

EUTOPIAGRAPHS: NARRATIVES OF PREFERRED-FUTURE SELVES  
WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL COACHING

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FINAL REPORT

Submitted to  
Institute of Coaching  
Harvard's McLean School of Medicine  
in partial fulfillment of  
research grant requirements

September, 2010

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## **Abstract**

Eutopiography is a narrative of a preferred future self that extends the research tradition of biography and autobiography. Taking place at the intersection of adult development, futures studies, and the practice of developmental coaching, this research asked the question, “what can eutopiography reveal about a client’s meaning-making that may inform a coaching relationship, goals, and outcomes?” Using an adapted form of the subject-object interview, and subsequent thematic analysis, the eutopiographies of eight participants were collected and studied. Structures of constructive-developmental theory (values, view of others, range of perspective, control, and responsibility) were identified and constructive-developmental stages were estimated. This work extends the traditional subject-object protocol by using a narrative of a “to-be-lived” experience, rather than a “lived” experience, as the stimulus for revealing stages of meaning-making.

Participants—estimated by the researcher to be at different developmental stages—identified differences in the potential use of a coach. Those at earlier stages, for instance, envisioned the need for a more prescriptive approach, while those at later stages anticipated less direction and more collaboration, in the nature of a trusted advisor. This work responds to the call for more research regarding familiar coaching practices (such as a discussion of a preferred future) and the application of adult developmental theory to the field of coaching. The potential application of adult developmental theory within the larger context of futures studies is addressed, shedding light on the different contributions to futures studies that may be made by individuals at different stages of development. Substantial connections were made to the mounting adaptive challenges of our complex world, the need for transformational leadership, and the possible use of developmental coaching as one way to address those challenges.



## **Research to Practice**

This research provides evidence that coaches, with training in adult developmental theory, can extend the value of a common practice—talking with clients about their preferred future selves—to uncover clues regarding clients’ constructive-developmental stages (Kegan 1982, 1994). Practitioners attracted to Kegan’s theory may find the researcher’s presentation of stage-related structure to be a succinct and ready reference regarding the key aspects of constructive development.

Many coaches are familiar with and use the Wheel of Life (Whitworth, et al, 2007) as a stimulus for discussions about the future and encourage their clients to imagine their future relationships, physical surroundings, and finances, for instance. Eutopiography, informed by the subject-object interview protocol (Lahey, et al, 1988), offers alternative stimuli—priming words—that tap into emotions that clients’ anticipate or prefer to experience in their futures. Asking clients to consider words such as success, challenge, and risk, for instance, opens the door for very rich, detailed narratives of “to-be-lived” experiences even if the coach is not attempting to understand clients’ developmental stage.

This research draws from the field of futures studies which is about creating values-based alternatives for the future that compel us to take action in the present. A preferred future, the scenario that defines eutopiography, is one of many scenarios that coaches can use to delve with their clients into an array of future alternatives. Alternatively, a coach may be curious about clients’ abandoned dreams—their “disowned” futures—and whether or not a particular disowned future might be re-energized. Perhaps, the coach might wonder if clients are accepting “used” futures—those defined by convention or by another person—thereby limiting their own options.

Coaches rely on powerful questions to evoke new insights from their clients. This research adds two questions to the coach's toolkit: "What do you imagine your preferred future to be?" and "How do you envision using a coach to assist you in moving toward your preferred future?" In addition to the substantive topical content that these two questions can reveal, this research provides evidence that they can lead to a better understanding of clients' constructive-developmental stage—an important consideration for the evolution and success of a coaching relationship.

## **Introduction**

Therapy is about the past. Coaching is about the future. Using this commonly held differentiator as a basic tenet of this research, the problems addressed are:

- Can clients' stories about their futures reveal more than a bucket list of things to do in the future? Can they reveal structure and stage related to Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory?
- Can an intervention rooted in therapy-based, clinical settings (the subject-object interview (Lahey, et al, 1988)) about past experiences be adapted to evoke and analyze experiences anticipated in the future?
- If anticipated future experiences can provide evidence of constructive-developmental stage, how might that information inform the coaching relationship, including the types of assignments and feedback that client and coach employ?

