

Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF)

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The Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF) is a theoretical framework for psychological assessment based on empirical research.

The framework is based on the assumption that an individual's perception of reality is an actively constructed "world of their own", unique to them and which they continue to develop over their lifespan. The assessment methodology involves three separate instruments that respectively measure a person's social-emotional stage, cognitive level of development, and psychological profile. The empirical methodology of CDF is grounded in research which began under Lawrence Kohlberg 40 years ago, continued by Robert Kegan and others (1982, 2011), and developed further since 1998 by Dr. Otto Laske, who integrated different forms of assessment and incorporated ideas about dialectical thinking as developed by the Frankfurt School and the philosopher Hegel. In Laske's conception CDF makes a strict differentiation between social-emotional and cognitive development and relates these two lines of development through empirical research.

1 CDF - Overview

Psychological assessment based on CDF measures three essential aspects of a person: Social-emotional Development (ED), Cognitive Development (CD) and personality profile (NP), the latter describing a person's likely behaviour in terms of their psychological 'needs' and 'press' - the environmental forces that they perceive acting on them (concepts developed by the psychologist Henry Murray). These three different aspects combine to present a unique picture of the individuality of a person.

In CDF, the social-emotional development of a person is typically measured in general and abstract terms as a 'stage'. In contrast, a person's cognitive development is measured in terms of their use of dialectical thinking, which is much more specific to the individual. The most differentiated view is offered by the Needs-Press personality profile that measures the psychodynamic aspects underlying the behavior of a person. All three dimensions of a person need to be determined in conjunction in order to do justice to an individual in an assessment.

2 Social-emotional development

2.1 Stages of adult development

According to the developmental psychologist, Robert Kegan (1982), a person's self concept evolves in a series of stages through their lifetime. Such evolution is driven alternately by two main motivations: that of being autonomous and that of belonging to a group. Human beings are "controlled" by these motivations in the sense that they do not have influence on them but are rather defined by them. Additionally, these motivations are in conflict and their relationship develops over a lifespan (Laske 2006: 31).

Kegan describes 5 stages of development, of which the latter 4 are progressively attained in adulthood, although only a small proportion of adults reach the fourth stage and beyond:

- Stage 2: The person's sense of self is ruled by their needs and wishes. The needs and wishes of others are relevant only to the extent that they support those of the person. Effectively the person and others inhabit two "separate worlds";
- Stage 3: The person's sense of self is socially determined, based on the real or imagined expectations of others;
- Stage 4: The person's sense of self is determined by a set of values that they have authored for themselves;
- Stage 5: The person's sense of self is no longer bound to any particular aspect of themselves or their history, and they are free to allow themselves to focus on the flow of their lives.

CDF refers to such stages as "social-emotional" in that they relate to the way a person makes meaning of their experience in the social world. CDF holds that people are rarely precisely at a single stage but more accurately distributed over a range where they are subject to the conflicting influences of a higher and a lower stage.

2.2 The social-emotional profile of a person

The social-emotional profile of person is assessed by means of an interview, referred to as the "subject-object" interview (Kegan, 1982). In the interview, the interviewer offers prompts such as "success", "change", "control", "limits", "frustration", and "risk" and invites the interviewee to

describe meaningful experiences under those headings. The interviewer serves as a listener, whose role is to focus the attention of the interviewee onto their own thoughts and feelings.

The interview is scored by identifying excerpts of speech that indicate a particular stage or sub-stage. Relevant sections are chosen from the transcript of the interview and analyzed for indications of the stage of development. The most frequent sub-stage revealed by the scoring is described as the interviewee's "centre of gravity". Stages scored at below the centre of gravity are described as "risk" (of regression) while stages scored above the centre of gravity are described as "potential" (for development). The distribution of scores is summarized by a "risk-clarity-potential" index (RCP) that can be used to characterize the nature of the developmental challenges facing a person.

