

## CHAPTER 29

# Executive Development as Adult Development

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*Few applications of adult development theories to the work  
setting have, in fact, been reported.*

—CYTRYNBAUM & CRITES  
(1989, p. 83)

The human resource function in organizations provides one of four perspectives in which to view human development in the workplace. In the framework conceived by Bolman and Deal (1991), this function gives rise to a perspective intersecting with three related but divergent perspectives the authors call structural, political, and symbolic. While the *human resource* perspective targets the creative potential and the needs of organization members, in a *structural* perspective organizations are seen as centered around a hierarchy or heterarchy of functions of power and control. By contrast, a *political* view sees organizational life as determined by coalitions competing for, and negotiating access to, scarce resources. Finally, the *symbolic* perspective regards organizational culture, a dimension in which values are created and shared that define an organization's *raison d'être* and mission (Schein, 1992).

It is sobering to think that the capacity to capture the complexity of organizations in terms of the four interrelated perspectives named is itself an adult developmental achievement. As shown by the organizational literature, this achievement is not attained by all, or even many, theorists and organization members (Senge, 1990; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999). The fact that the literatures on executive development are bifurcated along either agentic or ontic lines is further testimony of the challenge involved in comprehending organizational reality. How is one to reconcile a focus on meeting the needs of an organizational task environment, that is, the *agentic imperative*, with a focus on the mental growth needs of

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individuals involving the epistemic adequacy of their construction of the world in them and around them, that is, the *ontic imperative*? And especially, how is one to do so under the “new career contract” which postulates that the career that matters is the “internal career,” and that personal development is the worker’s own business, not the responsibility of organizational task environments (Hall et al., 1996).

Apparently, there exist not only societal obstacles to harmonizing the agentic and ontic imperatives, but also adult developmental limits to organizational experiencing, learning, and acting (as well as the theory of these) that purely behavioral, and even adult developmental, discussions of organizations tend to gloss over or miss. In short, executive development practice as well as research, when viewed from the vantage point of epistemic adequacy (adult developmental maturity), exhibit a lack of epistemological realism as to the extent to which organization members can be free of the constraints of their own, developmentally rooted, ideological system (Laske, 1997). When one undertakes to tackle this lack exclusively from a human resource perspective (as is done, e.g., in coaching), one only documents the lack of epistemic realism one is trying to expell.

In this text, I hope to escape the human resource/symbolic tunnel vision of most writings on adult development in organizations, which typically omits two vital perspectives, the political and the structural one. (Most recently, this tunnel vision has been articulated by the slogan of a “learning organization.”) In keeping with Bolman & Deal’s (1991) attempt, to see organizational life as taking place at the intersection of the four dimensions introduced above, I discuss adult development in organizations from a synthetic adult developmental point of view. Since much of the recent literature on development stresses the *strategic* need to foster the development of executives, meaning the potential of their development to guarantee an organization’s prospering, my focus is on notions pertaining to *strategic* executive development. I understand the strategic point of view expressed by this term as *a mix of structural and political interventions brought to bear on the human resource function*. In the structural view of human resources, the divisions of an organization are seen as different “schools of thought” that, aided by “catalysts” such as coaching, provide resources for the experiential learning of executives (McCall, 1998). In the political view, selecting individuals for opportunities of experiential learning is based on the competition for scarce resources within the organization (including those of attention), and is thus a compromise vis-à-vis other, more immediately advantageous, investments of capital. In a conceptual framework where the emphasis falls on replacing the a-developmental “survival of the fittest” by the agentic “development of the fittest,” the issue of what human resources to foster utilizing which mechanisms creates its own peculiar dilemmas (McCall, 1998).

In short, while agentic theorists tend to favor the structural and political perspectives on the human resource function in organizations, ontic (adult developmental) theorists favor the human resource and symbolic perspectives on that function. Often, the split is one of short-term vs. long-term, or surface vs. deep structure, perspectives. The result is a schism responsible for two bifurcated, non-communicating sets of writings on executive development. As I show in the following, what makes matters more complicated is that each of the two universes of discourse internally struggles with its own peculiar dichotomies, often but dimly perceived. The result is an academic and real-world discourse on adult

development in the workplace prone to reductionism and *simplification terrible*, and an adult developmental no-man's land pervading most organizations.



### The State of the Art in Adult Development in the Workplace

As noted, executive development is an ambiguous term, as it conjoins two different, although intrinsically related, meanings of the term *development*. The first, agentic, meaning derives from the homo labor metaphor of bringing about development by way of human change efforts. The second, ontic, meaning derives from the organismic metaphor of maturation over the lifespan (Werner, 1957). The term “executive development” evokes both metaphors in an uneasy *mélange*, often referred to as nature and nurture or, more atomistically, as “talent plus experience” (McCall, 1998).

There are a number of reasons why the discovery that executive development IS adult development is a recent and still novel one (Basseches, 1984; Laske, 1999b). These reasons are best explained with the aid of Fig. 29.1. As shown, not only are ontic and agentic notions of development presently not communicating with each other. There are also dichotomies within each of the two universes of discourse depicted in the diagram. On the ontic side, the split separates theories paying primary attention to developmental structure, stage, level, or telos of