The work of this research occurs at the intersection of three distinct avenues of research: constructive development, coaching, and futures studies. Existing research connecting any two of these avenues is scant. Attempts to connect all three are non-existent, prior to the publication of the dissertation entitled *Eutopiographies: Narratives of preferred future selves with implications for developmental coaching* (Diehl, 2010).

### **Constructive-developmental theory**

Frank Ball, a faculty member at Georgetown University's Coaching Program, recently commented that he can foresee a day when it is considered unethical for a coach to practice without adequate knowledge of adult development (personal communication, 2009). Axelrod (2005) wrote: "The effectiveness of coaching can be enhanced if it is based on a model of adult

development that encompasses both career and personal life” (p. 118). The model chosen for this research was Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory. According to Kegan (1994), development is “meaning-making and the evolution of consciousness...a new way of seeing ourselves...in relation to the demands of our environment” (Kegan, 1994, p. 2)—“the personal unfolding of ways of organizing experience that are not simply replaced as we grow but subsumed into more complex systems of mind” (p. 9). Individuals develop in ways that change what they value, how they view others, their ability to take on another’s perspective, and how they experience control and responsibility. These are the basic structures, or ways of organizing experience, that are differentiated across developmental stages. The protocol for analyzing stage and structure has been documented by Lahey and her colleagues (1988) and is referred to as the subject-object interview.

### **Prior Research**

Based on a quick sampling of coaching colleagues, coaches commonly use a best-possible-self exercise to elicit clients’ thoughts about the future. The format of the exercise often mirrors the Wheel-of-Life or the Future Self visualization techniques documented by Whitworth, Kimsey-house, Kimsey-House, and Sandahl (2007) in *Co-active coaching*. Coaches use the information they hear in these stories to help their clients identify and take action toward future goals. This is important coaching work, yet decidedly different from the underlying purpose of this research—to find evidence of constructive-developmental stage and structure in narratives about the future. And, in spite of frequent use in coaching, research has not been documented regarding the Wheel-of-Life and Future Self visualization techniques as they are applied in the practice of coaching. The intersection of “coaching” and “the future” is untilled ground from a research perspective.

The construct of possible selves derives from the notion of self-concept (Marcus & Nurius, 1986). “Possible selves represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation” (1986, p. 954). While the research regarding possible selves is vast, it is largely from the viewpoint of psychologists and deficit-based therapy. Only Frazier, Newman, and Jaccard’s (2007) article mentioned the connection between possible selves and adult development, and this connection was not considered within the context of a coaching relationship.

The epistemology for this research—eutopiography—takes its name from the field of futures studies, and a particular scenario—a preferred future. Futures studies are about values-based alternatives of the future that compel us to take action in the present (Bezold, personal communication, 2009). With this definition, the work of coaching is clearly a futures study – albeit a personal one, rather than one aimed at envisioning and striving toward a societal or organization-wide outcome.

Hayward (2003) and Dian (2009) provided the only research within the field of futures studies that make the connection between the individual and one’s response to a vision of the future. Hayward, using the adult developmental models of Loevinger (1976) and Cook-Greuter (1999) found evidence that individuals are variously disposed to take action (or not) on a future vision depending upon their adult developmental stage. Dian’s Foresight Styles Assessment used several underlying structures that are similar to Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive-developmental theory however she did not present them as a developmental continuum but as capabilities that either existed or not, within an individual. Both Hayward and Dian were

focused on individuals' engagement with external environments rather than own their personal preferred futures.

