

# The Complete Handbook of COACHING

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and DAVID CLUTTERBUCK

Fourth  
Edition

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# ONLINE RESOURCES FOR LECTURERS



*The Complete Handbook of Coaching* is supported by a wealth of online resources for lecturers, available at <https://study.sagepub.com/coxhandbook4e>. The Teaching Guide provides lecturers with chapter teaching and assessment suggestions, videos and further reading.

# 9

## PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN ADULTHOOD AND COACHING

Tatiana Bachkirova

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss:

- The origin and distinctive features of the theories of psychological development of adults
- The specific ways these theories are applicable to coaching practice
- An evaluation of the issues associated with the use of adult development theories in coaching.

I believe that the strength of coaching in comparison to other ways of facilitating individuals' learning and change is in providing developmental support in a way that is unique to each client. In order to provide such tailor-made support, coaches need to be knowledgeable about individual differences of clients. Theories of psychological development of adults add an important dimension to the knowledge about the way individuals can be different. This dimension is not about differences in personality types, learning styles or personal preferences, all of which are usually seen as relatively stable for each individual throughout their life. Adult development theories propose that people undergo significant changes during their adult life; for example, in the way they make meaning of their experiences, reason about their values and act in the world. These theories indicate that there are certain patterns in such changes and suggest that these changes occur in the sequential stages through which people progress. This progression can occur naturally just by living and acting in the world, but it can also be facilitated by appropriate support and challenge within the coaching process. The aim of this chapter is to explore how understanding some of the developmental trajectories may help coaches to be better equipped to address the diverse needs of their clients.

## A brief history of this developmental ‘tradition’

Adult development theories are based on three major areas of research or theoretical strands:

1. The first strand began with the important work of Piaget (1976) on cognitive development in children. It emphasizes developmental changes in reasoning and meaning-making, which also extend to adulthood, as explored in the studies on, for example, moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1969), intellectual development (Perry, 1970), reflective judgement (King & Kitchener, 1994) and ‘orders of mind’ (Kegan, 1982).
2. The second strand is about ego development, with its origins in the research of Loewinger (1976). It focuses on the development of self-identity and the maturity of interpersonal relationships. It has been also extended to include post-autonomous ego development by Cook-Greuter (1999) and action logics by Torbert & Associates (2004).
3. The foundation of the third strand is in the research by Graves (1970) into levels of existence, which was later extended into ‘worldviews’ and ‘values’ by Beck and Cowan (1996) and is known as ‘Spiral Dynamics’.

There are many other theories proposing variations of the sequential stages in the development of further individual characteristics, for example, emotions, needs and spiritual awareness. Following Wilber (1999), we will call these changing characteristics ‘*developmental lines*’. It is to Wilber (1999, 2000, 2006) that we also owe a comprehensive overview of developmental theories that explore these different developmental lines. Many theories of adult development are conceived, and relevant studies are conducted, in the tradition of developmental structuralism, which looks for patterns that connect specific psychological phenomena. There are, of course, other opposing philosophical positions and they are adapted to critique developmental theories in terms of their main principles (e.g. Paulson, 2007).

It is important to mention that none of these theories was developed for coaching. Their main purpose was to understand human nature and, more specifically, individual differences. However, practical applications of some theories relevant to coaching were gradually developed, for example, in the work of Kegan and Lahey (2009), Berger and Fitzgerald (2002) and Berger (2012). In this chapter, I review the main principles and distinctive features of the theories of adult development and their practical applications. I will then look at the theory of Development of Self in Action (DSA) (Bachkirova, 2011, 2022) as an exemplar approach to developmental coaching. It has been specifically developed for coaching, and consequently is enhanced by feedback from coaching practice.

## DISTINCTIVE FEATURES

A useful principle for theories of psychological development in adulthood is that of ‘*holarchy*’ (Wilber, 2006). An example of this principle is the relationship between atoms, molecules, cells and whole organisms that shows how each element or stage includes and transcends the previous stage. This example also suggests that, in terms of development, it is not possible, for example, to go from atoms to cells by ‘skipping’ molecules. When the holarchy principle is applied to the stages in adult development, it implies that adults take a considerable time to develop through each stage, and stages cannot be ‘skipped’ because each is built on and includes the previous one.

