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The Water We Swim In: A New Look at Cognitive Evolution

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The Water We Swim In: A New Look at Cognitive Evolution

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Σ AbstractSummary: ApplyUsing research in cognitive development and decision theory, this article presents a new model of decision making that will help you understand both your own processes and why those you live and work with make the decisions they do. The focus is on viewing how the brain works when faced with making a decision, what factors hinder and help when it comes to seeing options, and methods for helping ourselves - and others - in an organization to develop higher levels of thinking so we are better able to transfer our knowledge into positive behavioral change.

As coaches, we are in the business of helping people to reflect on their assumptions and behaviors. Then we help them to widen the space of possibilities as they formulate life choices, make interpersonal decisions, set strategic directions and sometimes, simply, know better who they are. Yet, when it comes to making important long-term behavioral changes, the transformation is often slow to come. Why is it so hard to put knowledge into practice? If real learning means that people transfer knowledge into action, what's missing? How do we best facilitate this growth for our clients, turning mental states into personal traits?

The problem is that people do not readily take on new behavioral skills, thoughts and attitudes unless the changes fit well inside their framework, or the "water they swim in."

As humans, what we strive to accomplish, what we react to and what we avoid depends on the context we live in. Yet just as fish do not see the water they swim in, it is rare for us to glimpse the context that influences our choices and decisions. EAnd even if we can define the context, expanding this view is a difficult task that often resisted by our protective brains. A fish grows in proportion to the size of his fishbowl, and then stops growing.

For example, our clients set high expectations for themselves when starting a new position, project or even an exercise program. They intellectually know what it takes to succeed. They are aware of their potential for masterful decision-making and powerful leadership. Yet unless they change their sense of what is important, what is right, and what is good, they revert back to old behaviors, especially under pressure.

One of the ways we can help our clients glimpse their contexts, or how they see the world, is to help them understand how they process information. Then, through inquiry, reflection, challenges, and requests, they can learn new ways of processing information and can jump out of the fish bowl. Yet, this isn't easy. This requires that people alter their thinking patterns to evolve from concrete and tactical thinking into strategic and finally, holistic thinking. They have to transport their knowledge and skills into a new world view, out of the bowl and into a tank, a river, an ocean and even into a universal perspective. Only then will they naturally change their attitudes, behavioral styles and ways of communicating with others.

In this article I will look at the process of cognitive development and what impedes our growth. I will, and then it will explore methods for helping people to develop higher levels of thinking so they are better able to transfer their knowledge into positive behavioral change.

LEVELS OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Using psychological terms and insights from Robert Kegan's book, *In Over Our Heads*, the levels of cognitive development can be defined as follows. Each of these domains exemplifies patterns people have come to rely on to make sense of particular situations. They are not fixed categories designed to pigeonhole or label people. They characterize situational states, not personality traits. Kegan describes the levels using academic and technological terminology. I have translated his views in a way I believe to be practical and usable for organizational coaches.

They have to transport their knowledge and skills into a new world view, out of the bowl and into a tank, a river, an ocean and even into a universal perspective.

Level one – This is the child's mind. It is egocentric. The child feels he or she is the center of the universe and everything exists for his or her pleasure. Consciousness is immediate and all experiences are personal. "I am all that matters," is the mantra of a level one mind. This perspective begins to shift at age four or five. Empathy, or the capacity to think from another's point of view, is equally underdeveloped.

Level two – As children mature, they begin to engage with the world in terms of durable concepts. They learn rules and conceive of universal laws. Everything is seen dualistically. They discern good from bad, right from wrong, and strong from weak. These concepts may change over time, but still exist as solid structures. People who think at level two rely on tradition and dogma for making decisions. They define themselves as a part of a system (family, culture, work, generation, religion, etc) and look to the system for answers and direction. If they face resistance to their ideas, they spend their energy justifying their stance instead of turning to reflection and discernment. Change tends to be intimidating. They prefer to live in the fantasy that life can be such a thing as "status quo" and that life can be simple, routine and fixed. As a result, they are constantly looking at "how it used to be" and pushing people to "stay the course."

