Stages of Adult Development (Forms of Mind)

The work of Robert Kegan proposes four stages of adult development, referred to by Jennifer Garvey Berger as Forms of Mind. These are *Self-Sovereign, Socialising, Self-Authored*, and *Self-Transforming*. The least developed is self-sovereign, while the most fully developed is self-transforming.

In relation to leadership, the logic of this model is that the best leaders are self-authored or even self-transforming. This is because as the leadership role becomes more complex (such as with larger and more diffuse organisations) the leader requires capacities for longer range strategic thinking, engagement with a more complex array of stakeholders, capacity to manage the reducing link between actions and outcomes, and the ability to take multiple perspectives that is not sufficiently developed in people with predominantly self-sovereign and socialising forms of mind.

To this end, professional development and coaching of leaders should be designed to respect the participant's current form of mind, while also opening the door to development to the higher forms.

The attached tables describes the attributes and learning opportunities for leaders with the various forms of mind as described in Garvey Berger's book *Changing on the Job: Developing Leaders for a Complex World* (2012).

It is likely that the demands of leadership will vary according to the context, organisational culture and challenges of the role. For this reason it is also likely that leaders who exhibit the various forms of mind will enjoy a close fit with a particular leadership role when their form of mind matches the characteristics of that role. For example, a prison superintendent is likely to manage their leadership role quite effectively even with a self-sovereign or socialised form of mind. On the other hand, the CEO of a multinational welfare organisation may be best served by a self-authoring or self-transforming form of mind.

Of course, as Cynthia Banham (2008) has pointed out, leadership has little to do with rank. Ethical leadership can be exercised from any level in an organisation, group or family. What's required is that the person exercising leadership has a set of internalised values and beliefs and the moral courage to act on them: the willingness to speak the truth when others in more senior or powerful roles may not want to hear it.

Such ethical leadership is typical behaviour for self-authored adults but is usually out of reach of those with socialized forms of mind, because they too greatly value the good opinion of those more senior or more powerful to speak out, or may become confused that there are other perspectives that are different from that of the more senior or more powerful person. Self-transforming adults, on the other hand, will not be certain about the existence of one truth, and will seek solutions that take into account the uniqueness of this situation as it relates to generalisations and patterns seen in many similar situations. A truth may emerge for them that works in this particular situation.

The starting point for any coaching engagement is increased clarity for the coachee around self-awareness. This model provides a powerful insight into the readiness of a coachee to take on a complex leadership role. It also provides guidance on how that participant may develop their form of mind to better equip them to manage the ambiguity, complexity, abstractness and resilience required to be successful as a leader.

Forms of Mind in the Population

In terms of population distribution, around 10-15% of adults have a self-sovereign form of mind, although it is likely to be more common amongst the young. Despite the discussion above about suitability for leadership roles, some senior leaders are able to progress and function effectively (although across a narrow range of competencies) with a self-sovereign form of mind. They have usually advance to a senior position because of high intelligence or strong technical skills or because of the ability to bring clarity and certainty to what needs to happen next.

Those who are supervised by a leader with a self-sovereign form of mind have the advantage of clarity and certainty, but the disadvantage of a lack of nuance, empathy and flexibility of thinking. Abstract thought and other people's perspectives are foreign to such leaders. Senior staff who supervise leaders

with a self-sovereign form of mind are able to motivate them using extrinsic rewards and sanctions, provided these are framed by self-interest.

Perhaps 45% of all adults exhibit a socialising form of mind. In terms of leadership they are typically very loyal to the organisation's mission and culture, and judge success by external standards such as KPIs or their superior's opinion. Success might also be seen as the extent to which they achieve the requirements of their PD. Coachees with a socialising form of mind are often particularly responsive to coaching because of their capacity to take other perspectives and their likely openness to the possibilities of moving on from the values, principles and standards of others to a more internalised values compass.