Another principle is the *independent progression of various developmental aspects* or lines (cognitive, emotional, moral, etc.). This means that for each individual, development of various psychological



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Another principle is the *independent progression of various developmental aspects* or lines (cognitive, emotional, moral, etc.). This means that for each individual, development of various psychological

aspects can be far from synchronic. Figure 9.1 represents a snapshot in time of how an individual's development might look if we were able to measure the development of each developmental line. This representation, however abstract, can be useful in dispelling myths promoting simplistic ideas of categorizing people and challenges the validity of quick conclusions concerning an individual's overall development. It may also indicate the futility of attempts to use one line for describing the development of another. Although Loevinger (1976) argued that there should be a common 'deep structure' in which lines proceed in tandem, and other authors claimed to identify this (e.g. Beck & Cowan, 1996; Laske, 2006), Wilber disputes such claims and the whole idea of overall development:

Although substantial empirical evidence demonstrates that each line develops through these hierarchical stages in an invariant sequence, nonetheless, because all two dozen of them develop relatively independently, overall growth and development is a massively complex, overlapping, nonlinear affair, following no set sequence whatsoever. (Wilber, 1999: 291-292)

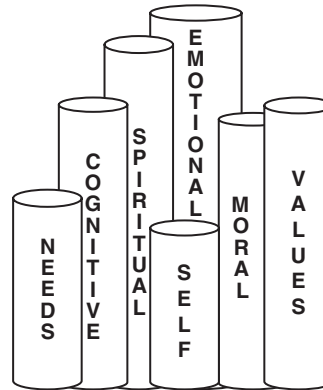


Figure 9.1 Example of a combination of the developmental lines in an individual

Table 9.1 A cumulative description of the three stages in adult psychological development with additions (Bachkirova, 2016b: 302)

| Stages                                                              | Unformed ego                                                                                                                            | Formed ego                                                                                                                                               | Reformed ego                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Cognitive style</b><br>(based mostly on Kegan, 1982)             | Socialized mind<br><i>Ability for abstract thinking and self-reflection</i>                                                             | Self-authoring mind<br><i>Can see multiplicity and patterns; is critical and analytical</i>                                                              | Self-transforming mind<br><i>Systems view; tolerance of ambiguity; change from linear logic to holistic understanding</i>                                         |
| <b>Interpersonal style</b><br>(Cook-Greuter, 1999; Loevinger, 1987) | Dependent<br>Conformist/self-conscious<br><i>Need for belonging; socially expected behaviour in relationships; peacemakers/ keepers</i> | Independent<br>Conscientious/individualist<br><i>Separate but responsible for their own choices; communication and individual differences are valued</i> | Inter-independent<br>Autonomous/integrated<br><i>Take responsibility for relationship; respect autonomy of others; tolerance of conflicts; non-hostile humour</i> |

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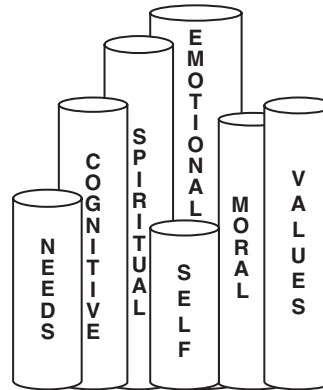


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| Stages                                                                                | Unformed ego                                                                                                                 | Formed ego                                                                                                                | Reformed ego                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Conscious preoccupations</b><br>(Graves, 1970)                                     | Multiplistic<br><i>Social acceptance, reputation, moral 'shoulds and oughts'</i>                                             | Relativistic/individualistic<br><i>Achievement of personal goals according to inner standards</i>                         | Systemic/integrated<br><i>Individuality; self-fulfilment; immediate present; understanding conflicting needs</i>                            |
| <b>Character development</b><br>(Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kohlberg, 1969; Loevinger, 1987) | Rule-bound<br><i>'Inappropriate' feelings are denied or repressed. Rules of important others are internalized and obeyed</i> | Conscientious<br><i>Self-reliant, conscientious; follow self-evaluated rules; judge themselves and critical of others</i> | Self-regulated<br><i>Behaviour is an expression of own moral principles. Concerned with conflicting roles, duties, value system</i>         |
| <b>Engagement in action</b><br>(Bachkirova, 2011, 2022)                               | Unformed ego<br><i>Limited sense of control over themselves and environment. Higher dependency on others for action</i>      | Formed ego<br><i>Capacity to take ownership of the past and act independently. 'Mind over body' control of action</i>     | Reformed ego<br><i>Harmony between mind and body in action. Appreciation of complexity in the relationship between self and environment</i> |