The subject-object interview (Lahey et al, 1988) has been the topic of numerous research studies, of which one (Berger and Fitzgerald, 2002) was specific to coaching. Berger and Fitzgerald identified implications of subject-object shifts in the context of executive coaching. My work, while similarly concerned with these implications, used narratives of preferred future selves rather than past experiences to elicit information regarding constructive-developmental stage and structure.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This research was intended to extend the usefulness of an adapted form of the subject-object interview by asking participants to talk about their preferred future selves. Clients regularly share their visions of the future with their coaches. This research provides evidence that coaches who are trained in constructive-developmental theory can use narratives about the future to learn something about clients' meaning-making capabilities. Awareness of these capabilities can inform the coaching relationship as suggestions or paths of inquiry may be variously constructed, received, and acted upon given differences in constructive-developmental stage.

### **Methodology**

While this work was not a cohort study of baby boomers, this generation has been a recurring subject area of interest for the researcher and remained so through the dissertation process. Baby boomers—born between the years 1946-1964—are the first-ever generation to experience a 10-15 year increase in their life-spans, during their lifetimes (Dychtwald, 2005). This newfound time is wedged between what has been considered the end of traditional

professional lives and traditional retirement for those in the workforce. Because of the potential for new alternatives for preferred future selves, given extended lifetimes, the participants were chosen from the baby boomer generation.

Participants were recruited through a convenience sample. All were middle-aged executives of public corporations from the Washington, DC area. Additional demographics include:

- 3 female, 5 male
- 6 white; 1 Hispanic; 1 Hawaiian
- Industry backgrounds included: professional services, financial services, hospitality, telecommunications, and construction
- 4 of the 8 participants had recently lost their positions due to economic decline in the Washington, DC area.

Eutopiography, a narrative of a preferred future self collected through in-person interviews with each participant, was the methodology used to collect the data for this research. Participants were asked to tell the interviewer about their preferred future selves and were given the opportunity to organize their thoughts on index cards that included prompts including the words: opportunity, success, challenge, risk, let go of/release. Each audio-recorded interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Narratives of eight participants were transcribed and subsequently reviewed through a thematic analysis, using an adaptation of the subject-object interview protocol (Lahey et al., 1988). Inter-rater reliability (Boyatzis, 1998) was assessed using a peer reviewer—an executive coach trained in constructive-developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

The subject-object interview (SOI) (Lahey et al, 1988) is a form of thematic analysis as described by Boyatzis (1998). Boyatzis called thematic analysis the “search for the codable moment” (p.1). The codable moments sought in this research were the bits of narrative that were evidence of a structure defined by constructive-developmental theory (CDT) (Kegan, 1982, 1994). The work of this research was to recognize, code, and interpret the CDT structures, at the ordinal levels (Stage 3, 4, or 5). Note that in the original SOI protocol, there exists the possibility of 21 step variations among Stages 1 through 5. Most adults have been assessed to be within the range of Stages 3-5 (Kegan and Lahey, 2009). As this was exploratory research intended for practical application in executive coaching rather than therapy the ordinal levels associated with adults were used to bound the analysis.

The standard steps of thematic analysis include: determining the units of analysis; identifying the codable moment; developing themes and codes; scoring, scaling, and clustering themes; and reaching consistency of judgment (Boyatzis, 1998). Note that in this work, new themes or codes were not developed. Rather, the themes (structures) and codes (stages) were derived from the structures and stages that have been identified by Kegan (1982, 1994). A summary of stage and structure are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Constructive-developmental stage and structure.*

<b>Constructive-developmental Structures (ways of organizing experience)</b>	<b>Stage 2 (Imperial) Characteristics</b>	<b>Stage 3 (Socialized) Characteristics</b>	<b>Stage 4 (Self-authoring) Characteristics</b>	<b>Stage 5 (Self-transforming) Characteristics</b>
<b>Values</b> <i>What do I value most in life?</i>	Getting my needs, interests, wishes met	Mutuality; Reciprocal/stable relationships; respect for authority; empathy; others understanding me; values come from an outside “institution”/authority	Psychological independence; sense of self; my own values; I can see limitations to the institution. My independent standards are important.	I am not invested in any one system, so we can create new ones. I value transformation to something new.
<b>View of others</b> <i>What is the role of others?</i>	You can meet my needs. Also, if I do something, you (something external) may be able to apply consequences. I view your needs, wishes, interests in terms of the consequences for my world.	I look to an external source for direction – from a “board of directors” who know better than I do.  You make me feel this way. The other’s view is determining/mediating.  Difference is a “problem.”	I do not hold you responsible for my feelings. I feel violated if you make me responsible for your feelings. You have feelings that I am not responsible for.  I am still seeking to confirm that I am doing it in a right way (idealism?)	We can participate in a process of creating a new perspective. I want feedback to know if my self-evaluations are correct.

