Contributions of Evidence-Based Developmental Coaching to Coaching Psychology and Practice[1]

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Abstract
In this article, some of the major contributions to coaching psychology made by *evidence-based developmental coaching*, a form of coaching based on research in adult development, are outlined. "Coaching Psychology" is seen as a behavioral discipline (Stober & Grant, 2006). Therefore, the emphasis is put, not on the developmental paradigm *per se*, but on how it relates to working with behavioral data in coaching practice. This amounts to shedding light on the limits of a strictly behavioral coaching paradigm, however evidence-based it may be. Positively speaking, it entails pointing to the enrichment of coaching psychology by way of acknowledging and integrating developmental research methods and findings about coaches as well as clients, and thus their interaction.
There is a common thematic denominator of disciplines using a developmental paradigm in Piaget's central notion of *increasing loss of ego-centricity over the life span*. This notion straightforwardly extends to behavior, in the sense of Freud's "what Id is shall Ego become," in that Freud's Ego is exactly where ego-centricity imposed by Id is being lost. If, as happens in developmental coaching, behavior is seen, as well as measured, in terms of a person's level of ego-centricity in its many forms, new perspectives on "helping" and "consultation" including coaching arise that are unknown in a behavioral universe of discourse.

The text is in six parts, each outlining a different contribution of evidence-based developmental coaching to coaching psychology:

(1) Epistemological contribution: Frame of Reference.
(2) Methodological contribution: Structure vs. Content.
(3) Cognitive contribution: Current potential capability (sense making).
(4) Social-emotional contribution: Emergent potential capability (meaning making).
(5) Clinical-developmental contribution: Work Capacity indicators.
(6) Outlook on integrating the developmental paradigm into coaching psychology.

I. FRAME OF REFERENCE (FoR)

It is one of the central tenets of research in human development since Piaget (1925) and Kohlberg (1970) that the major structural occurrence in human life span development is the mounting *loss of ego-centricity in all of its forms*. By ego-centricity is meant a *structural* state of affairs in both cognitive *sense making* and social-emotional *meaning making* in which human consciousness lacks appropriate operations and tools for de-centering from its own subjective orbit.

In cognitive terms, ego-centricity manifests as lack of dialectical thinking beyond formal logic (Basseches, 1984), while social-emotionally, it is apparent in confinement to lower stages of meaning making (Kegan, 1982). In terms of Freud's "what Id is shall Ego become," ego-centricity determines ways of *love and social relating generally*, while in the world

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of *work* it shows up in the profile of a worker's *psychogenic needs* regarding self conduct, approach to tasks, and emotional intelligence (Aderman, 1969; Murray, 1938). In Jaques's perspective on work capability, ego-centricity hampers a person's Capacity to realize developmental potential, or map potential into applied Capability (Jaques, 1994; 1998). The more a person remains centered on his/her psychogenic (inborn) needs, the less is there a capacity to "put to work" existing developmental resources, whether cognitive or social-emotional.

In short, prevalence of high degrees of ego-centricity is the hallmark of early developmental stages, whether in thinking, social relating, faith development, role play, work capacity, and other dimensions of human endeavour. Importantly, this prevalence is a <u>natural</u> occurrence, not a deficiency. It only becomes a deficiency when its duration extends beyond certain period boundaries of mental growth (such as 'late adolescence' or 'middle adulthood'), at which point it appears as developmental delay (Piaget's decalage) or arrest. Thus, ego-centricity entails a lack of readiness (potential Capability) to move on to higher developmental stages or phases typical of *adults*.

Admittedly, for a profession such as coaching – a consultation to another person's mental process in the broad sense of both "emotion" and "thinking" – the notion of *level of ego-centricity* is of central importance. In a state of prolonged focus of a client [or coach] on his/her own orbit, no coaching method [or coaching practice] will ultimately be effective. A major issue for coaching effectiveness is thus the state of **developmental readiness** of a client, whether in life or business coaching. The same must be said of the coach whose capability to assist clients depends on his/her level of adult development relative to that of clients. (Where clients' maturity exceeds that of the coach, developmental arrest, thus harm, is in the offing for them.)