It can be noted that different theories of psychological development argue for a different number of stages in the developmental lines they study. This is not problematic, according to Wilber (2006). As in map making, the way to divide and represent the territory is somewhat arbitrary – it is not important ‘how you slice and dice development’. In this regard, I suggest that the reader follows one of the pioneers in the field of adult development, who proposed that development proceeds from the ‘pre-conventional level’ to the ‘conventional level’ and then to the ‘post-conventional level’ (Kohlberg, 1969). My choice of focusing on three stages – the unformed, formed and reformed ego (see Table 9.1) – is made for simplicity of use in the coaching context and on the basis of various statistical data (Beck & Cowan, 1996; Wilber, 2000) which suggest that they are typical for the clientele of coaches.

In Table 9.1, the unformed, formed and reformed ego stages are described in relation to four major aspects of the individual: cognitive style, interpersonal style, conscious preoccupations and character development. The main input for each of these aspects is drawn from the theories of Kegan (1982), Graves (1970), Torbert (1991), Cook-Greuter (1999) and Wilber (2000), with the use of another simplifying meta-perspective on these theories offered by McCauley et al. (2006). My own contribution to these aspects is ‘engagement in action’, which I argue to be particularly relevant for coaching (Bachkirova, 2011, 2022) on the basis of the theory Development of Self in Action (DSA).

The differences between the stages of development in Table 9.1 can help us to see why some coaching approaches might be better suited than others when working with people at these stages. For example, person-centred coaching and Transactional Analysis (TA) have good methods that are suitable for an unformed ego, but may have limitations when working with a formed and reformed ego (Bachkirova & Borrington, 2018). Cognitive-behavioural and solution-focused coaching resonate well with a formed ego, but less so with a reformed ego. Coaches who work with a reformed ego might find the existential approach or Gestalt approach most appropriate. Evidence now exists to suggest that many coaches are familiar with some of the adult development theories and that the practical applications of these theories are useful in coaching practice (Bachkirova, 2022; Berger, 2012; Berger & Fitzgerald, 2002; Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

At the same time, it has to be said that the theories of psychological development in adulthood are known for their complexity, and particularly for the labour-intensive instruments used for identifying developmental stages. Lahey et al. (1988) developed the subject–object interview (SOI), which is used for the assessment of 21 gradations within Kegan’s orders of mind. It requires 60–90 minutes of recorded interview and a highly skilful scoring of the transcript. Although Berger’s work (2012) makes the process of identifying developmental stages much clearer and appealing to try, it is still a significant challenge for coaches. There is also the Washington University Sentence Completion Test used to measure Loevinger’s (1976) stages, which has been updated by Cook-Greuter (2004) as the Leadership Development Profile (LDP). Individual assessment with these tools can only be done through relevant organizations and there are many aspects of the measurement process that can potentially interfere with the quality of it, such as verbal fluency and educational and social background (Lawrence, 2017; McCauley et al., 2006). Although the commitment of these organizations to improving the quality of these instruments and the inter-rater reliability among their trained scorers is reassuring, the actual fact that the assessment is done through the third party can deter coaches from using them.

A different approach has been developed on the basis of the theory that avoids the issue of measurement by concentrating on ‘what’ clients are concerned with at the time they come for coaching (Bachkirova, 2011). The argument is that clients’ concerns, challenges and goals by themselves show a pattern that indicates development. Therefore, it was proposed that for the purpose of coaching there is no need to assess where each client is according to any scale. Instead, it is the *developmental themes* that are brought by clients themselves that are an ‘instrument’ of assessment. It is important to note that these themes are not only about goals; they are also about the challenges that people face in life, what they find difficult, and what their life circumstances demand from them in terms of engagement with their environment. The pattern in the themes (see Table 9.2) indicates the challenge that is characteristic of the stage of ego development. This information helps to shape an individual approach to coaching, i.e. offering coaching towards a healthy ego, coaching the ego or coaching beyond the ego (Bachkirova, 2022).