Level three – As cognition evolves, people gain the capacity to think abstractly and formulate principles. Generally, this shift in the continuum happens between adolescence and mid-twenties, when the cognitive brain is at its height of biological development. With a broad education and many life experiences, people come to understand how rules are formulated, and thus how these rules might be applied differently in specific and various situations. They begin to reason through their decisions. They can formulate hypothetical examples and analogies. In short, they learn to make decisions for themselves. However, the goal of their mental exercises continues to focus on the search for the right answer. They struggle with being right and being perceived as right by others. Their priorities are tactical, based on determining the right thing to do in a given situation.

Level four – With guidance, people can learn to step out of a situation and see the principles at work in a broad system, as if the fish were finally able to see the water they are swimming in. At this level, people first survey the landscape for all possible options before deciding what to do. They review assumptions, variables and alternative solutions before deciding what plan of action to take. They may see that many answers to a problem can work, but they are able to find a right answer for a particular situation at a given time. Their view is strategic, based on discovering the best option for everyone involved, chosen from a

range of possibilities for the specific time and situation.

Level five – Few people operate at this level because it can be threatening to the protective brain. People who think at level five appreciate what is good about all points of view. They hold this multiplicity of perspective while making choices for themselves. They embrace multiple truths at once even as they are acting on one. They do not fear, and can come to value, what other people believe, no matter how far these truths seem from their own. Even their own truth is fuzzy with boundaries overlapping other perspectives at any given time. Yet don't judge these people as having no conviction. They do care deeply. They have learned how to care without being emotionally attached. Their view of the world is holistic. They do not see end points. Solutions are arriving from moment to moment. They may act at a point in time, but they are comfortable knowing that tomorrow their views may change as life changes. The key is that they stay emotionally unattached.

Let's compare decision making actions. Level two thinkers base their decisions on what they have learned as right and wrong from the institutions they ascribe to or the people they believe in, without question. Level three thinkers will think about their choices and listen to arguments, but their decision will still be made on what they believe would be accepted by the groups they identify with. Level four thinkers see all sides of an argument. They will see more than just two sides, perceiving nuances in all the viewpoints put forward. They then will evaluate the options for achieving the desired result and choose an action based on what they think would be right for everyone involved over time, including one that will be a hybrid of ideas.

Level five thinkers would advocate that all lines of reasoning can be right, holding the space for diverse thought to operate simultaneously, honoring all ideas in the process. They will make a decision for themselves in the moment, but will advocate that others make their own objective decisions based on the information presented.

The leap of consciousness from level four to five is huge. Life truly looks different. Many people will judge the level five thinker negatively, saying their words are strange and their outlook, odd. Although level five thinkers can practically see the world with x-ray vision, their facilities do not necessarily win friends and influence people. They will encounter as many skeptics as they do admirers.

Let me demonstrate the differences in the levels with the example of creating a new budget. If you think at a level two, you would defer to the format you have used in the past. If you think at a level three, you might review a few formats, but would choose the one most recommended by people whose success you respect. If you think at a level four, you would probably first define the criteria you need on which to base your selection on, and then review a number of techniques before making your choice. You might even create a new system based on your analysis. At level five, you would first ask what the reason is for having the budget. "Why are we doing this? Do we need certainty or an approximation? What people can I get to help me make the best decisions?" You would then review everyone's opinions in an appreciative mode—seeing the strengths and successes of each idea—and then using all good ideas, you would act on what seemed the right thing to do at that time, knowing that things will change and you will have to make adjustments as you go.

Looking at the organization as a whole, another example would be how leaders decide to handle a layoff. Level two thinkers will probably do what has been done in the past, either in their company or in successful organizations they admire. However, if this is the first layoff for a company that prided itself on never laying people off, the leaders will have a difficult time carrying out the task and may look for outside help to justify their moral dilemma. Regardless, it will be a top-down decision.

Level three thinkers will make their decisions based on what is best for the company, their department and their careers. They will take factors into consideration such as efficiency and profitability and will only consider input from others who hold that have the same objective as they do. They may even fiercely protect members of their team, department or organization if they perceive these people to be vital to creating a successful result. Although some level three thinkers may appear ruthless, most care about the effect a layoff will have on the lives of the employees. However, their concern often reflects a paternal tone.

Level four thinkers will consider input from all levels. They might ask for ideas from the employees being affected. They may even choose something other than a layoff if the argument is logically presented and will achieve the intended results, and/or ensure a layoff process that respects the company's culture.

Although level five thinkers can practically see the world with x-ray vision, they do not easily win friends and influence people.