It is one of the major contributions of developmental psychology to coaching that the coach becomes no less a centre of attention than the client. Talking about "clients" without first attending to how coaches generate *models of clients* is one of the deficiencies of present coaching research that occurs when there is a lack of sensitivity to three major developmental tenets:

- **Coaching outcome is ultimately decided by the Frame of Reference (FoR) of the coach which is determined by his or her developmental profile** [not by any techniques or expert knowledge].
- **To consult *professionally* to another party, the coach has to understand that party's FoR.** Otherwise, the coach simply interprets the client from his or her own developmental level, thereby misconstruing the other party's sense and meaning making.
- **A coach can support a client only to the extent that s(he) is herself *ahead of the client developmentally*, and then only within the limits of the client's developmental potential.** A coach who operates at a lower developmental level than the client, while s(he) may be able to provoke *behavioral changes*, can not only not promote *developmental shifts* in the client; s(he) may even delay or arrest the client's adult development.

Informally, FoR is simply "how the world shows up for" either coach and/or client (Flaherty, 1999), determining what is 'real' and worthy of goal pursuit for them. In terms of developmental research, FoR results from development in four dimensions:

- Perception and Learning (P&L)
- Capacity (psychological Need/Press Profile, or NP).
- Cognitive Development (CD)
- Social-emotional Development (ED),

as shown in Fig. 1, below:

FOR = Frame of Reference
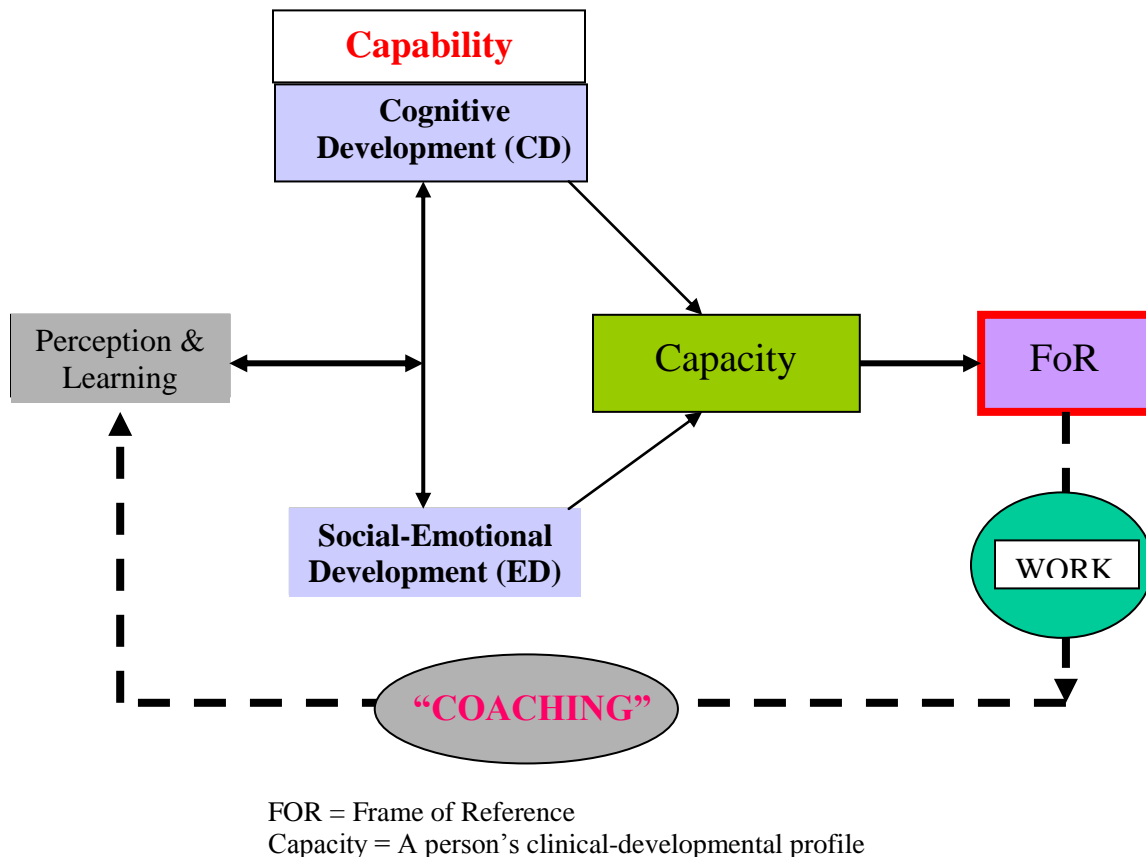Capacity = A person's clinical-developmental profile

