Evolving consciousness in leaders: Promoting late-stage conventional and post-conventional development

Nicola Caroline Vincent BA (Hons)

This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Psychology, at the University of Adelaide.

July 2014
# Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES .......................................................................................................................... IV

ABSTRACT ..................................................................................................................................... V

DECLARATION ............................................................................................................................... I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................. II

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM OF RESEARCH .............................................1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE ........................................................1

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS ............................................................ 4

RESEARCH PROGRAM ................................................................................................................ 7

Research questions ....................................................................................................................... 7

Research design ........................................................................................................................... 8

Researcher interests and actions undertaken to mitigate potential impacts ............................... 9

MATERIALS AND METHODS .................................................................................................... 11

Participants .................................................................................................................................. 11

Measures ...................................................................................................................................... 12

Procedure .................................................................................................................................... 18

COMMENT ON TERMINOLOGY ................................................................................................. 19

OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS ..................................................................................................... 20

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ...........................................................................................23

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER ............................................................. 23

LOEVINGER’S THEORY OF EGO DEVELOPMENT ..................................................................... 27

MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LOEVINGER’S AND KEGAN’S CONSTRUCTIVE DEVELOPMENTAL MODELS ............................................................ 37

COOK-GREUTER’S REVISIONS AND EXTENSIONS TO LOEVINGER’S THEORY ....................... 39

TORBERT’S ADAPTATIONS OF THE LOEVINGER MODEL .......................................................... 41

THE LIMITATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS .................................................. 42

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP .......... 51
CHAPTER 3: STUDY 1 - PERSONALITY PREFERENCES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO CONSCIOUSNESS DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS ................................................................. 88

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP .................................................................................................. 88

PREFACE TO STUDY 1 .................................................................................................................. 89

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 90

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................ 90

MATERIALS AND METHODS ....................................................................................................... 101

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ...................................................................................................... 105

CONCLUSIONS .............................................................................................................................. 116

CHAPTER 4: STUDY 2 – PROMOTING POST-CONVENTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN LEADERS: AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS ....................................................................................... 119

STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP .................................................................................................. 119

PREFACE TO STUDY 2 .................................................................................................................. 120

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................ 121

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................ 122

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH .......................................................................................... 124

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH ............................................................................................................ 138

MATERIALS AND METHODS ...................................................................................................... 139

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION ...................................................................................................... 145

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH OUTCOMES ............................................................................. 153

LIMITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH ......................... 155
List of Tables

Table 2.1: The Basic Propositions of Constructive-Developmental Theory ........................................24
Table 2.2: Loevinger’s ego stages .................................................................................................29
Table 2.3: Stages of Consciousness Development ........................................................................43
Table 2.4: Integrated Consciousness Stage Transition Phase Descriptions .....................................67
Table 3.1: Loevinger’s Stages of Ego Development .......................................................................92
Table 3.2: Distribution of Ego Stage at Program Entry ..................................................................106
Table 3.3: Distribution of MBTI preferences and types and means and standard deviations for WUSCT item sum by preference/type on program entry and exit and education level ..........................................................107
Table 3.4: Results of Chi-square analysis exploring the association between ego stage on program entry and the MBTI Sensing/Intuition preference. .......................................................................................110
Table 3.5: Results of Chi-square analysis exploring the association between ego stage increase on program exit, the MBTI Sensing/Intuition preference and gender ..............................................................................112
Table 4.1: Stages of Consciousness Development .......................................................................126
Table 4.2: Summary of additional psychosocial challenges included in enhanced CLPs .................136
Table 4.3: Sample characteristics by group ..................................................................................141
Table 4.4: Participants’ mean consciousness stage at entry and exit and mean difference between the latter by group ..........................................................................................................................146
Table 4.5: Percentage of participants advancing at least one consciousness stage on program exit ......148
Table 4.6: Distribution of MBTI Sensing and Intuition preferences by group .................................149
Table 4.7: Consciousness stage increases by Sensing and Intuition preferences and group .............151
Table 4.8: Consciousness stage increases by level on entry, Sensing and Intuition preferences and group 152
Table 5.1: Integrated Consciousness Stage Transition Phase Descriptions .....................................176
Table 5.2: Consciousness stage on program exit by group .............................................................187
Table 5.3: Developmental changes: Group comparisons .................................................................198
Table 5.4: Program impact: Group comparisons .........................................................................204
Table 5.5: Life challenges prior to and/or during the programs: Group comparisons ......................209
Table 5.6: Program timing: Group comparisons ...........................................................................210
Abstract

Loevinger’s (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976; Loevinger, 1987) theory of consciousness development provides a stage model for understanding psychological growth through the lifespan. Many constructive developmental theorists have argued that resolution of the adaptive challenges now faced by organisations, communities and globally, requires leadership from people who have reached Loevinger’s post-conventional stages of adult psychological development. As yet, there is little empirical evidence to explain why so few individuals attain these post-conventional stages, and whether or how such development may potentially be facilitated.

The research program presented in this dissertation aimed to help address this gap in the literature by furthering an understanding of factors influencing consciousness development, particularly to the first post-conventional level. It was undertaken in three stages, utilising a mixed methods approach, and resulting in production of three journal articles (one published, and two under review with international journals).