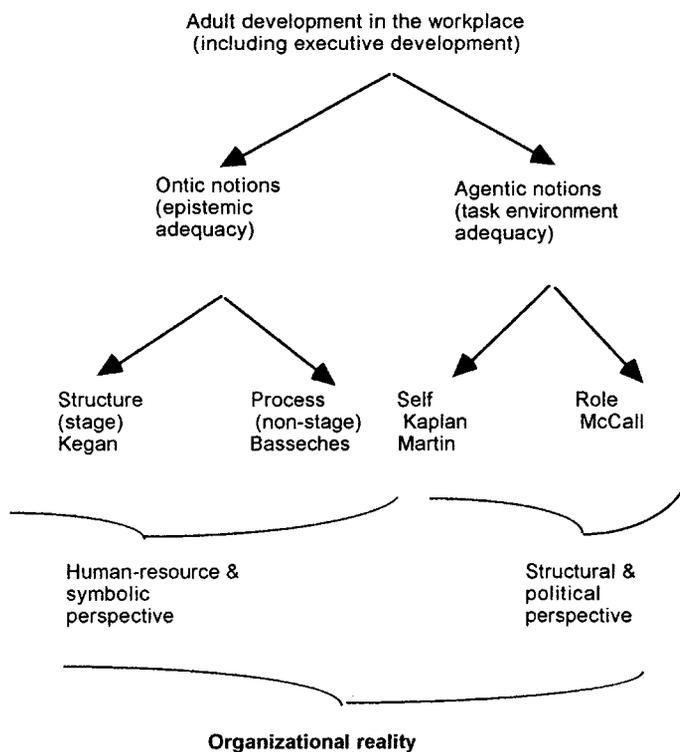


Figure 29.1. The state of the art in executive development as adult development.

development (e.g., Loevinger, 1976; Kegan, 1994), and those that are emphasizing the (“nonstage”) processes (from brain processes to symbolic processes) that undergird such structure, stage, or level (e.g., Basseches, 1984; Fischer & Pipp, 1984). Thus, the Piagetian legacy of firmly associating structure/level with process has been lost. On the agentic side, the split is one between structural and political views of the executive as a bearer of functions and roles (McCall, 1998), on one hand, and of human resource and symbolic conceptions of the executive as character or self (Kaplan, 1991; Martin, 1996), on the other. As developmental structure by itself does not easily lend itself to a fruitful mapping into the organizational domain (leading, rather, to ideal typical character sketches of executives that are but a caricature of epistemological analysis), the structure/process dichotomy in developmental psychology intrinsically and perniciously supports that between self and role in the organizational literature. And since, moreover, it is easy to mistake the epistemological self on the ontic side for the behavioral self on the agentic side, and map them into each other at will (Drath, 1990), one ends up in a situation where adult developmental thinking has precious little impact on actual executive development practice. This is true especially because that practice is largely carried out without psychological schooling.

### The Notion of Professional Agenda

In my view, the greatest barrier to a higher profile of adult developmental thought in organizations is the unexplored epistemology of mapping developmental findings, whether pertaining to structure or process or both, into the organizational domain. This mapping is especially crucial when one is aiming not just for a diagnosis, but an organizationally meaningful prognosis, of individual and team executive development. In this context, one of the keenest analyses of ontic developmental stage/structure theories has been provided by M. Basseches, who characterizes them as *teleological* in contrast to causal, and distinguishes ontic developmental position from an individual’s unique psychological organization and style (Basseches, 1989). Basseches’ analysis is easily extended to the psychosocial profile of an individual in the workplace, which comprises organizational functioning. On account of his analysis, Basseches shows that it is futile to transform stage diagnostics from a classificatory, ideal-typifying method into an causally explanatory (or even ontogenetic) one. Given the temptation to mistake the epistemological for the behavioral self, Basseches’ distinction between what is teleological and what is causal, seems to me to be a crucial one for creating an adult developmental culture in organizations.

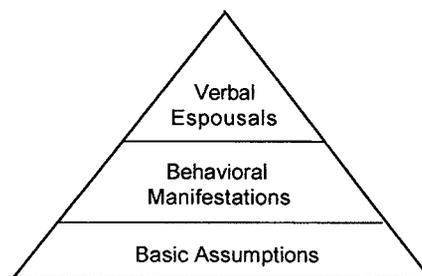
Following Basseches lead, in a recent study on transformative effects of coaching on executives’ professional agenda (Laske, 1999a), I have utilized the notion of *professional agenda* as an equivalent, in the organizational domain, of Basseches’ *unique psychological organization* in the clinical domain (1989). A professional agenda expresses a set of assumptions executives make about their relationship to work (Argyris, 1992, 1993; Kegan, 1994; Schein, 1992). These assumptions determine how executives behaviorally conduct themselves as organization members. The agenda articulates a peculiar adult developmental status quo. *Importantly, the latter has both a structural and a procedural aspect.*

The structural aspect specifies ego level, and the procedural one, the processes supporting that level in any concrete professional situation.

One way to conceptualize executive development is to see it centered on changes to an executive's *professional agenda* (Laske, 1999a, 1999b). The agenda articulates a set of assumptions regarding an executive's relationship to work (Kegan, 1994; Schein, 1992), including how he/she uses formal status, communicates in the organizational environment, sets goals, approaches tasks, makes sense of personal experiences in the workplace, relates to the organization at large, and conceives of his/her self-developmental mandate. In cognitive science terms, the professional agenda has three levels, as depicted in Fig. 29.2. As shown, the assumptions made by an executive are the foundation for the executives behavior and verbal espousals. As a consequence, there are two kinds of potential changes to the agenda: structural–developmental changes effecting the basic assumption set, and behavioral or adaptational changes effecting observable behavior through “learning.” In terms of assessment of the agenda, verbal espousals are used to decode the two lower levels. Because such espousals in most cases constitute “an espoused theory” that diverges from an individual's *theory in use* (Argyris, Smith, & Putnam, 1987), a *deep structure* analysis of the underlying assumptions articulated by the espousals is called for. From an adult developmental perspective, these assumptions change over a person's lifespan in accordance with what has variously been called ego level, developmental position, stage, or maturity (Kegan, 1994; Loevinger, 1976). These concepts refer to the structural aspect of development. The executive's assumption set is undergirded by a set of mental processes associated with a particular developmental level. These processes can be articulated *symbolically*, for example, by following Basseches' dialectical schema framework (Basseches, 1984). “Assessments for development” (Kaplan, 1998, p. 1) of the professional agenda comprise both a structure and a process statement. Together, these two assessments constitute the basis of evaluating an executives' behavior, learning, and adaptational changes to the agenda, as is topical, for example, in executive coaching. As Schein puts it:

