

# Winning the Development Challenge

It was inevitable that the film "What's it All About, Alfie?" would come back to ask us that now famous question once again. As professionals involved in the development of people, it is healthy for us to step back from time to time and ask a similar question "What is development all about?" Just when we are ready to contemplate that question (meaning, take some quality time to think about it) we get swept away in the race to help businesses develop capability, competencies and the ability to learn faster and better than the competition. But the question doesn't go away. And whether we ask that question in relation to organisations or to individuals, our answers could have profound implications.

"Winning the Development Challenge" isn't about defeating anyone. It is about evolving the development of people to increasingly higher levels, understanding development deeply and working with individuals and organisations out of that evolved understanding. As a by-product we wind up winning the prize that comes with deep and sustainable growth. We know that prize. We feel it each time we've truly hit on something, either taken a leap in our own growth or experienced helping someone else take a leap to their own next level.

"evolving the development of people to increasingly higher levels"

If you are reading this paper to learn yet another approach to "beating" the competition, you are likely to be disappointed. On the other hand, if you are looking for a route to a deeper insight into development, you might want to continue.



# Three Foundation Ideas

The phrase “foundation ideas” sounds a bit grand. Sorry about that. I’m not implying that these are the only foundations for thinking about individual and organisation development. I’m not even claiming they are the “truth”. By foundation ideas, I mean that they can be used as the foundation for joint thinking and dialogue about development. The ideas centre on three things: a) the emergent form of organisations, b) a frame for leadership development, and c) a frame for demonstrating the integral nature of individual and organisation development.

These ideas aren’t new. Actually most ideas aren’t; they are simply new ways of speaking to or describing things that somehow, most of us have known and felt innately, naturally, all along. An idea helps us, in David Bohm’s words, “suspend” this thing we know out in front of us so that we, together with others, can look at it, query into it, see what we can extract, evolve it and eventually take meaningful action as a result.

## Emergent Organisations – from Hierarchies to Performance Networks

Networks as structures aren’t new at all. As a matter of fact, they are probably the oldest natural structure that exists. From sub-atomic structures to molecules to basic organisms, plants and the human brain, networks are the fundamental structures of nature. What’s more, they are incredibly effective. So why do so few of our organisations look like networks? Most in-depth organisation practitioners would tell us that organisations are networks whether they are designed and depicted that way or not. Take the following phrases: “the informal communications network”, “knowing the ropes”, “rules of the game”, “the way things really work around here”, “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know”; they are testaments to the network structures underlying the “deconstructed” organisation designs most of us are familiar with. What we have seen over the years are the attempts to organise large numbers of people and resources to produce goods, and more recently, services and information. The early structures, while appearing complex to some, were simple hierarchies in design terms. “Org charts”, while cumbersome, are far from rocket science. The difficulties for those maintaining hierarchical organisation charts and the structures they describe is not that they are complex but that they don’t actually describe what is going on. In addition, they aren’t very agile or and flexible. In other words they don’t seem to “dance” that well.

The more complex the processes, deliverables and context of enterprises became, the less feasible these simple designs became as well.

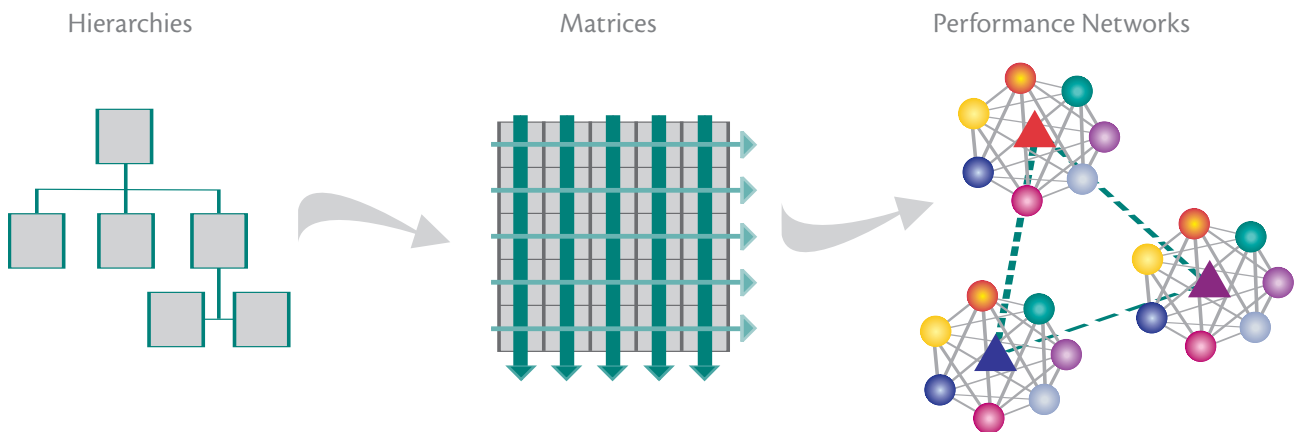
I’m going to simplify organisation history terribly here, so please bear with me and assume rightly that there are lots of steps before, in between and variations to what I’m going to describe in the following words and charts. There will also be steps to follow as development moves on. This history is intended to describe recent directional “development” in organisations. I’m only going back a few years and will focus on commercial organisations, though the models hold for other sectors as well. My abridged version of organisation history has three basic stages:

