

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

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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.

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Nicola Caroline Vincent

Date: 9 July, 2014

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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.

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