Profound Self-Awareness and the Need to Explore Drivers and Blockers

When you meet someone better than yourself, turn your thoughts to becoming that person's equal. When you meet someone not as good as you are, look within and examine your own self.
Confucius

Developing self-awareness is a critical and fundamental aspect of leadership development and growth. It is labeled as "leadership's first commandment" (Collingwood, 2001, p. 8). According to Goleman (2004), self-awareness involves an in-depth understanding of one's values, emotions, goals, strengths, weaknesses, needs and drives. Self-awareness is fundamental to the concept of "insightful awareness", which includes a profound understanding of one's "strengths, weaknesses, drivers and blockers". Personal self-exploration to make ourselves more aware can help us become more open to change. Indeed, the development "process of *personalization*" itself strengthens ability in self-awareness, where learning "helps to integrate past, present, and future; cognitive and emotional; personal and professional aspects of the individual's life" (Petriglieri et al., 2011, p. 445). We argue that exploring drivers and blockers (such as using the surfacing tool we propose) constitutes part of the personalization process, one that is set in the context or situation and is related to specific development objectives.

The drivers and blockers exploration approach builds on a systems psychodynamic perspective (French & Vince, 1999; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012), which addresses the organizational and social phenomenon by combining open systems and psychodynamic theories (Menzies, 1960; Miller & Rice, 1967) and is considered very effective for studying "change journeys" of individuals (Woodman & Dewett, 2004). Such a perspective is based on the assumption that the self contains contradictory and diverse elements, and attempts to explain how the tensions between these selves are understood and managed, socially as well as intrapsychically (Gabriel, 1999). As such, it is well suited to look deeply into the different elements of personal development. By focusing on conscious and unconscious factors, this approach can help explain aspects of individual change problems which otherwise might have been neglected. The conscious realization of these factors helps an individual to avoid misleading himself or herself into an image of who they are "that feeds on itself, becomes self-perpetuating, and eventually may become dysfunctional" (Goleman, 1985) as seen in Boyatzis (2006, p. 614).

For most people, understanding these elements and becoming comfortable including them as part of one's self-will should represent significant personal discovery and development. This notion is shared by Boyatzis & McKee (2006), who believe that, "part of the challenge of creating and sustaining excellent leadership is to recognize, manage, and even direct one's own process of learning and change". Managing one's own development, on the other hand, requires increasing self-awareness and making sound choices about the courses of action needed to improve efficacy as well as to accomplish the changes desired. Having worked with large numbers of leaders, we see that there are significant consequences for individuals, teams and organizations, where leaders do not possess sufficient self-awareness. These unaware leaders usually have a surplus of blind spots that are negatively affecting their interactions and behaviors. Consequently, they can wreak havoc, inflict damage and demoralize others. Demotivated and fearful workforces with low productivity and engagement are the result. This is one reason that accelerating and deepening self-awareness by exploring drivers and blockers is so important to help achieve change.

According to Boyatzis's (2006) "Intentional Change Theory" (ICT), the change process comprises a series of "discoveries", which work as a continuous cycle in bringing about sustainable and long-lasting change in individuals. This series of steps includes an understanding of one's "ideal

self",[1] that is, what one wants to be; the "real self"[2] and how it stands next to one's "ideal self", leading to an evaluation of one's strengths and weaknesses; a learning and development agenda; testing out and engaging one's new behaviors, perceptions and actions; and enduring and resonant relationships that help one to live, analyze and interpret each "discovery" as it happens. Critical to all these steps is the capacity to increase awareness, receive feedback and support, as well as apply continuous learning from experience. This is graphically represented below by adding in the exploration of drivers and blockers to the ICT frame (see Fig. 2.1).