Fig. 1. The Anatomy of Frame of Reference in Coaching

As indicated, for both coach and client, FoR is a result of complex interactions between both horizontal (P&L and Capacity) and vertical dimensions (CD and ED). The two latter define **Capability**, while **Capacity** (in the horizontal dimension) acts as a filter that determines to what extent a person's Capability (developmental potential) can be actualized in performance (applied capability). For this reason, **cutting people down to their performance level unduly reduces the mandate of coaching whose primary function is to act as a "transfer function" inducing higher levels of FoR, and thus affecting the interplay of all four dimensions** presented in the diagram**.**

Based on Fig. 1, we can methodologically distinguish several kinds of coaching:

1. *behavioral coaching* (disregarding FoR, and confined to applied capability or performance, without access to developmental insight);
2. *cognitive-behavioral coaching* (disregarding FoR, and focusing on behavior using 'thinking' tools, without access to developmental insight);
3. *cognitive coaching* (centered on boosting of CD and P&L, and disregarding social-emotional research findings);
4. *social-emotional coaching* (focused on emotional intelligence excluding developmental insight; -- much 'leadership coaching' is of this ilk)
5. *developmental coaching* (integrating behavioral and developmental research findings, and focused on understanding client's FoR).

In terms of Fig. 1, it's clear that developmental coaching best does justice to the complexity of FoR involved, and that coaching psychology is less than it could be without integrating developmental insights. For coaching to become a profession such integration is indispensable.

II METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

How, the reader may ask, can consultants determine a client's Frame of Reference (FoR) **empirically**? It is here that a second contribution to coaching psychology can be noted. The short answer is: by semi-structured interviews that are "scored" (evaluated) for *structure*, not *content*. This statement needs further elaboration.

Everyday discourse is content-, not structure-focused, and therefore does not in and by itself deliver valid cues for how a person presently makes meaning (ED) or sense (CD) of experiences. However, a developmental coach has acquired skills (and theoretical background) to create **special conversations** in which clients are led to reveal the way the world shows up for them, both cognitively and social-emotionally. We speak of "developmental interviews," and thereby mean *structured conversations*. Such conversations are different from coaching discourse, since they aim for discerning a client's level of ego-centricity and thus FoR. In developmental coaching, they form the *assessment phase* preceding coaching proper; they also bring a coaching period to a close when empirical proof of coaching effectiveness is desired.

Beginning with Piaget, different kinds of interviews have been created as tools for delving into the structure of individuals' FoR (Basseches, 1984; Lahey et al., 1988; King & Kitchener, 1994; Jaques 1994; Laske 1999). Carrying out such interviews requires knowing the theory of cognitive and social-emotional development, and the tools for probing ego-centricity as an indicator of such development. In contrast to sentence completion tests (Loevinger, 1976) and the like, interviews are not "tests" but are conversations building trust prior to actual coaching. The notion is that one does cannot know "what to coach for" without developmental data.

In these interviews, learning is potentially life-changing for both coach and client. For the client this is so since the conversations called "Professional Agenda Interview" (for CD) and "Subject-Object Interview" (for ED) uniquely center on the client's way of knowing the

world, the self, and his/her tasks, staying very close to his or her train of thought elicited either by "cognitive probes" (CD) or "social-emotional prompts" (ED). For coaches, learning these interviews is equally life-changing because they acquire an inkling of their own developmental profile, henceforth no longer taken for granted. (In addition, they learn what it *feels like* to be interviewed developmentally.)

