

## Volume 1 of *Measuring Hidden Dimensions*, Chapter 11 [revised 2019] Developmental Issues of Team Dynamics

### Otto Laske

So far in this book I have focused on the developmental profile of individuals. The reader will surely wonder whether any new information and insight emerges once one considers an entire team in terms of developmental stage scores and their associated Risk-Clarity-Potential Indexes (RCP's). Of course, team assessment leads to an aggregation of individuals' data. Given that computations would need to be made of team members' center of gravity (CoG) associated with RCPs, they are likely lead to complex statistical issues (as is shown Chapter 11 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of MHD by Alan Snow of 2017 (see bibliography). However, in this chapter we will keep things more intuitive and practical.

It has become very clear over the last 20 years, especially in my own cognitive research and teaching, that social-emotional findings are intrinsically linked to cognitive ones by which they may indeed strongly be influenced. This finding has so far attracted no attention from researchers simply because they have never investigated complex thinking in the sense of dialectical thinking. On account of this, working with teams from an exclusively social-emotional point of view, of meaning making, is insufficient. Nevertheless, establishing a purely social-emotional team typology (as I did in 2005), shown below, is a first step to understanding teams at a deeper level. (For delving into cognitive development, see Laske 2008 & 2015).

In light of Edgar Schein's research it makes good sense, when focusing on teams, to distinguish between two different team processes: (1) the team's *interpersonal* process which regards how team members internally position themselves toward their adult peers, and (2) the team's *task* process which regards "getting the work done efficiently and effectively". The hypothesis in this chapter is that a competent team is one that achieves a balance between both processes, none of them overwhelming the other. But this is an accomplishment rarely seen in the real world.

In such a balanced team, issues of bonding and mutual understanding would be treated on a par with pursuing and realizing the team's agenda, -- fulfilling the function it was created for. The research issue here is what, in terms of developmental scores, would such a balance look like, and how would it differ from one level of work complexity to another. (For the notion of *level of work complexity*, see Jan De Visch & Otto Laske, 2018).

For simplicity sake, the social-emotional team typology presented below regards a group of individuals as team members solely in terms of their Centers of Gravity (CoG), not their RCPs. Since teams whose members are all at the same CoG are exceedingly rare, if not non-existent, the typology pays primary attention to developmentally diverse teams, asking: what is the meaning-making structure of such teams, and what predictions about success and failure of team collaboration can one formulate once a team's social-emotional structure has become known through assessment?

### Social-Emotional Team Typology

It is of interest to understand how it would work out if the individuals we discussed in this book would be asked to work together as a team. Together, they constitute a good example of what real-world teams look like. Our team represents with the following developmental profiles:

1. Rick: **S-4(5)** {4:7:4}
2. Bob: **S-4(3)** {3:5:7}
3. Sarah: **S-4(3)** {3:7:5}
4. Katherine **S-4/3** {2:5:8}
5. Sam (CEO) **S-4/3** {5:6:4}

What, on account of CoG alone, can we say about the dynamics of this team, disregarding team members' RCP, their cognitive scores, as well as their psychological profile?

Since psychological data points to no more than symptoms, they are the least critical to consider here. Harder to work without are team members' cognitive scores since they are intrinsically linked to social-emotional ones and even determine them. What we see right away, in terms of team members' CoG is that the 5-person team presented above comprises two individuals at S-4/3, two at S-4(3), and one at S-4(5). This points to what in the typology below is called a 'downwardly divided T-3 Team'.

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It is a useful exercise following E. Schein (1999, 149), to formulate hypotheses about how a team's *interpersonal process* (which is primarily social-emotional) relates to its *task process* (which is primarily cognitive). The main notion is that wherever a team's task process becomes subordinate to its interpersonal one, the team following a 'downward' tendency by which it tends to sabotage its mission. From this vantage point the issue becomes: what makes a specific team prone to sabotaging its task process because it is focusing on its interpersonal process beyond reasonable limits?