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<b>Range of perspective</b> <i>How broad is my ability to see another's perspectives?</i>	I can see your point of view in terms of what I want/need. No internal battle. I cannot take more than one perspective. I am concerned only about my own perspective.	I can hold multiple points of view (interpersonal) e.g. mine, yours. I am responsible for your point of view. I can't imagine that you have a POV different from the one I think you have.  Your POV helps determine mine. I can look at myself through your eyes.	I can generate, define, and distinguish my point of view from yours. You can have a point of view outside of the one I have constructed internally as your POV.	Other's views may help me change my own.
<b>Control</b> <i>How much control do I have over myself, and where does that control come from?</i>	I can recognize my impulses and begin to control them to get what I want.	I am dedicated to doing what others expect of me.	Self-assertion; reduced control by others; my choices/action may not be mediated by your POV; independent of your feelings	Getting to a particular outcome is less important than working together to get to new and different outcomes.
<b>Responsibility</b> <i>What do I take responsibility for?</i>	I am not responsible for my actions independent of some external you.	I do not own responsibility for choices that have to be made/choices that an authority tells me are the right choices.	I am responsible for my own feelings/decisions. I take full responsibility for my own viewpoints/actions.	I am responsible for working with you to find a better way that neither of us has considered.

*Note.* Compiled from Lahey et al., 1988.

In this research, the unit of analysis was the individual research participant. The narratives of each individual participant were reviewed; codable moments (the unit of coding) were identified in each narrative using the rubric shown in Table 1, and the analysis for each participant was presented in an adapted form of SOI Process Formulation Sheet (Lahey et al.,

1988). Codes (the developmental stages) were assigned using nominal scoring (Boyatzis, 1998). Because no one bit of information was enough to assign a specific code (Lahey et al., 1988), bits of narrative were clustered that led to a particular stage assessment by the researcher. The process represents a form of theoretical clustering based on the related characteristics within a particular constructive-developmental stage (for example, Stage 3 vs. Stage 4) and viewed through the lens of the various themes (values, view of others, range of perspective, control, and responsibility). An example of the adapted SOI Process Formulation Sheet for one of the participants is provided in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Process formulation sheet: David.*

<b>Demographics</b>			
<b>Age:</b> 55	<b>Male</b>	<b>VP, Home Construction Industry</b>	
<b>Bit # (Interview page/line)</b>	<b>Theme (values, view of others, range of perception, control, responsibility)</b>	<b>Stage estimate (3,4,5)</b>	<b>Evidence and tests of stage hypotheses</b>
# 1 (1/26-33)	Values	4 → 5	When asked what working in an animal sanctuary would feed in him, David replied, “I look forward to having it help me focus on something other than me, or the immediate situation with myself, Jane, and my children or what not...to take time to smell the roses...I’m hoping I’ll be able to calm down a little bit and actually relax, which is not easy for me.” I have estimated an emerging shift to Stage 5 because of the process orientation of his statement, rather than a specific outcome.
#2 (3/111-119)	View of others	4	I asked David if he felt like he needed to get “permission” from anyone to make the move. He responded, “I’m a workaholic. And so to stop working, it makes me a little anxious to be honest. I feel like some kind of slacker or something...it would be nice if someone said, this is ok for you to do.” In a Stage 4 way, he is clear, but would appreciate confirmation from the outside that he is making the right choice.