A short ED-example will have to suffice.
If, in the context of a social-emotional interview, a client tells you that she recently experienced a situation in her workplace that "embarrassed" her, you as interviewer have to determine what level of meaning making generated the embarrassment. The client might be embarrassed on an *other-dependent* level where s(he) is defining herself by the expectation of *others*. In this case, the embarrassment arose out of not living up to others' expectations. Another form of embarrassment is one generated by the client's view not to have lived up to her *own* values and principles. In this case, meaning making is occurring at a *self-authoring* level which requires different feedback and coaching interventions. This is a somewhat simplistic example since there are intermediate steps between these two different ED-levels.

Obviously, developmental interviewing is an art as well as a science, that of *developmental listening*, which on the side of the coach requires complete internalization of theory. It is this internalization that is life changing, certainly consciousness-raising, and fortifies professionalism to a high degree. Why? Because it replaces the coach's *own little personality* by a professional *persona* that rests on impersonating developmental theory!

The basic notion in the interview conversations is that LANGUAGE SAYS IT ALL, meaning that developmental interviewing unlocks FoR in an inter-rater reliable way. Based on analyzing interviews, results emerge that professional coaches can agree and give feedback on. What is more, the coach can base the formulation of coaching plans on developmental data elicited through these kinds of structured interview.

III COGNITIVE CONTRIBUTION (CD)
We have seen that eliciting FoR is an skill required for determining clients' degree of ego-centricity in all of its forms, understood as something that keeps them at lower levels of realized potential. We have also seen that FoR has two distinct aspects, a cognitive and social-emotional one. As to the former, cognitive, aspects of FoR, it's important to under-stand that they remain out of reach in *cognitive-behavioral coaching,* simply because "FoR-CD" does not have to do with behavior, but with what underlines and determines behavior, so that 'behavior' is an epi-phenomenon.

In researching the development of adult thinking, several different paths have been followed:
1. psychometric
2. 'cognitive'
3. neo-Piagetian
4. 'contextual'.

Berg & Sternberg, addressing adult cognition as 'intelligence' (in my view, not a good choice), say regarding this classification (2003, 103):

> These four perspectives on adult intelligence offer different answers to two

questions that have guided the field of adult intelligence: (1) What is intelligence throughout adult development? And (2) how does intelligence develop across the adult lifespan? The psychometric and cognitive perspectives define intelligence to be largely the same throughout the lifespan … The neo-Piagetian and contextual perspectives hold that intelligence may change in its composition across the adult lifespan as individuals integrate the emotional and non-rational into thinking systems. … these four different perspectives chart different developmental trajectories for adult intelligence (i.e., decline, maintenance, and improvement). However, all struggle with the potential for both gains and losses at any point during adult development (see Baltes, Lindenberger, & Staudinger, 1998).

From a constructivist developmental vantage point, separating the 'neo-Piagetian' and 'contextual' perspectives is hard if not impossible to do. In a Piagetian perspective, cognition is based on a balance of *accommodation* to what's "out there" and its *assimilation* to existing cognitive structures. While in early development, accommodation wins out over assimilation, increasingly the latter overtakes the former, and the predominance of assimilation results in higher levels of abstract thinking called "dialectical." This is the meaning of *cognitive development over the lifespan* adopted for developmental coaching and coach education at the Interdevelopmental Institute.

In terms of coaching practice, what is the focus when centering on clients' cognitive development? Essentially, it means that in both cognitive assessments and cognitively focused coaching interventions the coach focuses on how far clients "integrate(s) the rational with emotional and interpersonal ways of understanding" (Berg & Sternberg, 2003, 114). Typically, this is accomplished by way of increasingly *systemic thinking* which 'sees' reality as a living system undergoing unceasing transformation, with the self as a system embedded in other systems. More broadly, it means expanding formal into dialectical logic in order to do justice to the complexities of what is experienced as real.