The risk in a team doing so should be clear. As we have shown throughout the book, each developmental position is not just a momentary mental state. Rather, it establishes the ground for a person's comprehensive *world view* and comes with its own psychology attached, complete with desires, needs, degrees of accountability, self-concept, self-doubts, and so forth. Taking into account that every social-emotional stage gives rise to a specific world view, the total range of stages comprised by a team – in the case above, 5, reaching from S-3/4 to S-4(5) – crucially matters: is the majority of the team made up of higher or lower social-emotional levels? If lower levels prevail, can the team be expected to follow its higher developed minority members in charting a coherent course of action? What kind of coaching is required to enable the team to do so? What would need to be the competences of the coach to be helpful to the team? How would coaches have to be educated to become capable developmental team coaches?

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As shown in Fig. 11.1, below, a social-emotional team typology defined in terms of its members' CoG groups together two adjacent main stages such as S-2, such that their intermediate stages -- 2(3); 2/3; 3/2; and 3(2) for S-2 -- remain implicit. This procedure amounts to distinguishing between three very different team processes: those of (1) S-2+3 [low-level meaning making], (2) S-3+4 [moderately mature

meaning making], and (3) S-4+5 [high-level meaning making], where each consecutive team is social-emotionally more mature.

In its columns, Fig. 11 presents three configurational types of a team:

1. *Unified* (e.g., a T-2, T-3, T-4, or T-5 team).
2. *Downwardly divided* (e.g., S-2 > S-3, in which the team majority resides at S-2)
3. *Upwardly divided* (e.g., S-2 < S-3, where the team majority resides at S-3).

|                          | <b><u>T-2 Team</u></b>                                                                                                                 | <b><u>T-3 Team</u></b>               | <b><u>T-4 Team</u></b>             | <b><u>T-5 Team</u></b>          |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                          | <b>Instrumental theory-in-use</b>                                                                                                      | <b>Other-dependent theory-in-use</b> | <b>Self-authored theory-in-use</b> | <b>Self-aware theory-in-use</b> |
| <b>Key</b>               | <b><i>The first integer refers to the stage at which the group's majority resides; the second is the stage the minority is at.</i></b> |                                      |                                    |                                 |
| Unified Teams            | 2=2                                                                                                                                    | 3=3                                  | 4=4                                | 5=5                             |
| Downwardly-divided Teams | 2>3                                                                                                                                    | 3>4                                  | 4>5                                |                                 |
| Upwardly-divided Teams   | 3>2                                                                                                                                    | 4>3                                  | 5>4                                |                                 |

**Table 11.1. Social-Emotional Team Typology**

Unified teams are those rare teams without either a developmentally differentiated majority or minority. In such teams, all members' developmental level falls around a single stage. More frequent are divided teams comprising a clear developmental majority and minority.

An *downwardly divided* team (e.g., S-2>3) comprises a majority of team members at **lower** levels (around S-2), and a minority at higher levels (around S-3). In such a case, the team is developmentally "bottom-" rather than "top-" heavy.

For instance, if, in a team of five, a majority of four members resides at levels lower than the minority of one, as in the team outlined above, the team is said to be *downwardly divided*, tending, in its practice, toward self-sabotage expressed by characteristics such as (a) narrowing the team agenda to interpersonal issues, (b) conceptually reducing the breadth of vision and thinking in the team, and, as a result, (3) disturbing the balance between "who we are" and "what is our task".

The opposite holds regarding *upwardly* divided teams (e.g., S-3>2), where the team majority resides closer to the **higher** level (S-3) than the lower one (S-2).

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In order to school ourselves in assessing teams in terms of their CoG alone and drawing the consequences of what we find empirically rather than by guesswork, let's look a little more closely at the table below which formulates *predictions* for each type of team generated by the typology.