Level five thinkers will step back and ask some foundational questions before deciding. "What is the purpose of this organization? Is the layoff the only means for achieving current goals? What is wrong with our systems that have brought us to this decision? What do we need to change, even in ourselves as leaders, so we do not face this need now or in the future?" They may still decide in favor of the layoff but not until after all options are equally explored and other hard but needed changes are implemented alongside this initiative.

You may rise to level five in one aspect of your life, such as in your primary relationships, but remain stuck in level three in another, such as how you deal with your career. And although it takes time to progress from one level to the next, at any moment you can, from any level, fall back to level two, especially under pressure.

Even the most advanced thinkers lapse into concrete thinking when stressed. They slip into seeing things as black and white and cannot hold multiple truths. The only way to climb back up is through conscious awareness and a courageous choice to let go of what you believe to be true in the moment.

However, not caring one way or the other about an issue does not indicate any level of thinking. To discern your level, you must be an active, not passive, participant in the situation.

At least one third of the people on this planet are stuck thinking at a level two, understanding concepts in concrete terms, generally based on their personal observation and by imitating those they admire or fear. Their opinions and perspectives then harden, making it difficult to acknowledge what is true in another point of view.

Unfortunately, the complexity of our modern world serves to increase the likelihood of concrete thinking instead of encouraging diversity of opinions. Unpredictability and turbulence push people to hold on to a particular set of beliefs and values that they believe will help them to make sense of the world. The brain requires that a person feel a sense of safety before it will activate the higher-level cognitive functions. And the more emotionally attached a person is in the moment, the more likely it is that he or she will they are to retreat to concrete thinking. As a result, the rut of stress responses grows deeper and deeper.

THE PATH TO CONSCIOUSNESS

To better understand the levels, I have created a four-quadrant grid that can be used to track how people are viewing a situation. I have created labels for the grid to help people identify the patterns, but the labels are not meant to label people.

The grid should be used as a guide for the coach to identify a dominant pattern of thinking

in a particular situation. Often once you identify how the person is thinking, you can find the right path of inquiry to help them evolve to the next level. From this vantage point, the person you are coaching will be able to frame situations differently and alter their choices and behavior accordingly.

Also, if you find yourself having difficulty communicating with someone on any issue, you can use the grid to determine, as objectively as possible, what level you are thinking at. It is hard to connect with someone when you are relating at different levels. Once you determine your level, you can adapt your language to their level to increase understanding and rapport. **[Graphic RE#1] REYNOLDS REALMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

[RE#1]

REYNOLDS REALMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

		CONTEXT DEFINED BY	
		OTHERS	SELF
D E C I S I O N S	OTHERS	BELIEVERS <i>concrete</i> 2	DRIVERS <i>strategic</i> 4
	SELF	ACHIEVERS <i>tactical</i> 3	THRIVERS <i>holistic</i> 5

Believers are level two thinkers. They do not make decisions based on their own criteria. They are either told what to do, or they look outside of themselves at various systems for answers, such as to their boss, their church, their political party leaders, or the media. They do not question what they are told by these groups and will not accept information that contradicts their “truths.” When acting on these directives, they do so with little sense of their selves. They do “what is right” without question. In return, they feel a strong sense of security identifying with the groups that provide them with direction and solutions. They see the world as “us vs. them.”

The brain requires that a person feel a sense of safety before it will activate the higher-level cognitive functions.

Believers never quite experience the “American Dream” now a benchmark for success in many countries. They may live comfortably, but do not achieve great prosperity or excel professionally in a way that makes them stand out for more than a few rewards ceremonies. As a result, they often numb their disappointment and humiliation with alcohol, drugs, television and food. T, they live with a quiet rage that shows up when they drive their cars or when they bark at their loved ones. T, they fear for their

survival although they defend themselves by looking for weaker people to judge, and they focus on what is not fair or how others wrong them. Or, they become what Richard Sennett in his book *Authority* calls Disobedient Dependents, eternally griping about and looking for ways to passive-aggressively harm those who they depend on, such as their bosses, companies, spouses and parents. One of the biggest challenges for managers is to deal with the multitude of believers who have become “grievers” found in every big company.