- Stage one: Traditional Hierarchies
- Stage two: Matrix Organisations
- Stage three: Performance Networks

Moving from Stage one to Stage three, ironically, is a move from less to more natural structures, from centrally planned structures to self-organising networks. As we move from Stage one to Stage three, we also move from “control hierarchies” to “growth hierarchies”.

This is particularly important in development terms. Development is heavily influenced by the context in which it occurs. Moving from one stage to another changes not only the structure but the context in which development occurs. A self-organising structure (stage three) is one that uses natural intelligence and resources to “emerge” a structure to meet current and future needs.

In simple terms, a self-organising network is what is naturally “happening”, if allowed, in any circumstance. Development then can occur in a more natural flow and context.



### A structural journey

At Delta we believe that structure is always evolving, seeking better ways of bringing people, technology and ideas together to accomplish great things. Past and current forms help us understand both the journey we’ve taken and the platform for taking the next steps. Business organisations have been on a particular journey.

We’ve summarised three phases of that journey over the past years, as we see it, above. Hierarchies and pyramidal structures, designed to put structure, control and order into larger enterprises were created only to give way to matrices, which were flatter and driven by processes.

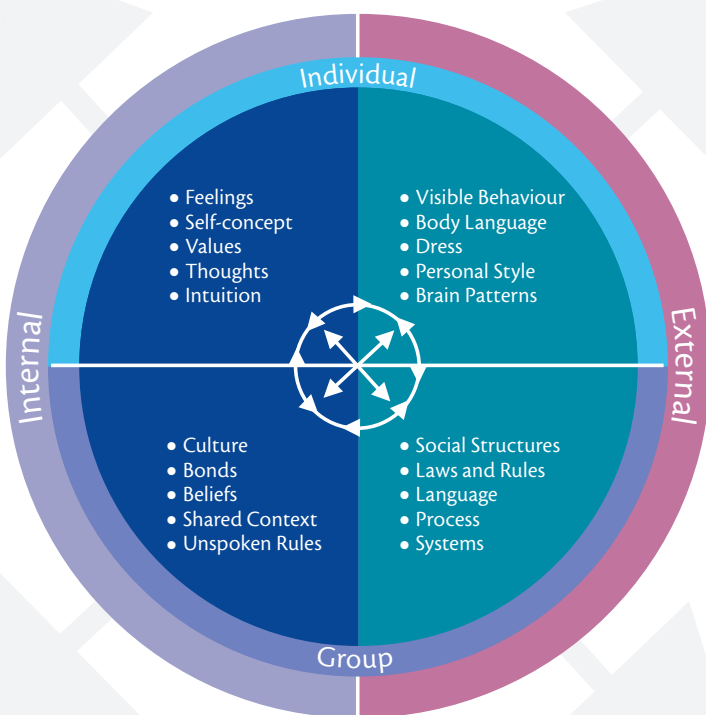
We see matrix structures as just now beginning to give way to self-organising performance networks, freely moving, releasing talent and blending what has been learned from the past into something new, further and even more effective.

Performance networks use self-organising capability and are designed to release talent, maintaining only essential controls. It will be interesting to see what develops next. Our challenge, we believe, is to help organisations and individuals create the space that fosters and enables these evolutionary transitions.

## An Integral Framework for Individual and Organisation Development

While things are changing as we speak, many organisations continue to separate the functions of individual development and organisation development. Practitioners as well tend to fall into one or the other of these camps. I used the term “deconstructed” earlier. The development domains have grown and developed in these deconstructed organisations and the fragmentation we often see is a result of that environment. I’m convinced we can “de-fragment” development and still maintain the richness that now exists in the various practice arenas.

We come very close to this defragmenting when dealing with leadership development. Leadership development is intimately linked with culture, values, style and look of the organisation. Ken Wilber, in his various works has put a powerful and particular distinction to the term “integral”. An integral framework suggests that there are four primary domains of practice and that intervening in one domain, inevitably impacts on the others. What I am suggesting here is that they are inseparable aspects of the same whole and we would do well to consider the whole in all our development endeavours.



This framework, based on Ken Wilber's work is called an integral framework as each quadrant is integral to the other three. In other words, there is a dynamic relationship between all four. This framework forms the foundation for our commitment to working with individual and organisation development as inseparable and intimately related. Depending upon the context, we might start work in any of the four quadrants. Wherever we start, we work with clients to see, understand and work with the influences of each of the other quadrants as well.