The first study explored whether personality preferences and combinations thereof (as measured by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or MBTI) are associated with higher consciousness levels (as measured by the Washington University Sentence Completion Test or WUSCT) and whether particular personality preferences might act as inhibiting or facilitating factors in consciousness development. Participants were 374 adults participating in Australian community leadership programs (CLPs) or professional management programs. After adjusting for age and education, a preference for Intuition was associated with significantly higher consciousness development on program entry and with greater consciousness development during the programs. These results provide support for Manners’ and Durkin’s (2000) proposal that dispositional personality characteristics may enhance or constrain consciousness development.
The second study involved 335 adults and explored the impact on consciousness development of participating in either standard or enhanced Australian CLPs (compared to control programs). Aligned with Manners’ and Durkin’s (2000) conceptual framework, CLPs offer experiences that are interpersonal, emotionally engaging, personally salient and structurally disequilibrating for later conventional consciousness stages. Enhanced CLPs include additional psychosocial challenges. Standard and enhanced CLPs were successful in facilitating consciousness development within the conventional stages. Enhanced CLPs were significantly more successful in triggering post-conventional development, and specifically among those participants who had a preference for MBTI Sensing.

The third study involved qualitative analysis of survey data from 84 individuals graduating from three enhanced CLPs. It found alignment with Loevinger’s (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976; Loevinger, 1987) theory and Manners’ and Durkin’s (2000) conceptual framework in terms of the changes that participants who had shifted a stage of consciousness (Shifters) had noticed in themselves, and the aspects of the CLP they believed had been important in facilitating their development. Shifters were also significantly more likely than non-shifters to cite work changes and challenges when asked about other influences that may have impacted their readiness for development. Those with an MBTI Sensing preference were significantly more likely to report factors that were supportive of their development than those with an MBTI preference for Intuition.

Together, these studies contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of the factors that may facilitate or inhibit consciousness development (particularly to post-conventional stages). Implications for the design of, and selection of participants for, leadership programs to promote such development are discussed, and future research directions are indicated.
Declaration

I, Nicola Caroline Vincent, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

The author acknowledges that copyright of published works contained within this thesis resides with the copyright holders of those works.

I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Nicola Caroline Vincent        Date: 9 July, 2014
Acknowledgements

I have been fascinated by psychological research for most of my adult life. All of the roles in my early career were in research, and I missed it a great deal when I eventually moved into senior executive roles that no longer required me to be involved in research in a hands-on way. Eventually, the call to undertake research again in an area that I find compelling because of its potential to impact not only the field in which I now work, but so much in else the world, drew me back to university and PhD study. As passionate as I am about this field of study however, I could not have imagined how arduous it would be to undertake a doctorate while also leading a dynamic, rapidly evolving and lean organisation - especially when added to the usual demands that having a large family entails (as well as the challenge of the life-threatening 2-year illness of one of my children along the way). I am exhilarated to finally be at the end of this long journey, and so grateful to those who have helped me to get to this point.

My husband Simon and I embarked on PhDs together (figuring our marriage would probably not survive one or other of us doing this alone whilst also holding down other significant roles). Throughout the journey we have been sounding boards for each other’s ideas (mostly during regular walks in the bush together), acted as each other’s reviewers, provided support and encouragement for each other during periods when the workload seemed overwhelming, and served as a continual source of competitive motivation for each other in the long-distance ‘race’ to get the dissertations finished! Simon, I want to thank you for all the emotional, physical and spiritual support you have given me throughout this process. I now look forward to the many other pursuits we can enjoy together during our free weekends!

I want to thank my four children for your love, respect, understanding and patience. You have tolerated my studying at university whilst also carrying out substantial paid roles and community work throughout a great deal of your lives. I am in admiration of (and relieved
about) the wonderful people you have become in spite of having a very part-time mother. I will now relish being able to spend more time with you all, and your own growing families.

My incredibly dedicated PhD supervisors, Dr Lynn Ward and Dr Linley Denson have been amazing throughout this whole process, always accessible, keeping me on track, offering guidance, feedback, support for my morale, and astute insights along the way – not to mention providing timely and specific editing advice – for which I will be eternally grateful. I really have appreciated and enjoyed sharing this journey with such wise, caring and conscientious women. Thank you both so much!

I also want to thank Dr Neil McAdam, Dr Sam Wells, Professor Tricia Vilkinas and Dr Susanne Cook-Greuter for their advice during the early conceptualisation of this project. I am particularly grateful to Neil for his detailed critical feedback on my first study and continued interest in my work. Thank you also to my dear friend Greg Jemsek, who read all of my studies and has offered insights and support along the journey, to Mike Morris, Senior Research Scientist at CPP, Inc. for his patient and timely assistance with MBTI data conversion, to Professor Elliott Ingersoll for scoring the WUSCTs needed to assess the reliability of my own scoring, and to the anonymous reviewers and journal editors who provided helpful comments on the manuscripts I submitted for publication.

To my Chairman Colin Dunsford AM and Board of Directors, thank you for agreeing to the part-time leave from work I needed over the last few months to undertake the final write-up of this dissertation. Huge thanks also to all the members of my team, for being patient with the difficulties my absences have created for you, as well as for the additional responsibilities you have shouldered as a result.
Finally, I am so grateful to all the program leaders and their participants who agreed to take part in this research. I hope you feel that the results of these studies have provided you with insights that make your involvement worthwhile. My sincere thanks to you all.