

Leadership Maturity Framework

Stage Descriptions

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The Opportunist (Self-protective) Stage of Development

The person acting from this frame of reference understands the world as a “what-you-see-is what-you-get” place, a view of the world which looks only at the surface of things and at action. When an opportunity arises, it must be grasped. “Opportunity” simply means finding ways to get the things one wants.

Opportunist managers have a nose for opportunities and grab them. They are not concerned with how things have been done in the past nor with what unintended effects their action might have. They have an entrepreneurial bent. At the same time, by jumping at every chance, they can make bad decisions. Opportunist mottos are: “Might makes right, the early bird catches the worm, he who hesitates loses, it’s a jungle out there.” Opportunists see the world only from their own, ‘me-first’ perspective, What is good for me is also ‘right’. They react upon their urgent needs and desires without reflection. They seek visible gratification in financial and status returns.

We have found few Opportunist managers in this part of the world [US] because their unilateral, dictatorial style does not fit well with complex, modern organizations. Opportunistic behaviour can occur with people at later action logics as an occasional lapse in judgment or as a deliberate and effective choice tailored to the circumstances or the people involved.

Characteristics of the Opportunist Manager

Opportunists:

- Regard whatever they can get away with as ‘legal’ and permissible.
- Act quickly and without deliberation.
- Experience rules as a loss of freedom.
- Focus on concrete tasks, rather than ideas, plans or principles.
- Have short time horizons, and are not guided by precedent.
- Manipulate and deceive others to achieve their ends.
- Are distrustful of others and assume that others do not trust them.
- Experience feedback as an attack and go on the offensive.
- Always find blame outside of themselves and negatively stereotype others.
- Punish others according to ‘an eye for an eye’.
- Believe that success depends on cleverness and good or bad luck.

The Diplomat (Conformist) Stage of Development

Moving away from the 'anything goes that serves me' framework of the Opportunist, Diplomats are aware of the group strength over individual power. Thus, they seek to belong to established groups (kinship, club, church, professional). Since one's power comes from one's 'affiliation' with others, rules and social norms are followed to seek approval and safeguard one's status as a group member. Any tension in the relationship is experienced as a threat to one's survival. One is either in or out. Thus, Diplomats keep relationships friendly and smooth, conform to group norms and avoid "bad" feelings and discord.

On the positive side, Diplomats provide group cohesion by creating a sense of shared community. They are willing team players and loyal to their groups and organizations. They will maintain positive group relationships and attend to the sort of day-to-day activities (such as remembering birthdays) which create a pleasant work atmosphere.

As managers, Diplomats tend to be overly agreeable, unable to criticize or reprimand others. They protect the status quo, avoid rocking the boat, and defend the group as well as themselves from any outside influences or attacks. They adhere to the rule of command, do not question authority, and accept group norms and ideas without examination. They keep doing what they do well, but feel embarrassed and puzzled when they are found wanting in any way. A great deal of their energy is spent on 'saving face', and creating positive appearances. In return for their loyalty, Diplomats expect to be rewarded with visible signs of approval - status symbols, appreciation certificates badges, etc. and money.

As a subordinate, a Diplomat will tend to feel that organizational norms prescribe every possible action, and that there is no room for creative risk-taking. As superiors, a Diplomat will in effect often subordinate themselves to their own subordinates. They will not confront their own superiors on their employees' or their own behalf, or on behalf of team projects. Diplomats are keenly aware of group differences and readily denigrate and dismiss those that do not belong to their group or believe in the same things they do. The split now is between 'them' and 'us' (in that order) while it was between 'me' and 'them' at the Opportunist action logic.

Because Diplomats do not feel empowered by themselves and need approval for their wellbeing, they preserve the group and existing ties at all costs. Later stage leaders understand team cohesion as one aspect of larger organizational concerns and will foster it where it is productive.