3 Cognitive development

3.1 Eras of adult cognitive development

According to Piaget, thinking develops in 4 stages from childhood to young adulthood. Piaget named these stages sensory-motor, pre-operational, concrete-operational, and formal-operational. Development of formal-operational thinking is considered to continue until approximately until the 25th year of life. Subsequent researchers have concentrated on the now famous question of Kohlberg: Is there a life after 25? According to CDF, the development of post formal-operational thinking in an adult is indicated primarily by the presence of dialectical thinking (Laske 2009: 120)

In CDF, human thinking is seen as developing in four sequential phases or 'eras', termed 'common sense', 'understanding', 'reason' and finally 'practical wisdom' (Laske 2009, Bhaskar 1993:21). The first three phases of thinking development can be related to the different thinking systems put forward by the philosophers Locke, Kant and Hegel. Each phase includes and transcends the thinking system of the previous phase. The final phase of 'practical wisdom' loops back to a higher form of 'common sense' in that it is sophisticated thinking that has become second nature and is therefore effortless (Laske: 2009: 128). In contrast to other researchers such as Fischer and Commons, Laske describes post-formal cognitive development in terms of the use and co-ordination of dialectical thought forms, which are themselves described as mental schematas (Basseches: 1984).

3.2 Four classes of dialectical thought forms

Dialectical thinking has its roots in Greek classical philosophy but is also found in ancient Hindu and Buddhist philosophy, and relates to the search for truth through reasoned argument. It finds its foremost expression in the work of the German philosopher Georg Hegel. Essentially, Dialectics is viewed as the system by which human thought attempts to capture the nature of reality. Building on Bhaskar (1993) and Basseches (1984), CDF uses a framework for Dialectical thinking based on the idea that everything in reality is transient and composed of contradictions, part of a larger whole, related in some way to everything else, and subject to sudden transformation. This framework therefore distinguishes dialectical thinking in terms of four classes of dialectical thought forms that can be said to define reality (Laske 2009: 224):

- Process (P) - constant change: this class of thought forms describes how things or systems emerge, evolve and disappear;
- Context (C) - stable structures: this class of thought forms describes how things are part of the structure of a larger, stable, organized whole. The contextualization of parts within a whole gives rise to different perspectives or points of view;

- Relationship (R) - unity in diversity: this class of thought forms describes how things (which are all part of a larger whole) are related and the nature of their common ground;
- Transformation (T) - balance and evolution: this class of thought forms describes how living systems are in constant development and transformation, potentially via a collapse of the previous form of organization, and subject to the influence of human agency.

In addition, CDF distinguishes seven individual thought forms for every class, making a total of 28 thought forms, representing a re-formulation of Basseches (1984) 24 schemas.

3.3 The cognitive profile of a person

The cognitive profile describes the thinking tools at a person's disposal and shows the degree to which a person's thinking has developed as indicated by their use of dialectical thought forms in the four classes. The profile is derived by means of a semi-structured interview where the interviewer has the task of eliciting the interviewee's use of thought forms in a conversation about the interviewee's work and workplace. The text of the interview is subsequently analyzed and scored to give a series of mathematical indicators.

According to CDF thinking that is highly developed is represented by the following features:

- a balanced use of thought forms of all four classes of dialectical thought forms (P, C, R, T)
- a high index for systemic thinking - meaning the use of transformative thought forms (T) and
- balanced use of critical and constructive thought forms (P+R) vs. (C+T).

4. Link between social-emotional development and cognitive development

Social-emotional and cognitive development are seen as separate lines of development (Wilber 2006: 58) but linked by the "stage of reflective judgment" (King and Kitchener, 1994) or "epistemic position" (Laske 2009: 137), described as the view taken by a person on what constitutes "knowledge" and "truth". Epistemic position defines a person's ability to deal with uncertainty and insecurity in their knowledge of the world and, together with the stage of social-emotional development, reflects the "stance" that a person takes towards the world. Whilst cognitive development provides a person with "tools" for thinking comprised of thought forms, derived from both logic and dialectics. (Laske 2009: 138), the "stance" that a person takes determines whether they apply the thinking tools at their disposal.

5. Personality

5.1 Psychogenic needs and press

CDF employs the theory put forward by psychologist Henry Murray that much of human behavior is determined by the effort to satisfy certain psychological (or "psychogenic" needs), many of which are unconscious. Personality is thus seen as characteristic behavior emerging from the dynamic between a person's pattern of psychogenic needs and the environmental forces acting on that person - termed "press".

