

Thomas Binder



Ego Development for Effective Coaching and Consulting

Including a Comprehensive
Overview of Ego Development
Theory, its Validation, Critique
and Empirical Foundations



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Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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What others have to say about this book:

“Thomas Binder’s book, published in English for the first time, is a truly necessary book in the ongoing history of developmental psychology and its pragmatic impact on the coaching, consulting, and leadership development professions. It foregrounds and judiciously reviews the ego development work of Jane Loevinger and of the many scholars who have used her WUSCT (Washington University Sentence Completion Test) and its variants in their own work. We owe Binder a debt of gratitude for his labor of love and his contribution to the field.”

William R. Torbert

Leadership Professor Emeritus, Boston College, Founding Board Member, Global Leadership Associates, Author, *Numbskull in the Theatre of Inquiry: Transforming Self, Friends, Organizations, and Social Science*.

“If you want a deep and wide understanding of the theory and research behind vertical development, this is the book you want to read. The depth and rigor of scholarship is first class, yet the style of writing keeps it interesting and easy to understand. I doubt there is any study of vertical development in the last 40 years, that is relevant to coaches, consultants, and managers, that isn’t summarized somewhere in this book. It’s a treasure trove of models, evidence and dots connected between research and practice.”

Gervase Bushe

Professor of Leadership and Organization Development,
Simon Fraser University Vancouver, Canada.

“It has been a pure, undiluted pleasure for me to read this book. I doubt that there is any other scholar worldwide that has such a comprehensive grasp of the accumulated literature on ego development from the beginnings in the 1960s up to now. Thomas Binder offers an extremely thorough and easily accessible review of empirical research on all the relevant aspects of the ego development framework that I could think of, with particular emphasis on coaching, consulting and leadership. This book will be a reference work that I believe will not have its equal for a generation to come. In terms of audiences, the book will be a treasure for academic scholars in the adult development field, but its main impact will be for coaches, organizational consultants and leadership development trainers, both those who are already practicing professionals and those who are in training. I sincerely hope that it will be used as course literature in academic and private programs on counseling, coaching and consulting.”

Thomas Jordan

PhD, Associate Professor and Senior Lecturer in Work Science,
Gothenburg University, Sweden.

“For those of us committed to supporting the learning and growth of others through the fields of leadership education, coaching, or consulting, the field of adult development is an invaluable resource and inspiration. The downside of becoming a mainstream feature of this area of practice is that adult development is often reduced to superficial, commodified concepts that have lost their depth, dimensionality, and nuance. Thomas Binder’s new contribution on the implications of ego development provides both theorists and practitioners a rigorous, critical, and comprehensive insight into the pioneering work of Jane Loevinger, the relationship between her vast empirical study and other prevailing theories of adult development, such as Robert Kegan’s, as well as helpful critical insights into the limits and possibilities of applying these powerful theories to the field of accompaniment. For anyone serious about supporting human growth, integration, and maturity, I highly recommend Binder’s *Ego Development for Effective Coaching and Consulting*.”

Rev. David C. McCallum, S.J.

Ed.D, Executive Director of the Discerning
Leadership Program, The Pontifical Gregorian University

“Mid-life crises interrupt our lives and are costly in many ways. Few scholars examine the interstitial periods, between the liminal episodes of angst, and ask what people want or can handle during these stages, phases or eras in order to grow and develop. Using ego-development theories with Loevinger’s as the backbone, Binder does a magnificent job of explaining what both the coach/consultant needs to address in their own issues and needs, as well as those of their clients to be of most help. Beware, you ignore your stage at the peril of your clients! This book can enlighten and guide you to more effective coaching and consulting and a better life!”

Richard Boyatzis

PhD, Distinguished University Professor, Case Western Reserve University, Co-author of the International Best Seller, *Primal Leadership* and the new *Helping People Change*.

“If you love the ideas of adult development theory and coaching, Binder’s artful synthesis is a necessary addition to your library. Thoughtfully researched and clearly presented, this wide-ranging book will shore up any weaknesses in your foundation and open new doors to your exploration. A must-read for developmental coaches and anyone who cares about the research-based ideas of adult growth!”