Characteristics of a Diplomat manager/leader

Diplomats:

- Conform to protocol and rules, and try to do what is expected of them.
- Do not voice disagreement to those more senior to them.
- Are usually nice and polite and often create a pleasant, 'homey' work environment.
- Avoid taking actions which may cause discontent or ruffle feathers.
- Are not aware of inner conflict and avoid situations which call for independent action.
- Work well to group standards and norms and hope to be noticed for being good 'guys' or 'girls'.

- Prefer to speak in clichés and absorb group jargon to demonstrate their membership.
- Are loyal to their immediate group(s), rather than the more distant organization or principles.
- Are uncomfortable about feedback that is even slightly critical of them and may feel uneasy evaluating others, especially peers or superiors.

The Expert (Self-conscious) Stage of Development

In moving from the Diplomat Stage to the Expert Stage, individuals trade emotional conformity to group norms for a willingness to actively experiment and seek more independent, but rational ways of doing things. Still needy of approval and beholden to traditional values, they do so, however, looking back over their shoulders to their reference groups. Unlike Diplomats, Experts no longer identify with what makes them the same as others in a group, but rather with what makes them stand out and be unique.

Experts (also called Technicians) admire 'craft logic'. They focus on the specific procedures and knowledge in their area of interest or expertise (i.e. 'craft'). A belief in the superiority of their 'craft' and their know-how becomes central to their lives. Problems and dilemmas have one logical answer that can be gained from authoritative sources (manuals, laws, spec books and authorities in the field). Experts often seek perfectionist standards in this area and are very critical of unfamiliar ways of handling a situation or approaching a problem. They rely on established explanations and procedures and defend against having their professional knowledge questioned.

On the positive side, managers and leaders at the Expert stage may be excellent in their specialization, are sticklers for detail, and take great pride in doing their jobs well. They would say 'a job worth doing is a job worth doing well'. They have a strong desire to seek incremental improvements and to find perfection. Thus, they play a vital role in the development of products, techniques and services. No society or organization could run without Experts, Technicians and Bureaucrats handling the day to day running of its affairs.

On the less positive side, Expert managers may be more impressed with efficiency and technical wizardry than with effectiveness, (e.g. they will write a report extensively and well, but will not consider the relative value of doing the report at all; they will perfect a product from an engineering point of view, while the competition brings a less perfect, but functional model to market). Experts will operate within the framework as defined by their craft culture, rather than by self-generated goals. A manager/leader at this stage is likely to be over involved with detail, unable to prioritize among competing efforts or to grasp the bigger picture.

Paradoxically, people at the Expert stage maybe be highly critical of their performance within their specialization, yet they resent feedback in general, especially from those not of a higher craft status than themselves. They are also hypercritical of others in their field of expertise. One-upmanship is common, as is the 'yes-but' syndrome, providing endless alternative solutions or arguments. Moreover, they tend to overstep the boundaries of what they know and give unsolicited advice.

Characteristics of an Expert manager

Experts:

- Give personal attention to details and seek perfection in their work.
- Find it difficult to delegate to or trust others to do the job well, because only they can do it right.
- Oppose the group norm when it doesn't fit their own preference or knowledge.
- Value correctness based on authority (technical knowledge, a famous professor etc.).
- Value decisions made on technical merit alone disregarding context and other contingencies.
- Aim at efficiency not effectiveness, unaware of the wider implications of their actions within the whole system.
- Dismiss feedback from those who are not their accepted craft masters or take it personally, not just as a criticism of a narrowly defined aspect of themselves.
- Give feedback in terms of telling others what they should or must do to improve or be respected.
- Can be dogmatic, particularly in response to ideas outside their own mental framework.
- May enjoy doing a job as well as they can within established norms or may experiment with different ways of doing the job in order to do it better.
- Take back delegated work as soon as it seems to be going badly.
- Work closely but somewhat impersonally or competitively with others.

The Achiever (Conscientious) Stage of Development

In most organizations, Experts and Achievers are responsible for the day to day business success. While Experts focus on the exacting detail of getting a job done well, Achievers are concerned with successful plans and outcomes. They focus on output measured in terms of turnover, volume, profit, return on investment, market share, and personal career satisfaction.