Most change processes emphasize the need for behavior change. Such change is important in laying the groundwork for cognitive redefinition but is not sufficient unless such redefinition (of some of the concepts in the assumption set, O.L.) takes place. (1992, p. 302)

In short, changing professional agenda is a type of cognitive restructuring that, taking place in the deep structure of the professional agenda, percolates upward to the behavioral and espousal levels. It is the task of developmental assessments



**Figure 29.2.** Three levels of the Professional Agenda.

to aid in the monitoring of restructuring. While the notion of self is thought to pertain to the assumption level, the notion of executive role or function, based on the notion of learning, is a behavioral one. Thus, when one speaks of the dialectic of self and role in executive functioning, what is involved is a complex interplay between two levels of the professional agenda, verbally articulated on a third, equally behavioral level. To gauge executive development, or development in the workplace more generally, it is therefore paramount methodologically, to have in place instruments that can gauge both the structural and procedural (process) aspect of human development in the workplace.

### The 1990s Literature on Executive Development

In the recent literature on executive development, increasing attention has been paid to *self* in contrast to *role*. This is largely due to the increasing penetration of the “new, Protean, career contract,” according to which personal development is a task of the employee, rather than the organization, the contract thus being a “contract with self” (Hall & Moss, 1998, p. 322). In the executive development literature, *self* has been conceptualized in various ways, as “character” (Kaplan, 1991, 1998), psychodynamic ego (Martin, 1996), even “talent” (McCall, 1998). Pervasively, self in the epistemological sense is confounded with (relational) “style” in the sense of feminist writing (Fletcher, 1996; Hodgetts, 1994; Kram & Hall, 1996) and, in behavioristic writing, with Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Jung, 1971) and learning preferences (Kolb, 1984). Reinforced by how-to approaches in the burgeoning human services industry, these non- or a-developmental substitutes for the assumption set self pervade the popular as well as scholarly literature on executive development.

Among the writings most easily related to the deep structure notion of development of neo-Piagetian and -Kohlbergian vintage are those of M. W. McCall, Jr. (1998), I. Martin (1996), R. Kaplan (1991, 1998), and D. T. Hall (1996). These writers share a concern for two main issues: first, for executive development being *strategically* linked to business objectives; and second, *experiential (experience-based) learning* as the crux of executive development. These two concerns are not unrelated: experiential learning is what an organization can most easily provide its employees in a cost-effective and focused fashion without having to transcend its own realm. By strategic executive development is meant that business strategy should “logically” translate into “people strategy” by defining organizationally needed capabilities (e.g., by using psychological trait language), and then doing a means–ends analysis of the gap between needed and required capabilities (see Seibert, Hall, & Kram, 1995). To close the gap, executive developmental “mechanisms” and “catalysts” are then to be introduced. The commitment to such procedures is seen as confirming a shift from the Darwinian ideology of “survival of the fittest” to “development of the fittest” in enlightened organizations (McCall, 1998). This agentic concept of development is linked to a notion of adaptational learning as “experiential,” associated with various degrees of self-transformation. Organizational divisions function as different “schools of thought” in which different experiences can be gained. The difficulties of learning from experience (Senge, 1990; Sims & Gioia, 1986) not to speak of ontic developmental preconditions, are not often taken into consideration in the literature.

I would characterize the present state of thinking about executive development by the partition separating writings on executive self (e.g., Kaplan, 1998; Martin, 1996) and executive role (McCall, 1998), although some intermediate positions exist that are poised to mitigate this separation (Hall et al., 1996). Predictably, this dichotomy is also one between the human resource and symbolic perspectives in the sense of Bolman and Deal (1991), on one hand, and structural and political perspectives, on the other. It is therefore pertinent to treat this dichotomy as one of *split organizational thinking* that, most likely for adult developmental reasons, fails to link together the four perspectives that cognitively define organizational reality. Because as Bolman and Deal (1991) convincingly show, each of the four perspectives is associated with different “action scenarios,” the proposals in the literature for making executive development more “strategic,” and learning more “experiential,” are a logical outcome of the action scenarios associated with the respective writer’s ideological persuasion and ontic developmental level. In what follows, I go into some more detail regarding the different approaches to executive development in the literature of the 1990s. I proceed from the structural/political to the human resource/symbolic pole of writings on executive development. Accordingly, I review in detail writings of M. W. McCall, Jr., I. Martin, R. Kaplan, and D. T. Hall.

### A Model of Executive Development in Organizations

McCall (1998) approaches executive development from the structural/political perspective on organizations. He defines the lowest denominator for introducing adult developmental thinking into organizations. McCall’s thinking is based on the notion of existing business divisions as “schools” for experience-based learning, and of scarce developmental resources competed for by antagonistic coalitions. McCall starts with what he perceives to be the lowest level of insight into development, where even development based on human agency (agentic development) is thought unnecessary due to a Darwinian belief in the survival of the fittest. By contrast, for McCall, “the right stuff,” meaning “talent plus experience,” can be generated only by active “development of the fittest.”

