

## Chapter 8

# The Aware Leader: Supporting Post-Autonomous Leadership Development

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### Introduction

In this chapter we share research and learning from Pacific Integral (PI)'s 15 years of designing and facilitating the Generating Transformative Change (GTC) program; a developmentally informed and research-based leadership development program. We address our approach to working developmentally with leaders, the application of the STAGES developmental model, and the research that informs and guides the program's curriculum. In greater detail we examine the developmental transition between Strategist and Construct Aware (Cook-Greuter, 2013; O'Fallon, 2016) and the implications for leadership practice and development. We explore the unique challenges and opportunities of this developmental transition and the practices and processes that support it. We conclude by sharing principles and practices for working developmentally with leaders, including pitfalls and challenges, and the ethical perspectives that guide the work.

### Leadership and Adult Development

The last 50 years of adult development research have provided considerable insight into the way adults grow, mature, and learn. Understanding these patterns of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, ethical, and spiritual development have significant implications for leadership practice and development (Kegan & Lahey 2009; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006; Reams, 2017; Torbert et al., 2004). The general developmental trajectory includes the widening of circles of identity, care, and responsibility, and increased capacity for perspective-taking, engaging with complexity, systems thinking, difference, and uncertainty. Patterns of thinking develop from either/or thinking to both/and, contextual thinking, and to one within the other paradoxical or interpenetrative thinking (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Lynam, 2014; O'Fallon, 2011). These developmental trajectories are relevant for today's increasingly complex global challenges, as well as rapidly changing and interconnected contexts for life and work. AQ1

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Adult development researchers and practitioners refer to developmental maps as a spectrum of compassion (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; O'Fallon, 2011), because understanding development has the potential to support an increased understanding and valuing of multiple ways of being in the world, and increased capacities for working with and across these differences. These capacities are critical in a world that is paradoxically both interconnected and polarized, where there is a heightened need for bridging differences and navigating uncertainty. Learning about development has the potential to support the use of self as instrument, and to help change agents integrate more perspectives, be conscious of blind spots, and thus to be more understanding, resilient, and ultimately effective (Brown, 2012; Lynam, 2014; Nicolaides, 2008).

Research on adult development and leadership finds that an individual's stage of development influences how they make meaning of and approach leadership (Kegan & Lahey 2009; Torbert et al., 2004). There are a number of studies that found a positive correlation between developmental maturity and leadership effectiveness, performance, and competence (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2005; Fisher & Torbert, 1991; Rooke & Torbert, 1998). There are also studies that found that the level of consciousness development predicts overall leadership effectiveness ratings (Helsing & Howell, 2013; Harris & Kuhnert, 2008; Strang & Kuhnert, 2009). However, there are limitations to the research, as noted by McCauley et al. (2006) who critique that studies are limited by small sample sizes, include a restricted range of stages of development (not many include participants at post-conventional levels), and lack participants from outside of the United States. Some of these limitations have been addressed by more recent studies (Shah, 2016; Vincent, 2014) however additional research is needed, particularly with larger sample sizes. There is also a need for research on the developmental process itself, and what supports and/or thwarts developmental movement (McCauley et al., 2006; Reams, 2017; Shah, 2016).

## **Generating Transformative Change**

GTC is a nine month developmentally informed and held leadership development program offered by PI. PI, founded in 2003, is a developer of educational and social change technologies and a global community of leaders and practitioners of transformative change. PI aims to impact human development, leadership, and social change to support the emergence of a sustainable, equitable, and beautiful future for humanity and all of creation.

GTC, PI's primary long-term program, has been offered for 15 years, on three continents (North America, Oceania, and Africa), with 28 cohorts, and over 350 graduates. The program enacts and facilitates a new way of being and action in the world, grounded in developmentally mature subtle states and stages of consciousness, that is, referred to as Causal Leadership (Ramirez, Fitch, & O'Fallon, 2013). GTC is a multidisciplinary, action-learning program which focuses on transformative approaches to leadership and human development. It integrates a range of theories and practices designed to help participants not just acquire new skills, but grow the inner capacities necessary for effective leadership in complex and demanding contexts. GTC takes place over nine months and consists of four

residential retreats and intersession learning, coaching, and application. Participants in GTC range in age from 20 to 75 and come from diverse cultures, countries, and professions including coaching, non- and for-profit leadership, organizational development, social change, sustainability, education, the arts and health care.