Achievers share the Expert's interest in experimenting. Unlike Experts, however, who work on improving given procedures, Achievers design whole new methods and approaches to solving a problem and streamlining processes. The greatest strength of Achievers is also their greatest weakness: a singularity of purpose, focus and drive. In pursuit of their personal favourite goals, Achievers will disregard other important areas of business and/or personal life. For example, an Achiever coordinator of an international aid charity was so dedicated to raising funds for the needy that he did not see how hard he pushed himself and his own staff and at what costs to himself and the organization. Neither did he see how this 'driving' behaviour negatively affected his home life.

Achievers apply energy in a consistent direction to solve problems and use the tools of their trade creatively. They initiate change and seek to move mountains. Their determination and energy is often inspiring to others. Achievers are open to learning and discovering – they welcome

behavioural and tactical feedback, especially if it can bring them closer to their envisioned goals. They will resist feedback which questions the very framework within which they operate. Achievers believe deeply in linear cause and effect and objective rationality. From their point of view, the natural world, including the behaviour of people, is governed by predictable patterns and laws. These can be researched, made explicit and applied to influence and control outcomes. Thus, results are secured by relying on an objective 'scientific' approach and by applying one's personal conviction and energy to refining the knowledge base.

As managers/leaders they tend to be matter of fact, concerned with getting things done, but also fair and perceptive in engaging others. They will listen to others' reasons. Achievers can prioritize among competing projects and tasks, cooperate around mutual goals and delegate work in a way that the Expert cannot. Sometimes, they anticipate unintended outcomes or side effects. They perceive multiple causes for human behaviour and may want to counsel others who have difficulty.

Characteristics of Achiever managers/leaders

Achievers:

- Feel they are the masters of their ship and in control of their destiny. They make their choices.
- Decide upon a future and what needs to be done to get there.
- Define specific medium and long term goals and strive for maximum impact and/or benefit.
- Drive others as hard as they drive themselves.
- May value different opinions and perspectives as useful data even though individual differences may be irritating.
- Welcome feedback, especially if it helps them to achieve their goals and to improve.
- Believe passionately that rationality and objectivity are vital aspects of good management.
- Seek to be fair and consistent in their treatment of reportees.
- Tend to believe that they know themselves and others well, and are in control of their emotions.
- Prioritize and initiate actions as well as delegate tasks if necessary.
- Distinguish between ethics (an inner sense of right and wrong) and manners (social conventions of what is right or wrong).
- Have high performance standards and may be their own worst critics when they do not measure up to these standards.

The Higher, Rarer Stages of Development

The Achiever is the highest stage in conventional adult development. It is the model adult stage of modern times. As an 'adult' one is expected to pursue goals defined in output terms (professional leader role, personal income, market share, status, consistent effort etc). The Achiever is the highest stage fully supported by western culture and society and encompasses the traditional scientific mindset. Culturally it forms a kind of ceiling in development, overcome by less than 10% of the general population. Those individuals who do develop beyond the 'conventional' stages (of which Achiever is the last) move into what we describe as 'post-conventional' stages of development. The LMF identifies a sequence of four distinct post-conventional stages of adult meaning making. We call these the Individualist, the Transforming, the Alchemist/Magician, and the Unitive (Ironist) stages.

Redefining/Individualist (Pluralist) Stage of Development

The psychological and cognitive energy of the Individualist stage is directed towards the limitations and unexamined assumptions of the Achiever stage. It is the first stage which explores not only what one believes, but how one comes to believe what one does. Individualists are motivated to expose the reductionism of the traditional scientific approach, to unearth hidden social and cultural assumptions and to make these visible to themselves and to others.

The key discoveries of Individualists are:

- Objectivity is a myth. The observer is always influencing what is being observed. Variables can not be isolated and boundaries between self and other, subject and object are socially constructed and interdependent.
- Each variable, each object, each event is both a whole in its own right and part of a bigger system--ad infinitum.
- All beliefs are relative to the culture, historical context and personal experience in which they were formed.