McCall addresses executive development in the context of the immediate organizational task environment, largely ignoring the larger life context in which human development occurs. Despite this seemingly narrow vision, his writing convinces on account of systemic thinking and a fearless way of addressing intrinsic organizational antinomies, such as the conspiracies that support lopsided human development for the sake of immediate, short-term profit. Regarding the dialectic of executive self and role, McCall largely “leaves the person out of it” (Kaplan, 1991, p. 148), although he pays lip service to personal experience. Articulating the 1990s philosophy of “strategic” executive development, McCall wants the human resource function to be faultlessly integrated into the development of business strategy. (McCall is aware of the political issues this creates in the organization.) Conceptually, he follows Seibert et al.’s definition:

Strategic executive development is the (1) implementation of explicit corporate and business strategies through the (2) identification and (3) growth of (4) wanted executive skills, experiences, and motivations for the (5) intermediate and long-range future. (1995, p. 559)

This deceptively simple definition hides most of the antinomies of human development in organizations, especially the issue of what it takes, *in terms of the adult developmental status quo of those determining organizational strategy*, to define business strategy so that it can be “mapped into” developmentally productive (rather than arrestive or abortive) human resource goals and opportunities.

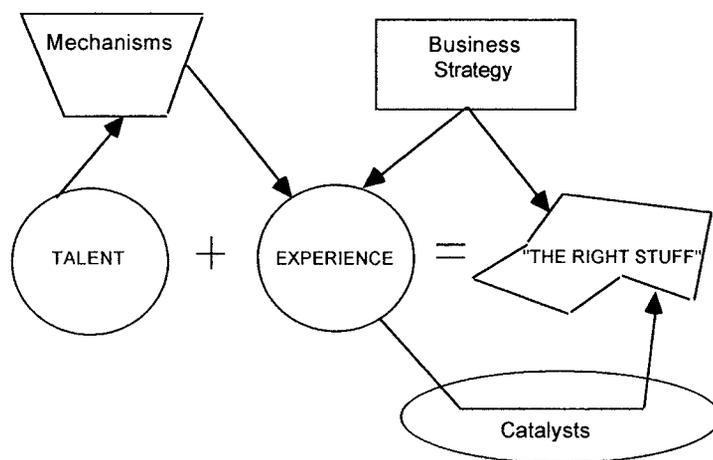
In terms of the mechanisms and catalysts that bring about human development in organizations, McCall is a believer in what he calls “experience.” Because he neither distinguishes learning from development, nor experience from making sense of experiences in the adult developmental sense, his implicit formula is:

experience  $\Rightarrow$  learning (sometimes)  $\Rightarrow$  development,

where “experience” is closer in meaning to “organizational opportunities for making experiences” than to experience in a biographic, clinical, or epistemological sense. McCall’s notion of experience is geared to *action learning*, in contrast to *classroom learning*. The notion focuses on the contingencies of learning, that is, the organizational, thus sociological, conditions under which learning and experience can be said to occur and relate to each other (Kolb, 1984). His approach is captured in Fig. 29.3 (McCall, 1998, p. 189).

What is called “mechanisms” in this diagram stands for structural opportunities existing inside an organization, while “catalysts” are supports such as coaching and development programs generally. The underlying notion is that (1) talent must be *found*, and (2) exposed to challenging situations inherent in organizational mechanisms, so that (3) talent is joined with experience which, when (4) supported by suitable catalysts, will render (5) the right stuff, viz., a transmutation of strategic into personal imperatives in the lives of talented executives. To arrive at this goal, McCall proposes to use preexisting business structures rather than learning opportunities removed from the actual task environment of executives:

From a developmental perspective, business units or divisions can be thought of as “schools,” each with a “curriculum” consisting of the experiences and exposures common to people who are successful within that part of the organization. (McCall, 1998, p. 84)



**Figure 29.3.** McCall’s model of strategic executive development.

He underscores his belief in these schools as follows:

Although the particular patterns are subject to change, the analytical approach assumes that the nature of the business and the structure of work in each of the organizations determines [sic!] the patterns of experience that talented people [sic!] will have. (McCall, 1998, pp. 84–85)

This statement has in mind executives' role, not self, given that it completely disregards what executives have to manage psychologically, as well as what is presupposed in terms of ontic-developmental status, for them to make *powerful experiences*. Suggesting that “executive development begins with experience and is driven by business strategy” (McCall, 1998, p. 18), McCall takes on the following issues:

- What experiences matter in shaping executives as leaders
- How important is the context in which development takes place
- How to choose among the valuable lessons many experiences teach
- How to think about talent other than as a static asset
- How to get the right people into the right experiences at the right time.

Throughout his discussion of these topics, the major issue for McCall is how the development of executives as leaders can be promoted by using the experiential resources available in an organization, which so far have not been optimally exploited for the purposes of leadership development. His polemic is directed against the “right stuff ideology” according to which fixed developmental sequences guarantee progressively more complex experiences (Dalton, 1989). McCall is thus critiquing notions deriving from the old career contract as a contract with an organization, in contrast to the “new career contract” which is a contract “with self” (Hall et al., 1996; see below). In this, he is motivated by his studies in corporate derailment, and in the organizational conspiracies giving rise to it. Aligning himself with the realities of the new career contract, he states:

The bottom line for individuals is that no one cares as much about a person's development than the person. Whether the organization supports development Or inhibits it, individuals need to take responsibility for achieving their potential. (McCall, 1998, p. 59)

The fervor with which McCall endorses “development of the fittest” in organizations stems from the dichotomy between the situation targeted in the above statement, and his conviction that organizations comprise valuable, but un- or under-utilized, experiential resources. These resources comprise challenging job assignments, other people (especially supervisors), formal programs, but also “non-work experiences” and “hardships and setbacks” (McCall, 1998, pp. 65 f). However, it never occurs to McCall that both the organizational context of experiential learning as well as the powerful experiences that context allows for are not only a matter of factual existence, but of ontic developmental preparedness to “see” and take advantage of them. In short, McCall lacks an appreciation of ontic developmental limits of experiential learning. His argument thus ends in a prognosis without empirical evidence:

People with the ability to learn from experience, (i.e., talented people, O.L.), when given [sic!] key experiences as determined by the business strategy, will learn the needed skills if given the right kind of support. (McCall, 1998, pp. 188)

According to McCall, human development in organizations is apt to encounter the following five “dilemmas” (McCall, 1998, p. 189 f):

- Dilemma 1: How to think about talent.
- Dilemma 2: Mechanisms controlling selection necessarily also control development.
- Dilemma 3: Development is spurred by challenge and risk, which is contrary to organizational imperatives of predictability.
- Dilemma 4: Learning from experience is not automatic.
- Dilemma 5: Business strategy must address multiple possibilities (of using organizational resources).