Staff who are supervised by a leader with a socialising form of mind have the advantage of knowing that a range of perspectives will be considered, but the disadvantage that decisions will be made based on the group/organisation/role's values and standards. The leader may appear inauthentic, inflexible or uncertain, especially when those values or standards should be challenged or may be inadequate for the situation. The management of a leader with a socialising form of mind may rely on appeals to organisational loyalty, cultural expectations, or adherence to the stated expectations of the role or mission of the organisation.

A further 45% of the population have developed a self-authored form of mind. These leaders have developed the capacity to weigh the perspectives of others with their own internalised values, principles or standards and to make decisions from a balanced point of view. Their perception of the right thing to do comes from an internalised value system wherein they are able to take unpopular decisions with authenticity. They manage ambiguity and abstract ideas through an appreciation that every situation is different and that they can rely on their own judgement.

Staff who are managed by a leader with a self-authored form of mind have the advantage of a leader who takes responsibility for, and exhibits flexibility and authenticity in decision-making, but the disadvantage of not having an obvious external framework of values, principles and standards against which to anticipate decisions. Supervisors of a leader with a self-authored form of mind will wish to gain an understanding of the leader's decision-making frame, but will benefit from giving the leader the scope to make decisions without the imposition of rigid or excessive rules, standards or organisational expectations.

Perhaps less that 2% of the population have a self-transforming form of mind. Such leaders appreciate the limitations of a self-authored form of mind and constantly seek to grow their understanding through experiencing the unknown and through questioning their assumptions. They seek the positive in negative situations and the negative in successes. The a self-transforming form of mind is especially suited to understanding emerging challenges for which there have been no previous answers. They realise that wisdom comes from an appreciation of the importance of what is unknown. They are able to see connections that are not apparent to others. They know that the solutions to the great challenges facing human kind cannot be solved using the levels of thinking that created them.

Staff who are supervised by a leader with a self-transforming form of mind will have the advantage of being inspired by an awesome thinker, but the disadvantage of often not knowing where the ideas and decisions are coming from. The supervision of such a leader will likely involve presenting them with complex and challenging problems and projects.

Steps for Uncovering Forms of Mind

What do you do?	Why is this a help?
Step 1: Look for key issues: responsibility, conflict, perspective-taking, and assumptions about the world	Each of these issues is likely a place where someone has energy and interest to push her understanding to the edges. These issues are also stories where structure is most apparent.
Step 2: Narrow the choices	Every time you begin to ask questions to help you understand someone's form of mind, you should keep an open mind and assume that this person could be self-sovereign, self-transforming, or anywhere in between. After a few questions, though, you will likely have enough data to begin to eliminate certain forms of mind and test for others.
Step 3: Moving to the edge: most, least, best, worst	Because the forms of mind are cumulative, each person who is self-authored also has some piece of her that is socialized and some piece that is self-sovereign. This means that unless you help her move to the edge of her understanding, you cannot know whether the socialized part you are seeing represents her greatest level of complexity.
Step 4: Ask the same question in a new way to go deeper.	People tend to answer questions believing that they are being asked for more story. Generally it is the second or third of the moving-to-the-edges kind of question that actually moves away from the story and into meaning-making space.

Questions to ask to test particular Forms of Mind

Form of Mind	Questions to ask to explore meaning-making
Self-sovereign	How much do I focus on the benefits to and impacts on myself without taking other people into account? Can I imagine what others might be thinking or feeling about this situation, even when those others are quite different from me or they might believe I'm wrong.
Socialised	How much of my answer is about how I think others will perceive me and what I think others will think I should do? How much do the opinions of others shape my opinion of myself? How much am I searching for The Right Answer or attempting to judge myself against some external standard instead of creating the answer and the standard for myself? Who do I think I might be if others are disappointed in me or if I did not follow the rules or guidance of theories or role-imagers that were centrally important to me.
Self-authored	How much of my answer is driven by my own sense of what I think is best in the world, regardless of how others might see me or react? How much am I equating *who I am* with my own ideology as it is lived out? Who do I think I might be if I didn't live up to my own standards? What would that mean for how I know and understand myself?
Self-transforming	How much of the entire picture am I seeing here, versus how much of my own perspective am I locked inside? When I try to look at my own situation from multiple angles, how easy is it? Do I sense the positive inside the negative and the negative inside the positive inside my story? Am I finding it hard to see my life as straightforward, to see things as particularly good or particularly bad, but rather simply the way that life is for me and thus is interesting and rich?