The principles that guide the design of GTC are that it be integral (encompassing as much of reality as possible), developmental (not merely asserting a single worldview, but situated in an ongoing, evolutionary trajectory of perspective-taking capacity), and motivated by universal compassion (serving to reduce suffering and increase fulfillment in the largest span and depth imaginable). Key learning areas include: Adult development theory and practice (Cook-Greuter, 2004; O'Fallon, 2011), Theory U and Presencing (Scharmer, 2007), dialogue (Bohm, 1996; AQ2 O'Fallon & Kramer, 2008), integral theory (Wilber, 2006), integral polarity practice (Kesler, 2014), awareness and somatic practices (Brown, 2006; Pierrakos, 2005), developmental action inquiry (Torbert et al., 2004), complex systems, paradoxes of group life (Smith & Berg, 1997), collective evolution (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016), communication, truthfulness, and intimacy practices (Golabuk, 2012; Richo, 2014), and individual and collective shadow work (Masters, 2010, 2018).

We often describe GTC as a leadership development program, designed to support people growing and expanding into transformative leaders. While this description creates a context of leadership, a more complex set of implicit and explicit intentions is at play. Participants bring their own intentions for their development – expectations, goals, plans, and visions for the future – as well as implicit intentions arising out of the emergent developmental process itself. In other words, if there is a future that wants to emerge, beyond our preconceptions of it, we can conceive of this future as an intention that in a sense, life wants for us, and it is to be discovered. From the outset, we invite participants to listen for this future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2007); their next stage of leadership and expression in the world. An intention of GTC is to be an incubator for this future, and to invite participants to imagine and sense into what that future might be. As designers and facilitators of GTC, it is our intent to discover the developmental unfolding in each participant (and each cohort), rather than to predict it or impose a particular form of development on groups or the individual as some transformative programs consciously or unconsciously tend to do. We also encourage participants to continue to reveal their own implicit intentions for growth and transformation through their own responses and actions. This is a process of discovering and uncovering intentions, as well as consciously creating intentions for growth and development (Fitch, 2016). Ultimately, the provocation to leadership offers a learning opportunity with the intention to expand creativity, impact, and service in the world.

## **Developmental Theory and Practice**

Adult development theory and practice is integrated into every aspect of GTC, including pre- and post-assessments, the curriculum, and facilitation of the program. Participants take a developmental assessment prior to starting GTC, receive a developmental debrief and coaching, take an assessment a year after completing GTC, and then are invited to take additional assessments every two years ongoing.

In the early years of the program, we used Cook-Greuter's post-Loevinger research on ego development and the associated Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP) sentence completion instrument. In 2014 we began to use the STAGES model and assessment (O'Fallon, 2016), although the STAGES research had been going on for years prior.

Adult development theory and practice is also taught as a part of the curriculum, initially applied to the development of individuals and later to the development of groups, organizations, and systems. Throughout the program, we support a form of developmental action inquiry, engaging participants in reflection and dialogue on how they are enacting and experiencing perspective-taking and their unfolding development as individuals and as a cohort. And perhaps most important of all, faculty create a developmental holding environment grounded in causal witnessing awareness. More will be shared about this later in the chapter, but for now we can describe this as meeting participants where they are developmentally and supporting them on their growing edges; integrating and valuing the developmental diversity present in a cohort; and touching the sacred ground of being and lifting the ceiling on individuals' and the cohorts' becoming.

### **Research on Transformative Change and Development**

From the beginning, PI has engaged in action research on how the process of transformative change and development occurs. We wanted to deepen our understanding of how individuals and collectives develop and what supports that development. We also wanted to understand how the development informs or influences behavior, including the question of how do people show up differently as they grow through stages and develop new capacities? Conducting developmental assessments and then having the opportunity to spend nine months (18 months for the first six cohorts) with participants, exploring and supporting the development of their ways of being in relation to self, community, and the world, offered a unique opportunity to explore individual and collective leadership development in depth.

This ultimately resulted in the theory and practice of Causal Leadership (Fitch, Ramirez, & O'Fallon, 2010; Ramirez, Fitch, & O'Fallon, 2013), as well as the STAGES model, a new, integral theory of development, articulated by Terri O'Fallon (2010, 2016, 2018). It also supported the ongoing evolution of GTC, distilling the curriculum and clarify key aspects of the design.

The action research was complemented by the ongoing longitudinal developmental research with participants. The following table shows the developmental span of North American GTC cohorts over the last nine years and the relative distribution of the different stages. Two things are notable in this data. One is the relative developmental maturity of the participants compared to a representative sample (Cook-Greuter, 1999). The second is that the developmental span of cohorts in the first five years of GTC was similar to the last nine years, but the relative percentages of the stages has changed significantly, from 23% 4.5 Strategists in the first five years to 41% over the past nine years, and from 11% 5.0 Construct Aware in the earlier cohorts to 22% in the recent group. This shift is even more dramatically illustrated by noting that in the first three cohorts, 23% of

Table 1. Developmental Stages of Incoming GTC Participants (n = 148, 2011–2019).