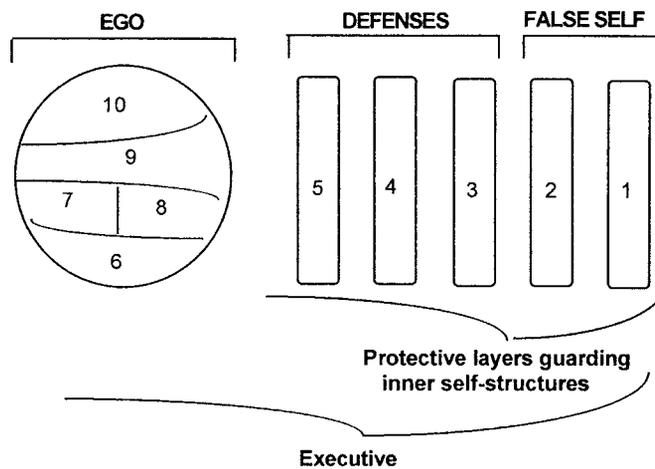
Of these, dilemmas 2, 3, and 5 have a systemic, structural and political, aspect, while 1 and 4 are epistemological human resource concerns. The most important dilemma of McCall’s model, in light of the adult developmental literature, may be his problematic relationship to conceptual complexity. Notions such as “talent,” “experience,” “the right stuff,” and “strategic intent,” and others are used by him in a developmentally as well as psychologically unreflected way that does not lend itself to epistemological subtlety. Nevertheless, McCall’s systemic point of view and his spirited demonstration that agentic development is a strategical requirement for contemporary organizations are important assets. Among the unstated, and unresolved, dilemmas of McCall’s model the following stand out:

- The *relationship of role to self*, and the issue of their “integration” in executives
- The *ontic developmental preconditions* of formulating business strategy and “translating” it into an executive development system
- The issue of *developmental catalysts* for learning from experience

The first issue is taken up by I. Martin, the remaining ones by Laske (1999a).

### **The Dialectic of Executive Role and Executive Self**

A step toward conceptualizing the relationship of executive self and role is made by I. Martin who, in formulating a theory of corporate mentoring, unites the family systems and psychoanalytic traditions. Although Martin (1996) shares with McCall the systemic viewpoint, in contrast to him, she approaches executive development from a human resource and symbolic perspective. This entails that she focuses on the link connecting executives’ personal development needs with the requirements of organizational development. Consequently, the system of importance to her is not the organization at large and its divisions per se, but the executive team and the family-of-origin reenactments its members are subject to in their organizational transactions. Seeing an organization’s executive team as its culture bearer, she conceives of the self-transformation of each of its members as the enabling force by which to transform organizational cultures. In short, her theory of executive development is an ingredient of her theory of culture transformation.



**Figure 29.4.** Martin's model of self-consciousness as a basis for executive mentoring aiming at culture transformation.

Just as the executive team, for Martin, forms a system of constituents bound together by a common dynamic, viz., that of individuals' family of origin, so does executives' individual psychological organization (Martin, 1996, p. 140).

As shown in Fig. 29.4, the executive self, identified by Martin with an individual's "unique psychological organization" (Basseches, 1989), is a system simultaneously operating on two sets of levels of consciousness "in which perception moves successively from an external to an internal focus" (Martin, 1996, pp. 140–141). The first set of levels makes up the individual's false self and defenses ("character"), while the second set of levels forms the ego. It is the task of the first five levels, to protect the inner self structures (levels 6–10) from feelings of shame and lack of self-worth. These levels constitute (social) role, self-illusions, defenses, developmental conflicts, and terror and rage (in the sense of A. Miller, 1984). In the second set of layers, 6 represents "basic self-love and eagerness for growth" (Martin, 1996, p. 145), followed by gender identification (7), triangulation tactics learned in the family of origin (8), and observing (9) and executive ego (10). Layer 9 represents "the ability to monitor one's own behavior with a realistic eye," that is, by taking it as object, while 10 is "the part of the ego that can oversee and direct an ongoing internal transformational process in which barriers (to growth) can be observed and then transmuted (Martin, 1996, p. 146). This "levels of self" model of an executive not only defines a framework for understanding the psychological dialectic of self (ego) and role; it also enables Martin to conceive of an executive's *professional agenda* as something determined by the executive's ability, to become aware of, and thereby transmute, the false-self and defense layers of the ego. This transmutation is the goal of mentoring as "corporate therapy." It simultaneously (and somewhat magically) aligns the executive with visionary strategic objectives of the organization, introduced by mentors (i.e., role models) external to the organization.