When viewing cognitive development with a focus on the development of systemic thinking and reflective thinking, we can distinguish *three eras of cognitive development beyond common sense:*
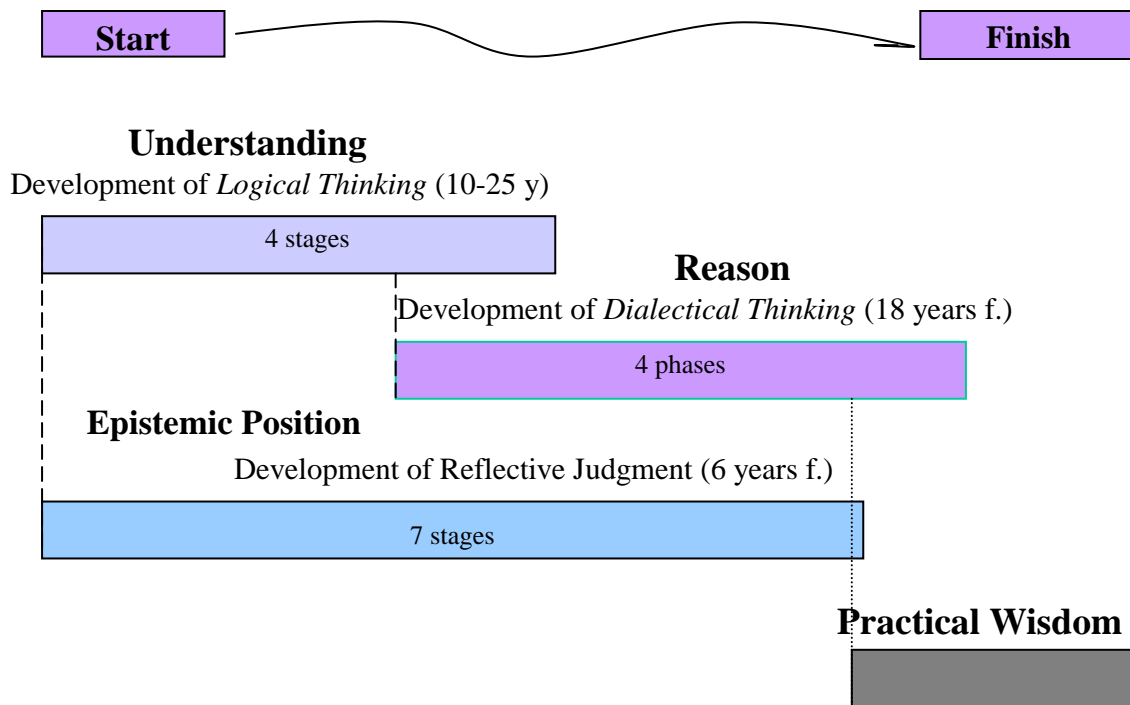
Fig. 2 Trajectory of cognitive development from a Piagetian perspective

The trajectory is as follows. Late adolescents develop the ability to use abstractions, a development that culminates in the ability to think in terms of formal logic at about age 25. Following that achievement – which neuropsychologically is based on the maturation of the frontal lobes – adults develop increasing capability to think in abstractions *at higher and higher, "dialectical" levels*. ("Dialectic" refers to the ability to "split off" one abstraction from another, and thereby relate one abstraction to other, related abstractions not initially acknowledged by the thinker.) The dialectical turn of adult thinking is dependent upon adults' evolving *epistemic position* – having to do with what for them is the nature of knowledge and truth, thus there stage of reflective judgment (King and Kitchener, 1994).

How clients "think about" knowledge and truth shows up in how they justify beliefs in what is *true* for them. As long as the nature of truth is to be *certain*, thinking and belief do not differ. They only begin to differ to the extent that truth is seen as *uncertain*, and thus as requiring justification of belief. How this is accomplished is different in the two different logics named in Fig.2, namely formal and dialectical logic. As shown in the figure, these logics developmentally overlap during adolescence until dialectical thinking increasingly transcends formal logical constraints. When dialectical thinking – thinking in polarities that are brought together at a higher level – becomes second nature, we speak of Practical Wisdom, meaning an effortless kind of systemic thinking focused, not on static things, but on things seen as ever-changing *forms*.

These notions seem rather academic until one realizes that the extent of a client's dialectical -- systemic -- thinking or lack thereof determines his/her answers to the crucial question of WHAT CAN I DO, AND WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS? At IDM, coaches learn to determine clients' FoR-CD by way of a special interview that is evaluated based on structure

in terms of *Thought Forms* rather than content. To do so enables coaches to give clients feedback on the strength of their critical vs. constructive thinking regardless of any specific content. We speak of a client's *current potential capability* which decides what the client can currently do in terms of realizing his/her present cognitive potential.