	3.5 Achiever	4.0 Pluralist	4.5 Strategist	5.0 Construct Aware	5.5 Transpersonal
GTC total	13	27	61	33	14
GTC percentage	9%	18%	41%	22%	9%
US representative population	36.5%	11.3%	4.9%	1.5%	0.05%

participants initially tested at 4.5 Strategist and later; in the first five cohorts that number was 45%; but in the most recent nine years, the number averages 84%. A comparison between the data on pre- and post-assessments shows a comparable overall developmental growth in GTC graduates, but in the past nine years, there is more growth in the MetAware stages (5.0 Construct Aware and later). Our interpretation of this data is that GTC is better serving participants that are Strategist and later, as well as attracting more people from the later end of the developmental spectrum (Table 1).

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Table 2 shows the pre- and post-assessments results for a sample of 48 participants from the past nine years of the North American GTC program. This is a partial sample because some cohorts have yet to take the retest that occurs a year after GTC is completed, and because some of the graduates have not participated in the post-GTC assessments. In the sample of 48, 45% stayed at the same stage, 38% grew by a single stage, 14% by two stages and one individual assessed three stages later. This is significant developmental growth within a two-year period. It can't be directly attributed to participation in GTC, however given that other research suggests that post-conventional development often takes years if it happens at all (Kegan, 1994), it is likely that GTC had an impact on these individual's development.

### Stages Model

The STAGES model is an adult developmental framework and assessment methodology developed by Terri O'Fallon. Built on the lineage of Loevinger and Cook-Greuter, STAGES identifies underlying repeating patterns (or parameters) in development and adds two additional later-level stages to these models. It "reveals a natural sequence of deep 'vertical' structures, as well as iterating, wave-like patterns of development" (O'Fallon, 2018). Loevinger's 1976 ego development model is built on the work of Erik Erickson and is based on research using the Washington University Sentence Completion Test, one of the most widely utilized and researched developmental assessments (Loevinger, 1976). Susanne Cook-Greuter then refined the sentence completion test instrument as well as the level descriptions, adding the distinction of perspectives and two later-level stages to Loevinger's work (Cook-Greuter, 2013).

Stages of human development are typically identified by interviewing or observing samples of people, recording their responses, and organizing these

Table 2. Differences between Pre- and Post-assessments for GTC Participants (Partial Sample  $n = 42$ ) (2011–2019).

Post-test Stages	# Participants	% Stage Change	3.5 Achiever	4.0 Pluralist	4.5 Strategist	5.0 Construct Aware	5.5 Transpersonal
Same stage	19	45%			12	6	1
One-stage later	16	38%		4	9	2	1
Two-stage later	6	14%	1	1	4		
Three-stage later	1	2%	1				
Pre-test stages	42		2	5	25	8	2
% Pre-test stages			5%	12%	60%	19%	5%
Average change	0.7		2.5	1.2	0.7	0.3	0.5

responses into categories. Researchers then sort these categories into a sequence of developmental stages. The STAGES model defines underlying patterns or parameters for describing developmental stages, rather than only using categories. The model and the research validating it, suggests that these patterns are fundamental underlying attributes that lead to development in the first place.

STAGES defines three primary patterns that shift as people transit the stages. The first is on the objects of awareness. The question asked is

What kind of object is arising in awareness: a concrete object (family, car, work, rules, interior and exterior senses); a subtle object (metacognition, ideas, abstract theories, goals, contexts, systems, awareness); or a MetAware object (awareness of awareness, immanence, sea of manifestation)?

Each of these: concrete, subtle, and MetAware represent the three major tiers of development, each with four stages. The second pattern is the Individual/Collective polarity. The question asked is, "Is the emphasis on individuals (all about 'me') or collectives (all about 'we')?" This pattern iterates twice in a tier. The third pattern refers to the four learning styles. The question is: Is the experience or meaning-making orientation receptive, active, reciprocal, or interpenetrative? With the third pattern, development unfolds through four learning styles in each tier: passive-individual (Receptive), active-individual (Active), passive-collective (Reciprocal), and active-collective (Interpenetrative).

These patterns define the three tiers, each with two major shifts in perspective-taking (first person, second person, etc.), and each of the person perspectives with one shift in the learning style (receptive, active, reciprocal, or interpenetrative), for a total of 12 stages across three tiers. The stages are numbered for their person perspective-taking capacities (1.0 and 1.5 referring to early and late first person perspective, 2.0 and 2.5 referring to early and late second person perspective, etc.). The STAGES assessment has been statistically grounded (with a high level of reproducibility) to correlate with the SCTi-MAP, the most widely used and researched assessment tool of adult human development (O'Fallon, 2016) (Fig. 1).

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## **Brief Description of the Person Perspectives**

In the first person perspective, one is in a concrete "I" stage. In the STAGES model, these are the receptive 1.0 Impulsive and active 1.5 Opportunist stages. In these stages, it is "all about me" and there is no understanding yet of a "We." One can see others but does not have a truly unique identity separate from others, nor does one see others as unique in their own right. The focus is on one's concrete needs and wants.