There are some people who bask in the safety of not having to think too hard about life. Yet few people who think in concrete terms live out their lives in bliss. In order to claim what is good they have to denounce what is wrong. In order to hold onto what is right, they must acknowledge and resist what they believe is bad. Fear and anger are never far from moments of happiness for a level two thinker who has even a modicum of intelligence. Ignorance is bliss ... but only to the ignorant.

Achievers, the level three thinkers, have a sense of themselves and how they fit into the world. They hold a sense of dignity knowing that their existence matters. They are most joyful when they can tangibly feel the special place they hold.

But Achievers also feel a sad sense of separateness as they pursue their private agendas and fight to get what they want. They are both grateful for their independence and burdened by it. They are tactical, focused on what needs to be done.

Yet, like level two thinkers, they let others set the context and make the rules. They can see options and possibilities, but their solutions and success are defined by a fixed set of rules determined by outer influences, such as their parents, society, or an organization (even though they may be hard pressed to identify these rule makers). In fact, most of their life choices are based on seeking the approval of these outside sources.

Achievers display their successes in their language, possessions, titles, awards and in the successes of their children. Humble or not, they want their efforts to be recognized in some way. Without this acknowledgment, they might lose motivation and drift back to level two thinking.

Achievers have a hard time forgiving themselves for making a mistake. Blame is big in their vocabulary. They attribute success to their actions and dispositional factors, but failures, negative behaviors and mistakes to situational factors.

As achievers age, they take fewer risks. Once they find what works, they don't like to consider other methods and they don't want to be pushed to change. They will take risks only if the justification is weighted toward success.

One of the biggest challenges for managers is to deal with the multitude of believers who have become “grievers” found in every big company.

Achievers can discern details, see the dimensions of a situation, compose metaphors and creatively problem solve. They see multiplicity in the world, but it is always skewed for their own purposes.

This does not mean that achievers can't be caring, nurturing, relational people. It's just that their altruism is limited to the world that supports their identity and appreciates their contribution. If they begin to lose this identity (when group values shift, new technologies make them less significant or they can't reach the next step in their career plan), the achievers are susceptible to falling back to level two where they either get bitter or give up.

It is hard sometimes to discern a level four thinker from a level three, meaning a Driver from an Achiever. Both have their eyes on succeeding. However, level four Drivers can step back from a situation, survey the problem and possibilities, and analyze each one against crite-

ria they devise before they choose. They make their own choices, but not for themselves. They make them considering the outcome for other people, such as for family members or for an organization. On the other hand, level three Achievers may take on the role of a Driver (making decisions that include everyone), but self-interest still frames their decisions, whether or not the good of the group prevails. .

Narcissistic leaders may be adept strategically and can be seen as Drivers. However, they tend to ignore available options if these do not support their centralized position and opinions. Therefore, they are really Achievers.

A leadership role doesn't guarantee Driver thinking. The word Driver pertains to those who take on a steering function. It is not meant to indicate a capacity to push ideas on others. True Drivers do not demand that people carry out their strategies. However, since they have a wider perspective than Achievers, they often include others in their planning process. They may even let Achievers take the glory for a success they engineered. They aren't as motivated by outside approval as Achievers are. They succeed for the sake of the accomplishment more than for the acknowledgment. However, their requests may be taken as dualistic and dictatorial by Achievers and Believers since people thinking in these domains are not always privy to the thought processes of the Drivers.

Drivers are logical, but they are also abstract and hypothetical. They can consider the future, so they appear imaginative and creative. They are dreamers, which can be both inspiring and frustrating to others. They deduce, infer, relate, debate, combine, separate, correlate, connect, reason and resolve. In the end, they still come up with one right answer, if only right for the time being. Then they expect others to agree.

Drivers institute a vision, set rules, define roles, resolve conflicts, explore emotions, listen with empathy, conceive, co-create, challenge and support. However, even though they are focused on others for implementation, the way in which how they handle authority and disobedience will vary based on their personal analysis of what is the best thing to do.

Many great teachers and leaders are drivers. People fight for the seats on the busses they drive. Drivers can range from a sage to a beloved talk show host. They are trend-setters and critics, kindergarten teachers and scholars. You may find them anywhere. They may not seek center stage, but they earn it by their actions and innovative ideas..

