Processes and personality preferences involved in adult consciousness development: An investigation of participants in Australian community leadership programs

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My core question

How can we develop the creative, innovative and analytical ability, long-range future orientation, flexibility, willingness to experiment and high tolerance for ambiguity that will be required to come to terms with, and make progress on, the complex adaptive challenges we now face in our organisations, communities and globally?

A core realisation

The capacities for recognising and responding effectively to adaptive challenges are related to the development of our consciousness.

Aims of the Research

- To advance understanding of why and how development to higher consciousness levels might occur for some individuals and not others (Vincent, Ward & Denson, 2013 - *Journal of Adult Development*)

- To investigate the efficacy of community leadership programs (CLP's) in triggering consciousness development (Vincent, Ward & Denson, manuscript in preparation)

Loevinger's stage theory of ego (consciousness) development

- One of the most comprehensive constructs in the field of developmental psychology.

- Provides a framework for conceptualising the growth in an individual's way of constructing meaning through the lifespan.

- Invariant sequence of stages, each characterised by qualitatively distinct conscious preoccupations, expressions of impulse control and interpersonal and cognitive styles.

- Each stage shift transforms perceptions of reality, offering a more integrated perspective.

- Development proceeds toward greater self and interpersonal awareness, decreasing defensiveness and increasing flexibility, reflection, skill in interacting with the environment, tolerance for difference and ambiguity, cognitive complexity, responsibility and personal autonomy

- Critical reviews of Loevinger's theory and its measurement tool - the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) - have concluded that there is substantial empirical support for the construct and discriminant validity of both the theory and the WUSCT (Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Hauser, 1976; Loevinger, 1979; Manners & Durkin, 2001).

Pre-conventional stages

STAGE	TYPICAL MANIFESTATIONS
IMPULSIVE	Demanding; impulsive; conceptually confused; concerned with bodily feelings, especially sexual and aggressive; no sense of psychological causation; dependent; good and bad seen in terms of how it affects the self; dichotomous good/bad, nice/mean.
OPPORTUNIST	Wary; complaining; exploitive; hedonistic; preoccupied with staying out of trouble, not getting caught; learning about rules and self control; externalising blame. 4.3% of managerial sample (n=4510) estimated to be at this stage (see Cook-Greuter, 2004)

Conventional stages

STAGE	TYPICAL MANIFESTATIONS
DIPLOMAT	Conventional; moralistic; sentimental; rule-bound; stereotyped; need for belonging; superficial niceness; behaviour of others seen in terms of externals; feelings only understood at banal level; conceptually simple, "black and white" thinking. 11.3% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004)
EXPERT	Increased, although still limited, self-awareness and appreciation of multiple possibilities in situations; self-critical; emerging rudimentary awareness of inner feelings of self and others; banal level reflections on life issues: God, death, relationships, health. 36.5% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004)
ACHIEVER	Self evaluated standards; reflective; responsible; empathetic; long term goals and ideals; true conceptual complexity displayed and perceived; can see the broader perspective and can discern patterns; principled morality; rich and differentiated inner life; mutuality in relationships; self-critical; values achievement. 29.7% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004)

Post-conventional stages

STAGE	TYPICAL MANIFESTATIONS
INDIVIDUALIST	Heightened sense of individuality; concern about emotional dependence; tolerant of self and others; incipient awareness of inner conflicts and personal paradoxes, without a sense of resolution or integration; values relationships over achievement; vivid and unique way of expressing self. 11.3% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004).
STRATEGIST	Capacity to face and cope with inner conflicts; high tolerance for ambiguity and can see conflict as an expression of the multifaceted nature of people and life in general; respectful of the autonomy of the self and others; relationships seen as interdependent rather than as dependent/independent; concerned with self-actualisation; recognises the systemic nature of relationships; cherishes individuality and uniqueness; vivid expression of feelings. 4.9% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004)
ALCHEMIST	Wise; broadly empathic; full sense of identity; able to reconcile inner conflicts, and integrate paradoxes. Similar to Maslow's (1962) description of the "self-actualised" person who is growth motivated, seeking to actualise potential capacities, to understand his/her intrinsic nature, and to achieve integration and synergy within the self. 2.0% of managers (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

In over our heads

"...the expectations on us [in modern life] demand something more than the acquisition of specific skills or the mastery of particular knowledge. They make demands on our minds, on how we know, on the complexity of our consciousness."