The second person perspective stages foreground the concrete "We." These stages are the reciprocal 2.0 Rule-oriented and interpenetrative 2.5 Conformist stages. In the second person perspective, one sees that others see them and that, in order to satisfy their needs, they must work with others and make and follow rules together. In these "We" stages, the "I" is present and understood, but backgrounded, or deprioritized, in favor of relationships and groups.

PP	Question 1: Is the object of awareness <b>Concrete, Subtle,</b> or <b>MetAware?</b>	Question 2: Is the experience <b>Individual</b> or <b>Collective?</b>	Question 3: Is the experience <b>Receptive, Active,</b> <b>Reciprocal,</b> or <b>Interpenetrative?</b>	STAGE NAME
	TIER	SOCIAL PREFERENCE	LEARNING STYLE	
1.0	Concrete	Individual	Receptive	Impulsive
1.5	Concrete	Individual	Active	Egocentric
2.0	Concrete	Collective	Reciprocal	Rule Oriented
2.5	Concrete	Collective	Interpenetrative	Conformist
3.0	Subtle	Individual	Receptive	Expert
3.5	Subtle	Individual	Active	Achiever
4.0	Subtle	Collective	Reciprocal	Pluralist
4.5	Subtle	Collective	Interpenetrative	Strategist
5.0	MetAware	Individual	Receptive	Construct Aware
5.5	MetAware	Individual	Active	Transpersonal
6.0	MetAware	Collective	Reciprocal	Universal
6.5	MetAware	Collective	Interpenetrative	Illumined

AQ6 Fig. 1. The STAGES Matrix (Barta & O’Fallon, 2018).

The next perspective gives rise to subtle “I” stages, where a person realizes they have a subtle self – the thoughts, emotions, and independent mind of rational consciousness. This includes the receptive 3.0 Expert and active 3.5 Achiever stages. This is an I-oriented space again, but the “we” is present and backgrounded. The “We” that is present, however, is the concrete we, groups and their norms and rituals, since no new subtle “We” has yet been discovered. The “I” that is formed is a new, subtle self, not identified with the body and concrete appearances, but with the thinking and feeling mind.

This pattern continues with the fourth person perspective, where the subtle “We” is foregrounded. The subtle collective consists of the perception of one being situated in and arising out of a plurality of contexts. This includes the receptive 4.0 Pluralist and active 4.5 Strategist stages. The “We” isn’t then a specific group, but it is a kind of space, and that space is complex. It consists not only of outer manifestations, such as the physical environment, the systems in which the context is embedded, the cultural context and form, but also inner manifestations, such as the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, states of awareness, and ontological dispositions of the collective.

At the fifth person perspective, individuals awaken to their ever-present awareness beyond the ordinary, subtle self, as the ground of their own being. This is awareness no longer identified with the concrete and subtle selves, or what we might conventionally refer to as the personal ego. Individuals in these stages begin to identify with this being as a new self, which is both empty and full, transcendent and immanent. In these stages including the receptive 5.0 Construct

Aware and active 5.5 Transpersonal, the “I” is foregrounded but the subtle “We” remains as a context for this I. The “I” is however not what we conventionally think of as “I” – our concrete bodily self or our subtle thinking or narrative self, but rather our causal self, the limitless open horizon of awareness that we paradoxically seem to share with everyone and everything.

At the sixth person perspective, this new “I” is again backgrounded as it lets go into a much larger, MetAware “We.” In the sixth level stages (6.0 Kosmic and 6.5 Illumined), the “We” is all of concrete, subtle, and causal manifestation itself, the Kosmos, the utterly full and empty existence, eternal and beyond time, infinite and beyond space. Here one experiences themselves as this whole, with their apparent (even causal) “I” birthed by and birthing the whole. There is a keen interest at the sixth level in living as this larger collective, which has its own sense of “We,” and in allowing the intelligence of the whole, and that which births the whole, to express one’s existence (Fitch, 2016).

## Developmental Maturity and Leadership

This section looks at the unique developmental capacities of Strategist and Construct Aware, the implications for leadership, and how we support the development between these two stages. We maintain some focus on this transition for a few key reasons. One is that 41% of GTC participants in the last 10 years assess at 4.5 Strategist (see Table 1) as they start the program and many of them are or begin navigating the transition to 5.0 Construct Aware during or after GTC. Another is that our curriculum and holding environment is geared in part toward supporting this stage transition and developing MetAware capacities, and we have learned many lessons about the gifts and challenges of this developmental territory over the years. A third reason is that developmentally informed leadership research finds a positive correlation between post-conventional developmental maturity and leadership effectiveness, performance, and competence (Eigel & Kuhnert, 2005; Fisher & Torbert, 1991; Rooke & Torbert, 1998).