By joining executives' "unique psychological organization" (Basseches, 1989) to the sociological context of development outlined by McCall, and *defining executive role as an aspect of executive self*, Martin complexifies the set of parameters

factoring into the equation of adult development in the workplace. Although her conceptualization excludes orthodox adult developmental ideas, she introduces the notion of a self-in-transformation that is determined by both organizational and psychological dynamics. Her systemic view of executive functioning, in the double sense of individuals' membership in the executive team as "family," and of each individual's multiple-level self, contributes to the richness of her conception. In her theory, there is no other way of transforming an organizational culture than by way of the personal self-transformation of individual members of the executive team:

As culture transformation is viewed as a metaphor for the simultaneous transformation of a critical mass of executives through mentoring, it follows that systemic transformation will occur as mentoring unfolds. ... As people transform, they seek to transform their business and environment. (Martin, 1996, p. 156)

In many ways, her view of transformation is similar to that of E. Schein (1992):

If any part of the core structure (of an organization's culture, O. L.) is to change in more than minor incremental ways, the system must first experience enough disequilibrium to force a coping process that goes beyond just reinforcing the assumptions that are already in place... This is what Lewin called unfreezing, or creating a motivation to change.

except that she conceptualizes the obstacles to transformation in terms of systemic family therapy (Kirschner & Kirschner, 1986). In line with her multileveled model of self, she envisions a complex, 2-year course of mentoring that individual executives' pass through, to emerge as bearers of a new organizational culture firmly embracing strategically visionary objectives. Every mentee in the executive team engages in a kind of centrifugal mentoring, in that he or she takes on others to mentor who are not immediate supports. As a consequence, human development in the workplace and organizational development occur in close connection with each other. Both are based on personal self-transformation promoted by mentoring.

### **The Dialectic of Managerial Strengths and Weaknesses**

A different approach to executive development from the vantage point of the dialectic of self and role is taken by R. Kaplan (1989, 1991, 1998) and W. H. Drath (1990), who adopt the method of *biographic action research*. This method combines ideas from action science (Argyris, 1987) with research into the biography of executives for the sake of coaching and mentoring them to provoke a self-transformation. The method has yielded important insights into executive derailment and, more generally, lopsided adult development in organizations. Kaplan, especially, is convinced that a behavioral approach to executive development does not suffice, and therefore suggests "getting personal" in executive development research and practice. For him, this entails a critique of all approaches that "leave the person out of it" (Kaplan, 1991, p. 148), an approach he demonstrates in his research on three types of "expansive" character in executives (Kaplan, 1991). In light of the foregoing, Kaplan takes on the ego-protective layers of Martin's multi-level self, both to explain expansiveness, and to bring about a "character shift" in executives. As for Martin, for Kaplan (1991, pp. 4–5) "character" is "a set of deep-seated strategies used to enhance or protect one's sense of self-worth." In his

research, Kaplan comes upon two “styles” of executive functioning, “separate” and “relational.” He points out that the organizational bias in favor of task mastery over relational competence (see also Fletcher, 1996) leads to incongruencies in adult development that ultimately, especially when secretly supported by an institutional “conspiracy,” leads to derailment:

There are organizational circumstances in which what is *required* is an executive who is clearly overbalanced on the side of results (emphasis O. L.). (Kaplan, 1998, p. 228)

Expansive character—whether in the form of the striver-builder, self-vindicator, or perfectionist-systematizer—is seen as a constellation of defenses that weakens executives’ capacity to achieve a developmental balance. In addition, Kaplan shows that power and authority inhibit disconfirming criticism, thus further endangering the balance. To counteract these organizational conditions, mentoring is required:

... the class of interventions with which we have been principally concerned in this book is *deeply introspective self-development*. This is self-development precipitated by a concentrated dose of constructive criticism (emphasis O. L.). (Kaplan, 1991, p. 228)

Although he cautions that “deeply introspective self-development” is not a panacea for everyone, Kaplan sees such development as “a way of enhancing or accelerating the natural process of maturation” (Kaplan, 1991, p. 233), thus endorsing a notion of adult (ontic) development.

The process of *self-construction over the lifespan* has so far not been taken seriously in research on executive development. However, a first, shy step has nevertheless been made. Kaplan’s exploration of the dialectics of executive self and role is extended by his colleague Drath, who emphasizes the intrinsic and constitutive relatedness, and thus the dialectic, of managerial strengths and weaknesses. To clarify this dialectic, Drath (1990), in a pioneering paper, adopts the early subject/object theory of R. Kegan (1982), without the benefit of its 1994 revisions. By “explaining” managerial weaknesses and strengths as a direct outcome of subject/object epistemologic (stage), thus by equating “unique psychological organization” and style with epistemologic, Drath demonstrates the stark reductionism that undialectical uses of the stage concept are likely to produce:

Another prominent managerial strength arising from taking relationship as an object is toughness in decision making. This [toughness] is possible because of the way the institutional stage dramatically reduces the role of interpersonal feelings in decision making. Although a manager’s “rational” approach to decisions can be explained in terms of learned skills [i.e., behaviorally], the objectification of feelings allows such a rational analysis to proceed without the manager’s experiencing undue qualms. (Drath, 1990, p. 490)

This caricature of constructive developmental thought, in which a character trait such as “toughness” and a disposition of mind such as “undue qualms” straightforwardly follows from an individual’s ontic developmental position, is likely to make adult developmental theory a bad name. It also explains the prevailing ineffectiveness of the theory. The caricature, which is not Drath’s alone, shows an absence of epistemological know-how, one that has not benefited from Basseches’ critique of epistemological reductionism in adult developmental psychology (Basseches, 1989). The caricature, while it introduces constructive developmental theory into executive development, demonstrates the difficulty of

formulating a true “mapping” of teleological insight into adult development into concrete organizational contexts.