Kegan, (1994)

In over our heads contd…

- The vast majority of adults stabilise at or below the Achiever stage – well below the maximum potential for development (Cohn, 1998; Cook-Greuter, 2004)

- People at the Expert/Achiever are unlikely to be able to deal with the complexity of the adaptive challenges we face today.

- The currently predominant conventional worldview is limited in form and range to a relatively short-term, unreflective, mainly instrumental empirical-analytic mode of thinking:

"…*well suited to calculating the means to attain predetermined ends, but deficient when it comes to more fundamental matters – such as determining what ends are to be pursued, and challenging the premises on which calculations proceed*"

(Donovan, 1997)

Leadership and consciousness development

ଈଚ Much research has demonstrated that the growth of adult consciousness development to post-conventional levels is associated with many adaptive advantages for the individual and society.

ଈଚ Research focussed on management and leadership performance has found associations between consciousness development and better leadership performance and outcomes in organisations

(Barker & Torbert, 2011; Bushe & Gibbs, 1990; Brown, 2011; Guerette, 1986, Joiner & Josephs, 2007; King & Roberts, 1992; Marrewijk & Were, 2003; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor & Baker, 2006; Merron, 1985; Merron, Fisher & Torbert, 1987; Rooke & Torbert, 1998; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009; Torbert & Associates, 2004).

Implications for leadership development

ളა Horizontal development involves focussing on knowledge and competencies that expand and enrich a person's current way of making meaning

ളా Vertical development involves transformations in the way we see the world and what we are able to be aware of (taking a broader perspective)

How do we develop consciousness?

ഔ Development occurs in response to self-initiated or externally-prompted life experiences that are:

- o emotionally engaging and challenging (but amenable to positive interpretation)
- o personally salient
- o interpersonal in nature
- o challenge the person's existing ways of seeing the world (disequilbrating)

ഔ Development is also influenced by:

- o Personality factors
- o Psychological factors
- o Timing

(Manners & Durkin, 2000, 2004)

Australian Community Leadership Programs

ଜ Although not deliberately designed in terms of the Manners and Durkin (2000) framework, most fit well:

- o recruit participants from very diverse business, government and not-for-profit leadership positions with potential to become future community leaders.

- o Facilitate experiential exposure to major economic, environmental, social and cultural issues affecting communities, countries and the globe and to the leaders at the forefront of these issues from a diversity of perspectives, sectors and industries.

- o Experience often includes working with the homeless and other underprivileged communities, field trips to prisons, farms, indigenous communities and law courts, attending artistic performances and visiting businesses – as well as meetings with high level State officials, and visiting overseas dignitaries.

Australian Community Leadership Programs contd...

- Some include:

  - Community-oriented group action learning project
  - Psychological testing of participants and associated feedback and development integrated through the program
  - One-on-one personal coaching for participants (delivered by a professional coach)
  - Peer assessment and feedback (includes peer/personal case study work)
  - Case in point learning
  - Adventure-based/outward bound wilderness challenges (extending over several days)
  - Field trip to a developing country

- Some differences in the structure and approach taken between CLPs but generally describe themselves as:

  - taking participants out of their comfort zone
  - exposing them to aspects of society they would otherwise never experience and
  - exploring and challenging values and beliefs.

Australian Community Leadership Programs contd...

❧ The types of experiences and activities that CLPs offer have the potential to be most disequilibriating for those at the last conventional stage of consciousness (Achiever) because they:

- o begin to expose participants to the fundamental paradoxes in human nature
- o confront them with ambiguous challenges and invite them to face their discomfort with this
- o focus them on their own mental habits and biases

❧ Most of the programs are run over a 10-month period from February to November each year with around 25-35 sessions (full day, ½ day, evenings, field trips, weekend retreats) during this time.