In addition to the leadership implications of developmentally post-conventional leaders, there are trends in Western societies (and possibly other parts of the world, although the data isn’t sufficient yet) that suggest that the late fourth person perspective is the leading edge of cultural change and leadership practice. Our organizational research reflects this with a mix of populations in third and fourth person perspective stages (Fitch, Ramirez, & O’Fallon, 2010). Larger data sets (see Table 3) illustrate that the earlier stages in the subtle tier (third person perspectives) are representative of about 50% or more of leaders and managers in the US and UK (Cook-Greuter, 2013). Global research finds similar patterns however there are fewer studies overall. The research suggests a 3.0 Expert and 3.5 Achiever developmental center of gravity (most common meaning-making stages) for Western populations. There also appears to be societal movement beyond modernism (3.5 Achiever), to post-modernism (4.0 Pluralist) and beyond to meta-modernism (4.5 Strategist and later). One example of this is in the book *Reinventing Organizations*, where Laloux reviews a series of compelling cases of novel, innovative organizational structures and demonstrates how these organizations reflect the “Teal” or Strategist developmental stage (2014).

Table 3. Comparison of Percentage Stage Distribution in Six Different Samples (Anderson, 2014; Cook-Greuter, 2013; O’Fallon, 2018).

	<b>535 Leaders, UK, Pre-2000 Torbert and Cook-Greuter</b>	<b>497 Leaders USA, Pre-2000 Torbert and Cook-Greuter</b>	<b>4,510 Mixed Adult Population, USA, 1999 Cook-Greuter</b>	<b>3,397 International Self-selected, 2000–2007 Cook-Greuter</b>	<b>905 International, Self-selected, 2014–2018 O’Fallon</b>	<b>150 GTC Pre-test Data 2011–2019</b>
Conformist	1.7	8.2	4.3	72		
Expert	21.1	47.8	11.3			
Achiever	33.5	34.8	36.5		18	9
Pluralist	23.4	5.0	11.3	15.5	20	18
Strategist	13.5	1.4	4.9	9.0	33	41
Construct Aware	5.6	<1	1.5	3.0	18	22
Transpersonal	0.09	<1	0.05	0.5	10	9
Universal						
Illumined					0.09	

## **Strategist and Construct Aware Stages**

Research conducted by Cook-Greuter between 2000 and 2007, on a self-selected and international sample of leaders ( $n = 3,397$ ), found that 9% assessed at Strategist and 3% at Construct Aware. Another international and self-selected sample by O'Fallon ( $n = 905$ ), researched between 2014 and 2018, found 33% assessed at Strategist, 18% at Construct Aware, and 10% in Transpersonal (see Table 3). These samples are very likely to be much later developmentally than broader populations because these are self-selected samples; people who choose to take a developmental assessment, or whose organization makes use of developmental assessments. However, it is significant to recognize the increasing prevalence of people at these relatively late, post-conventional stages.

### ***4.5 Strategist***

The STAGES model's articulation of the underlying tiers of development suggests that the last stage of a tier (in this case the 4.5 Strategist stage as the last stage in the Subtle tier) forms a kind of complete understanding of the world from a given level of subtlety. One who has matured into the 4.5 Strategist stage has some very important understandings. From here one has a sophisticated understanding of the subtle self and of the collectives that form from subtle awareness (in very much the same way one finds one's place in a coherent view of the concrete world at 2.5 Conformist). There is an intuitive understanding of meaning making, projection, complexity, power, and systems. The individual at this stage orients toward a sense of an authentic self in this subtle world. In understanding the impact of the development of meaning making, there is often a strong interest in supporting the transformational development of others and as well as systems.

### ***Shift to 5.0 Construct Aware***

The shift from 4.5 Strategist to 5.0 Construct Aware is a very significant one, and for many is seen as a significant, life-altering event. The STAGES model's understanding of the rhythm of change in the underlying patterns also explains why the shift into a new developmental tier is so significant because it is at this transition that all three of the underlying patterns change at once. There is a shift from the subtle to the MetAware tier (first parameter): At 4.5 an individual has fully developed an identification with and understanding of the subtle self and world. At 5.0 this falls away and a new, transpersonal self begins to arise. This new self is aware of the subtle self and has a beginning awareness of the subtle ego, which matures at 5.5 Transpersonal (O'Fallon, 2018). There is a shift from the more interpenetrative (paradoxical or one within another) pattern of 4.5, with a strong action orientation, toward a receptive stance of 5.0 (second parameter). While the person at 4.5 experiences themselves as very active, prioritizing, engaged, and developmentally focused, at 5.0 they become (sometimes suddenly), deeply intent on in-the-moment experience, wondering, receptive, and tend to be skeptical of models, maps, and agendas. There is a shift from the collective focus of 4.5 to an intensely individual focus (third parameter). This individual self is now a much

more vast, transpersonal self, grounded in awareness of awareness and so the individual at 5.0 may not experience themselves as “self” focused. They are nevertheless immersed in their own individual experience of this expanded consciousness.

