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**Ego Development
and its implications
for the business world.**

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Abstract:



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Thematic Session - Career development

Ego Development and its Implications for the Business World

Binder T.¹

¹Systemics - Consulting and Training for Systems and their Key Players, Office Charlottenburg, Berlin, Germany

The concept of Ego-Development as developed by Jane Loevinger (1976) represents an important and original approach to understanding personality and its development. Her empirically derived description of qualitative changes in personality growth can be counted amongst the most important achievements of personality and developmental psychology (Westenberg, 1998). Recent reviews and meta-analyses (e.g. Cohn & Westenberg, 2004; Manners & Durkin, 2001) have found substantial empirical support for the soundness of her theory and method of measurement (WUSCT).

The more than 350 empirical studies on Ego-Development are mostly done by developmental or personality researchers concerned with basic research. Only a small number of studies are in the field of applied research. Interestingly, for a concept that touches on such a wide range of aspects, there are only a few studies that analyze the impact of Ego-Development in the business world. This too despite the fact that many other personality tests are so widely used in business.

This presentation will show what the impact of different stages of Ego-Development in business settings could be and how crucial these aspects are for managers and consultants in their daily work. Research findings from other professions (e.g. Rooke & Torbert, 1998), often unknown by developmental and personality researchers, will also be presented. This will show how developmental, personality and business psychology can be fruitful for each other.

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Some reflections from a business consultant...

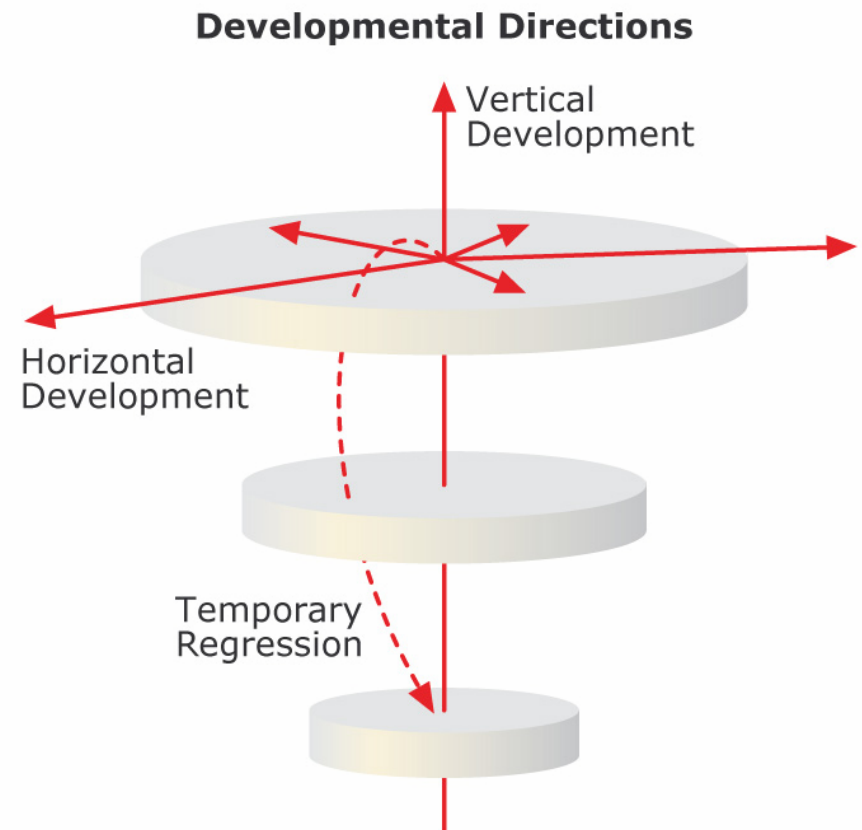
- ◆ The connection between personality research and business is very strong (e.g. personality tests, assessment procedures).
- ◆ But there is almost:
 - no developmental perspective in business psychology nor Human Resource Departments
 - no business perspective in developmental psychology

What is Ego Development?

- ◆ Ego Development is about how a person sees and interprets the world around him and himself.
- ◆ With each new stage a person can control more of his own self and is less likely to be controlled by unknown aspects (to him).
- ◆ Each stage is a transformation of ones self-definition marked by increased levels of differentiation and integrative views of others and the world.

Developmental directions:

- ◆ Horizontal Development: Expansion at same stage within a given action logic (adding new skills, knowledge).
- ◆ Vertical Development: Transformation towards a new and more integrated action logic.



The complexity of a managers/consultants world:

- ◆ Problems are usually ill defined and have many influencing factors. Almost all elements are related to each other.
- ◆ Most decisions have long lasting and significant impacts.
- ◆ Motives, interests and backgrounds of different people have to be taken into account.
- ◆ You have to be able to „stand against the crowd“ as well as being reflective and open to change.

With increasing Ego Development people...

- ◆ can better understand the complexity of interpersonal situations – are more able to hold different perspectives.
- ◆ can more easily shift their own perspective.
- ◆ are more aware of process and goal in their actions.
- ◆ can accept more ambiguity and contradictions.
- ◆ are more able to reflect and change their views.

Some research findings: Ego Development has impact on...

- ◆ Consulting competence of business consultants (Bushe & Gibbs, 1990)
- ◆ Use of more mature defense mechanisms in interaction with the environment (Vaillant, 1993).
- ◆ Flexibility of power use (Smith, 1980).
- ◆ A CEO´s ability to successfully transform a company (Rooke & Torbert, 1998)
- ◆ Ability to successfully perform under high levels of uncertainty (Merron, 1985).

Benefit and use for business:

- ◆ Personnel selection for managers: Better fit between complexity of (a) role and level of maturity.
- ◆ Leadership development programmes that not only *in-form* but *trans-form* people.
- ◆ Coaching that is designed to fit (and expand) the ego development level of the client.
- ◆ Training programmes of coaches and consultants to expand their level of maturity.

Further research should:

- ◆ more clarify the relationship between stable personality factors and Ego Development.
- ◆ study the impact of Ego Development on important aspects of management (e.g. decision making, handling conflict, dealing with stakeholders).
- ◆ investigate career and Ego Development together over the lifespan.
- ◆ examine how Ego Development can actively be promoted.