They also look at their own beliefs and - finding the centre does not hold - turn to the here and now and enjoy a newly discovered cultural independence. Rekindled creativity and imagination are often visible signs of people who are at this stage. Sometimes Individualists despair about ever finding a new foothold. Relativism is everywhere. 'Is this it then?' may emerge as an unsettling question. Some may become cynical. Others are given to constantly deconstructing orthodoxy, but without having something better to offer in return.

However, in an environment where Individualists are supported and challenged by likeminded people or more mature role models (Transforming leaders), they may learn to apply their critical energy in new, more constructive directions. Part of their developmental challenge is to find a more integrated position from which to act and evaluate experience. One type of individualists can be fun to have around: they relish their individuality & pursue whatever appeals to them with gusto. While aware of conventional social norms, they are not constrained by them. At the same time, they truly appreciate others for their uniqueness and different perspectives & like to play counselling roles in helping them become more fully themselves.

Another type values others' insights and views so much that as managers and leaders, they may tend to want everyone's input and perspective. In order to not harm anyone, they may rely on consensus decisions and endless explorations of possibilities. Individualists are attuned to political correctness.

Characteristics of a Redefining/Individualist leader

Redefining/ Individualists:

- Become increasingly focused on the experiences of the moment and themselves as experiencers while their interest in leadership as a way to achieve results may diminish. If this happens at a time in people's careers when they are already responsible for leading many people, they may withdraw from the leadership role to some degree. Instead, they explore the complexities of leading people and take a 'let live and see what happens' attitude towards them.
- May be irritated by the drive and utility of the Achiever's main relational mode. They would rather associate with others who are less driven and more thoughtful.
- Are increasingly aware of 'systems thinking' (the search for single causes is replaced by thinking about the system as a whole) and, as managers and leaders, can contribute to this broader view.
- Are aware that people may take on different roles in different circumstances and at different times. They themselves may experiment with different kinds of relationships and with using power differently in different contexts.
- May be creative and flexible thinkers who relish thinking 'outside of the box' as they liberate themselves from the driving of Achievers. They are interested in development (particularly their own) as an innate human possibility and a goal in and of itself rather than as a means towards the end of greater achievement and success.
- May be experimenting with significant aspects of work: extending their roles (or contracting more routine parts of it), experimenting with working in different ways and habitats, or they may choose to 'follow their bliss'.

From the point of view of the Achiever employee, Individualist superiors cannot be counted on to be consistent and to engage fully with them on their terms. "I don't know where she's coming from" might be said of an Individualist manager or leader. Individualists tend to provide less certainty and firm leadership because they realize the layers upon layers of assumptions, interpretations and fundamental uncertainty.

Paradoxically, all of this prepares the groundwork for the development of a more strategic leadership style based on a deepening of relationships with others. Beginning with the Individualist stage, there is increasing appreciation for complexity, a growing appreciation for individual differences, and an ability to think in terms of how complexities and paradox can be integrated into larger, coherent wholes or systems (=systems thinking).

The Transforming (Autonomous) Stage of Development

Moving from Achiever to Individualist and on to Transforming involves a major shift in one's frame of reference. The Diplomat's desire to stay in touch, the Technician's penchant for craft logic, the Achiever's focus on conventional results are replaced by self-generated and individual ways of viewing and interpreting the world.

The Individualist stage is the first post-conventional stage because Individualists no longer automatically conform to the reality view and to the behaviour scripts offered by their culture. With this comes a shift in perspective about the objective nature of reality. Having found no position to stand on as final truth and no way to prioritize among competing perspectives and positions, the Individualist is an absolute relativist. All views are equally acceptable or unacceptable.

Transforming leaders, in contrast, are able to adjudicate among rivaling opinions and beliefs based on the quality of the arguments and ideas given. They tend to value those perspectives that are constructive, people-oriented, inclusive, dynamic, and which foster continuous learning over those perspectives that are critical or judgmental, single constituency, exclusive, static, and merely fact-oriented, or 'objective'.