### ***Challenges and Opportunities in this Transition***

As with all stage transitions, there can be challenges as the existing self-sense gives way to something new. With the magnitude of the shift at the transition to 5.0 Construct Aware, the challenges can be significant. A similarly significant shift occurs when entering the 3.0 Expert stage with the dawning of the subtle mind, which typically happens at late adolescence. At this point, a new mind is arising, and the person begins to have their own independent thoughts and feelings that seem not to be conditioned by family, community, or religion. In modern societies, this is by and large accepted and supported, and even though at times it creates tension within the existing communal structures, it is seen as a normal part of development.

This highlights two significant challenges with the 5.0 transition: there is a new “mind” that is arising, that can be very disorienting, *and*, unlike the transition to 3.0, the stage is so rare in our societies that it may not be understood by others around the person undergoing the shift. They may find the shift disconcerting and those around them may not know how to support them through it, or worse, may pathologize what is simply a natural emergence into a new stage. The natural disorientation and confusion accompanying a significant stage shift may be confused for clinical depression or other conditions. Some of the experiences of the 5.0 stage, such as feeling disidentified with the ordinary self, altered or transpersonal state experiences, shifts in sensory perception, and awareness of the mind’s construction giving a sense of illusoriness to experience, may be interpreted as depersonalization, derealization, or psychosis. On the other hand, for a small number of people who are susceptible to these pathologies, the shift into 5.0 Construct Aware can trigger them, so any concern for mental health must be assessed by a developmentally aware, later-stage clinician, under the best of circumstances. For most navigating the transition, it is sufficient to simply be in contact with others who understand the transition and can provide reflection, moral support, and encouragement.

In our observations of dozens of individuals transitioning into and developing through these later-stage leaders, we notice that emergence into the MetAware tier seems to enable a new set of important capacities for leadership:

- The MetAware leader sees all subtle boundaries as constructed. All conventions, agreements, and cultural assumptions are seen as made up, and so are open to questioning and revision. In fact, the very way we define the terms of reality are open to question. This enables a seemingly boundless creativity in leadership. MetAware leaders can easily define, redefine, frame narratives, move boundaries, play with intention and attention, all in service to what is needed.
- Beginning with 5.0 Construct Aware and continuing through later stages, there is a growing, deep acceptance of “what is.” This arises as one increases identification with awareness itself. Seeing the constructed nature of the content of awareness, allows one to lessen one’s grip on it, while awareness itself is understood to

be indifferent and open to what is arising. This does not mean that one does not have one's concrete and subtle perceptions, thoughts, and feelings – one does – but alongside it is the awareness that we can accept them along with everything else. This enables a leader to have a deeper capacity to be present to complexity, conflict, ambiguity, and intensity – to stay present and calm in the storm.

- These capacities enable a deep agility in MetAware leaders. Leaders in these stages revel in an engagement that honors the limitation of knowing, where we step into the unknown and let the work emerge through our open, exploratory participation with each other and with the world.
- There is a natural appreciation for unconscious motivations, or shadow. MetAware leaders understand that much of the construction of the mind and social field is unconscious and motivated by hidden parts of the self. There is a humility that we can't understand or appreciate the limits of the subtle mind, yet it is always operating. This makes these leaders sensitive to explicit and hidden forces that may be at play and open to new discoveries.
- MetAware leaders have a wide sense of space and deep sense of time. This sense of space constitutes a vast territory for leadership, extending well beyond one's organizational context. These leaders may see whatever organizational or role they occupy as a position from which to impact multiple systems and affect larger social change.
- The deep sense of time gives rise to an understanding that change is and can be historic. This sense of deep time includes and appreciate that what happens in this moment is in some sense both profoundly important and not so important. This enables the MetAware leader to move with events and to allow them to unfold, while at other times making bold moves that may have profound consequences.

Aside from the transitional challenges mentioned above, we have noticed some pitfalls or learning demands for leaders integrating into and discovering how to express themselves at these later stages. Stepping in to a new developmental tier is a deep reordering of one's sense of self and the world. While in some ways, those who transition into 5.0 Construct Aware have a sense of having arrived at or awakening into a deep ground of being in themselves, in other ways this shift marks the beginning of a new developmental journey and challenges the person to unlearn, relearn, and develop new skills and abilities in contexts in which one has been familiar and able. This learning is limited to some degree by the novelty and relatively unelaborated nature of these later stages. Below are comments on some of the challenges we notice most frequently.

With the burgeoning awareness of the subtle ego (the ordinary sense of self or "me") and the heightened awareness of inner experience of self and other, those at the 5.0 Construct Aware and 5.5 Transpersonal (TP) stages can develop an ego-vigilance that can be expressed as self-doubt, questioning one's motives and impulses, and an orientation to avoid commitment. It takes time for this new MetAware self to develop and to be affirmed in one's identity and, until then, ego-awareness of the ordinary subtle self can leave one not trusting one's self to move forward.