**Table 9.2** Examples of developmental themes in three groups of ego development

| Themes of unformed ego                                                    | Themes of formed ego                                                             | Themes of reformed ego                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Decision making in difficult situations with a number of stakeholders     | Coping with a high amount of self-created work                                   | Dissatisfaction with life, in spite of achievements                                          |
| Taking a higher level of responsibility than they feel they can cope with | Achieving recognition, promotion, etc.                                           | Internal conflict<br>Not ‘fitting in’                                                        |
| Work–life balance connected to an inability to say ‘no’                   | Interpersonal conflicts<br>Driving for success and an underlying fear of failure | Searching for meaning in life<br>Overcoming a life crisis<br>Initiating a significant change |
| Performance anxiety                                                       | Problem-solving<br>Learning to delegate                                          | Dealing with personal illusions                                                              |
| Issues of self-esteem                                                     | Stress management                                                                | Staying true to themselves in a complex situation                                            |

Ego in the DSA theory (Bachkirova, 2022) is a network of mini-selves based on an understanding of the mind as modular (e.g. Gazzaniga, 1985; Kurzban, 2012). Each mini-self is a combination of brain/mind states and processes that are involved in the organism's engagement with a certain task, or, more precisely, it is a particular pattern of links between different areas of the brain that become activated or inhibited when the organism is involved in an act. It is possible to say that the existence of fully-functioning and important-for-the-person mini-selves indicates a 'centre of developmental gravity' in terms of engagement in action – the stage of ego development.

The ego can be developed to various degrees and described as unformed, formed or reformed. When the ego is fully developed, the mind/brain can act, or refrain from action if necessary, in a way that reasonably satisfies the organism as a whole with all the multiplicity of its needs and tasks. With the *unformed ego*, there are needs that remain unsatisfied and tasks that are unfulfilled as the organism is missing some important mini-selves. The sign of a *formed ego*, which has sufficient important mini-selves, is the capacity to take ownership of the past, withstand anxiety about what the future holds and build relationships with others without losing the sense of who they are. The choices that the formed ego makes may be constructive or destructive, but they are usually made according to their own criteria. At the same time, this stage of ego development is associated with other developmental challenges. The sense of control and self-ownership may lead to an overestimation of what is possible and realistic for the organism, which may result in a lack of attention to and even abuse of the body when working to achieve some specific targets. The third category, *reformed ego*, represents the capacities of the ego that go beyond those of the formed ego. There is a much more harmonious relationship between the mind and body in action, manifested in the ability of the organism to tolerate the ambiguity of some needs and tasks, thus minimizing energy wasted on conflicts between the various mini-selves.

### Influencing development in coaching

Although coaching may seem to be a perfect way to influence development as described, the idea of actively influencing development is contentious. Some authors strongly advocate the need for development (Laske, 2006), while others are more tentative (Bachkirova, 2011; Berger, 2012; Kegan, 1982). For example, Kegan (1982) suggests that the quality of psychological support for an individual who is facing a transition or a new developmental task will be higher if the coach is 'developmentally-minded'. The main value is for the client to be in the presence of someone 'who can see, recognize and understand who the person is and who he or she is *becoming*' (Kegan, 1982: 260, emphasis added). However, Kegan also expressed an important concern about over-zealous attempts to change someone developmentally: 'amongst the many things from which a practitioner's clients need protection is the practitioner's hopes for the client's future, however benign and sympathetic these hopes may be' (Kegan, 1982: 295).

It is important to emphasize that the nature of development, as discussed in this chapter, is a complex process that involves a combination of known and unknown, and internal and environmental factors. The shift from one stage to another may be slow and subtle as clients' mini-selves are not concentrated on the same developmental stage. However, once understood, these theories may be so attractive that some coaches are seduced into using them inappropriately, designing and suggesting interventions to 'move' clients from one stage to another. This tendency can also be

further intensified as ‘vertical development’ ideas in leadership become popular and organizations are overly eager to take them on board. The main danger of this approach is that it may create the illusion that significant developmental shifts can be induced by sufficient motivation and effort. It may also distract coaches from attending to the clients’ other concerns, which may actually be more relevant to them and have greater urgency. Berger (2012) also warned about hasty judgements of developmental stages, particularly in organizational contexts, and about simplistic interpretations of this theoretical perspective.