Thus, Transforming leaders want to know how the different systems they are engaged in (organization, family, society) interact with each other. They assess the balance and adequacy between the larger organizational mission (social vision) and the strategies and actions used to pursue them. Increasingly, they will be concerned with what is happening at all levels of an organization and point out potential long-term outcomes (intended and unintended) both for the organizations as well as for its members and wider circles of influence. That is, they have become capable of systematic thought. Transforming leaders are as interested in the processes of doing something as in the results achieved.

Transforming leaders question the social, technological, productive and market oriented facets of the system and the interplay among them. Transforming leaders have learned to examine other perspectives and to choose one that allows for maximum effectiveness of influence as well as for possible transformation. Subordinates at earlier stages may feel disconcerted by them and their 'odd view of reality'. They may find them too complex and not practical enough, always looking beyond immediate concerns. Transforming leaders with good people skills, may be able to motivate staff and clients/consumers towards culture change, integral values and long-term, ecologically more sound and globally responsible business practices.

Transforming leaders invite thoughtful feedback from all sources as a necessary means to overcome their blind spots and grow in self-knowledge and understanding of the world. Because they know their own view of reality to be partial, they value others' perspectives as part of a more complete picture or as a possible impetus to change their current strategy or actions. On the other hand, they are able to discern among different types of feedback, and seek illustrations that will confirm or disconfirm the assumptions, attributions, or evaluations embedded in the feedback. Because they are used to relying on their own assessment of complex situations, some Transforming leaders may discount information that doesn't come from those they look up to. The 'go-it-alone' tendency of the Individualist is replaced by a desire in Transforming leaders to co-create and work in collaboration with others. Because they appreciate how different are the frames of different people, they are dedicated to developing shared visions for projects and organizations,

visions that attract the commitment of members. They tend to be entrepreneurial, not just in an economic sense, but in a social, ecological, and /or developmental sense as well.

Characteristics of the Transforming leader

Transforming leaders:

- Are aware that what one sees depends upon one's frame of reference. 'Reality' is relative and what is considered as common sense may be based on conformist and unexamined patterns. They can consciously tailor their management style to the needs of diverse people. They may therefore come across to different people as having quite different personalities.
- Are flexible about how tasks should be performed, trust people to find their own solutions, and offer help if needed.
- Play a variety of roles in their work life and life beyond work, which can confuse less flexible people.
- Use humour and wit to defuse tense situations. While the humour of Transforming leaders is light-hearted, existential and spontaneous, that of Opportunists and Experts is often hostile and cutting, and that of Individualists sometimes sarcastic or 'off-the-wall'.
- Can find rapid decision making difficult as they see many sides of an argument or situation and do not like to act prematurely or for action's sake.
- Recognize the importance of ethical principles and mindful judgment for making valid and good decisions. Integrity is an important personal value. Transforming leaders tend to choose what seems reasonable or just for many people in the long run rather than going for short-term gain or victory. They may do so even at personal risk or cost to them.
- Enjoy 'reframing' (rather than breaking) the rules where the rules are seen as unnecessarily limiting, unproductive or stifling of creativity.
- Appreciate and engage with the complexities of individuals and dynamic situations.
- Are creative in conflict resolution because they see conflict (i.e. differences in values and perspectives) as an inevitable part of viable relationships.

The Alchemist/Magician (Construct-aware) Stage of Development

The next post-conventional stage is what we call the Alchemist. In organizations as well as in society, people who score at this level are very rare. In one sample of nearly 500 managers in the USA only three were rated at this stage. It is possible that you do not personally know someone wholly at this stage of development, although there may be elements or glimpses of Alchemist behaviours in yourself or people who you know and admire. We have not found a title for this stage that does justice to its quality and complexity. Other terms considered for this stage, such as Shaman, Jester, Crone, Witch, or Magician, also have connotations that can be misleading.

Alchemists are individuals who embody a deep wisdom coupled with the humility, ordinariness and the lightness of a jester. They are likely to personify seemingly opposite attributes such as complexity and simplicity, joyfulness and sadness, intensity and tranquillity. In other words, they live in paradox, and at times appear to transcend it in a 'marriage of opposites'.

