people are products of the culture within which they exist and have learned what is socially acceptable within their organizations and communities. Leadership development programs must therefore help participants better understand how they have been shaped by powerful and influential people in their environment and how it affects them and others within in it. This isn't as straightforward as it seems, as the "real" culture is often different from the "espoused" culture. As Argyris (1997) notes:

Human beings hold two different master designs. The first incorporates the theories humans espouse about dealing effectively with others. The

second design involves the theories of action they use (i.e., their theories-in-use). Whenever any issue is dealt with that activates embarrassment or threat, we have found a systemic discrepancy between the espoused theories and the theories-in-use *and* a systemic unawareness of the discrepancy while individuals are producing it. (p. 10)

In the end, alignment of the espoused theory and the theory-in-use is a challenging endeavor. A culture that values communication, honesty, ethical behavior, and transparency may not accept individuals with differing values (and vice versa). Individuals creating leadership development initiatives should also remember the role that self-efficacy plays in the process. As Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "flow" (1990) reminds us, any learning environment should ideally contain a balance of challenge and support. Too much of the former creates anxiety and a desire to escape; too much of the latter leads to lethargy and boredom. Creating an environment with small wins and a focus on past accomplishments can provide a culture of hope and efficacy for participants. In turn, these participants can then become models for their own environments.

### **Constructive Developmentalism**

The idea that healthy psychological development requires a balance between opposing forces isn't limited to flow theory. In *The Evolving Self* (1982), Robert Kegan suggested that adults are faced with a constant struggle between two dialectic forces, *connection* and *independence*. People need to feel accepted and nurtured by others who are important to them and by the culture in which they live; they also need a sense of autonomy and an ability to act successfully on their own, much like Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. Because the needs for connection and independence can never exist comfortably together, first one tends to dominate, then the other, what Kegan calls "fundamental alternation." Development occurs as individuals shift back and forth. Those who are most successful with this gradually appreciate the importance of having a strong personal identity within connection - and independence surrounded by a nurturing community.

Back in the 80s one of us participated in an extensive investigation into the nature of faculty satisfaction in colleges and universities (Caffarella, et al., 1989), and our findings confirmed Kegan's ideas. We found that faculty members who were most satisfied with their lives and work were able to describe what we later called a "niche": a sense of place within work-lives and/or home-lives that was *theirs*, and that was honored by those around them. A sense of niche meant that the faculty member felt confident that he or she both had something unique to contribute (independence) and that this contribution was valued by the surrounding culture (connection).

Implications for leadership development are obvious. Evolving leaders have to appreciate the importance of balancing forces in their lives – challenge and

support, connection and independence. Concentrating too heavily on developing leaders who will “transform” their organizations will result in an over-emphasis on strength and power; focusing too heavily on developing leaders who will understand and identify with the organizational culture will result in an over-emphasis on feel-good, palliative approaches. The former, in turn, leads to autocracy, the latter to aimlessness. Instead, leadership development programs should emphasize the dialectic nature of their work – that the art of leadership lies at least in part on one’s ability to balance and negotiate these opposing life forces.

How does this happen? Kegan & Lahey (1984) suggest that development is the ability to make meaning of experiences – regardless of age. How individuals interpret a situation or an event is dependent upon their developmental level. According to Day (2004), “Individuals at higher levels of development are able to use a greater number of knowledge principles to construct their experiences (differentiation) and to make more interconnections among these principles (integration). This results in a broader perspective on how things are interrelated (inclusiveness)” (p. 43). Therefore, individuals’ ways of knowing guide their lives and actions. According to Kegan & Lahey (1984) this does not link to age, because three different adults could experience the same event and interpret the happenings in three different ways. Development is “a process of outgrowing one system of meaning by integrating it (as a subsystem) into a new system of meaning. What was ‘the whole’ becomes ‘part’ of a *new* whole” (1984, p. 203). Kegan (1994) calls this the “subject-object” relationship. According to Kegan

‘Object’ refers to those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate and otherwise operate upon. All of these expressions suggest that the element of knowing is not the whole of us; it is distinct enough from us that we can do something with it.

‘Subject’ refers to those elements of our knowing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in. We have object, we are subject. We cannot be responsible, in control of, or reflect upon that which is subject. Subject is immediate; object is mediate. (p. 32)

According to Kuhnert & Lewis (1987), “understanding the process through which people construct meaning out of their experiences may advance our knowledge of how leaders understand, experience, and approach the enterprise of leading” (p. 650). For example, leaders who have little awareness of their emotions and how they affect others are subject to these behaviors; they do not have control or in some cases, the ability to reflect upon their actions. Kuhnert & Lewis (2001) describe it this way: “What is subject for some is object for those at higher stages of development” (p. 651). Kegan’s theory outlines five distinct stages of development but, within the context of this discussion, we highlight three: imperial (stage two), interpersonal (stage three) and institutional (stage four).