<b>Demographics</b> <b>Age: 55      Male      VP, Home Construction Industry</b>			
<b>Bit # (Interview page/line)</b>	<b>Theme (values, view of others, range of perception, control, responsibility)</b>	<b>Stage estimate (3,4,5)</b>	<b>Evidence and tests of stage hypotheses</b>
#3 (4/139-169)  (6/241-251)	Values	4	<p>David defined success as being able to provide some education, particularly at the elementary school level, on animal rights issues. I ask him, “what is it about your point of view vs. their point of view of animals.” He responded, “It’s a difference between seeing animals as property and animals as living creatures...Jane and I will be driving down there, and it’s [a dog] chained up outside in the back.. sometimes in a shack...sometimes with nothing...It’s just an understanding that that’s not really an appropriate way for a pack animal to be kept for instance.” He sees their point of view and is very strong about how his differs from theirs.</p> <p>Further into our discussion, David mentioned another situation in which people who have bought homes on marshland suddenly complain because they have animals in their front yards. He then said, “I realized very quickly that... a lot of people were raised, particularly in our society, out in rural areas. ...they just don’t know.” He gets where they are coming from, even though he doesn’t agree with them.</p>
#4 (7/297-307)	View of others	4	<p>Having made the decision to be less of a workaholic (a change in his own standards) David will look to Jane and his children for feedback. He imagined them saying, “Gee, you seem a little bit more relaxed...more accessible.” He will look to others to confirm what he’s doing is right.</p>

<b>Demographics</b> <b>Age: 55      Male      VP, Home Construction Industry</b>			
<b>Bit # (Interview page/line)</b>	<b>Theme (values, view of others, range of perception, control, responsibility)</b>	<b>Stage estimate (3,4,5)</b>	<b>Evidence and tests of stage hypotheses</b>
#5 (7/313-319)	Values	4	In talking about others he says, “they have absolutely no feedback loop, and it amazes me how they’ve actually functioned in life. I do have a feedback loop to myself. I’m not always as honest with myself as I think I should be. ...It’s the honesty with which I interpret that data that I gotta be careful about.” He assesses himself against his own standards in a self-authoring way.
#6 (10/414-436)  (11/469-474)	View of others	4	We talked about feedback. David said that where he gets feedback from the sanctuary will be very different from what he’s used to (metrics.) He said, “one of the challenges ...is we are moving into an area and being surrounded by neighbors who are this old mentality about how you interact with wildlife. And part of my concern is that we don’t turn people off...it’s not good because you don’t get your message out...and I can see it becoming a situation where your neighbor takes offense, or we offend somebody because we get in their face....and the next thing we know that some of the dogs are shot in the middle of the night....we have to be careful how we go about this.” Here David is saying that people have different feelings because they have different viewpoints. The feeling of being offended is related to their view of how to treat animals.  David continued, “I know I have more of an open thought on this than Jane does, it’s ok, they’re doing this, I’m doing that...I need to understand a little bit more of where they’re coming from and is my point of view too jaded.? At the end, he anticipates seeking to confirm that what he’s doing is right.

<b>Demographics</b> <b>Age: 55      Male      VP, Home Construction Industry</b>			
<b>Bit # (Interview page/line)</b>	<b>Theme (values, view of others, range of perception, control, responsibility)</b>	<b>Stage estimate (3,4,5)</b>	<b>Evidence and tests of stage hypotheses</b>
#7 (16/699- 706)	Values	4	David talked about a movie he'd just seen where the humans follow the rats because they seem to know where they're going. He compared it to the corporate rat race, saying, "so yeah, the conventional wisdom is yeah, you gotta work your way up the corporate ladder, and you gotta get these promotions and pay...and keep up with the Jones'. And I never really was into that type of keeping up with the Jones' kind of thing...I was running with the rats, at least I knew that, and I was pretty good at it. Now I'm doing something different, and so there's a little bit of fear with that decision." He's clearly indicating his standards – hard work is important, but it's not about keeping up.
	Overall Stage Estimate	4	I saw absolutely no structural evidence of Stage 3. David's future and the way he makes meaning of it seems all about taking this self-authored idea to fruition.

