

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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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*.

Table of Contents

Preface to the English edition	15
Foreword	17
List of figures	19
List of tables	21
Appendices	23
 1 Introduction, relevance, and overview	 25
1.1 Introduction and relevance	25
1.2 Overview of the work	30
 2 Ego development	 33
2.1 Detailed presentation of Loevinger's ego development model	33
2.1.1 The ego (the "I") – attempt at a definition	33
2.1.2 The "discovery" and development of the model	38
2.1.3 Stages of ego development	42
2.1.3.1 Early stages of ego development	45
2.1.3.2 Middle stages of ego development	46
2.1.3.3 Late stages of ego development	47
2.1.4 Aspects and areas of ego development	48
2.1.5 Ego development as transformation	51
2.1.6 Levels of development	55
2.1.6.1 Pre-conventional level	56
2.1.6.2 Conventional level	56
2.1.6.3 Post-conventional level	57
2.1.7 Extension of the post-conventional level by Cook-Greuter	58
2.1.7.1 Reinterpretation of the post-conventional level	59
2.1.7.2 The last two stages of ego development according to Cook-Greuter	62
2.1.8 Excursus: Kegan's subject-object theory of the evolving self	64
2.1.8.1 The "discovery" of the subject-object model	65
2.1.8.2 Cognition and emotion as two sides of development	65

2.1.8.3	Subject-object relations as the basis of “meaning making”	66
2.1.8.4	The spiral process of the evolving self	70
2.1.8.5	Main stages of the self	72
2.1.9	Stability and changeability of ego stage	73
2.1.9.1	Age and ego development	73
2.1.9.2	Achieving a stable balance of ego stage	75
2.1.9.3	Mechanisms that promote stability or change in personality with reference to ego development	79
2.1.9.4	Conclusion on the changeability of ego stage in adulthood	87
2.1.10	Distribution of ego development stages in adulthood	89
2.1.10.1	Studies based on Loevinger’s work	89
2.1.10.2	Comparison with studies on Kegan’s model	92
2.1.11	Ego development and personality	94
2.1.11.1	Clarification of the term “personality”	94
2.1.11.2	Ego development and trait approaches to personality	95
2.1.11.3	Ego development in integrative personality approaches	97
2.1.11.3.1	Ego development in the context of McAdams’s three level-model of personality	99
2.1.11.3.2	Ego development in Kuhl’s theory of personality system interactions	101
2.1.12	Criticism of Loevinger’s ego development model	105
2.1.12.1	Lack of definitions of the ego and of ego development	106
2.1.12.2	Questioning the unity of the ego	107
2.1.12.3	No hard structure theory in Piaget’s sense	108
2.1.12.4	No method to measure the deep structure	109
2.1.12.5	Insufficient explanation of the mechanisms of ego development	110
2.1.12.6	Not considering mental health	111
2.2	Empirical validation of the ego development model	112
2.2.1	Reliability	113
2.2.2	Validity	117
2.2.2.1	Discriminant and incremental validity	118
2.2.2.1.1	Ego development and socio-economic status	119
2.2.2.1.2	Ego development and intelligence	122
2.2.2.1.3	Ego development and language skills	124
2.2.2.2	Convergent validity	125
2.2.2.2.1	Ego development and other methods and concepts of maturity	126
2.2.2.2.2	Ego development and methods for measuring individual aspects	130
2.2.2.2.2.1	Character as a domain of ego development	132
2.2.2.2.2.2	Interpersonal style as a domain of ego development	136

2.2.2.2.2.3	Conscious preoccupations as a domain of ego development	139
2.2.2.2.2.4	Cognitive style as a domain of ego development	142
2.2.2.3	Unity of the ego	146
2.2.2.4	Sequentiality of stages	149
2.2.2.4.1	Cross-sectional studies	150
2.2.2.4.2	Longitudinal studies	151
2.2.2.4.3	Intervention studies	153
2.2.2.4.4	Studies on the asymmetry of the understanding of ego development	154
2.2.2.4.5	Studies of the regularity of response patterns	155
2.2.2.4.6	Biographical research based on criteria of ego development	158
2.2.2.5	Cultural universality of ego development	159
2.2.3	Conclusion	161
3	Analyses of coaching/consulting competence and ego development	163
3.1	Questions	163
3.2	Clarification of the terms “coaching” and “consulting”	164
3.3	Clarification of the term “competence”	167
3.4	Substantive parallels between competence requirements for coaches/consultants and aspects of ego development	170
3.4.1	Methodology	171
3.4.1.1	Choice of professional associations	172
3.4.1.2	Choice and evaluation of competence requirements	173
3.4.2	Results: Aspects of ego development in competence requirements of coaching and consulting associations	174
3.4.3	Examples of underlying development requirements implicit in competence models	180
3.4.4	Conclusion	182
3.5	Empirical relationships between coaching and consulting competences and aspects of ego development	183
3.5.1	Studies within coaching and consulting contexts	184
3.5.1.1	Studies with focus on empathy	184
3.5.1.2	Studies with focus on the competence and/or effectiveness of coaching/consulting	186
3.5.1.3	Studies with focus on the fit between coach/consultant and client	191
3.5.1.4	Studies with focus on one’s own well-being and self-regulation	194
3.5.1.5	Studies with focus on morality, ethical attitudes and values	196
3.5.2	Other relevant studies outside coaching and consulting contexts	199
3.5.2.1	Studies with focus on self-competence	200

3.5.2.2	Studies with focus on dealing with complexity	205
3.5.3	Conclusion	209
4	Discussion and prospects	211
4.1	Discussion	211
4.1.1	Discussion on the model of ego development	211
4.1.2	Discussion on the relationship between coaching and consulting competence and ego development	216
4.1.2.1	Substantive parallels between competence requirements for coaches and consultants and aspects of ego development . .	216
4.1.2.2	Empirical relationships between coaching and consulting competences and aspects of ego development	217
4.2	Prospects	220
4.2.1	Prospects for further research	220
4.2.2	Prospects for practice	222
	Bibliography	226
	Appendix	257

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