The needs-press analysis draws on Sigmund Freud's model of the human psyche divided into the components of *Id*, *Ego* and *Super-ego*. In living, a person is subject to the unconscious yearnings of the *Id*, whilst consciously aspiring to certain ideals imposed by the *Super-ego*, which itself is

influenced by the social context. It is the dynamic balance between the forces of *Id* and *Super-ego* and the work environment that determines a person's capacity for work. Imbalances between the social reality of work and a person's ideals lead to frustration, and imbalances between a person's unconscious needs and their ideals lead to a waste of energy or "energy sink" (Laske, 2009: 419).

5.2 The personality profile of a person

CDF assessment methodology uses a self-report psychometric questionnaire originated by Henry Murray's student Morris Aderman, called the Need-Press inventory (www.needpress.com).

The questionnaire assesses psychological characteristics in terms of three categories: self-conduct, task focus, and interpersonal perspective, and compares a person's current needs with 1) what they would like in an ideal world and 2) what they perceive they are offered in actuality. Each category is composed of several scales such as: need for control, drive to achieve, affiliation etc.

Comparisons and interpretation can be made between a person's scores for "Need", and their scores ideal and actual "Press". Comparisons can also be made between a person's scores and those of the group of people with whom they are working.

6 Applications

6.1 Assessment of work capability

The assessment methodology employed by CDF was created to measure peoples' capability and capacity for work. The theory of work used by CDF is derived from the work of Elliott Jaques. According to Jaques (1989), work is defined as the application of reflective judgment in order to pursue certain goals within certain time limits. This definition stresses the importance of decision-making and the time-span within which decisions are carried out. While Jaques offers a strictly cognitive definition of work, CDF views the social-emotional aspects of work as equally important.

CDF distinguishes between two kinds of work capability, applied and potential. Applied capability refers to the resources that an individual can already apply in order to carry out work. Potential capability refers to the resources that an individual may be capable of applying in the future (Laske 2009: 57). An individual can decide at any time not to apply their potential work capability. Equally circumstances may impede a person from applying their potential. Work capability is therefore not the same as the capacity to deliver work but rather defines it.

In CDF work capacity is measured in terms of the Needs-Press personality profile, whilst applied capability is measured in terms of the thinking tools shown up by the cognitive profile, and potential capability is measured in terms of the Risk-Clarity-Potential score taken from the social-emotional profile.

6.2 Organizational Talent Management

For Elliot Jaques (1989) human organizations are structured managerially according to levels of accountability. Each level of accountability entails a higher level of complexity in the work required of the role-holder, termed "size of role". Jaques defined the notion of "requisite organization" where roles in an organization are hierarchically organized at specific levels of increasing complexity.

The application of CDF as an assessment methodology to measure the “size of person” in terms of their work capability and capacity provides a way forward for talent management systems to match the “size of person” to the “size of role”. Progressively more complex roles require progressively higher levels of social-emotional development and cognitive development in the role-holder. In this way requisite organizations can align their human capability architecture with their managerial accountability architecture (Laske 2009: 84) and design “growth assignments” (DeVisch, 2010) that facilitate the development of capability for more complex roles.

6.3 Coaching

CDF provides a platform for professional coaching in a variety of ways. Firstly it provides assessment tools from which the coach can construct an integrated model complete with the developmental challenges of the client who is to be helped. Secondly, and in the sense used by Edgar Schein (1999) the use of the assessment tools and the feedback of results by the coach is an act of “process consultation” by which the client may come to understand better the assumptions, values, attitudes and behaviors that are helping or hindering their success. Thirdly, CDF provides tools for deeper and more sophisticated thinking, thereby enabling the client to explore and expand their conceptual landscape of a problem.

CDF distinguishes between behavioral and developmental coaching. The goal of behavioral coaching is to improve the client’s actual performance at work, described in CDF terms as their applied capability. In contrast, the goal of developmental coaching is to illuminate and develop the client’s current and emergent capabilities for work in the context of their cognitive and social-emotional development. Self-awareness is thereby given priority to performance, because fundamentally it supports performance.

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Weblinks

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