Consistent with the Boyatzis (2006) approach, we contend that this interlinking sequence of "discoveries", which can lead to sustainable change in individuals, involves developing insightful awareness, which helps a person identify and understand the different "forces" in operation
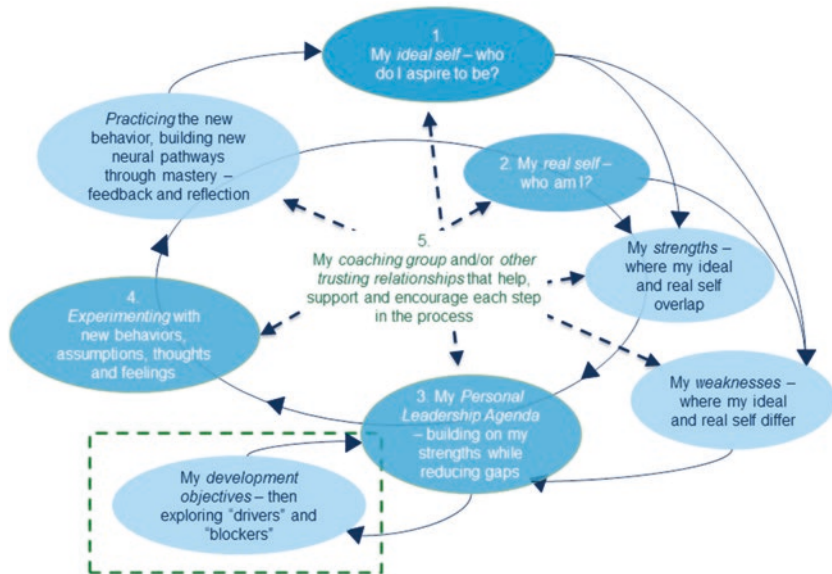

Fig. 2.1 Intentional change theory process. (Adapted from Boyatzis (2006))

[1] This refers to the self we want to be. It is the psychological element of self, which is to some extent conscious and to some extent unconscious and is different for different individuals (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

[2] An individual's actual behavior (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

in themselves. In other words, it involves ***uncovering and understanding*** the "assumptions" and "forces" which influence or act as the drivers and blockers; ***overcoming*** the blockers, which might create conflict, competition and change incoherence; and ***unleashing*** the drivers to support the changes desired.

The idea of exploring ***both*** drivers and blockers and not just blockers also draws from the field of positive psychology, which follows that, "what is good about life is as genuine as what is bad and therefore deserves equal attention" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 4). The movement is led by Seligman (1998a, 1998b) and other psychologists (e.g. Ed Diener (2000), Christopher Peterson (2000) and Rick Snyder (2000)), who argue for a need to focus on strengths and adaptability in people, rather than continuing on the path of looking into and fixing negatives or weaknesses. Scholars (e.g. Luthans, 2002) contend that in organizational behavior studies, negatives (such as resistance, burnout and stress) have received much more attention than positives.

Positive psychology, although more researched than so-called feel-good perspectives (promoted in popular media), has received criticism from a number of scholars (e.g. Held, 2004; Krippner, Pitchford, & Davies, 2012). For example, Barbara Held (2004) maintains that the theory is self-contradictory in its presentation and construction. For her, some scholars of the positive psychology movement disregard the notions or perspectives that oppose the positive psychology's dominant message, being ***negativity about negativity itself*** and ***negativity about the wrong kind of positivity*** (p. 9). Positive psychology has also been criticized for its failure to adequately identify the vital roles of "*negative*" emotions (Krippner et al., 2012).

However, like Aspinwall & Staudinger (2003), we believe that "a psychology of human strengths should not be the study of how negative experience [or factors*] may be avoided or ignored, but rather how positive and negative experience [or factors*] may be inter-related" (pp. 14–15)—hence the combination of exploring drivers *and* blockers. Since drivers are beneficial, individuals can develop as many of them as they are able; however, not all drivers might serve equally well. Sometimes drivers can be over-used or become peripheral; drivers in combination with some blockers may be harmless in some situations and detrimental in others. Some blockers may also be drivers, not easy to assess or to change; however, the risk here is that they may be seen as the very drivers that are suggested for people to draw on in their everyday work.

Identifying both drivers and blockers and their combinations can help an individual to understand the complex interactions between these, as well as how these are relative and situationally determined. This is also hinted at in the work of McCall (2009) on executive derailment, in which he questions the notion that strengths are always strengths or that weaknesses can be ignored. McCall (2009) sees people as a farrago of strengths and weaknesses, and knowing and understanding their strengths and weaknesses necessitates studying combinations of both of these in specific situations.