However, a Driver, however, is also susceptible to falling back to Achiever status since personal success is most prized in our society. Many Drivers vacillate between the two mental frames. They may also fall even further to the mindset of a Griever if they face a number of professional or personal setbacks. Since the implementation of their ideas requires participation, if they face rejection or defiance from many angles, their confidence might erode enough that they fall prey to "the dark side."

The hope for Drivers lies in their ability to let go of their expectations and desire for specific outcomes. The release of emotional attachments frees them to move to level five, the domain of the Thriver. However, this growth requires in-depth self-awareness, emotional intelligence and motivations that may be considered eccentric by many people in our society. The level five Thriver is a rare breed. Though this state of mind is often referred to as "spiritual," what I am describing is a mental, not ethereal or cosmic realm. Fred Massarik and Marissa Pei-Carpenter, in their his book *Organization Development and Consulting*,⁴ defines being spiritual as the ability to turn your awareness inward and attuning to:

"...the consciousness within you that lies beyond your ego's mental and emotional condi-

Narcissistic leaders may be seen as Drivers but they tend to ignore options that don't support their position. Therefore, they are really Achievers.

tioning. It is the process of quieting your ego's fears and wants so you can directly experience the pure consciousness that is the source of your being. By detaching from your conditioned ways of perceiving, you can more directly experience reality without mental and emotional filters...you become a better and better person in the sense of maturing, evolving, becoming more fully human." (page 175) [move page number to endnote]

Thrivers are most skilled at collaboration. Instead of evaluating possibilities in search of common ground, Thrivers appraise alternate viewpoints as significant, whole and distinct (as well as viewing the participants as significant, whole and distinct). They, and then seek to fully understand the meaning and value of the perspective so they can promote a dialogue about possible resolutions.

The stand a Thriver takes for himself is not attached to anyone's approval or previous action, which can be frustrating to those of other levels. Thrivers they take action based on what they feel is right at the moment, fully aware of the ambiguity they feel, and are not concerned if anyone follows their lead.

It might appear that they don't care about others. This is not true. They care deeply about people, about life and about the future which they see more clearly than most people. This misinterpretation is often based on the acknowledgment that the others think they need from a Thriver, not on the consideration felt by the Thriver.

Thrivers are comfortable with their vulnerability. They know that when they are in the act of discovery, they might lose their present stance in favor of another. Yet since their identity

If the right motivation is found and the frame-breaking question is asked, the lower level thinker and the level five thinker might be able to see a better way together.

is not attached to any idea or concept, they do not lose their confidence in this vulnerability. They understand that even their concept of self is a process of ongoing creation. Their consciousness is an evolutionary process, and they view life from within this continuum.

Thrivers do not feel their own ideas are complete, ever. Since all knowledge is relativistic and non-absolute, and since that contradiction and distinctions are inherent features of reality, the Thriver uses dialogue to further understanding, cooperation, and accommodation in a way that can sustain differences within a broader view of context and culture.

Although Thrivers they are looked on as strange and even wishy-washy by many, they are called Thrivers because they even hold the point of view of their critics as acceptable and vital. They know that they cannot support a lower level thinker to rise up in consciousness without first accepting that where that person is right now in their development is right and good. They are able to develop empathy for other positions. They can easily recognize the lower levels in action and speak in the language of any level in order for people to hear them. Then, if the right motivation is found and the frame-breaking question is asked, the lower level thinker and the level five thinker might be able to see a better way together.

It is critical that we define the value of this level of consciousness in a way that can be accepted by our dominant culture. Only then can those who reach this level be supported and encouraged to transfer their high-level thoughts into daily decisions and behavior, and then help others to advance on the continuum as well. We must ask look to Thrivers to model for us how to socially evolve. We need to give them respect so that they will more readily voice their views and act out their thoughts.

However, the status quo and dominant ideology in the U.S. doesn't support the level five

thinker. If successful, Believers, Achievers and Drivers will draw the Thriver back into the fold. The precarious nature of the mindset itself can sabotage the Thriver, and the complexity of the postmodern society with its vast number of viewpoints, can strain the brain of a Thriver, especially an inexperienced Thriver. As in Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith, even a Jedi Knight can fall prey to the dark side when faced with the loss of something or someone they hold dear.

The hope for the Thriver is that a new status quo and ideology will emerge as more Thrivers walk the planet. In the meantime, we must come to accept the oddness of those who are awake, and seek them out for their wisdom and insight.