This points to a more subtle challenge, which is that in this transition the nexus of agency is shifting. “As my 4.5 Strategist self, I was full of purpose and agency. Now, I am very skeptical of ‘my’ agenda or what the ‘self’ wants. But still, where do I look for direction?” There is an experience of emergence at these later stages. One sees one’s self as embedded in vastly complex system or field of experience, to which one can simply be sensitive and present. Through this presence one can participate with the future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2007). This kind of perspective can background one’s individual agency. The combination of ego-vigilance and the perspective that one is witnessing emergence both enables powerful new capabilities and in other ways can be debilitating. The developmental task during this time is to discover a new nexus of agency in the self and to reintegrate one’s body and mind as a formative aspect of the emergent field that is completely liberated in its expressions. One is simultaneously witnessing the emergence and an active part of it.

The STAGES model identifies a challenge unique to the individualistic oriented stages (e.g., 3.0, 3.5, 5.0, 5.5) that is important to mention in the context of MetAware leadership. In this model, we note that at a given tier, the individual self emerges before the awareness of the collective and the ability to be reciprocal with the new found capacities and awarenesses of that tier. When the subtle self emerges at 3.0 and 3.5, its collective is still the concrete collective of 2.0 Rule-Oriented and 2.5 Conformist. Then at 4.0 and 4.5 the subtle collective emerges, and a complete awareness of the subtle tier is formed, including the ability to be reciprocal and ultimately interpenetrative with fourth person perspective capacities. At the initial MetAware stages of 5.0 Construct Aware and 5.5 Transpersonal, the collective one is aware of and operating in is the subtle collective. This gives rise to a challenge in communication. The MetAware leader at these stages is experiencing profound, transpersonal insights and later formulating them into complex thoughts to express in the world, but the venue for expressing these is the limited environment of subtle language and context. Thus, there is a nagging sense that others can’t “get” this MetAware self and that one can’t ultimately be seen in and connect with one’s deepest understanding. This dilemma is ultimately relieved with the perspectives of 6.0 Universal and 6.5 Illumined, as the MetAware collective comes into consciousness. But for the MetAware leader at the individual stages a challenge can be to formulate one’s deepest understandings and manage the anxiety that comes with the ultimate failure to consistently connect with others. This is of course compounded by the fact that community at these later stages is relatively rare.

Finally, we note a challenge of these later stages, which is also an opportunity. The paradox of developmental maturity is that while we grow through developmental stages, we develop capacities that are more complex, deeper, and wider – in some sense, more mature, and at the same time, we are developing into stages that are themselves less mature. Here by “less mature” we mean that in the scope of human history they are less developed. There is perhaps nothing humans know more than how to be a baby. In fact, we don’t even need to learn this once we are born. At the conventional stages of development, we are exercising capacities for abstract thought, reasoning, organization, and production that are profoundly developed in human society, but still relatively new in the history of humanity. As we grow into the later stages of development, we manifest structures in

consciousness that are profound and complex, but for which there is little analog in our communities, systems, and society. At the center of Western society is modern mind expressed by the 3.5 Achiever stage of development and human beings have developed a vast set of tools, practices, knowledge, institutions, cultural norms, political systems, etc., that can be readily deployed. At the context aware stages of 4.0 and 4.5, we find what has been the leading edge of leadership and organization for the last 20 years or so. But as the leader transitions into the MetAware tier, there is little cultural knowledge to draw on. The opportunity and, frankly, the fun for the MetAware leader is that they get to co-create these practices and structures. There are emerging practices at these stages (Fitch, 2016; Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016), but they are highly novel and, paradoxically, immature.

### **Principles to Support Development**

No discussion of supporting development is complete without considering the challenging ethical questions involved. Happily, we feel that the community of practitioners of development have integrated a good understanding of the basics of developmental ethics: we don't preference or idealize later stages; we don't bring an agenda for development; we allow and support whatever is appropriate in each other, regardless of whether it involves developmental growth; and we understand that developmental growth does not necessarily imply goodness, efficacy, balance, or health. These considerations in practitioners can be supported by continued personal development work to uncover shadow material that may express hidden agendas in our practice. We also have come to consider that a principle concern with developmental ethics – that we account for constructive development's hierarchical nature and not unconsciously form structures of power and domination – is in fact a much larger problem that humans face, which developmental awareness only highlights, rather than causes.

It is important for those at later developmental stages to find community that resonates with, reflects and supports them to make sense of, integrate, and live their developmental capacities. A principle tenant of our work has been to develop and engage later-stage practices of community and communities of practice. While later-stage leaders are in the world, expressing their unique gifts and abilities, it is important that they find spaces in which they can be met and nourish themselves and seek and offer support. By contrast, it is important that this community be inclusive of later-stage practice, but not be exclusive to it, so as to avoid a developmental elitism and to support the integration across the stages of development. One of the most important developmental tasks of the fifth person perspective leader is to learn to express and integrate their insights with earlier stages of development.