Coaching Approaches

Form of Mind	Key Characteristics	Coaching Interventions
Self-sovereign	• Clarity of purpose and self-interest. • Lack of perspective-taking and empathy. • Little or no sense of psychological functioning or of abstract concepts. • Can be resistant to coaching if it seems too psychological.	• Listen without judgment • Attack the tactical (skills coaching) • Grow the capacity to take perspectives of others and see a picture bigger than themselves. This may seem overwhelming and unfair at times. • Change your mind before trying to change others
Socialised	• Devotion to causes bigger than himself. • Lack of capacity to decide between important others or competing ideas in which he is embedded. • Sense of self comes from others or from the coachee's role. • People can either seem powerless to change themselves or can seem to take on too much responsibility, thinking they can solve everything.	• Live own values and ideals authentically • Question authorities • Write definitions (e.g., success) • Focus on authorship (write your own narrative) • He may feel over his head in, or ill-suited to the leadership role.
Self-authored	• Strength of commitment to self-authored ideals and values. • Sense of self internally created. • Depending on where in the self-authored trajectory, she could be tightly defending boundaries or loosening them to include other perspectives, principles, or values in her thinking. • May lack the capacity to get outside own commitments and perspectives and see the ways a well-reasoned idea might be wrong	• Develop understanding that we *are* our values and principles. Certainties come from our "lines in the sand". • Explore the limitations of these certainties. • Explore dichotomies and polarities (look for shades of grey) • Uncover assumptions • Seek wise mentors and thinking partners
Self-transforming	• Openness to new perspectives • Constant interest in learning • Ability to see nuances • Untroubled by complexity • May lack the ability *not* to see patterns • Difficulty remembering that seeing the world this way is unusual	• Seeing the world from this form of mind can seem lonely. She may appreciate good company and deep listening.

How to Encourage Adult Development

Whether it's in the workplace or in other developmental settings, Garvey Berger suggests three habits that, if practiced regularly, will support the development of adults through the stages described above.

These habits are most likely to become part of the organisational culture when leaders model openness and growth that is similar to the learning organisation concept advocated by Peter Senge. Senge described a learning organisation as *an organisation that is continually expanding its capacity to create its own future*.

Garvey Berger's model holds that the continual expansion of an organisation's capacity to decide its own future is dependent on the readiness and ability of the organisation to grow its leaders through the stages of adult development to the self-authored and self transforming levels.

The three habits are:

1. Asking different questions;
2. Taking multiple perspectives; and
3. Seeing the system

Asking Different Questions

To encourage adult development, leaders ask questions in a way that increases the respondent's capacity to learn and, in particular, to take other perspectives on the situation.

This is consistent with Don Dunoon's (2008) concept of learning-centered leadership, in which the questioner seeks to support joint sense making by leaving open the possibility that there are other ways of seeing the problem or situation, and that the question and answer process increases the awareness of both the questioner and the respondent. This interaction leads to a better outcome than if there is an assumption in the questioner's questions that the questioner already has the answer, or is a font of greater knowledge.

This mindset and approach is also consistent with Stephen Covey's fifth habit: *Seek first to understand, then to be understood*. Asking questions in such a way is also the fundamental skill in giving effective feedback.

Taking Multiple Perspectives

Leaders (and others) have a key role in remaining open to a wider range of possibilities, to empathize, make deep connections, and understand the views of others. A key effect of this habit, once entrenched, is that others see the leader as open, and become comfortable in bringing forward perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked, ignored, or dismissed. The natural human tendency is to see only those perspectives that support our own view, especially from a self-sovereign or socialized form of mind. Taking multiple perspectives as a routine practice, is itself developmental, pushing the leader towards higher forms of mind.