IV SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CONTRIBUTION (ED)
In addition to the cognitive "what can I do?" question, clients implicitly or explicitly ask a second focal question, namely: WHAT SHOULD I DO, AND FOR WHOM? Answers to this question reveal the social-emotional aspect of their FoR. With R. Kegan (1982), we can conceptualize social-emotional development as occurring discontinuously, in stages. This development is centered around the relationship of SELF and OTHER, or ME and NOT-ME. Focus on ME is, by definition, ego-centric, but different levels of ego-centrism need to be distinguished. **The relationship of FoR-ED to FoR-CD is straightforward:**

Social-emotional Stage	Relationship of Self (S) to Other (O)	Approximate Epistemic Position as to the Nature of Truth & Knowledge
1	S is merged with O	1
2	S and O are opposites, with O opposite to S and an instrument for S	2
3	S 'internalizes' O, becoming defined by O	3-4
4	S experiences itself as a system related to, but other than, O	5
5	S knows to be incomplete without O and is dialectically linked to O with which it shares common ground	6-7

Table 1. Correspondence between FoR-ED and Epistemic Position underlying FoR-CD

In strictly social-emotional terms, the five "main" stages – intermediate stages aside – appear as follows:

Focus on SELF   **Focus on OTHERS**   Age and education are poor predictors of stage.

Toward Stage 5

Stage 4 (ca. 40 years)

Stage 3 (ca. 25 years)

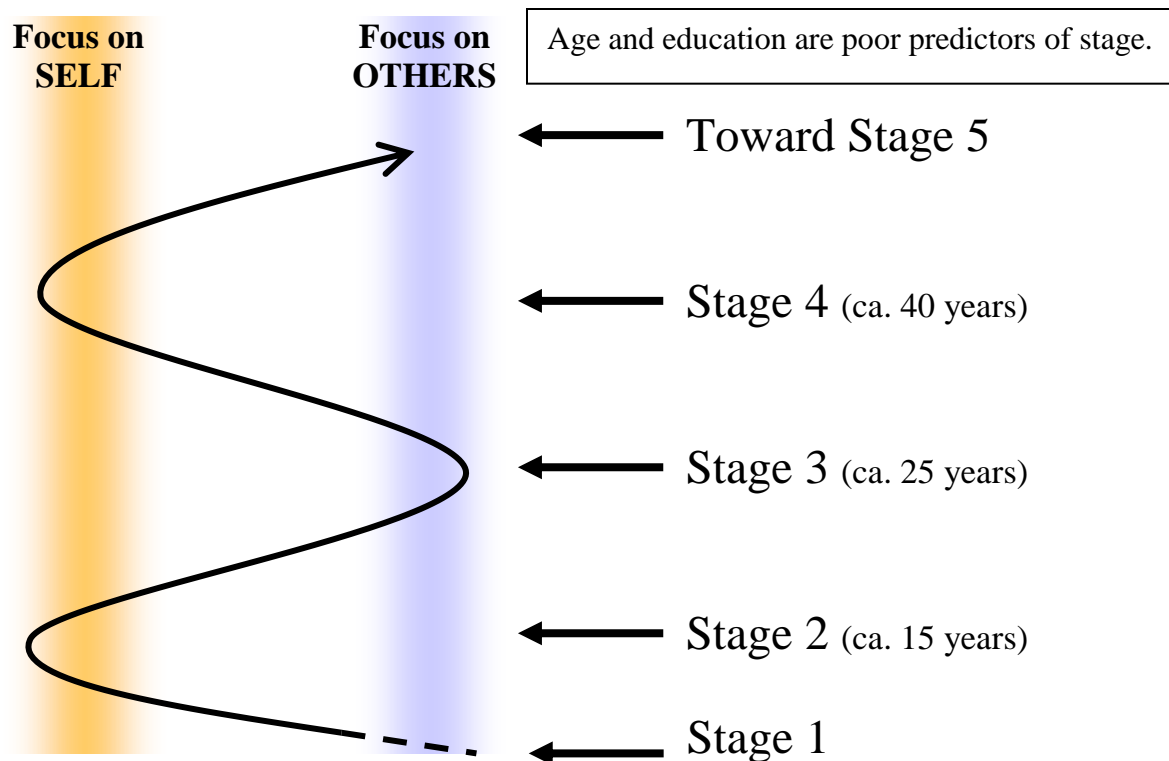Stage 2 (ca. 15 years)