At the same time, we do see repeatedly that the coaching process, even when it aims at specific and pragmatic goals, provides important conditions for potential developmental shifts in individuals. By engaging with the presenting task, coaches inevitably evaluate a fit between the existing capabilities of the client and the complexity of a task. This prompts them to create appropriate conditions for a developmental shift if necessary, and that shift may well happen. This means that coaches working in different traditions can work developmentally and be successful in promoting development without focusing on moving the client to the next stage of development. In addition, good understanding of the theories of development can help them to recognize where the main challenges for the client are and to understand why their usual approach may not work with all clients.

Working more specifically in a developmental coaching genre would require a coach approaching a new assignment initially in the same way as any other coach: identifying the client’s needs, exploring their situation fully and clarifying their goals. However, gradually they would gain a sense of the developmental theme and corresponding ego stage which describes the client’s challenges and the difficulties they are experiencing. The task of the coach is then to engage with whatever issue/goal is presented, but also to consider relevant coaching strategies suitable for the identified ego stage. This extra exploration can be done through reflection on the previous sessions, preparation for the coming sessions and discussion of these cases in supervision.

It is important to add that the developmental coach is concerned with both the agenda of the client for the session and the development of their overall capacity for learning according to the developmental trajectory that a theory of adult development suggests. As an example of the approach that I advocate, the main purpose of this work can be described in the definition of developmental coaching:

Developmental coaching is a partnership between the client and the coach that addresses the current needs of the client with a view to increasing their overall capacity to engage with the challenges of life and to create a better platform for further growth. (Bachkirova, 2022: 3)

## METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

In Kegan’s (1982) approach to development, an important mechanism of change is the shift from Subject to Object, which coaching can usefully influence. Things that are Subject in Kegan’s theory can prompt us to action but cannot be observed or reflected on. We cannot stand back and take a look at them because we are embedded in them. On the other hand, things that are Object for us are ‘those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon’ (Kegan, 1994: 32). It has been said that to be Subject is to ‘see with’ rather than to ‘see through’ (Drath, 1990). A good example is ‘cultural blindness’, as described by Drath (1990), who suggests that:



we see with our culture-bound norms and expectations, accept them as given, and cannot examine them for what they are – that is, we cannot see through them. Our cultural heritage is something we are, not something we have. The culture holds us; we are embedded in it and cannot rise above it. (Drath, 1990: 486)

It is natural, therefore, that the more individuals can take as Object, the more complex their world-view becomes, because they can examine and act on more things. The mechanism of the shift from Subject to Object can be considered as an essential element of coaching. It is one of the functions of coaches to watch for the re-absorption of insight in the client and to help build *psychological muscle* in order to hold something out from a person as an Object (Berger & Fitzgerald, 2002). As Berger and Fitzgerald (2002: 31) say: ‘one of the most powerful interventions coaches can provide is simply to help keep critical insights alive for their clients’.

The following case can describe how the above intervention can be part of the coaching process. In his new role of head of department, a client received feedback suggesting that his way of one-to-one communication with people made some of his staff uncomfortable. He asked his coach to help him to respond to this feedback, which he found puzzling. They explored this feedback together with the coach’s own observations of his interactions with her and others. It appeared that the client’s style involved unusually long pauses that people perceived as withdrawals. These apparently made those colleagues who were more self-conscious than others to feel insecure. The client was not aware of this. His style was so much a part of who he was that he could not reflect on the effect it was having on other people. As the result of coaching, his style has gradually changed from being Subject into Object, leading to the client’s increased ability to notice his style and modify it when necessary.

Kegan and Lahey (2009) proposed the idea of *immunity to change*, suggesting that many people who sincerely want to change may not be able to do so because they are directing a lot of productive energy towards a hidden competing commitment. For example, a client may genuinely want to empower others and to delegate, but finds himself regularly sorting problems by himself. His competing commitment is apparently to be personally useful, with an assumption behind it that he might not be satisfied if he is not the one who is ‘leading from the front’. Kegan and Lahey (2009) also developed an exercise that helps to identify such an assumption and to make it an ‘Object’ for a person. This may lead to a new, more ‘spacious’ mental structure, which is able to accommodate a wider range of links. In this example, the definition of individual ‘hero’ can expand into someone who is a ‘hero’ by virtue of empowering others.