### Predictions for each type of team

| Team Type                       | Prediction Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T-2=2                           | <u>Unified T-2 team</u> : Team united by an opportunistic strategy, but barely more than a "group" since members' instrumental objectives hinder consensual action. Fragility of the team due to lack of shared goals. No coherent task process. No leadership.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| T-2>3                           | <u>Downwardly divided T-2 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-2, a minority closer to S-3. The majority's instrumental theory in use outweighs minority strivings toward consensual action. The goals espoused are not truly shared. Argyris's Model-I self-sealing processes are the rule (see bibliography). Dominance of interpersonal over task process. Temporary and inconsistent leadership.                                        |
| T-3>2                           | <u>Upwardly divided T-3 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-3, a minority closer to S-2. The majority's shared context and consensus is weakened or openly opposed by the minority's special interests. Majority consensus postures as "leadership." Task process is chaotic, overrun by interpersonal process which is marked by projection of self on others.                                                                            |
| T-3=3                           | <u>Unified T-3 team</u> : Strongly consensual group without leader, unable to transcend itself through principled action. Interpersonal process absorbs task process. Leadership, if existent, is limited to carrying out group consensus (with a largely managerial rather than leadership focus).                                                                                                                                             |
| T-3>4<br>[the<br>team<br>above] | <u>Downwardly divided T-3 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-3, a minority closer to S-4 (or slightly beyond). Team with a leadership potential groping for a unified mission but remaining open to power dynamics. Leadership is fragile since exerted by minority member(s) who are potentially without power and support. Task process is largely determined by interpersonal process, thus at risk for sabotage by special interests. |
| T-4>3                           | <u>Upwardly divided T-4 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-4, a minority closer to S-3. Team defined by a hierarchical profile. Those members who define guidelines beyond shared context are responded to as authorities to follow. Task process is becoming nearly independent of interpersonal process and may even weaken or neglect the latter.                                                                                      |
| T-4=4                           | <u>Unified T-4 team</u> : Status- and expertise-based team with respectful competition between different ideological systems. The team favors hierarchical ("top down")                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|       | solutions, unable to stand back from its own governing variables of action. Risk of espousal dominating theory-in-use (Argyris). Resistance to consensual work, since members prefer to “go it alone,” following their own value system. Divided or competing task processes risking discordance in team networks.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| T-4>5 | <u>Downwardly divided T-4 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-4, a minority closer to S-5. The team minority is able to set transformational goals and exert leadership, but the majority is afraid of opening flood gates to personal sharing, resisting leadership as potentially self-threatening. Leader may use interpersonal process to advance task process, but his or her hold on the team is a fragile one. Need for support of the leader, and for dealing with majority defenses (Argyris’ Model-I). |
| T-5>4 | <u>Upwardly divided T-5 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-5, a minority closer to S-4. Team focused on self-transformation by members empowering each other as midwives of reciprocal development. Focus on how to strengthen self-transformation without dismantling authority, by scrutinizing one’s own governing variables of action. Interpersonal process absorbed into, and balanced with, task process. Exceedingly rare.                                                                              |
| T-5=5 | <u>Unified T-5 team</u> : Ideal but ‘too good to be true’. Complete equilibrium of task and interpersonal process, where mutual self-transformation leads to consensual leadership, as in friendship. Performance risk: task process may get subordinated to transpersonal goals of team members. Team is ideal for philanthropy.                                                                                                                                                                                     |

**Table 11.2. Developmental Typology of Teams interpreted**

Two main contrasts are embedded in the above typology, that between:

1. (Political) power and level of self-awareness
2. Task and interpersonal process.

The first contrast is one between actual power in a team and the balance of that power with the level of members’ self-awareness. Clearly, where power strivings or exertions outdo manifestations of self-awareness, important critical and reflective processes get cancelled in favor of brute force action and hyperactivity as well as a reduction of the team agenda’s scope.

The second contrast is between what gets done (effectiveness) and how it gets done (Schein, 1999, 146 f.). As the reader will have noticed, in most teams listed above the two processes are not equilibrated. Only where team majority is beyond S-4(5) is there a reasonable chance that interpersonal and task process can be balanced.

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Let us now for a moment focus on the team stepwise put together in this book and presented at the beginning of the chapter. What predictions about it can we make in the absence of cognitive and

psychological scores but inclusion of team members' RCP? The table above only provides a very general characterization of the team.