This habit can be practiced using group activities in which a range of viewpoints are possible in relation to an ambiguous or abstract situation or challenge.

Seeing the System

Leaders and others that easily see systems are able to identify linkages between situations, people, opportunities, threats and risks that are frequently missed by those with predominantly self-sovereign or socialized forms of mind.

Systems are patterns, recurrent similarities and differences, connections, trends, habits, cultural mores, assumptions, procedures, local arrangements, conventions, and agreed approaches. These can be formal and obvious or subtle and unwritten. Sometimes the most insidious of such systems are those that have evolved in contravention of a formal agreement, rule, policy or law. They are often unseen by those that use them. Being aware of such systems is a key developmental capability, as it takes the ability to step back from a situation to see the systems that are in action. This capacity to objectify systems (rather than being a subject of them) is often beyond those with predominantly self-sovereign or socialized forms of mind.

One way of encouraging staff to see systems is to map situations using tools like the SWAT and PESTLE analysis.

Form of Mind	Classic Questions They Ask	Strengths	Blind Spots	Areas for Growth
Self-Sovereign	• What's in it for me? • What are others doing that will affect me? • Who is in charge and enforcing things here? • What are the rewards and consequences regarding standards?	When a straightforward job is important, the person with a self-sovereign form of mind is in her element. She is great when there are clear images of right and wrong, good and bad, that can be reinforced through external rewards and rules. She sees a direct connection between external rewards and external results. Linking salary to productivity is likely to be a key incentive.	Unable to take the perspective of other people or be influenced by abstraction. Does not have an orientation towards her own (or anyone else's) inner psychological world. Cannot understand the subtleties of human interaction. Lives in a world with only two choices for every decision: us and them; right and wrong; what I want and what others want. Likely to follow rules provided they are in her own best interest rather than from loyalty or duty.	Learn to understand (and internalise) the perspectives of others. Happens gradually as she begins to understand the connections between herself and others, and begins to want to affiliate with those she considers most important.
Socialising	• What will others say? • How will this change my standing in my group/role? • Is this appropriate given my role or experience? • Am I doing the right thing? • Are others doing the right thing?	His strength is his ability to take on the expectations of others for good performance. He can be reflective about the issues and perhaps name and value the perspectives of others. He is loyal to the idea, group, or organisation with whom he identifies – so loyal that he subordinates his own interests to the interests of the group/idea.	Lacks the ability to untangle divergent perspectives or resolve conflicting points of view. He cannot mediate between the perspectives of important others. Similarly, he cannot yet mediate between his own internally competing identifications, so that when his role as *Good Son* conflicts with his role as *Good Employee*, he is likely to feel stuck and unable to find an appropriate course of action.	As he moves towards self-authored form of mind, he will benefit from opportunities to move away from external theories or rules of leadership and to reflect on overarching principles and values that can help him to resolve the conflicting perspectives of others. He will grow to see that no one theory, group, or organisation is infallible, and her will develop a more individual and nuanced set of beliefs and loyalties.
Self-Authored	• How does this forward my bigger goals/values? • What are others contributing? With whom do I need to cooperate? • How do I know that this is the right thing for me? • By what standard do I judge my success? • Is it within my scope to do this? • How can I interact with others on this?	She is likely to have a clear sense of personal mission that can be extended to the organisational realm. Similarly, she has the ability to hold onto many different perspectives and to make an informed decision that takes competing perspectives into account but is driven by their own sense of mission or values.	Can have an attachment to her own mission that can become inflexible. May also have trouble dealing with the more complex situations, such as cross-cultural or cross-functional leadership, or any tasks that require her to examine and genuinely question her own system of values and principles.	She will benefit from seeing the way her personal theories and practices of leadership are limited and expanding her images to include other – even competing – theories and practices.
Self-Transforming	• What can I learn from this? • What assumptions underpin my actions or opinions, and those of others? • How do I work with others to shape or re-shape this issue? How does it re-shape us? • What is lost if I succeed? What is gained if I fail?	His greatest strength is his ability to see connections everywhere. He is able to look at an issue and see the ways that the different perspectives overlap.	Because we don't know of a form of mind beyond the self-transforming, it is hard to know what his individual blind spots are. What is clear is that because this form of mind is so rare, these people have few peers who make meaning in similar ways. It also may be difficult for those who see the world through other forms of mind to fully understand this person's perspective, so his ideas may feel overwhelming, confusing, or just wrong.	Those with this form of mind are constantly working to grow, to question their own assumptions, to understand and cope with greater and greater amounts of complexity. Because of this, the world is a constant source of growth.