Wilber describes an "integral philosophy"; a way of viewing and understanding the world through a basic frame or lens. That frame has two axes: Internal/External and Singular/Plural.

While quite simple, the impact of looking at interventions through this four part lens can be quite profound. As I argued earlier, many of us don't do this - a result of the fragmentation so prevalent for so many years.

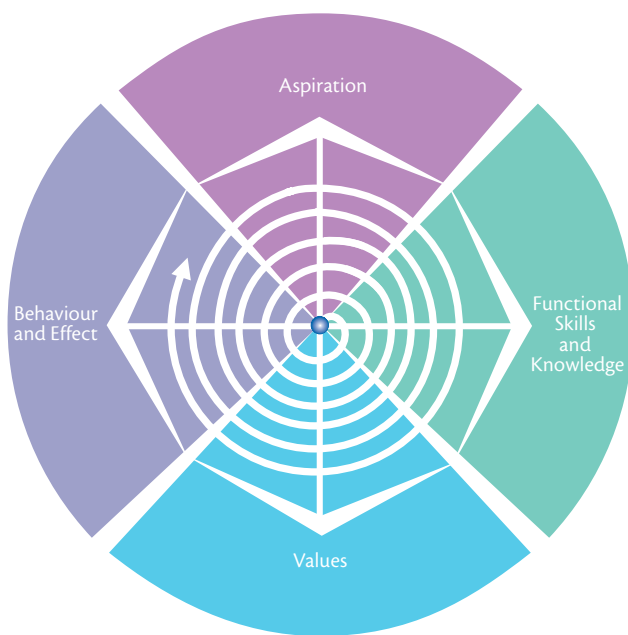
## A Leadership Development Framework

The third frame I would like to address, focuses on the individual aspects of the integral frame described above. It addresses both the internal and external aspects of a leader's development and focuses on a particular driver which is "aspiration". Aspiration comes from the same roots as spirit, inspiration, and is related to motivation. This frame makes the assumption that for leaders, there is an aspiration to lead not only self but others, and to expand that leadership into ever expanding contexts. While our focus is on leaders, this framework more than the other three, depicts a developmental view. By developmental view, I mean the view shared by those in the fields of psychology know as developmentalists.

This group includes names such as Jean Piaget, Robert Kegan, Erik Erikson, Carol Gilligan and others. A developmental view incorporates some of the following principles:

- Human development occurs in stages throughout life. At each stage the individual goes through a cycle of 1) incorporating what was learned in the previous stage, 2) integrating new capabilities and learning and 3) sensing and moving to the next stage. We move through these stages by working through developmental tasks.
- Development occurs in several domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and others. While these domains develop to some extent independent of the others, they are also highly interrelated.
- An underdeveloped area remains so unless addressed. If you skip some developmental tasks when they presented themselves in the natural process of "growing up" you will likely need to address those tasks again albeit in different circumstances.

- There is a natural drive to develop fully, i.e. to develop in all domains and to continue to develop. While this drive can be suppressed or repressed, it none-the-less remains and can be made available.
- Context is critical to successful development. Family, school, community, work and play all have an influence on our development via the presentation of tasks and the proper support or holding environment.



We follow the notion that development is basically a journey with four very important aspects. These become even more critical when working with leadership development.

The development journey can easily become skewed in one particular direction, missing the benefits of the other three. In leadership development this balance becomes not only important but crucial.

This journey takes place in a context that either supports the necessary development or hinders it. This context for many is the organisation, group or team to which they belong.

The frame below depicts development as a journey that goes through a series of ever-expanding stages. While each axis can be developed separately, we would ideally be developing young leaders by assuring a balanced approach on the journey.

### The four directions of the development frame

To make this easy, let's follow a leadership development path. We start our journey at the centre with a particular set of behaviours, skills, values and aspirations.

- Aspirations:** Our aspirations, early on are to move from an individual contributor role to a team leader role.
- Skills and Knowledge:** That aspiration should lead us to developing a wider set of skills (team management) and a higher level of interest in the various disciplines on the team.
- Behaviour:** What are the behaviours and attitudes of an effective team leader? Do I have these? How aware am I of myself and how others perceive me?
- Values:** Stepping into a team leader role means I should be valuing the development and contributions of others as well as myself. Decisions I make should be for the benefit of the greater group, the team, not to mention the larger organisation.

As people aspire to higher levels of leadership, the corresponding development areas need to be addressed consciously. While they seem logical, it is all too easy to become focussed on one of the directions and lose balance. Our sense is that this applies not only to individuals but to organisations as well.

## Pulling It Together

In summary, these three ideas represent the organisational territory, with its own development dynamics, the individual journey and the integration of both the individual and organisational aspects of development. While we can explore each independently, they build off each other to provide both lens and context for a more comprehensive understanding of and approach to development.

The challenge in essence, is not getting trapped in any one particular aspect of the development picture. Winning is achieving development in as whole and complete a way as possible. Both our organisations and the individuals in them will be the eventual winners.



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