Most of our team members reside at S-3 while a single team member scores beyond S-4 [Rick]. Following the typology introduced, the following characteristics can be named:

- *Team without a unified mission.*
- *Team leadership is fragile since exerted by a very small minority.*
- *Task process is largely determined by interpersonal process, thus risks being sabotaged.*

A more behavioral characterization of this team stems from team member Rick, the CFO we discussed in Chapter 10, of whom was reported: Rick has a strong personal relationship with CEO Sam, but is often at loggerheads with the rest of the executive team. Rick has been accused by his peers of being "too close" to the CEO in terms of secret schemes the two are pursuing without knowledge of the rest of the team. Because of this, Rick has decided to work on the dynamics he seems to set up in the team, and on ways to smooth ruffled feathers. When we consider the dynamic of Rick's downwardly divided T-3 team, we begin to understand his issues, as well as his close association with Sam, the CEO. Here is what seems to be happening.

Psychological temperament and behavioral issues deriving from it aside, Rick is clearly the highest developed member of the team. This means that other team members can only vaguely 'intuit' what it feels like to look at the world as he does. For lack of Rick's frame of reference, it is impossible for them, spiritual leanings aside, to understand his effort, to step outside of his own ideological system of S-4(5), toward S-4/5.

In this situation, Rick may feel that support by a politically powerful team member, like the CEO, is helpful not only to him but the team as a whole. Although Sam's CoG stretches all the way to S-3/4, in his best moments and supported by Rick, he reaches an espoused self-authoring stance (S-4(3)) which, combined with his power as CEO, can sway decisions in the direction Rick judges best to follow.

Aside from their personal relationship, Sam and Rick therefore often form a club [of two] *for structural developmental reasons*; they are understandably and predictably suspected by the rest of the team to be secretive and follow dubious schemes. (It is hard to say to what extent the secrecy observed by team members derives from their lack of grasp of higher developmental levels, and to what extent it is rooted in Rick's and Sam's behavior.)

Based this analysis, what are we to think of what our typology says of our team?

#### **Downwardly divided T-3 team: T-3>4**

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| T-3>4<br>['our team'] | <u>Downwardly divided T-3 team</u> : Most team members reside at S-3, a minority closer to S-4 (or slightly beyond). Team with a leadership potential groping for a unified mission but remaining open to power dynamics. Leadership is fragile since exerted by minority member(s) who are potentially without power and support. Task process is largely determined by interpersonal process, thus at risk for sabotage by special interests. |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Our typology permits making the following predictions:

- We are dealing with a group more than a team; it is a group with a confused leadership potential since those in power are less developed than others in the team.
- A clearly articulated S-4 position, of self-authoring, is glaringly absent.
- Followership is fragile since higher developed minority member(s) find it hard to hinder the task process from becoming overwhelmed by the team's interpersonal process.
- The quality of team dialogue, in strictly social-emotional (rather than cognitive) terms, suffers from the majority's lack of awareness of their other-dependency on team members who function as their internalized own others.

What is a team to do in which four members (Rick, Sarah, Bob, Katherine) have leadership potential, and in which the official leader (Sam) finds it hard to assume a leadership position? Since S-4 principled action does not define the team's dynamics, its interpersonal process is always ready to overwhelm the team's task process where the real work should get done.

In cases where Sam and Rick diverge, leadership is almost entirely suspended, except if consensus on the side of Bob, Katherine, and Sarah strengthens Rick (or Sam) in his pursuits. When Sam and Rick join hands, they alienate the remainder of the team, and the heaviest blows come down on Rick who therefore speaks of 'wearing himself out'.

Without an explicit assessment of team members, pitfalls of team functioning are hard to avoid. Evidently, it pays off to obtain a differentiated social-emotional analysis of a team, not to speak of acquiring knowledge of its cognitive-developmental scores. With such assessment findings, merely behavioral findings such as delivered, e.g., by an MBTI, can be transcended if not also explicated and differentiated as to their practical meaning for how the team functions in real time.