Jennifer Garvey Berger

EdD, Former Associate Professor, George Mason University,
CEO Cultivating Leadership, Author of Books on Adult Development, e.g. *Changing on the Job*,
Simple Habits for Complex Times.

“Binder’s thoroughly researched and clearly written book is an extremely welcome first step toward better training and evaluation of management consultants. Moreover, what the book says about consultants also applies to their clients: namely, that organizational work is differentiated by developmental stages that can be comprehensively and unambiguously determined empirically.”

Otto Laske

PhD, Founder and Director Interdevelopmental Institute, Boston/MA, USA,
Author of books like *Measuring Hidden Dimensions of Human Systems* or *Dialectical Thinking for Integral Leaders: A Primer*.

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When I was a boy of fourteen,
my father was so ignorant
I could hardly stand to have
the old man around.

But when I got to be 21, I was astonished
at how much he had learned in seven years.

Mark Twain
(Loeb, 1996, p. 15)

Preface to the English edition

I am pleased that this book is now available in English, after a second edition has been published for the German market after only two years.

The issue of ego development has fascinated me since the early 1990s, when I began working at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. This issue raises many questions and continues to intrigue me to this day as a researcher, coach, teaching supervisor, organizational consultant as well as a human being wanting to develop with my family as well as others. Beyond my own spiritual practice – and perhaps even more directly than there – it is precisely the topic of ego development that confronts and connects me to the process of life – if I manage to live it.

By now I have analyzed well about 1500 ego development profiles and worked in countless coaching sessions with clients and various leadership development programs on the issue of ego development. This experience, as well as the intensive learning of measurement techniques of other developmental models (e. g. Kohlberg, Kegan) have profoundly changed my understanding of ego development and my practice. From this arose the desire to compile a well-founded scientific summary and critical classification of the theoretical and empirical questions of the ego development model. In addition my aim was to comprehensively research the connection with coaching/consulting competence, within the framework of a dissertation. This has not been done yet. This would not have been possible, had I not started studying this discipline about 30 years ago.

A lot has changed. Back then, it was still considered to be a niche discipline for only a few university professors, most of whom had a solid methodological background and no commercial interests. Today, the topic of “adult development” has increasingly arrived in everyday life, where it actually belongs and where it can be useful to a broader audience. In my view, the model of ego development in particular can contribute to many things that make a more conscious life possible.

For the individual, increasing ego development is first and foremost a “promise of freedom”. With regard to human societies, it is probably pivotal that as many people as possible reach a full Self-Governed Stage (E6) (with some signs of the next stage). This would allow for societies in which self-determination is a lived reality, whilst guaranteeing sufficient understanding of others. Reaching this stage is what I call the completion of the first journey in adult life (“freedom from others”). Given the political developments in many countries, this stage of development appears to be more necessary than ever for human society, and more relevant than focusing on ever later stages of development, as tempting as this may be (even for me).

In my opinion, the increasing dissemination of ideas and models of “vertical development” in everyday life is unfortunately also causing some questionable developments – exploitation interests and the claim to interpretative sovereignty are increasing. Concepts and models are compared¹ with each other without deeper understanding and coaches and consulting companies “craft” their own “models” with a scientific veneer with a quick pen, to be sold to bona fide clients. Scientific concepts are abridged, “mixed” with others or expanded into all-encompassing models, so that one wonders what construct is actually involved – a question that should be at the beginning of any serious theory-building. Others promise a rapid stage development, leaving a critical person or one familiar with the research in doubt.

Despite these developments, I believe that the potential benefits for society outweigh the disadvantages. I would be pleased if my book contributes to a more sound understanding of ego development and helps researchers and practitioners alike to orient themselves in the “thicket” of publications and offerings.

Thomas Binder

Berlin, Germany

Note on gender-related formulations

In order to write as neutrally as possible, I use alternating masculine and feminine forms per paragraph. The only exceptions are quotations, in order not to change the original text afterwards.

1 e.g. Ross, 2008b

Foreword

It is a rare pleasure to find oneself as an elder in the adult development research community to applaud a younger colleague's clear and elegant writing and his intellectual contribution to the field. Thomas Binder and I have both spent most of our adult lives exploring, almost independently of one another, the pioneering work of Jane Loevinger on ego development, expanding it and making it available for practical applications. For him, this effort has been driven equally by his own dedication and his curiosity as a consultant, coach, and scientist. With this work, I hope that more and more researchers, consultants, and executives realize that understanding the reality of adult vertical development is a difference that makes a difference.