Stage 1

Fig. 3 The social-emotional trajectory of adult development

As depicted in Fig. 3, a social-emotional *stage* is a *mode of functioning* determined by how an individual's focus on Self is negotiated in relation to that on Other (NOT-ME). For instance, focus on Self in stage 2 (the "instrumentalist" stage) is very different from that in stage 4 where a *self-authoring* view of self, manifest in authentic and idiosyncratic values and principles, has emerged. Considering that there are four intermediate stages [not shown] between the main stages shown in Fig. 3, it's clear that transition between main stages can take a decade to occur. In addition, nobody ever lives at a single stage. Rather, clients act from a *Center of Gravity*, oscillating between one or two stages below and above the center, and this oscillation is assessed by way of a "Risk-Clarity-Potential Index". The index is of high importance in coaching since it suggests to a coach whether attending to developmental risk is a priority, rather than attending to developmental potential. Students at IDM learn to determine a client's Center of Gravity, as well as the oscillations around the center in terms of lower and higher stages through semi-structured interview.

For example, a client may have behavioral (or even clinical) symptoms having to do with relating to others. A developmental coach approaches such symptoms very differently if the client defines herself by the expectations of others (Stage S-3), compared to a self-definition based on her own values and principles (Stage S-4). The behavioral symptom in question is the same in both cases, but its *meaning* for the client is decidedly different at different stages, and therefore requires different interventions. In this context, having available data on a client's developmental risk and potential (index) is of great benefit to the coach.

V CLINICAL-DEVELOPMENTAL CONTRIBUTION

When bringing together the three dimensions of CDF – social-emotional, cognitive, and psychodynamic ("behavioral") – either in feedback to or work with clients, it is important to understand the different levels of generality of CDF findings, as shown below:

Figure 4
Hierarchy of degrees of generality
of CDF scores
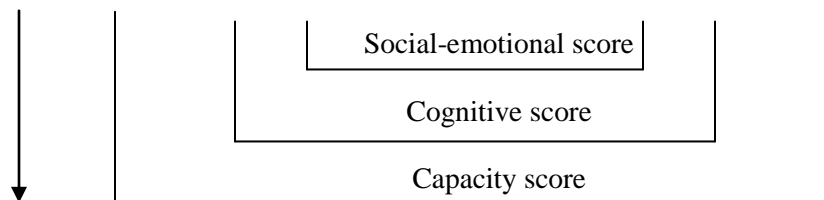
While social-emotional findings are highly *generic* – there are millions of people functioning at the same developmental level – cognitive developmental findings are more highly individuated. As a result, many different cognitive profiles can potentially be associated with one and the same level of social-emotional development.

Even more diverse are clinical-developmental data of the form the "Need/Press Questionnaire" (NP) elicits which point to the concrete singularity of an individual (Aderman, 1967; Murray, 1938). The questionnaire is a deep-digging assessment tool whose outcomes lend themselves to interpretation from a social-emotional as well as cognitive perspective.

Without going into extensive detail, the psychodynamic data provided by the NP questionnaire focuses on *self conduct, approach to tasks, and interpersonal perspective* of an individual in an organizational environment. The questionnaire views behavior from the vantage point of *psychogenic needs* in relation to *pressures* self- imposed by the client in terms of aspirations [ideal Press] and by the social environment [actual Press] (Aderman, 1967). The 18 variables of the questionnaire are evaluated along a Likert scale from 0 to 9 referenced to a managerial norm. Wherever a client's outcomes for these variables lie at extreme ends of the scale, or significantly deviate from the managerial norm, a coaching problem is indicated.