In Berger (2012), we can find many overall strategies for working with clients when their stages of development are identified. She suggests various ways of identifying key strengths, blind spots and central areas of growth for the clients at each stage, and comments on the pitfalls that coaches may face with these client groups. For example, coaching the self-authored types of client (which I referred to as formed ego), Berger recommends *exploring dichotomies, uncovering assumptions, questioning certainty and seeking wise mentors and thinking partners*. What is particularly important in Berger’s developmental approach to coaching is the emphasis not only on techniques and methods of working with clients, but also the attitude and intention of the coach (Berger, 2012: 93). For example, she argues that simply learning about theories of development is developmental. By engaging with these theories, coaches begin to ask themselves the developmental questions the theory asks and begin to listen in a different way to their own answers.

I have proposed three further mechanisms for development as part of developmental coaching (Bachkirova, 2011, 2022): (1) improving the quality of perception, (2) working with the multiplicity

of self, and (3) working with the unconscious, automatic parts of the mind/brain and body (i.e. improving the relationship between the conscious mind and reasoning ('the rider') and the emotional, unconscious mind and the body ('the elephant')). Attending to these aspects in developmental coaching should enhance the client's engagement with the change they are aiming at.

### Improving the quality of perception

In order to improve the quality of perception, coaches traditionally aim to develop active listening skills, observation skills, and learn to attend to body language, etc. However, it is also important to know what we are up against when we try to improve our quality of perception – what it is that prevents us from seeing things with fewer filters. According to Krishnamurti (1996: 54), it is only through understanding the nature of the trap that one can be free of it. Therefore, in coaching, *conditioning* and *self-deception* are the two main issues that interfere with the quality of perception.

*Conditioning* indicates issues of 'second-hand knowledge' that are absorbed from the culture of organizations, circles of friends, and society as a whole, in ways that prevent change and development. Exposing and counteracting these influences are useful in developmental coaching. Another obstacle to perception is *self-deception*. While during conditioning the filters impacting on our perception of reality are polished by influential others, in self-deception this job is done internally. Insights into the psychology of self-deception in individuals can enrich our work with the gaps in clients' perceptions that are created by self-deception (Bachkirova, 2016a; Fingarette, 2000).

### Working with the multiplicity of self

The multiplicity of self is manifested in the mini-selves that constitute the ego and are represented in the many stories put together by the *narrator* – a mini-self that has evolved with our ability to use language. Coaches can help clients to recognize and *accept the fact of multiplicity*. Accepting the multiplicity of self leads to conscious openness to experimenting with new roles that are often useful in coaching. It also helps if the stories we create about our engagements with the world correspond to how we actually act, to our mini-selves, which can be a relevant topic to be explored in the process of developmental coaching (Bachkirova, 2022).

### Improving the relationship between the rider and the elephant

The third mechanism of change is about the importance of better interaction between the conscious mind and reasoning (*the rider*) and the emotional, unconscious mind and the body (*the elephant*) during the process of change. This is possible through the promotion of *soft thinking* (Claxton, 1999: 146), which implies a softer focus, 'looking at' rather than 'looking for' (Claxton, 2015); gentle rather than 'incisive' questioning; and simply slowing down the process to support a non-superficial reflection. This approach accentuates the role of the whole body in sense-making and action. At the same time, reason is not excluded as it allows 'a firm and effective priority system' (Midgley, 1995: 252).

Developmental coaches are advised to pay equal attention to both the rider and the elephant of the client and to encourage better communication between them.

Although these mechanisms indicate the potential for development in any coaching process, each of them needs to be approached differently when they are applied to different stages of ego development. For example, in terms of increasing the quality of perception, working with the unformed ego needs more attention to be given to conditioning, giving priority to experience and the client's own voice, while the formed ego is more susceptible to self-deception, requiring priority to be given to external input, feedback and discrepancies (Bachkirova, 2011).

## APPLICATION

There is an obvious connection between the approaches to coaching that are based on theories of psychological development in adulthood and *developmental coaching* as a genre, which is concerned with holistic changes in the person. If clients are dealing with important dilemmas or transitions in their lives (a theme that often occurs in developmental coaching), the perspective discussed in this chapter may help coaches and clients to understand that transitions may not only be an adjustment to environmental changes, but also an internal process that has specific features of a developmental nature. This can be useful for clients, as it will help them to understand what they are going through and to see the specific landmarks of this process.