At the Alchemist stage, people are committed to the transformation of themselves and others, of society and the organizations in which they participate. They are able to hold many perspectives at once, seeing their multiple, interconnecting pros and cons. They are less likely than Transforming leaders to initiate well-meaning interventions based on principled, but personal theories of what is good for the world. Alchemists seek timely action on a moment-to-moment basis founded upon exquisite awareness of what is happening now, in pursuit of potential transformation. Alchemists seem to have the knack of doing the right things (often unexpected or unorthodox) at the right time. They handle many things at once as they often hold more than one significant post in organizations and society, yet have adequate time available. The following is a description of a vice-president of Motorola, who measured at the Alchemist stage by a consultant who worked with him:

"(...) he is visionary yet practical, effervescent yet confronting, playful yet at work by 6.00 a.m. most mornings. (...) (he) generates spontaneity, laughter, long-term focus and attention to execution and follow through (from his team)."

Alchemists are capable of friendly contact with adversaries. They may create more enlightened social rules as Gandhi did for non-violent protest and in overturning the caste principles within his own household. Like many charismatic leaders at this stage, he was abhorred by many more conventional people for his actions and beliefs.

Unlike Achievers in organizations, Alchemists may not be the persons who dedicate themselves to immediate goals and outcomes if the moment or a long-term consideration requires a different approach. The Alchemists' ability to simultaneously attend to multiple practical, ethical, ecological, immediate and long-term considerations, as well as to emotional, rational and spiritual concerns may disturb others or arouse suspicion in them.

Historically, Alchemists have been the kind of social catalysts and visionaries who have been rejected, locked up, assassinated or simply ignored as being mad or out of touch with common sense 'reality'. What allows the move from the Transforming to Alchemist stage is as yet not well known. Near-death experiences (both physical and psychological) have been reported as key turning points. In addition, Alchemists have mentioned outstanding mentors, an ongoing spiritual discipline or quest as crucial dimensions of development into this stage.

Characteristics of the Magician/Alchemical leadership style

We cannot describe Alchemists as 'typically' doing anything. The sample is small and by definition they are highly post-conventional. Still, some of the following might be observed in leaders at this stage.

Magicians:

- Serve the development and growth, and even purification of themselves and other people. They will thus often take the role of mentor or 'guru' as well as leader.
- Seek transformation of organizations not according to conventional goals or principles but according to a higher order of behaviour and being. As leaders they will be seen as visionaries - either inspired or deluded.
- May appear to most people as other-worldly, speaking a different language or seeing different realities. They may be seen as abstract, spiritual, apparently unrealistic or even 'off the wall'!
- Unselfconsciousness, power and charisma may either attract others or it may intimidate and alienate them in contrast to the strategic use of power.
- Are aware, bemused and saddened by the inevitability of paradox in human affairs, yet address contradictions and complexity wholeheartedly. They will thus seem to be, and in reality will be, complex personalities that see events at many levels.
- Can have a transforming ability to draw together opposites and initiate new directions from creative tension.
- They can often turn around a hopeless situation by the strength of their insight and personal courage (which may indeed seem magical!).
- They will have multiple and diverse responsibilities which will spread well beyond the confines of one organization.

The Unitive/Ironic Stage of Development

This level of development is even rarer (less than 1%) of the population even among highly educated, successful thought leaders. People operating at the Unitive stage can be found in all professions, but often prefer to stay behind the scenes or go about their business quietly from sweeping the entryway, to facilitating a seminar to overseeing military action. They do what needs doing with great precision, compassion, wisdom. They can use tough love and be kind depending on what is required in the moment. They are not afraid to stand up for justice, to act with conviction and suffer the consequences. But they don't do it for heroic personal needs, only for the benefit of others or to inspire others by example.

Their ego is no longer the driver for what they do. Therefore, they have little to defend and much to observe, absorb and appreciate. In general, they are not overly interested in complex explanations and approaches, and not impressed with or seek titles, honours and status symbols, although they may accept them graciously if bestowed. Most Unitive individuals practice regular meditation and/or are part of a spiritual discipline. They continue to develop themselves and others to embrace ever greater wisdom, mercy and right action.