For instance, under Self Conduct, a client may present with a self concept that is either at 0 (arrogant, unbending, rigid self perception) or 9 (lack of confidence, self doubts). In this case, there is a significant deviation from the managerial norm of 3 especially on the far end of the scale, indicating behavioral difficulties that a coach would want to attend to. (The finding may also indicate clinical symptoms, in which case the client would have to be referred to a clinical psychologist.)

When considering psychological data of a behavioral nature (like the above) from a developmental point of view, we are essentially asking: **why should these symptoms exist?** That is, we consider developmental information as *explanatory of* behavioral data. A related question is: **given our developmental interpretation of these symptoms, what is the optimal approach to the client in regard to these symptoms?**

For instance, let's say we elicited the following data about our client's interpersonal perspective (emotional intelligence):

- *Limited ability to distinguish own motivations from those of others.*
- *Cloudy regarding own motivations and their impact on others.*
- *Limited ability to empathize with others.*
- *Somewhat distant and aloof, undemonstrative.*
- *Likely to question others' motive.*

As developmental coaches we ask ourselves two fundamental questions:

1. What is the developmental explanation for these symptoms, either in the cognitive or social-emotional domain, or both?
2. How, given the client's developmental profile (FoR), should the coach work with the client, and what would seem to be an optimal coaching plan for approaching these issues?

The nature of a coaching intervention in this context would strongly depend on how the client defines herself social-emotionally and cognitively. An "other-dependent" client (stage 3) would have a fundamentally different understanding of these findings compared to a "self-authoring" client (stage 4). Also, depending on the client's present cognitive profile, strength or weakness of systemic thinking would matter considerably in terms of how to proceed. (See Laske, 2006, Appendix B, for more details on the case of Sarah.)

VI OUTLOOK ON INTEGRATING THE DEVELOPMENTAL PARADIGM INTO COACHING PSYCHOLOGY

As noted by D. Stober (2006), "coaching is all about human growth and change." In light of this insight, it stands to reason that coaching psychology will remain less professional than it could be wherever developmental methodology and findings are not fully integrated.

What is perhaps less clear to the coaching psychologist coming from a behavioral tradition is the fact that developmental data *lies in a different dimension* compared to behavioral findings. Developmental data flows from a different paradigm that has consequences not only for clients, but for coaches as well. Most simply, developmental data lie in a 'vertical' dimension that *explains* behavioral data, and thus transcends behavioral arguments. This is highlighted by Fig. 1 at the beginning of the chapter.

In light of the *Constructive-Developmental Framework* (CDF) briefly outlined above, there presently exists a "black hole" not only in coaching practice but also in coaching research. This black hole is due to assumptions made by the international "coaching community" that closely approximate social-emotional level 3, of other-dependence (Kegan, 1994; Laske, 2006).

Level-3 meaning making fertilizes the notion that "coach and client speak the same language and see the world from the same vantage point" (O'Connor, 2007) while at the same time the coach as a professional claims a self-authoring position (Kegan's level 4) as any piece of the coaching literature will show. This *espousal of a professional, level 4, position associated with a level-3 methodology* is based on lack of self-awareness, and is a clear hindrance to making coaching a true profession. The espousal will continue as long as coaches do not know their own developmental level and do not regard their level of self development as the basis of their effectiveness with clients.

There would be much to say about the curriculum changes in coaching psychology that would need to occur for the integration suggested above to occur. I have outlined such changes in a previous article (Laske, 2006) when presenting the curriculum followed by the Interdevelopmental Institute. Present commercial pressures leading to a portrayal of coaching as an *industry service* make it difficult to "come clean" regarding the pedagogical changes that need to be made, even in academia.

The pedagogical changes that seem required for closing the black hole mentioned above all regard the fact that, by laws of human mental growth, coaches live at different developmental levels and "coach" accordingly. Coaching from a specific developmental level concretely means that the practitioner's model defining "who the client is" is a function of his/her present way of meaning- and sense-making, or self definition. Developmental levels define limitations that cannot be overcome by mere espousal, but require mental growth to occur both cognitively and social-emotionally. It therefore stands to reason that coach "training" – or rather "education" – would be the best way to make a first step in closing the black hole of coaching. Perhaps then, out of an "industry service" may arise a "profession."

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