The “imperial stage” (stage two) finds individuals focused heavily on individual needs and goals. An example offered by Kegan (1982) is that if individuals at this stage do something wrong, they are likely filled with worries of “being caught” rather than guilt. Kuhnert & Lewis (2001) posit that leaders at this stage only have the capacity to work out of the transactional leadership style, focusing on task completion and compliance, organizational rewards and punishments. The authors further suggest that “stage two leaders may say that they aspire to higher order transactions (e.g., team spirit, mutual respect), but from the perspective of cognitive/developmental theory they have not developed the organizing processes (subject) necessary for understanding or participating in mutual experiences and shared perceptions” (p. 652). Leaders at this stage do not have the capacity to reflect on their agendas. They *are* their agendas.

At the “interpersonal stage” (stage three), leaders focus on personal needs and the needs of others. They can hold their own interests and the interests of others simultaneously. In addition, stage three leaders are more likely to connect with those around them and experience increased levels of trust, connectedness and commitment to others. According to Kuhnert & Lewis (2001), “whereas the stage two leaders negotiate with their employers to satisfy personal agendas, stage three leaders sacrifice their personal goals in order to maintain connections with their employers. Thus, the key transactions for the stage three leaders are mutual support, expectations, obligation and rewards” (p. 652). Although still working out of transactional leadership style, stage three leaders are moving away from their own needs to an interconnection between their needs and the needs of others or, in Kegan’s terms, between connection and independence.

Stage four is the “institutional stage.” Kegan (1982) suggests that individuals at this stage have developed a consistency across arenas, developing their own identity. This self-identity and reliance on personal standards and commitments is the hallmark of stage four. Stage four leaders, in a sense, “stand on their own.” As Kegan (1982) suggests, they move from “I am my relationships” to “I have relationships” (p. 100). Such leaders work through what Burns (1978) might call “end values.” At this stage of development, leaders may make their decisions out of a strong set of values and principles rather than goals or relationships. Moreover, the individual has the capacity to reflect and modify these values (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). According to Kuhnert & Lewis (1987), “unless leaders have progressed to stage four personality structures, they will be unable to transcend the personal needs and commitments of others and they will be unable to pursue their own end values” (p. 653). Because of this, Kuhnert & Lewis assert that transformational leadership begins at this level. Although pieces exist in stage three, it is here where an individual acts holistically out of a place of transformational leadership. Kuhnert & Lewis (1987) assert that “transforming leadership is made possible when leaders’ end values (internal standards) are adopted by followers, thereby producing changes in the attitudes, beliefs and goals of followers” (p. 653).

The constructive/developmental view of leadership has a number of implications for the study of leadership and leadership development. First, Day (2004) suggests that individuals at lower levels of development will likely construct leadership out of a place of dominance: a transactional place. According to Day (2004), “this is not a wrong way to construct leadership, but it is inherently limiting because an individual leader is expected to act as a sort of hero” (p. 44). A more sophisticated level of leadership requires interpersonal influence, which may be more inclusive and allow the leader more flexibility. Helping leaders understand and examine where they work from develops self-awareness and provides additional tools for success.

Second, according to Avolio and Gibbons (1989), “A leader who operates at a lower developmental level than his or her followers cannot transform followers to a higher level than his or her own. Conversely, a leader who views the world from a developmental level that is not understood by his or her followers will also have difficulty transforming followers to his or her way of thinking” (p. 294). The leader may need to be aware of how followers make meaning and approach the conversation or relationship from their level. This is an important because leadership development initiatives should meet people where they are; one size simply cannot fit all. A program developed and constructed at stage four may sound and be completely foreign to an individual at stage two. The concepts of stage four may be a jump. Day and Halpin (2003) agree and suggest “there is an inherent asymmetry in the development process in which those at higher levels of complexity can understand the thinking of those at lower levels (if motivated to do so), but those at lower levels cannot understand the thinking of those at higher development levels” (p. 14).

A third implication for leadership development is the concept of meaning-making and perception. VanVelsor and Drath (2005) exemplify this notion through the following suggestion: “what he learns will be framed and limited by the ways in which he can make what he learned meaningful. Everything learned will cohere within that developmental framework” (p. 396). Each person views the world through a different lens depending on life experience and developmental level. This concept alone can help leaders make better sense of their situation and the environmental context. For instance, leaders who work out of stage three may begin to understand why some have a difficult time understanding them literally and conceptually. If surrounded by a number of competitive stage two team members, it will be a challenging task to work together and truly develop a sense of team; team members will be too busy thinking about their own needs.