For example, the "Drivers and Blockers Exploration Tool", in particular, acts as a structured surfacing method for people to engage in becoming aware of the forces sitting behind strengths and weaknesses. This constitutes a step toward emancipation—the significance of changing an individual's structure of assumptions and forces that contribute to his or her way of thinking and interpreting. Bringing about this "insightful awareness" contributes to thinking and practice in leadership development by: increasing understanding of why changing behavior is not a simple process; uncovering the reasons as to why accomplishing the desired change does not follow the path that one might prefer and opening the mind to positive drivers to support the change desired.

Profound self-awareness is even more relevant for leaders attempting to navigate the modern world and create sense and meaning. This so-called D-VUCAD[3] world of disruption, volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity and diversity presents challenges and opportunities for business and for personal, team and talent development, as well as for the need to develop new mindsets, capabilities and leadership approaches or seek innovation or lead major change. For example, see Beechler and Woodward (2009); Woodward and Shaffakat (2017).

2.1   Adult Mind Development Stages and the "Immunity to Change" Process

Although there are a number of adult development theories proposed in the literature, such as by Kegan (1982), Loevinger (1976, 1987) and Torbert (1991), to give a reasonable focus for our research work, we concentrated on Kegan's (1982) adult mind development theory, which

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[3] "D-VUCAD" as a construct of contemporary business context is described in: https://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/leadership-is-a-journey-not-a-destination-7581

provides a strong foundation for arguments we propose later in the book. We also provide a description of Kegan & Lahey's (2001a) "immunity to change" process, which built on these authors' work on adult mind development. The emphasis here is on exploring the inner and intrinsic self, which paradoxically is a place of both great innovation and those dark and susceptible areas of self, which people prefer not to expose (Chuck 2007).

Predicated on Ronald Heifetz's theory that elucidates the important distinction between "technical[4]" and "adaptive[5]" problems, Kegan & Lahey (2009) contend that certain individual change problems are "adaptive" in nature and necessitate developing bigger or transforming mindsets. In other words, we have to adapt so as to learn how to solve complex change challenges. Kegan and Lahey developed a process that evolved from merely "diagnosing" immunities to change to "overcoming" immunities to change, thereby fulfilling both objectives simultaneously (p. xii). The "immunity to change" process helps in exposing "hidden" commitments and the assumptions behind them. This understanding then enhances mental complexity, transforming mindsets from subject to object. Furthermore, the ability to change the individual's mindset and move it to a more effective and more advanced level is as a critical strength to address difficult adaptive problems (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

2.1.1   *Adult Mind Development and Stages*

The idea behind transformation or knowing is epistemological change, not just change in the behavioral pattern (Kegan, 2000). In other words, what someone does is not to just construct or change their meanings but rather change the very *form* of the meaning-making system, that is, their epistemologies.[6]

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[4] Technical problems are the problems that are very mechanical and require quick and easy fixes (Heifetz, 1994).

[5] Adaptive problems, on the other hand, have no straightforward solution or quick fixes available. These problems necessitate a transformation in beliefs, ideologies, values and ways of working (Heifetz, 1994).

[6] The concept of meaning-making is different to that of sense-making (Weick, 1995) which is seen as more "automatic and immediate" (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schreurs, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2009, p. 511). van den Heuvel et al. (2009) further see meaning-making as a "psychological process of in-depth, internal exploration of an issue of concern" (p. 511).

Kegan's "meaning-forming/making" framework sets forth five qualitatively different levels or "orders of mind" after early childhood (Kegan, 1982, 1994). These "orders of mind" are principles for the *organization* of an individual's thinking, emotions and relating to others rather than the *content* of an individual's thinking, emotions and relating to others (Kegan, 1994). Each level or order of mind involves "looking at" (object) a paradigm, which in the previous level one could only manage to "look through" (subject), that is, the subject/object relation is core to these levels or orders. In other words, it means we can have a more objective view when we advance to high orders, and as such are not trapped in our own "frame".