Form of Mind	The Perspective they Typically Take	Orientation to Authority	When Your Perspective Agrees with Mine	When Your Perspective Disagrees with Mine
Self-Sovereign	The only perspective is my own. All other perspectives are mysterious. I can only get to make a guess at them from what I see.	Authority is found in rules and regulations. When two external authorities disagree, it can be frustrating, but not internally problematic	You have the right values and perspective. You see clearly and you put the facts together appropriately.	You are either with me or against me. If you are against me, you are incorrect, and not seeing things with a logical/moral/correct perspective. Because this shows a flaw in you, it seems unlikely to me that I will find common ground with you on anything.
Socialising	I take on and become embedded in the perspectives of other people, theories, organisations, religions, my role. When I see the world, judging right from wrong, good from bad, I do so through these other perspectives.	Authority is in an internalised value, principle or role that comes from outside herself. When these important values/principles/roles conflict she feels an internal tearing, as if parts of herself were pitted against one another.	You are "one of us". If you share my beliefs about this issue it is likely that you will share my beliefs about other things that are important to "us".	You are one of "them", and perhaps could become one of "us" in time if you changed your actions. There might be some ways we agree, and, depending on how vital this issue is to me, I might be interested in finding common ground.
Self-Authored	I can take multiple perspectives while maintaining my own. I can understand the views and opinions of others and often use these to strengthen my own arguments or set of principles	Authority is found in the self. The self-authored system determines individual's rules and regulations for himself. When others disagree it can be inv=convenient or unpleasant but is not internally wrenching. (When one internal value disagrees with another, this can cause internal tearing).	You and I share a perspective on this – which does not necessarily mean that we will share perspectives on future issues.	I seek to understand your reason for holding a different opinion because often it is people who disagree with me who help me hone and shape my argument the most. I can judge – and perhaps admire – you logic irrespective of your views on this one issue.
Transforming	Such a person sees and understands the perspectives of others and uses those perspectives to continuously transform her own system, becoming more expansive and more inclusive. She does not use the perspectives of others to fine tune her own argument or principles, but puts the whole system at risk for change with each interaction with others.	Authority is fluid and shared, and is not located in any particular person or job. Rather, authority comes from the combination of the situation and the people in the situation. A new situation (or different players) may cause a shift on where authority is located.	You and I agree on this issue, but my guess is that we probably have a whole different sense that we make of the issue and we probably agree for a variety of interestingly distinct reasons. I'm curious about the differences in why we might agree about this.	I am interested in all views on all issues because they push my thinking around and help me learn. Your disagreeing view, might change the way I think about my own opinion, adding nuance and complexity. I recognize, in fact, that the only reason I can even hold one perspective strongly is because someone else holds the opposite perspective strongly – that in some ways, your opposite perspective creates and enables mine.

References

Banham C (2008) *Leadership has Little to do with Rank*. Sydney Morning Herald. 9 August.

Covey S (2004) *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. Free Press

Dunoon D (2008) *In the Leadership Mode. Concepts, Practices, and Tools for a Different Leadership*. Trafford

Garvey Berger J (2012) *Changing on the Job. Developing Leaders for a Complex World* Stanford Business Books

Senge P (1990) *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* Random House