As we grow developmentally, it is always good to keep an eye to the integration of and development of earlier capacities and parts of the self. This may involve shadow work or therapy to heal trauma or integrate disowned parts of the self. It may also involve a return to earlier stages to develop skills or capacities that are missing. Development is step-wise. Each stage builds on the earlier ones. As we grow, the more we skip over or leave behind, the weaker our foundation is. Many of the developmental challenges of MetAware leaders don't arise out of their

MetAware perspectives, but indicate growth, healing, and development at earlier stages. For example, a MetAware leader who is fascinated by novel, later-stage organizational practices or leadership approaches, may also need to acknowledge their gaps and weaknesses in more conventional practices, upon which these new approaches rely.

Finally, we note that the best principle of support with the transition into MetAware and the development of later stages may be to give it time. In our research, we find that those who transition into 5.0 Construct Aware may retest at 4.5 Strategist before stabilizing into the 5.0 Construct Aware stage. This transition is a significant one and takes time to integrate. Those transitioning into the MetAware tier may take two to four years to fully ground in and operationalize their new perspectives and capacities. During this time, they may experience intense periods of questioning and confusion; of letting go of existing structures and relationships; or simply an inner process of integration and growth that takes time to complete. Time is also needed to develop the practical wisdom that supports the leader to enact their later-stage capacities. Patience is important. Patience also implies a need for a container for growth. In addition to later-stage communities of practice, having healthy relationships, support systems, work engagements, and income flows in support of the transition, as well as opportunities to connect and serve others, can be very supportive to establishing a container for the transition.

### **Practices that Support Development in GTC**

In developmental research and practice, there is a lot more research on the stages of development and their implications, than there is research on what specifically supports the development. This is in part due to the challenge of finding causal relationships between development and what supported or catalyzed it, as well as the time needed for longitudinal research on the developmental process. Some of the key factors that researchers and practitioners point to as supporting development include the importance of a holding environment, subject-object differentiation, overcoming the immunity to change, and a collaborative learning and community of connections (Kegan, 2001). Torbert et al. (2004) advocate for action inquiry and triple loop learning as effective tools in growing leaders developmentally. Manners and Durkin (2000) who studied 16 intervention programs qualified that there is not enough clarity on the principles involved in stage development, however they did find that experiences that are “disequilibrating, cognitively, and emotionally engaging, of an interpersonal nature and personally salient” support stage development.

In our work we have found some similar patterns to what appears to support participants’ development within the context of GTC. These are: a developmental holding environment that is grounded in MetAware perspectives, and is both loving and supports growth; participant permission and readiness; continual in-the-moment awareness and presence practices for both faculty and participants; development assessments, inquiry, and feedback; a developmentally diverse community and embrace of the whole developmental spectrum; reflection and embodiment; truthfulness and intimacy; working with life’s disorientating

dilemmas; engaging in individual and collective shadow practices; witnessing and releasing subtle ego; conceptual frameworks that support development and transformative change; action-learning experiments in the real world; and cultivating the impulse for love and compassion in life.

These principles and practices were further corroborated by research conducted by Sheetal Shah, who interviewed 12 leaders from three continents to discover what supported their development within the context of GTC (2016). The key factors that these individuals named as important contributors to their development movement were as follows: (a) taking a development assessment, receiving feedback on the assessment, and understanding development theory and the trajectory of movement through the different stages of consciousness; (b) the combination of experiencing a new way of leading and being, and reflective awareness on those experiences; (c) the mindful and non-judgmental presence of the faculty combined with their skillful facilitation and curious inquiry, allowed individuals to access different parts of themselves; (d) the holding container and collective space that was created provided validation but also encouraged progressive risk-taking in a safe way; (e) state experiences of love and acceptance, joy and gratitude, peace and stillness, and connectedness with self, nature, people, and the world; and (f) the experience of connecting with a deeper source and finding a deeper place of knowing and being (Shah, 2016).

## Conclusion

The aware leader is ultimately awareness itself, present to and attuned to a leadership vision that is an expression of evolution – of the innate reach for greater wholeness, integration, and complexity (Ramirez, Fitch, & O’Fallon, 2013). This wholeness and integration eventually reaches back and includes all aspects of the self and world, including all the developmental stages, and is paradoxically both engaging with and indifferent to development. As with all developmental learning, we do well to hold our understanding lightly and with ethical care, but especially so when working with these later stages, as they are so new historically. Questions and opportunities for new learning and research are numerous as are the opportunities for misunderstanding. We hope these learnings contribute to our collective understanding and support of the development into and enactment of the MetAware stages.

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