COGNITIVE EVOLUTION

The evolution of thinking starts with the acknowledgment that a concrete, grieving mindset is not a healthy way to live. In fact, a sign that a person has reached level three thinking is the capability of meta-level thinking, meaning they can think about their own thoughts. However, this tends to cause emotional turmoil until level four, where you don't take things so personally. Then, if you rise to level five, you can completely detach from negative emotions. This is where we can finally, and consciously, make long-term, positive behavioral changes. Thrivers represent the possibility of a cognitive evolution.

And so our world is full of smart, aware people who gossip about their neighbors, relish when road hogs and cheaters get their due, and give the slow grocery clerk the evil eye. Until we (including me) are able to hold all realities within one frame, we continue to act out our judgments, disappointments, and desires.

It is threatening to consider that at any given moment people are changing their minds.

In fact, the last thing to shift is behavior. Contexts must shift first. Then, as a person tries on new behaviors steeped in a fresh perspective, their family, workgroup or society may beat them into submission. It is easier to learn about behavior than it is to change it.

Even if the family, workgroup or society say they support growth, change is hard for most people to accept. There is a comfort knowing how someone thinks and where he or she stands on issues. It is threatening to consider that at any given moment people are changing their minds.

However, if everyone within a system commits to changing their perspective, the evolution can take place. If Drivers can provide incentives and role modeling and remove roadblocks for Achievers and Believers to grow, they might create a culture of strategic thinkers. Behavior will follow. The result will be more collaboration and creative ideas.

LEADERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

Expanding one's context is difficult to do alone. Coaches are well positioned to help their clients to step out of their mental ruts. A well-trained coach will ask the right questions or draw a new picture that can tip perspective into a new realm. It takes objectivity to fully engage a client in the reflective dialogue necessary to see new possibilities.

For example, many years ago I was complaining to my mentor about my boss's heartless behavior. After listening to my long harangue, she offered me a different angle on the situation. She saw my boss as operating as best he could with the amount of "light" he had. His light was small. Mine was big. I should have compassion for someone whose struggles were darker than my own.

I felt smugly satisfied with her explanation. Then she hit me between the eyes. She said, "Since you have so much light, it is your re-

sponsibility to model what big light looks like.”

How could I refute this? If I declined, I would be stooping to his level. She took me out of my fishbowl to see the problem from a broader point of view.

During the next conversation I had with my boss, I had no choice but to swallow my frustration and model the behavior I wanted him to demonstrate toward me.

My mentor helped me to realize two important rules of engagement when dealing with people I have difficulty connecting with:

1. I have to understand the outlook of the person I am talking to as right for them in that moment; their views have truth in them, from their perspective and level of cognitive development.

2. It is my responsibility as an “enlightened human” to take the higher ground. Forces will always work to drag me down when I am upset. Becoming the observer of my own mind while arguing with someone is my greatest tool and my greatest achievement.

My mentor was operating at a level four or five, a Driver or Thriver. I was operating at a level two, a Griever. She used a metaphor to help me think at a higher level.

Coaches should regularly lead their clients to question what their brains are doing.

A good coach can take complex situations and communicate them simply to concrete thinkers. Once the concrete thinker “gets the picture,” the coach can help them to think about the range of possibilities that can be true interpretations of a situation, using “what if” questions, and to hypothetically think of possible solutions and outcomes using “what else” questions. This dialogue should help to reveal

the vague assumptions the concrete thinker uses to make decisions, which can then lead them to seeing situations in a different light. Helping others to better observe their brains and be the master of their reactions is a special gift we as coaches can give to our clients.

Coaches should regularly lead their clients to step outside of themselves to question what their brains are doing. From this vantage point, clients are better able to make choices for themselves even when emotionally involved.

FACTORS NECESSARY FOR COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

However, in order for a person to begin reflecting on their belief systems and blocks, three factors must be present: Willingness, Desire, and Courage. Without these factors, people remain stuck in their realms of thinking.

Willingness is a mental factor. People have to decide they are willing to actually judge their own thoughts. Even if just for five minutes, they must be willing to let go of their assumptions and predispositions. Then they must be willing to accept gentle reminders if they fall back into their mental traps during the dialogue.