The model of ego development shows us how people develop during their lives through qualitatively different stages, each building upon the previous one. In the field of adult development, most models tend to privilege cognitive complexity as the sole index of maturity. I tend to call this “aboutism,” since one can learn to reason in a complex way “about” any topic – including self-development and morality – without embodying or translating that knowledge into real world action. In contrast, ego development is a whole person theory that takes thought, affect and action as well as context (historical and cultural) into account. It shows what needs people have, what they attend to, how they define themselves, interact with others, and how they think and feel. In short, what they have already mastered on the long and sometimes rocky road of a person's development and what limits remain.

Thomas Binder puts forward the most comprehensive and thorough exploration in the world today of the concept of ego development: He describes its origin, its diverse facets, points of criticism, and its refinement as well as extensions since the 1960's, and compares it with other personality models. He provides for the first time a complete picture of the empirical foundations of the ego development model and the projective testing procedure on which it is based. To this end, he carefully analyzes hundreds of studies that have tried to

validate or refute Loevinger's approach from every possible corner of psychometrics. He examines these issues with meticulous attention to psychometric knowledge and practices and offers telling data, diagrams, and arguments, in order to be able to systematize the various research results. The reference list spans 46 pages and follows psychological theory from its forerunners to today. This shows that the ego development model (and the proper measurement methodology for it) can now be considered as one of the best-substantiated stage models of development.

On this foundation, Binder offers his own carefully crafted research studies and makes a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between competence requirements in process-oriented coaching and consulting and aspects of ego development, showing vividly the diverse ways in which these are linked with vertical development. These empirical analyses also indicate the minimum level of personal maturity that is actually required for effective coaching and consulting. As his conclusions show, a large percentage of adults are not yet able to gain the necessary insights and to act accordingly.

Thomas Binder's book can inspire many other fields – such as education, therapy, coaching, management, and leadership development – to address their questions from the perspective of ego development. Just as our outer world is ever more rapidly changing, so too are demands on adults increasing, to be more discerning and to more flexibly take a broader, longer-term, and more multi-faceted perspective. Without considering the interactions among individuals, groups, cultural systems, and global factors, we cannot adequately address the serious challenges that we face as humanity.

Binder in this labor of love demonstrates the continuing power of ego development theory for understanding human growth and thriving, and he substantiates it skillfully. In his chapter "Discussion and prospects", he also shows what this could mean in coaching and consulting practice. I hope that he and this work will reach many more fields and people, because he proves, in a scientifically sound and readable manner, that personality development ceased being "esoteric" long ago, and that maturity can now be accurately measured and also purposefully promoted.

Susanne Cook-Greuter

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1 Introduction, relevance, and overview

1.1 Introduction and relevance

My personal experiences in coaching, consulting and training form the starting point of this book. Since 1995 I have worked as an organizational consultant, and from 2002 also as a supervisor and coach, and the professional director of a year-long change management program. In 2005 I began lecturing on additional process-oriented coaching and consultancy trainings, in the context of systemic consulting and organizational development. Throughout this time, I have been interested in questions such as the following:

- What are the reasons for the trainees' different skill application levels, when it comes to effectively using the approaches and methods they have learned?
- Why is it that some consultants seem to “stick” to the problem as it is described by the client, while others can easily reinterpret the situation, pose additional questions, and are thus capable of much more flexible coaching and consulting?
- Why is it that executives differ greatly in how they deal with feedback? Some request it, but still respond defensively to even the most discreet expression of it. Others seem more to welcome different perspectives as a gift.

These differences seemed to me not so much a matter of intelligence or personality characteristics, such as those described in the Big Five model of personality. Rather, I suspected that there was an underlying developmental component, familiar to me from my previous work as a project assistant at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin. At that time I was doing research in the department of Wolfgang Edelstein (e.g., Grundmann, Binder, Edelstein & Krettenauer, 1998) and conducted interviews, interviewer training, and scoring according to Kohlberg's model of moral development. That was where I came into contact with the ego development model of Jane Loevinger, whose survey instrument was being used in an MPIB longitudinal