Triggers for the research

- Most graduates of our community leadership program describe it as 'transformational' (backed by independent research undertaken by the University of Adelaide in 2007)

- Introduction of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) in 2008. Since then we have found that 35-50% of participants (depending on the year) have transitioned at least one stage of consciousness by end of program (mostly Achiever to Individualist)

- Observed that some participants seemed to transform more readily than others during the program – possibly related to personality preferences

Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT)

- First published in 1970 and revised in 1985 and 1996
- Described as the most extensively validated projective technique for assessing personality – used in hundreds of studies and administered to many thousands of people
- Respondents complete 36 sentence stems selected for eliciting various aspects of ego development
- Premise of the test is that a person's choice of sentence content and structure models the way they see the world
- Scored using a detailed manual and responses combined using ogive rules that place the respondent at particular stage of ego development
- Test can be split in half to produce two abbreviated versions to prevent the measurement error effects found in repeated use of the full test

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

ಖ   MBTI reveals preferences on four dichotomies:

o   E-I - differences in the way people orient their energy – either directing it primarily to the external world of people and things (Extraversion - E) or primarily to their inner world thoughts and reflections (Introversion - I).

o   S-N - differences in the way people take in information and the kind of information they like and trust – either preferring to take in information using their senses and focus on the present and what is real and tangible (Sensing – S) or preferring to go beyond what is real or concrete and focus on the future – patterns, possibilities, meanings and connections (Intuition – N).

o   T-F - differences in the way people make decisions - those with a preference for Thinking (T) preferring to base decisions on impersonal, objective logic and those with a preference for Feeling (F) preferring a person-centred, values-based process.

o   J-P - differences in orientation to the external world, with some having a preference for planning and organising (Judging – J) and others preferring spontaneity and flexibility (Perceiving – P).

o   These sets of opposite preferences result in 16 possible "type" combinations.

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) contd...

- MBTI Self-Scorable Form M is a self-report instrument where the respondent selects one of two options for each of 93 items to identify his or her preferences (and preference clarity scores) on the four dichotomies.

- A respondent is assigned one of 16 possible 'type' classifications based on their preferences.

- Psychometric properties of the MBTI and its reliability and validity found to be generally very good, although key structural assumptions of type theory and the way in which the MBTI is assumed to operationalise them remains controversial.

Aims of the Research

- To advance understanding of why and how development to higher consciousness levels might occur for some individuals and not others (Vincent, Ward & Denson, 2013 - *Journal of Adult Development*)

- To investigate the efficacy of community leadership programs (CLP's) in triggering consciousness development (Vincent, Ward & Denson, manuscript in preparation)

Research questions

ଏ This research explored the following broad questions (amongst others):

o Are particular personality preferences (as measured by the MBTI) associated with greater consciousness development?

o Do community leadership programs that align with the framework of Manners and Durkin (2000) facilitate shifts in consciousness development?

Procedure

- Participants gave informed consent to take part in the study.

- Completed the WUSCT (first 18 stems) on program entry, along with the MBTI.

- Completed the WUSCT (second 18 stems) on program exit

- Due to funding limitations, most WUSCT protocols scored by a single trained scorer but 67 were checked by second expert scorer and proportionate agreement was 93% (Kappa = 0.79, p < .0005).

Research participants

- 374 participants initially recruited - 337 from 11 Australian community leadership programs (CLPs) and 37 controls from 2 university-run management programs

- Overall, 96% of participants in the 13 programs (n=390) were tested at the commencement of their programs and 90% of these (n=335) participated in the final testing session

- 70% from programs in metro regions of major cities - remainder from regional programs

- 50% female, age 18 - 61 (mean age = 40)

- All fluent in English but for 6% this was a second language

- 4% identified as Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI)

- Highly educated - 75% completed bachelor degree, 26% completed Masters or PhD. Only 6% did not complete high school.

Research participants contd...

Distribution of Consciousness Stages at Program Entry

Category	Frequency	Per cent
Diplomat	7	1.9
Expert	57	15.2
Achiever	252	67.4
Individualist	52	13.9
Strategist	6	1.6
Total	374	100.0

Research participants contd...

Distribution of MBTI preferences at Program Entry

Preference	Frequency	Per cent
Extraversion	216	57.8
Introversion	158	42.2
Sensing	185	49.5
Intuition	189	50.5
Thinking	225	60.2
Feeling	149	39.8
Judging	199	53.2
Perceiving	175	46.8

Results

Ș Are particular personality preferences (as measured by the MBTI) associated with greater consciousness development?

- After adjusting for effects of age and education, a preference for Intuition was associated with significantly higher consciousness development on program entry ($F_{(1, 353)} = 20.98$, $p < .0005$, partial eta squared = .06).

- 23.2% of participants with a preference for Sensing were at the Expert (or earlier) stage on program entry compared to 11.1% of those with a preference for Intuition.