Desire is an emotional factor. In order to sustain willingness, clients must have a justification to stay in the conversation based on their values and pleasures. There must be a payoff that has personal meaning and value. People often “don’t get it” when they are given broad reasons for change. They want to know if this is going to hurt them or not. They want to know what is in it for them.

Therefore, coaches and leaders must know what will stimulate desire in both a group and the individuals involved. Generally, a bribe of money or “things” will not maintain desire to change behavior over time. There must be a rise in less tangible needs, such as love, respect, a sense of control, a sense of predictability, achievement (especially for level three achievers), hope, attention, appreciation, acknowledgment and acceptance. These rewards must be greater than the ease of not changing. If you want to coach someone to see their world differently, you must discover what would drive them to want to do this. With a worthy

payoff, they might open their minds to something new.

Finally, the third factor is courage. Even a modest level of fear can turn off willingness. Asking people to crumble their world view can be paralyzing. The coach must have the patience to walk with their clients one step at a time.

TRANSFORMATION

Unfortunately, the quickest path to growth is through crisis and trauma. Life-changing events can shatter a person's frame of reference and open them to new possibilities. This is particularly seen when people move out of level two to level three because they can no longer hold on to their dualism.⁵

Often young adults experience this when they realize their parents are no longer heroes, their favorite teachers are human and their best friend is not on the same moral plane as they are. First they feel betrayed. Yet if they feel sufficient trust in the source of information (their parent, teacher or friend), they can weather the shock of losing their perspective and move into multiplicity [do you want to reference William Perry's work here?] where accept that there can be many versions of reality.

Therefore, coaches must create a sense of rapport and trust first before asking their clients to face new worlds voluntarily. Clients must have need this trust to develop the self confidence necessary to seek new versions of reality. They may still choose to live by one version, but they are aware that other viable versions exist. Often people with international experience make this shift easier than others, because stepping into other cultures makes one aware of one's own culture and its assumptions.

When dealing with change in the organization, leaders have to look at what psychological covenants people brought with them when they joined the organization. If these are shattered on the job, employees may lose hope and become cynical unless they have a leader they trust. This phenomena is evident when leaders try to institute an innovative change. They need to take into consideration the beliefs and information processing patterns of their constituents when communicating the need for the change.

An example of this was seen in the early failure of self-managed workgroups at Motorola. The employees expected to be given direction. They knew the rules and played by them. When they were told to break the mold, make new decisions for themselves, and create new rules, they rebelled. No one considered that they wouldn't see the payoff. No one considered the fear that would keep them from treading new ground. If their concerns were addressed in the addressed in the language of the level two thinker, they might have made an effort to try the new way.

Also, people are often open to learn from others who have been through similar circumstances. That is why peer coaching can help people to grow. Trust comes with knowing there is empathy, which holds the space for dialogue and discovery. One can also see this dynamic at work where colleagues learn more at lunch than in the classroom. It is why group coaching on the job can diminish fear and expedite a change process.

Staying Awake

If a client has reached at least level three when processing information, they may be open to learning about all the levels, especially if they see how this will help them succeed. When coaches teach their clients about the realms of consciousness, their clients learn how to identify these patterns on their own.

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First, clients need to become aware of what their brains are doing under all situations, not just during a coaching session. Remember that thinking in some parts of our lives is less developed than others. We can think at level four at work, then revert to level two at home. Coaches can help their clients become aware of how they are making decisions under various circumstances so they can “rise to the occasion” when they catch themselves falling into old patterns of thinking.

Once a person moves beyond level two, they are always in motion, either moving up or down the continuum of consciousness. To help your clients stay in upward motion, journaling and dialogue can help.

However, higher-level thinking can also open Pandora’s Box, creating anxiety around the plethora of choices. Coaches need to make sure their clients have the tools for making choices in a sea of options.⁶

Also, the courage to think at higher levels depends on knowing that most choices that people make will not strap them down for life. If a person knows she they can choose something else later, she they are more apt to take a risk. A Then, as we they live with our their decisions, we they can continue to see many ways of either making it work or changing it. In the end, I believe the greatest gift we can give our clients is to show them how to let go and flow with diversity. Only then will they know what the “flow experience” feels like. Becoming a Thriver is an admirable purpose to hold for life. If everyone sought this feeling of flow, and worked to help others to experience flow in their work and home life, wouldn’t this world be a wonderful place to live in? It’s time for an evolution in consciousness.

ENDNOTES

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