Following the researcher's analysis of each eutopiography, a peer reviewer was engaged to randomly test the reliability of the researcher's overall stage estimate. The reviewer was provided with the demographics of all participants and chose one. The participant's recorded interview and transcription were provided. Using a metric of rater/expert reliability using the percentage agreement of presence method (Boyatzis, 1998), evidence of reliability was developed.

## **Findings**

This exploratory research provided evidence that a discussion of preferred future selves can evoke a narrative that can be used to assess constructive-developmental structure and stage.

The codable moments and clustering of themes resulted in stage assessments that aligned with the anticipated range for adults (Stages 3 through 5). Two participants were assessed at Stage 3 with movement toward Stage 4; five were assessed at Stage 4; and, one was assessed at Stage 4 with movement toward Stage 5.

The narratives also revealed differences in the types of preferred futures that were envisioned across the various stages. The two participants estimated to be at Stage 3 anticipated futures that would require definition of their own values, and making a conscious split from goals and evaluations that were imposed by large organizational structures. Finding out who they were and what they stood for, beyond the corporate world, would be important work in the future. Moving past the constraints of an outside institutional authority was top of mind for these participants.

Participants assessed at Stage 4 were better able to define the personal values that they wanted to honor in their future lives. Among the values discussed were: independence; life-long learning; embracing one's cultural heritage as a conscious, personal choice; and, making a personal contribution to humanitarian causes. Four of the five participants assessed at Stage 4 had very specific plans associated with these values. Each of these participants narrated clear differentiations between themselves and the organizations for which they worked and owned, and celebrated their ability to design and choose their future paths.

The one participant estimated at Stage 4 moving toward Stage 5, had a decidedly less structured view of the future. She envisioned working with others to create something bigger than each might create individually and imagined living "in the moment"—open to whatever might come her way to challenge and invigorate her in ways that she may not have previously

considered. She was less outcome oriented than the other participants and was looking forward to the process of living in the future, with all of its potential twists and turns.

Finally, in very stage-revealing ways, each participant responded to the question, “How might you use a coach to help you make your preferred future a reality?” Those assessed at Stage 3, expressed a desire to be helped in defining their own values and a path for the future. Those assessed at Stage 4 wanted someone to hold them accountable to their closely-held values and plans of action. The individual assessed as moving toward Stage 5 said, “The whole world is my coach.” She could not imagine one person serving in that role and would look to any number of others to challenge her views and plans and open her eyes to new options for the future.

### **Discussion**

Drake (2008) cautioned that “evidence only becomes significant when put into action in response to a question, in support of an outcome or in the creation of relevant knowledge” (p. 23). What is the relevant knowledge that has been created from this research and how might it be put into action?

The use of a preferred future self as a stimulus extends the protocol of the subject-object interview (Lahey et al, 1988). Anticipation of a to-be-lived experience can effectively evoke stage and structure related to Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory. As the future is the field of interest for coaching clients, this research suggests that such discussions between clients and coaches can reveal more than a to-do list and itinerary for the future. Clients’ values--and how they make meaning of anticipated future experiences that will embody those values--can provide additional insight regarding adult development. Coaches can find clues to the following questions:

- How much personal responsibility do clients assume for their futures? Are they active or passive participants in the creation of their futures?
- How wide are clients' perspectives on options for the future or are they limited by others' rules or societal convention?
- Given an assessment of clients' adult developmental stage, what coaching actions are likely to be most valuable for clients at particular stages? Might the coach attend to clients' understanding of their own values; or, act as a trusted source of feedback and accountability; or, might the coach be part of a wide system of support for clients who are intrigued more by the process of living into the future, rather than particular outcomes?