### The Shift to the Protean (“Inner”) Career

The schism of self and role in theories of executive development, demonstrated above, receives additional saliency in the context of what Hall has called “the new career contract” which, for him, is exemplified by the “Protean career” (Hall et al., 1996). The career contract regards the employer–employee relationship. It is ultimately a set of expectations regarding human development in organizations. As Hall explains:

The idea of the psychological contract gained currency in the early 1960’s when writers such as Chris Argyris, Harry Levinson, and Edgar Schein used the term to describe the employer-employee relationship. ... Later, Ian MacNeil discussed two forms of what he called the “social contract.” (Hall & Moss, 1998, p. 23)

It is Hall’s conjecture that MacNeil’s *relational* social contract (if it was not a legend to begin with), has since the 1980s been replaced by a *transactional* contract. The latter essentially makes an employee’s career contract one *with self*, and only secondarily one with an organization, as it no longer holds the employer responsible for an individual’s adult development. Hall sees the shift as one from an “organizational” to a “Protean” career which is centered on an individual’s *psychological success* as a basis for his or her development in the workplace:

The protean career is a process which the person, not the organization, is managing. It consists of all the person’s varied experiences in education, training, work in several organizations, changes in occupational field, etc. The protean person’s own personal career choices and search for self-fulfillment are the unifying or integrative element in his or her life. The criterion of success is internal (psychological success), not external. (Hall & Moss, 1998, pp. 24–25)

In an even more emphatically constructivist way, Hall speaks of a shift toward the “internal career which describes the individual’s perception and self-constructions of career phenomena” (Hall, Briscoe, & Kram, 1997, p. 321). This sociological change-of-scene clearly redefines the conditions and implications of adult development in the workplace. This shift is all the more noticeable since throughout the 1980’s and 1990s, career theory was rather firmly wedded to theories of change (especially D. J. Levinson, Darrow, Klein, M. H. Levinson, & Mckee, 1978), rather than theories of development, in the sense of Fig. 29.5 (adapted from Demick, 1996, p. 118).

Not surprisingly, the saliency of stage theories of change ended with the old career contract, according to which an organizationally predefined sequence of career steps leads to increasingly more complex developmental opportunities and their psychological equivalent (e.g., Dalton, 1989, p. 100). As Kegan observed, the time for constructivist theories of development in the workplace was not ripe:

What may be lacking is an understanding that the demand of work, the hidden curriculum of work, does not require that a new set of skills be “put in,” but that a new *threshold of consciousness* be reached. (Kegan, 1994, p. 164)

Given the advent of the new career contract, has the time for constructivist theories of adult development in the organizational workplace arrived? Although

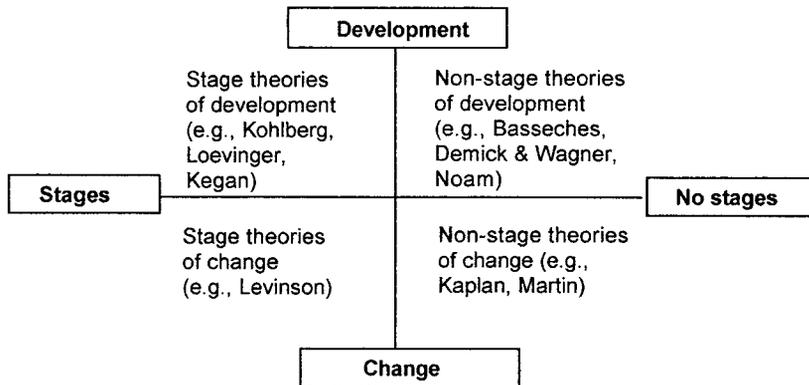


Figure 29.5. Stage and nonstage developmental theories.

career theory as well as executive development theories are poised to absorb and utilize adult developmental ideas, this potential still has to prove itself. Moreover, adult-developmental psychology must fulfil its side of the bargain. I briefly outline what this might entail in what follows.



### Three Tasks of Constructivist Developmental Theory

If my hunch that there are adult developmental limits to comprehending organizational reality is correct (Laske, 1997), then no amount of preaching the good ontic developmental news, and no amount of scholarly reduction of organizational complexity to stages or derivatives thereof, will make the slightest dent in the state of the art of executive development research and practice. For adult developmental psychologists escaping the fascination with pathology, and concerned about creativity instead, there is a major self-critical task to accomplish before a cogent theory of *executive development as adult development* can emerge. This task, first seen in its full amplitude by Basseches (1984, 1989), in my view comprises three subtasks:

1. First, to firmly link developmental structure (stage, level, etc.) to the mental processes that undergird it (as Piaget taught us)
2. Second, to emerge from the human resource and/or symbolic tunnel vision that makes developmental theory incapable of taking structural and political perspectives on organizations (e.g., as outlined by McCall) into account
3. Third, to studiously scrutinize and avoid epistemological reductionism that portrays factual psychological or organizational content as a causal outcome of teleological principles.

Methodologically, these tasks entail, in the order followed above,

1. First, leaving stage vs. nonstage controversies behind, and researching what are the epistemological and neuropsychological processes that make

- reaching and maintaining a given constructivist developmental level (however defined) possible in the first place
2. Second, furthering a theory of organizations as “thinking organizations,” following the example of cognitive sociologists of the 1980s (e.g., Gioia & Sims, 1986)
  3. Third, abstaining from false claims regarding what a teleologically grounded constructivist theory of human development can hope to “explain” that is of relevance to the theory of organizations, and to agentic practices in executive development.

In a research project undertaken to pursue the first subtask (and make a step toward the second one), entitled “Transformative effects of coaching on executives’ professional agenda” (Laske, 1999a), I have designed and implemented an epistemological assessment tool, called the Developmental Structure/Process Tool (DSPT™). The instrument conjoins a structure description of developmental status quo, derived from Kegan’s work (Kegan, 1994) and a process description of developmental level, deriving from Basseches’ work on dialectical thinking (Basseches, 1984). Especially when used longitudinally (and with proper validity concerns regarding self-reports), the DSPT™ makes it possible to formulate a comprehensive assessment of an executive’s developmental status quo. The instrument enables its user (psychologist or paraprofessional), to prognosticate developmental regression, stasis, and advance within a given developmental sequence. It requires the user to formulate a *nonreductionistic mapping of teleological findings into the organizational domain from which the executive’s espousal has been taken*. By “mapping” is meant a confidential formulation of developmental findings that is grounded in the concrete details of an executive’s organizational functioning at a particular time. Such a mapping becomes possible by utilizing, in addition to interview material, behavioral data deriving from, for example, 360-degree feedback procedures and related information about the organization’s present strategic objectives.