Finally, Kegan’s thinking can increase the self-awareness of the leader. Learning about this and other theories allows leaders an opportunity to reflect on their own developmental stages and how this affects them and their associates.

### **Adult Development and Leadership Development – Suggestions for Practice**

By now the reader may think that a primary reason why adult development theory has been mostly ignored in leadership development programs is the sheer number of different – and seemingly conflicting – theories. Our position, however, is that these theories conflict only in perspective, and are in fact complementary. If so, a careful synthesis of them could lead to important advances in practice. The relationships between adult development theory and leadership development have huge implications for practitioners. A leadership development curriculum that had adult development theory as a solid foundation would have the following elements:

### ***Pre-assessment of developmental issues or stages***

A natural starting place for leadership development programs is to assess the developmental level of participants. This may be as simple as asking participants to situate themselves in the developmental process. For instance, what are the life experiences that have shaped their current world view? What have been the watershed learning moments and how have these moments informed their current world view? How does age, race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status inform their current reality? How do all of these variables both enhance and limit the individual when leading others? What are the great gifts that each of these perspectives/orientations bring and what limitations do they pose?

Another approach may be a more formal assessment of development level. For instance, Kegan and his colleagues developed the “subject-object” interview to help determine an individual’s epistemology (Lahey et al., 1988). The interview is an hour long and according to the authors, “contents are generated from real life experience of the interviewee; and involve emotional as well as cognitive, and intrapersonal aspects of psychological organization” (para. XX). Day (2003) notes that there are 10 standardized questions used to “elicit verbal data on how the participant organizes intra- and interpersonal experiences. Interview protocols are scored according to 21 epistemological distinctions in which five gradations between each epistemology (or way of knowing) are possible. Interrater reliability estimates are purported to range from .75 to .90, and test-retest reliability was estimated to be .83” (p. 17).

### ***Recognition of the importance of perspective-building as well as skill-building***

Along with a baseline assessment of participants’ attention needs to be paid to the content of the programming. There needs to be a balance of skill building with perspective building. Conger & Benjamin (1998) suggest that “that the most essential competencies should be embedded in an organization’s reward and performance measurement systems if they are to have any long term impact. The challenge then becomes one of recognizing their limitations and updating both the competencies and corresponding organizational measures as leadership needs shift” (p. 57-58). Skill-building “demands that leadership abilities be broken

down into actual mechanical processes that you and I can perform” (Conger, 1992, p. 176). Conger asserts that certain aspects of skills such as communication and motivation can be taught. London (1999) suggests that leadership skills should include elements such as “envisioning the future, establishing goals, communicating, rallying support for the vision, planning for its implementation and putting the plans in place” (p. 22). To do it right, skill building programs take a great deal of time and should be reinforced back on the job; Conger (1992) asserts that “a four or five-day program can introduce the basics of a skills to participants, but cannot truly develop it for most of them” (p. 179).

Along with skill-building, personal growth or perspective building should be given a high priority. Personal growth and self-awareness permeates the literature on leadership development. Personal growth programs are “based, generally, on the assumption that leaders are individuals who are deeply in touch with their personal dreams and talents and who will act to fulfill them” (Conger, 1992, pp. 45-46). Essentially, the purpose of these programs is to increase self-awareness and emphasize self-exploration and perspective transformation. Avolio & Gibbons (1989) assert that, “after getting their own personal shops in order, charismatic/transformational leaders are free to look outward and beyond the time period in which they operate to solve significant problems” (p. 285). The theory is that the self-aware leader will be better prepared to work with others.

### ***Intentional modeling behavior***

As we noted earlier, Bandura’s social learning theory (1977) has important implications for leadership development. Students not only gain knowledge and fresh perspectives from teachers, they also, usually unconsciously, emulate their teachers’ behavior: they begin to imagine how they would approach a problematic situation in a way that is similar to what the teacher is demonstrating. In a leadership development program, the teacher/leader is not only imparting information, he or she is modeling leadership itself, and must be extra careful not to be incongruent. Giving a lecture on principles of “distributed” or “lateral” leadership will not be very effective by itself; students will have a much more powerful learning experience if they see distributed leadership modeled in the classroom.