Moving beyond the context of adult developmental theory, the possibilities of imaging an experience, rather than relying on past experiences, is also interesting in the context of Kolb's (1983) model of experiential learning. He defined four stages of learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Several participants said that they learned something about themselves through the eutopiographies. The experience of imagining an experience and tapping into the feeling of that imagined experience through priming words such as success and risk led to learning for the participants. This imagined experience, tied to feelings, is different from the actual experience of Kolb's (1983) model and may, therefore, extend it.

Eutopiography, narratives of preferred future selves, is an outgrowth of a futures studies scenario. Discussion about the implications for this research would be incomplete without making a contribution to the field of futures studies. Futurists, such as Bezold (personal communications, 2009), have noticed differences in scenario building capacities that may be

linked to Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) preferences. Through the analysis of eutopiographies, this researcher can imagine that scenario building capacities may also be linked to participants' stages of constructive-development. For instance, participants operating at Stage 3 (the socialized mind) may find it challenging to think beyond currently acceptable societal norms when considering alternatives for the future. Those at Stage 4 (the self-authoring mind) may have such strongly held and personally formed ideologies, that options that don't conform to their ideologies may be threatening and unimaginable. Those at Stage 5 (the self-transforming mind) may be most capable of "thinking outside of the box" and might be most open to alternatives that recognize a broader constituency of inputs and process.

Finally, coaching is often a modality of leadership and executive development. What connection can be made among coaching, constructive-developmental theory (Kegan 1982, 1994), and the leadership literature? Given the limitations of space, consider just one prominent contributor to the leadership literature—Ron Heifetz. Heifetz (1994) wrote about adaptive challenges that require new ways of identifying problems and solutions, and the principles of adaptive leadership. These principles are:

- Adaptive leaders identify the challenge.
- They give the work back to the people.
- They provide a safe container for the work.
- They recognize the sources of informal power.
- They have an ability to go to the balcony.

Each of these principles might be analyzed through the lens of constructive-developmental theory as the capacity for embodying each principle may differ according to developmental stage. Focus, for the moment, on the ability to recognize the sources of informal

power. Heifetz saw these sources as people at the fringes, beyond the easily identifiable owners of direction and control. Using constructive-developmental theory as the lens, I would suggest that such power may be in the uncovered elements of mindset that either shackle an individual to an order of consciousness that no longer works, or lure him/her to a new order where an adaptive challenge can be overcome. Developmental coaching, with its emphasis on expanding worldviews through self-authorship to self-transformation, is about exposing the power of mental boxes and making that power work for the client in new ways.

### **Research to Practice**

Recalling that the participants in this research identified stage-relevant ways in which they would imagine using a coach, I offer the following practical approaches to stage-aware coaching.

Stage 3 meaning makers want direction and guidance. With these clients, I would use assessments such as the MBTI and StrengthsFinder, or the online surveys made available by the Positive Psychology team at the University of Pennsylvania, to help clients learn more about their own personality styles, strengths, and values. I would hope that clients might get separation from the socialized mind by identifying possibilities for the emergent self-authoring mind through these assessments. With more defined ideas about themselves, I would ask clients to look at their espoused values vs. values in action (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978). Where are they doing things that do not comport with their beliefs? Where is there tension between what they believe or do and what the organization (or social norm) believes or does? Paraphrasing Lahey et al. (1988), where there is challenge there is the opportunity for growth.

Eutopiography provides an important opportunity to learn about clients beyond the traditional assessments, a few of which were noted above. Assessments largely provide insight

based upon where a client has been and where he/she is today. Eutopiography provides the chance to learn about a client based upon where he or she is going. This nuance is very much aligned with the forward thinking approach of coaches like me.

The goal to increase self-awareness at Stage 3 might benefit from exercises that are influenced by Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) concept of flow. Where do clients find real happiness or contentment? Where do they feel particularly alive and energized? These moments provide hints regarding most closely held values.

Finally, as Torbert (2004) suggested, I might help Stage 3 clients with two of Torbert's parts of speech—framing and advocating. Where might clients find opportunities to frame and advocate for their own points of view rather than defer to conventional wisdom?