This entails that rather than translating a specific “developmental stage” (e.g., the Kegan-stage 4(3); Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 1988) into a “character sketch” of the executive, thereby treating universalistic teleological data as causes of some unique psychological organization (Drath, 1990); or equating an epistemic profile dominated by the use of dialectical schemata of, for example, motion (Basseches, 1984) with behavioral processes that need to be “unlearned” or “improved,” it is required to think through the epistemic (ontic) limits of the person assessed in terms of strategic, presently salient, agentic imperatives of the organizational task environment in question, formulating one’s DSPT™ assessment accordingly. As a result of using the DSPT™, the user is enabled to build bridges from the domain of ontic developmental discourse to the agentic domain of coaching and mentoring, succession planning, and, when applied to groups of executives’, the evaluation of entire corporate development programs. This is the case since developmental process descriptions, formulated symbolically by using Basseches’ dialectical–schemata framework, when linked to associated structure (stage) descriptions, are prognostic of the movement of an individual’s ego level within a teleological range of lower and higher stages. Linking stage and process descriptions has a high payoff, as prognostic assessments of executives’

developmental status quo enable the DSPT™ user, to advise executive coaches and corporate development officers regarding the presence or lack of transformative effects of coaching on executives' professional agenda, with consequences for the reorientation of executive development efforts.

Based on a subject/object and a dialectical–schemata interview with each of six executives, I have been able to show that, and in what way, coaching outcome articulates the ontic developmental status quo of executives.

In columns A to E, Table 29.1 (Laske, 1999a, vol. 1, p. 239) relates modified subject/object stages (column B; Kegan, 1982) attained by six different executives (column A) to the number and quality of uses of metaform schemata in the sense of Basseches (1984, column D). The table compares six executives (column A), ranked in order of their ontic developmental position (column B), as to their reported uses of coaching (column E). The ranking of executives within subject/object-stage 4 is based on a “potential/clarity index” (column C) that quantitatively compares an executive's potential for transcending the present stage (column B) to the clarity and force by which the stage, and embeddedness in it, is expressed (column C). In the study, executives' self reports have been assessed by a subject/object (Lahey et al., 1988) and a dialectical–schemata analysis (Basseches, 1984), respectively. As the table shows, the use executives have been able to make of coaching is a reflection of their ontic developmental status quo. With a higher stage score, as well as quantitatively higher uses of metaform schemata, the ability to use coaching for more than a single purpose, and to make self-transformation a conscious telos of the coaching alliance, is strengthened. For example, using coaching strictly for skill building is a prerogative of executives who are firmly ensconced in a subject/object-stage 4 (i.e., clarity > potential), where being at the particular ontic developmental level overshadows any potential to transcend it (e.g., S3,  $p = 0 < c = 9$ ), which signals possible developmental arrest. On account of the process profile of the executives in question, the DSPT™ offers the capability to prognosticate movement within the teleological range of stages over the lifespan (i.e., regression, stasis/arrest, and transcendence), which has direct consequences for executives' resilience (Maddi, 1999). This leads me to the conclusion that having access to a symbolic representation of the mental

**Table 29.1. Uses of Coaching as a Function of Ontic Developmental Status Quo**

A	B	C	D	E
Subject	Stage & risk/ clarity/potential Index	Potential to clarity (of stage)	Meta-form (%)	Type of coaching endorsed
S5	4(5){2:4:7}	$p > c$	44	Adult development, skill, performance, agenda
S6	4{2:9:4}	$p < c$	41	Adult development (inner agenda)
S2	4{1:8:5}	$p < c$	15	Performance/agenda
S4	4{0:5:3}	$p < c$	26	Performance
S1	4{3:9:2}	$p < c$	19	Skills/performance
S3	4{1:9:0}	$p < c$	1	Skills

processes that undergird “being at stage X,” a developmental psychologist can formulate an ontic developmental prognosis of individual executives, both with regard to their concrete organizational functioning in the foreseeable future, and their ontic developmental resilience generally. As long as the error of epistemological reductionism is strenuously avoided (subtask 3), and the ontic developmental findings are responsibly mapped to organizational realities (e.g., the executive’s functions, and existing strategic objectives of the organization), the developmental psychologist can provide coaches and corporate development officers with prognostic information, not only regarding individual executives-in-coaching, but equally regarding the outcome, over a longitudinal time span, of a corporate development effort in its entirety.

To conclude, while executive development has always been adult development—as much as we have always spoken prose, mostly without realizing it—the use theorists and organization members have made of self in thinking about, and promoting, that development, has not been commensurate with the complexities of organizational reality which includes adult development. For the same reason, developmental psychologists (as little as organization theorists and organization members) have so far been unable to gratify both the agentic and the ontic imperative of development in the workplace and larger society. However, if the new career contract in Western countries is indeed focused on the *internal career* (Hall et al., 1996), which implies attention to, and regard for, self (rather than just role), then there is a chance for practitioners of developmental psychology, to gain influence in, and become helpful to, organizations, but only if they eschew epistemological reductionism. Of course, this chance will depend on the extent to which these practitioners themselves can muster a commensurate ontic developmental status quo due to which they can epistemically cope with the complexities inherent in organizational reality. As I have shown, that reality is defined by the dialectic of agentic and ontic imperatives in the workplace.

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