- In contrast, 5.9% of those with a preference for Sensing were at the Individualist (or later) stage on entry, compared to 24.9% of those with a preference for Intuition.

Association between ego stage on program entry and the MBTI Sensing/Intuition preference.

			MBTI Sensing	MBTI Intuition	Total
Consciousness stage on program entry	Expert or earlier	Count	43	21	64
		% within ego category	67.2%	32.8%	100.0%
		% within S or N	23.2%	11.1%	17.1%
		% of Total	11.5%	5.6%	17.1%
	Achiever	Count	131	121	252
		% within ego category	52.0%	48.0%	100.0%
		% within S or N	70.8%	64.0%	67.4%
		% of Total	35.0%	32.4%	67.4%
	Individualist or later	Count	11	47	58
		% within ego category	19.0%	81.0%	100.0%
		% within S or N	5.9%	24.9%	15.5%
		% of Total	2.9%	12.6%	15.5%
Total		Count	185	189	374
		% within ego category	49.5%	50.5%	100.0%
		% within S or N	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	49.5%	50.5%	100.0%

Results contd...

o A preference for Intuition was associated with significantly higher consciousness development during the programs ($F (1, 315) = 6.76$, $p = .01$, partial eta squared = .02).

o 34% of those with a preference for Intuition had increased a stage at the end of the program, compared with 24% of those with a preference for Sensing.

o These results are consistent with previous research and provide support for Manners' and Durkin's (2000) proposal that dispositional personality characteristics may enhance or constrain consciousness development.

Results contd...

- Not all Australian community leadership programs (CLPs) are the same - some provide greater psychosocial challenges than others

- An important aim was to test whether programs that included such additional challenges had a greater impact in terms of promoting consciousness development

- These additional challenges included the following:

  - Community-oriented group action learning project
  - Psychological testing of participants and associated feedback and development integrated through the program
  - One-on-one personal coaching for participants (delivered by a professional coach)
  - Peer assessment and feedback (includes peer/personal case study work)
  - Case in point learning
  - Extended adventure-based/outward bound wilderness challenges (over several days)
  - Field trip to a developing country

- Those programs that incorporated additional psychosocial challenges for participants were placed into the CLP1 group. Those which did not were placed in the CLP2 group. The university-based professional management programs formed the control group.

Results contd...

- Do Australian community leadership programs that align with the Manners and Durkin (2000) framework facilitate shifts in consciousness development?

  - Statistically significant difference in the difference between the consciousness stage of participants at program exit and program entry for the three groups: $F_{(2, 332)} = 14.66$, $p < .0001$, eta squared = .08.

  - Post hoc comparisons showed that the mean difference score for the CLP1 group was significantly greater than the CLP2 group and controls (the latter did not differ significantly from each other).

  - The mean increase in consciousness stage from program entry to program exit represented just over a third of a stage for the CLP1 group. In contrast, the CLP2 group and controls showed no increase in consciousness at program exit.

Results contd...

- CLP1 and CLP2 did not differ statistically in terms of the number of shifts up from Diplomat (100% in both groups) and up from Expert (68.7% in CLP1 and 50% in CLP2)

- In CLP1, 29.3% of participants rated at Achiever stage on program entry had shifted up a stage (or more) on exit, compared with 7.3% in the CLP2 and 12.5% in the control group.

- There was a statistically significant difference in exit-entry consciousness level for the three Achiever groups: $F(2, 225) = 14.33$, $p < .0001$, eta squared = .11 (medium).

- Post hoc comparisons indicated that CLP1 ($M = .29$, $SD = .53$) was significantly higher than CLP2 ($M = -.13$, $SD = .51$) and the control group ($M = -.06$, $SD = .57$). The latter did not differ significantly.

Conclusions

- Reinforced the finding from one previous study that MBTI Intuition associated with higher consciousness development

- Found something that has not been demonstrated before - those with a preference for Intuition were more likely than Sensing types to have increased a consciousness stage at the end of a leadership development program

- Although Intuitive types have a modest advantage, in general MBTI personality preferences don't appear to be major influence in consciousness development – at least in mature aspiring community leaders

- The research also supports Manners' and Durkin's (2000) framework for interventions designed to promote consciousness development

Reference and contact details

- Part of the results of this research have been published – see:

    Vincent, N., Ward, L. & Denson, L. (2013). Personality preferences and their relationship to ego development. *Journal of Adult Development.*

- Contact me at:

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