### **Team Coaching: From Coaching to Critical Facilitation**

We live in a time when team coaching increasingly supersedes individual coaching. Teams and networks of teams define the organizational landscape more than ever. Developmental diversity in teams, as exemplified by the social-emotional typology above, has become a major stumbling block for companies on their way from a top-down command hierarchy to a networked, deliberately developmental, organization (De Visch & Laske, 2018; 2020). In such companies, the question of how to coach teams assumes strategic and structural significance, that of managing developmental diversity organization-wide. Thought through further, developmental diversity of human resources leads to a redefinition of coaching, in the sense that social-emotional coaching in and by itself no longer suffices. What is needed is the inclusion, in coaching and coach education, of competences that help advance and strengthen coaches' own cognitive development, not only for coaches' but for their clients' sake. This holds true especially since developmentally, coaches are in no way beyond and 'other than' clients. Just as their clients, they are subject to rather than in control of their adult development.

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A brief way of clarifying what is meant for coaches to take the issue of developmental diversity seriously would be to say that “coaches need to become *critical facilitators*”. The change of terms indicates a different, broader focus than that of conventional (behavioral), and even of social-emotional, coaching. The topic in question for coaches is: “at what level of complexity do members of this team think?”. For coaches, it entails the question: “what means do I have to assess the complexity of team members’ thinking (i.e., sense making)?” Answering these questions is important because team members’ thinking informs the quality of their dialogue with themselves as well as with each other, and it is the quality of a team’s dialogue that determines both the quality and dynamics of collaboration in teams, the coherence of teams’ decision making relative to the entire organization, and in the end, the chances of a company’s survival in the market.

The transition from behavioral coaching to critical facilitation based on adult-developmental research can best be described as one from coaching to *developmental process consultation*, a notion we introduced at the beginning of this book. The notion of coaching as process consultation is that of a consultation to clients’ *mental process*, not behavior, especially the cognitive process. Developmental coaches work on changing clients’ *frame of reference*, the way clients construct what is ‘real’ for them in the world, and in this way *indirectly* their behavior as well, which derives from their frame of reference. The frame of reference manifests as a developmentally – social-emotionally and cognitively – grounded *world view* which determines “how the world shows up” for an adult. And it is with how the world shows up for them that clients primarily engage.

The world shows up for coaches and clients alike according to the developmental level they are presently operating from, and this level is defined by a person’s CoG and RCP social-emotionally, and his/her structure of thinking cognitively. As the reader by now knows, developmental levels are not static but represent an oscillation around a center of gravity. They represent a platform in constant motion between regressive and potential-unfolding tendencies of the mind, which motion is quite different in a profile such as S-4 {5:8:2} compared with S-4 {2:8:5}. In the former case, regressive tendencies predominate (5), while in the latter, potential-unfolding tendencies do (5).

Although research on the link between social-emotional and cognitive development is only in its beginning stages (see the blogs at [www.interdevelopmentals.org](http://www.interdevelopmentals.org)), it is clear to any experienced coach that how a client makes meaning of his experiences and thinks conceptually are closely linked. Since there is nothing a person does that is not filtered through his or her thinking, the need to address the person’s cognitive capability together with that of meaning making is not in dispute. The question rather is: how to educate coaches who are able to address clients’ frame of reference in both of its dimensions, of meaning making and sense making, and what is more, how to educate coaches who are able to switch from social-emotional to cognitive work in real time, just when the client’s or clients’ circumstances demand it?

As is becoming clear to the reader, the move from individual to team coaching necessitates an extension from merely social-emotional to cognitive coaching. Think about it this way. A team’s work comprises two very different processes, what E. Schein has called *interpersonal* in contrast to *task* process. The first process predominantly focuses on meaning making (the topic of this book), while the second focuses predominantly on sense-making, that is, capabilities of complex, ‘dialectical’, thinking (Laske 2015).