Drath (1990) explains the role of subject and object through the example of "cultural blindness":

> We see with our culture-bound norms and expectations, accept them as given, and cannot examine them for what they are – that is, we cannot see through them. Our cultural heritage is something we are, not something we have. The culture holds us; we are embedded in it and cannot rise above it. A cognitive development shift, however, is possible when we become aware of culturally determined differences and the distance they create from others. Such understanding could make cultural influences an Object, opening up new ways of seeing ourselves and of relating to others. (1990, p. 48)

The first two orders of mind, that is, "impulsive mind" and "instrumental mind", relate to the significant developments that take place during childhood and as such will not be discussed here. The majority of adults engage in "meaning-making" between the third level (i.e. "socialized mind") and the fourth (i.e. "self-authoring mind"), and only a small fraction of adults advance to the fifth level (i.e. "self-transforming mind") (Kegan, 1994; Torbert et al., 2004). A detailed overview of these three adult higher "orders of mind" (socialized mind, self-authoring mind and self-transforming mind) is provided in Sect. 10.2.

Each level of mental complexity in the three "orders of mind" is more sophisticated than the previous level, since it can accomplish the mental activity of the previous level, as well as additional functions. So, the higher level of mental complexity is more advanced and surpasses the lower level in performance (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). For example, in exercising leadership, scholars (e.g. Helsing & Howell, 2014; Kegan, 1994; McAuliffe, 2006; Rooke & Torbert, 1998) argue that leaders, with advanced levels of

mental complexity, can better deal with leadership challenges and thus can be more effective. Also, the differences in approach of leaders with some being transactional and some transformational are explained through Kegan's "orders of mind" (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006). Kuhnert & Lewis (1987) attribute the differences between these two leadership styles to the different "orders of mind". Leaders with these two styles differ in the manner in which they view and construct reality (i.e. leadership issues and challenges).

Transactional leaders, for example, depend on associations predicated on mutual support, expectations, promises and economic exchange with their followers—this aligns with the "socialized mind", where individuals are identified by their relations with others. Transformational leaders, on the other hand, use their personal value system to inspire followers to espouse it. This style of leadership is more in line with the "self-authoring" mind, where the individuals' self-identity stems from their self-determination. These individuals rise above their self-interest for the common organizational objective (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987).

McCauley et al.'s (2006) work also maintains that leaders at the self-authoring level are more inclined to lead in ways considered effective by contemporary organizations. These leaders are "more likely to delegate, hold people accountable, influence through rewards and expertise (rather than coercive power), look for underlying causes of problems, act as change agents, and be more comfortable with conflict" (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 647). These findings are similar to the findings of a study by Hasegawa (2004) conducted on nine teachers taking on leadership roles.

Furthermore, research by Van Velsor & Drath (2004) on 25 leaders showed that leaders operating at the "socialized mind" level experienced greater difficulties in handling complex challenges at work than the ones operating at "self-authoring" levels. The leaders in this study were challenged "by being in a role that was ill-defined, becoming a member of a more senior group, needing to take a minority position in a group or with a superior, presenting oneself authentically in stressful situations, and facing competing demands from work and home lives" (p. 400).

Scholars (e.g. Eigel, 1998; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert et al., 2004) contend that the current business world requires the workforce, which is currently at the socialized mind level, to be at the self-authoring mind level. Kegan & Lahey (2009), in particular, stress that the times that required managers to keep their performance within given constraints, while applying power through personal attributes

to promote one's position and stand firm in the face of opposition, have changed. Research on talent concurs (e.g. Beechler & Woodward, 2009). The current business world requires managers who can transform their organization—its vision, mission and culture—to adapt to or cope with external demands of the D-VUCAD world described earlier.

With these debates as background, Kegan & Lahey (2009) point to the increased demand for mental complexity in work, which has become more complicated. The same is confirmed by data from two big studies by Kegan (1994) and Torbert (1987) on mental complexity distribution levels across adults. This research indicates a huge gap between the existing and the expected levels of people's minds. All in all, studies over time highlight the necessity for "self-authorship" in the application of a range of skills and competencies that are vital for success across different facets of an individual's personal and professional life and impact on his or her ability to lead (Helsing & Howell, 2014).

We argue that exploring specific drivers and blockers in ourselves can play a role in helping leaders advance to higher order levels of self-authoring and self-transforming minds, thereby mitigating the gap between their own mental complexity and the complexity of the world.