In relation to *team coaching*, this approach makes clear why group work is sometimes difficult. For example, when individuals who are at different stages of development are intensely involved in the same process, the chances of serious misunderstandings are numerous. However, opportunities for expected and unexpected growth may also be present. Theories of psychological development may help to explain the reasons for disagreements and conflicts. They may also help coaches to find an overall perspective which allows for the integration of the different needs of individuals into the value system of the team. Useful ideas about this kind of work can be found in Lawrence (2017).

The coach's own stage of development is also important. To be of most help to the client, the coach should be able to recognize where the client is on the developmental line. As has been said already, people find it difficult to recognize stages of development that come later than their current stage of development. Consequently, in such cases, they may not be optimally helpful as coaches. At the same time, it can be argued that within certain coaching genres, for example skills coaching, such a discrepancy is less important.

## EVALUATION

The application of psychological development theories can be highly valuable for coaching practice. These theories provide knowledge about an important dimension of clients' individual differences. However, this approach is not without controversy. Sometimes it causes unease in some coaches, and for others it can lead to over-zealous and uncritical acceptance of its tenets. We also need to acknowledge the considerable restrictions in the competent use of the diagnostic instruments, which prevents the wider application of these theories in coaching practice.

First, it is important to address the concern about this approach expressed by some coaches who believe that theories of psychological development imply a judgement about the level of development. This is seen to be contrary to a general commitment to the idea of coaching being non-judgemental. Without minimizing the significance of this concern, it is important to notice that similar judgements are made on an everyday basis for all sorts of reasons, including those that can be reasonably justified. Coaches reflect on such judgements individually and in supervision to evaluate their effect on the coaching process. What usually matters is the purpose of the judgement (or a better term would be assessment) and its validity. The purpose of such an assessment in coaching is to facilitate a better fit between the environment and the client's capacity for dealing with it. In this case, assessment is done in the best service of the client. The validity of the assessment depends on the quality of the theory that supports it and the quality of the actual assessment.

This leads us again to issues relating to the instruments for assessing individual development. In order to know the stage of development of the client, coaches seem to have various options, which are complex and time-consuming, but can be developmental in themselves. Yet another option is to learn about DSA theory and use developmental themes for assessment of the ego stage (Bachkirova, 2022), an approach that is less quantitatively precise compared to the other instruments but is considerably more informative than an 'educated guess'. It is an option that is available to any coach who is interested in these theories. The advantages of this approach for coaching practice also include an appropriate sensitivity to context and the complexity of human nature, making such assessment more organic and tentative. The coach will remain open to other interpretations of their assessment, which prompts them to give respectful attention to the voices of *all* the client's mini-selves, which could be at different stages of development. Having a healthy doubt about such an evaluation helps to keep the coach's attention fresh and open to these voices. The emphasis on the assessment of the developmental theme rather than the person also takes the edge from the concern about being 'judgemental' about the client's development.

Finally, the value of theories about psychological development in adulthood are specifically useful for coaches in relation to their own development. Learning about these theories is an opportunity for coaches to see more dimensions in themselves, their clients and the process of coaching. They might be in a better position to understand their own role in the coaching process and the dynamics of the coaching relationship, and thus be able to articulate, influence and change more critical situations in the coaching process. The realization of this complexity can enrich coaches' capacities for reflection and effective interaction with others, providing more openings to their own growth as a person. This is particularly important when the philosophy of coaching proposes that the self of the coach is the main instrument of their practice.

## FURTHER READING

Bachkirova, T. (2022). *Developmental coaching: Working with the self*. London: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

Updated and extended version of the theory of adult development that is specifically created for coaching. It includes a fully articulated practical approach based on this theory.

Berger, J. G. (2012). *Changing on the job: Developing leaders for a complex world*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

A practical and thoughtful adaptation of Kegan's original theory, which is particularly valuable in the organizational context.

Lawrence, P. (2017). Coaching and adult development. In T. Bachkirova, G. Spence, & D. Drake (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of coaching* (pp. 121–138). London: Sage.

An excellent overview of adult development theories in the context of coaching, with a balanced level of critique.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what way can your approach to coaching be considered as developmental?
- What do you see as your own developmental challenges as a coach?
- What is your view on the potential discrepancies between the levels of development of the coach and the client? How can they affect the coaching process?

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