In addition, the higher the level of work complexity of an individual client and/or team, the higher is the demand on their, as well as the facilitator’s, thinking. The two go hand in hand. This is so because at



higher levels of work complexity, measured in cognitive terms, a team's (and a facilitator's) task process increasingly guides team members' interpersonal exchange (J. De Visch 2017, 2010). As a result, a coach unschooled in, or deficient in, complex thinking is unable to function as a *critical facilitator* of team collaboration.

The way to such a higher level of coaching competence has been laid out by Laske in volume 2 of *Measuring Hidden Dimensions*, subtitled "Foundations of Requisite Organization" (Laske 2008). According to research reported in that book, a critical facilitator is a practitioner who is an expert in discerning the conceptual structure and quality of team -- and two-party-- dialogue. Such a practitioner knows how to assess a team's cognitive profile through semi-structured interviews. S(he) acts upon the knowledge that what a person is verbally communicating reflects his or her *internal dialogue*, and that the depth of this internal dialogue is grounded in the person's social-emotional as well as cognitive profile that can be cogently assessed empirically.

But what is the 'structure and quality of team dialogue'?

A short answer must suffice here. A true give-and-take dialogue is structured in terms of *concepts*, and these concepts can be traced to what is called *thought-forms*. What makes a thought form different from a single concept is that it intrinsically refers to the *real world* to which human action is oriented; it is not part of a "play on words" but in gathering concepts into conceptual constellations aims for the truth, and thus points to realistic action. An example for a thought form would, for example, be *unceasing change*. This is a notion that can be spelled out in various ways, using many different concepts. Such a thought-form is a higher-level abstraction beyond the level of isolated concepts. Thought-forms form a network so that none of them makes any sense in isolation but only in coordination with other thought-forms.

*Unceasing change* is a worldwide phenomenon that occurs both in the physical and social worlds, and in the world of the mind itself. In the latter, it is a 'mind-opener' whose use transforms a person's or team's thinking. A coaching client or team member who able think of a situation or event in terms of unceasing change is open to taking nothing for granted since taking nothing as absolute; in his or her dialogue with self and others, s(he) can cope with ambiguity. S(he) sees something X that was 'the case' yesterday as most likely being no longer the case today. Such a person is potentially a complex as well as critical thinker who considers the real world as being in flux, open to questions, criticism, and doubt.

It is his or her 'cognitive' stance toward the real world that, based on mastering thought-forms, makes a coach into a critical facilitator. Such a facilitator can help a team stop taking today's situation or events for granted and begin to see relationships heretofore neglected. The facilitator can help team members not to get overwhelmed by their interpersonal process and thereby assist them in meeting task demands requiring complex thinking. A coach turned critical facilitator can invigorate a team's thinking by questioning its scope and depth; s(he) can develop team members to the point where they are ready to deal with the real world, rather than only with conceptual abstractions picked up from outside their own thinking and thoughtlessly adapted to a problem at hand.

## Practice Reflections

- In your work as a consultant or coach, why would it be useful to possess empirical data regarding the developmental range of a team, if not also developmental scores for each of the members of the team?
- Have you ever come upon a developmentally *unified* team in which all members oscillate around the same center of gravity? How would coaching such a team be different from working with a developmentally diverse team as we most often encounter in our work?
- What is your definition of a developmentally *downwardly divided* team?
- How would you describe a developmentally *upwardly divided* team?
- Give an example of a developmentally *upwardly divided* team you have worked with and state the characteristics that made your work productive.
- Give an example of a developmentally *downwardly divided* team and describe the pitfalls you encountered as a coach. What was the relationship of the task process to the interpersonal process in such a team?
- How would you test clients' social-emotional level by using behavioral (psychological) data (e.g., the MBTI), keeping in mind that social-emotional data cannot be reduced to psychological data?
- What is your take on the notion that *personality* is largely a manifestation of developmental level?
- What for you is the challenge in embracing empirical insight into the cognitive development of adults, including your own?
- What behavioral coaching work you have done would seem to you to facilitate your transition to becoming a critical facilitator of teams?

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