Those at Stage 4 want to be challenged and supported. Clients at this stage may be so deeply invested in their own self-authored selves that there is no room for the perspective of others. By their position on the stage continuum, clients making-meaning at Stage 4, are at a point of differentiation. I would want to find ways to open them up to another growth spurt toward integration. I would offer Argyris's (1990) ladder of inference as a way to allow space for more assumptions and beliefs to be put on the table, especially when there is conflict. Reflection on listening skills would be helpful. Where might clients use the remaining two of Torbert's parts of speech (illustrating and guiding) rather than autocratically giving direction? And, where might clients get more and different kinds of feedback, such as Torbert's (2004) double and triple loop feedback?

Development toward Stage 5 would include a wider worldview and a concern with systems, and multiple players, with lots of divergent ideas. Where might the Stage 4 clients find

opportunities to participate in such systems with a goal to broaden their own perspectives?

Participation in mastermind groups might work, for instance.

Stage 5 clients may want a place to verbalize their new thoughts about new possibilities and may want a coach who can listen and add to the discussion with his/her own new thoughts. Clients at this stage may be very intrigued by Wheatley's (2006) new science, or Olson and Eoyang's (2001) discussion of complexity science. Using these theories as a premise for reflection, I would urge clients to be looking for recurring patterns and small, but possibly very important, changes going on around or within. While worldviews are larger at this stage, being aware of parts of that worldview can be equally important.

For clients at all stages, I would work with them to have stage appropriate plans for evaluating the effectiveness of their coaching goals. For those at Stage 3, the outcomes may be very concrete and easily assessed. Those at Stage 4 and 5 may have to qualify changes in relationships or personal style. Finally, where appropriate, I would return to the muses for this work, Kegan and Lahey (2009), and use their four-column commitment model to overcome immunity to change. The model helps clients identify the assumptions that underlie their competing commitments, and provides a way to test those assumptions in safe ways to engender larger worldviews and larger possibilities for the future.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

This research was intended to be exploratory in nature and, as such, is limited by several factors. Each factor could be analyzed and become fodder for future research. Following are the limitations I have identified:

- Participant demographics: a small sample of midlife executives working in publicly traded companies

- Convenience sample: limited diversity, particularly as related to geographic location and ethnicity
- Number of participants who had recently lost their jobs: the impact of a reduction in force may have made anticipated experiences of the future particularly more salient and evocative of stage and structure, and may have shortened the time horizons under consideration
- Theoretical framework choice: How might other theories of adult development be applied to eutopiography? What alternatives to the subject-object protocol adaptation might be envisioned?
- Preferred futures of individuals: How might eutopiography be used in a group context?
- Face-to-face interviews: How might eutopiography be adapted for use in telephone interviews?
- Long-term coaching relationship: How might eutopiographies evolve over the course of a long-term coaching relationship?

### **Summary**

The use of eutopiographies—narratives of preferred-future selves—has been shown to be effective in eliciting constructive-developmental structure that can be used to identify a participant’s stage of meaning-making. This research has validated that eutopiography, aimed at understanding “to-be-lived” experiences within the context of constructive-developmental theory, is not only intriguingly novel but also appropriate (as anticipated by Dr. Lahey), and thus extends the original protocol for the subject-object interview.

Eutopiographies of participants at different stages differ in the types of future challenges and the ways in which participants imagine the use of a coach to address those challenges.

Evidence now exists that a coaching client can reveal something about his/her stage of meaning-making simply by telling the coach what coaching support he or she wants.

Limitations, mostly generated by the exploratory nature of this study into the use of a new epistemology, can be overcome in future research that looks at the epistemology—eutopiography—in new and different contexts.

And, finally, substantial connections have been made between this work and the recognition of mounting adaptive challenges and the need for transformational leadership to address those challenges. Executive coaching can be enriched and transformed into developmental coaching by putting a new constructive-developmental lens on a very simple question,

“What do you imagine your preferred future to be?”

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