### ***Focus on self-efficacy, sensitivity to balance between challenge and support***

As suggested building an individual’s self-efficacy can have a major effect on their growth and development (Avolio & Gibbons, 1989). The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) suggests a process of *assessment, challenge and support* (McCauley, Moxley & Van Velsor, 1998). CCL suggests that these elements, when combined, provide for the most powerful experience for the learner. As we have suggested, *assessment* helps participants become more aware of their strengths, weaknesses and how others perceive them. Along with *assessment*, *challenging* experiences help individuals develop and grow. Challenging

experiences force people out of their comfort zones and into new places. Some would call these disorienting dilemmas; situations that force individuals to reflect, think and act in new ways (Mezirow, 2002). Finally, a *supportive* learning environment is a must. It is the only way that trust can be developed allowing learners the opportunity to take chances and experiment with new approaches.

### ***Continued emphasis for participants on leader and leadership development***

Prior to reviewing the specific content it is important to attend to an insight by Day (2001); the differences between *leader* development and *leadership* development. According to Day (2001), “In the case of *leader* development, the emphasis typically is on individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities associated with formal leadership roles” (p. 584); in other words, *leader* development is development at an individual level. It is concerned with developing the capacities of individuals within an organization in an effort to help them better take on organizational roles. Day (2001) mentions self-awareness, self-regulation, and self motivation as focus competencies of this level. *Leadership* development, on the other hand, focuses on “building and using interpersonal competence...key components of interpersonal competences include social awareness and social skills” (p. 585). In other words, *leadership* development is the interaction between the individual and the larger (social) and organizational environment. According to Day, *leadership* development is a much more challenging goal than individual leader development. In the end, Day & O’Conner (2003) assert that there is a need for both *leadership* development and *leader* development in organizations.

### ***Acknowledgment that development requires intentional change, and change isn’t easy***

Why is it that we often want to change, but find that we are unable to do so? Why is change so difficult even when everyone and everything is aligned around the goal? The reason is that most of us have built-in immunity to change.

Based on their research in adult development theory, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey have developed an innovative teaching methodology and activity called *Immunity to Change*. According to Kegan

We think we have discovered a powerful dynamic that tends to keep us exactly where we are, despite sincere, even passionate, intentions to change. A recent study concluded that doctors can tell heart patients that they will literally die if they do not change their ways, and still only about one in seven will be able to make the changes. These are not people who want to die. They want to live out their lives, fulfill their dreams, watch their grandchildren grow up—and, still, they cannot make the changes they need to in order to survive.

“If wanting to change and actually being able to are so uncertainly linked when our very lives are on the line,” Kegan asks, “why should we expect that even the most passionate school leader’s aspiration to improve instruction or close achievement gaps is going to lead to these changes actually occurring?”

What this implies, says Kegan, is that more knowledge is needed about the change process itself, and more understanding of the “immunity to change. (<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/impact/stories/faculty/kegan.php>, para. 3, 4, 5)

This activity is an awareness-building exercise that makes explicit that which is currently implicit. *Immunity to Change* helps participants better understand their competing commitments and truly begin to understand the motivation behind behavior and why change, with all of the best intentions, can be so difficult to master.

According to Kegan and Lahey the primary objective to the Immunity to Change exercise is to: *create insight into why change is so difficult – bringing to light hidden barriers. The Immunity to Change* exercise is one way to help participants move through the different stages of development. In essence, its goal is to move that which is “subject” to “object.” The exercise itself uses a four column *Immunity Map* which participants complete in response to a series of questions. The exercise moves quickly and each individual “constructs” his or her personal map. The basic flow of the exercise is that participants are asked a question, given time to think, invited to check in with a neighbor and have a discussion as a group. Then the next question is asked. The exercise takes (at a minimum) two hours to complete. Ground rules are established for the partnerships and participants are told that they can choose whether to go “deep” or “shallow.”

Change is a difficult concept for humans to approach, endure and facilitate. After all, if only one in seven patients are willing to change their behavior and the consequence is potential death, what is the likelihood for change in the average three day leadership course? An understanding of *how* and *why* humans change behavior is an important attribute of any leadership development initiative.

### **Adult Development - Conclusion**

According to Heifetz & Linsky (2002), “Habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one’s identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves” (p. 27). Adult development theory helps us examine what has shaped us throughout life – how our unique combination of family and work experiences, relationships, and life events has made us who we are.

Understanding this central idea can be of great benefit to leaders. First, they will be better able to “get their own shops in order,” and as Bass (1985) suggests, be in a better position to work out of the end values. Second, leaders will better understand how workplace challenges can be motivating for some and dispiriting, or worse, for others. And third, leaders will realize that significant change is likely over the arc of a person’s career. People do not simply gain skills and experience over the years; they change *as people* with significantly different motives and aspirations. Recognizing that organizational “deadwood” may simply be those who want and need something different from their work would save countless hours of unhappiness and lost productivity. If it’s true that adult development is the single most ignored topic in leadership, then finally paying attention to it could be one of the most important improvements leadership development programs could make.

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