2.1.2   The "Immunity to Change" Process

Kegan & Lahey (2001b) developed the "immunity to change" discovery process or the four-column "immunity map" (see Sect. 10.3 for additional details) by studying people who genuinely wanted to change but somehow failed to effect the changes they initiated. Their analysis led them to understand and uncover the reasons, often beyond the conscious level, why a change initially committed to fails to accomplish the desired results. These reasons are referred to as "competing commitments" (McAvoy & Butler, 2005) which, along with the related "big assumptions" (which we describe as blockers), guide and direct one's behaviors and actions.

These "big assumptions" are deeply embedded beliefs about the nature of reality and how one recognizes it (Kegan & Lahey, 2001a). These might be rooted in fear and other negative emotions attributed to life experiences. These "big assumptions", as well as the immune system (a metaphor used by Kegan and Lahey), form the elements of one's reality and hinder the process of accomplishing the very change one is committed to make.

The immune system is a complicated, stable arrangement, prudently formed for self-protection and handling fears and insecurities. The change in "beliefs" or "assumptions" on which this system stands leads the immune system to perceive the state as a threat, triggering resistance behaviors (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). Bowe, Lahey, Armstrong, & Kegan (2003) believe that, "like many New Year's resolutions, sincere intent to change may be short lived and followed by a discouraging return to old behaviors" (p. 715). Similarly, Banerjee (2003, p. 74) defines "competing commitments" as "self-defeating behavior", which is hidden and opposes the change process.

As an exemplar of this, consider Lorenz,[7] a business head in the automotive industry we worked with, who was committed to empower his team members. During the drivers and blockers exploration exercise, he admitted that he does not trust people, which he saw as a main blocker preventing him from empowering his team members. He held the assumption that only by keeping direct control over crucial tasks would he be able to ensure high quality delivery, which he was "known for" and which had contributed to his success to date. By taking him through the exploration of drivers, Lorenz was also able to reconnect to another strong value of his, which was autonomy. During his early years, his superiors constantly pushed him out of his comfort zone and provided him with opportunities to take ownership and responsibility for things he knew little about. This had contributed to his success and personal growth. The awareness of that driver in him made him realize that he would want to be a leader who promotes the same kind of growth environment in his organization and for his people. This deeper awareness of the drivers and blockers which were impacting his change objective created the possibility for him to experiment with empowering his team and eventually integrating the element of "trusting and developing others" in his leadership style. His assumption that only tight control would ensure quality results was proven wrong through tangible and courageous practice of this new behavior.

The notion of transformative change stems from adult development and learning theory (discussed above) which explains the variations and development patterns in people's (adults) construction and perception of themselves and their realities (Basseches, 1984; Kegan, 1982; Kelly, 1955). The process of evaluating people's cognitive mechanisms affects an advancement to an improved thinking and reasoning and increased cogni-

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[7] An example from our research (see Sect. 10.1, Example 1).

tive complexity (Bochman & Kroth, 2010). For a transformative change to take place, it is imperative that the person's "competing commitments" and the related hidden "assumptions" (the blockers) are reconsidered and restated. These become deep insights for change action. This is because our immune system does not just hinder progress on a single goal; it also adheres to our adult mental complexity continuum. This means something in us is not just competing against one goal, one objective, one job; but rather the way of looking at many things, creating a meaning-making lens as if we are stuck at the lower level or orders of mind.

The process of the immunity to change gives people an "outside" as well as "inside" view on the dynamics of adult mind development (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, p. 47). These views can help people to look deeper into their immune system, a mechanism that guards people, or as Kegan & Lahey (2009) describe, "an intelligent force that seeks to protect you and even to save your life" (p. 47). Reflecting upon these concepts of self-protection and intelligence provides people with more detailed knowledge, which tells individuals that development involves the "head and heart" functioning together.

As such, we now traverse many different aspects of the "head and heart" including the conscious and unconscious mind; ego and mini-selves, possible-selves; worldviews; emotions; personality; dispositional variables; values; and extrinsic and intrinsic motivators—these constitute the reservoirs or sources for the assumptions and forces influencing or acting as drivers and blockers in the change process in ourselves. These reservoirs of drivers and blockers are reflected in the "Drivers and Blockers Exploration Tool" questionnaire. Before turning to that model and the tool, the next five chapters cover the research and literature, as well as provide examples about the reservoirs or sources of drivers and blockers.