

Response to Reams Review

Robert Anderson¹ and William Adams²

We would like to thank Jonathan Reams for his balanced and thoughtful review of *Mastering Leadership*. We think you capture well the intention and the challenge of this book. This book was written for business leaders and the practitioner audience with the intention to make complex theory and research business relevant through practical application. We endeavored to make this knowledge accessible to those not steeped in developmental theory and research, while also doing justice to the underlying complexity of the theory. At the same time, we want to bring home the significance of this body of work in a way that moves a developmental approach to leadership development to the center stage. In our opinion, vertical development is not yet mainstream (far from it), and it needs to become best practice.

We feel you did a very accurate job of summarizing the major focus of each chapter and the book as a whole. We especially appreciated your acknowledgement (from your 20 years of reading the field) that our theoretical framework integrates well the frameworks and research you find most relevant and useful. You also acknowledge, as the core achievement of this book, how we have integrated all this leadership and psychological theory into a well-described developmental framework.

Your critique of our interpretation of the Zenger-Folkman research is spot on. We made a mistake. In reading from their book, it is not specified that the middle percentiles are average performance. We mistakenly believed these to be aggregated performance numbers. Two-fold outperformance is correct, not six-fold. The argument we made is directionally correct. Leaders who measure in the top 10 to 20 percentile groups on a good 360 assessment are likely to significantly outperform the average.

¹ **Robert J. Anderson** is the Founder, Chairman and Chief Development Officer of The Leadership Circle. He is also the Co-founder and Chairman of Full Circle Group. Bob is the creator of The Leadership Circle Profile™ used by thousands of organizations around the world. Bob serves as adjunct faculty for the Stayer Center for Executive Education at the University of Notre Dame Mendoza College of Business. In 2005, Bob received the Partner in Innovation faculty award. Bob holds a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from John Carroll University and a Master's Degree in Organizational Development from Bowling Green State University.
randerson@theleadershipcircle.com

² **Bill Adams** is the co-founder and CEO of Full Circle Group, North America, and CEO of The Leadership Circle. He is extensively sought out as a trusted advisor to CEO's, top executives and teams around the world to partner with them to unlock breakthrough performance, develop deep leadership capability and produce systemic, transformational business results. His clients range from Fortune 500 corporations to start-ups across multiple industries.
Bill authored *The Whole Systems Approach: Involving Everyone in the Company to Transform and Run Your Business* (with his wife and co-author, Cynthia Adams) and *The Quest for Quality: Prescriptions for Achieving Service Excellence* (with co-authors Phil Wexler and Emil Bohn). Bill holds a Master's Degree in Interpersonal and Organizational Communication from the University of Montana.
william.adams@fcg-global.com



You also raise the question of how we arrived at the conclusion that 20% of leaders are operating at Creative or higher. In describing how we came to this, let us set some context: There is a difference between *thought leadership* and *practice leadership*. We are practice leaders, not thought leaders, in the area of developmental theory. Our work serves as a bridge between theory and application, with the focus being on application. We profoundly value the contribution of Bob Kegan, Lisa Lahey, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Bill Torbert, Josephs and Joiner and so many others who are pioneering this most important research. We are not doing primary research and theory creation in this area, and do not represent ourselves as such. We are practice leaders who are working to faithfully integrate and apply the seminal work of developmental thought leaders. This book is written from that perspective. We reserve the right to get smarter and we believe very much that we have to be directionally accurate in all of our models and work. We consider ourselves learners who, through application, move the field forward.

As practice leaders, we have years of experience attempting to explain and apply these models in ways that gain traction with business leaders and that are experienced as business relevant. While very relevant to this audience of integrally and developmentally informed readers, an in depth discussion of theory would distract many business leaders from getting the full import of understanding their leadership through the lens of a developmental framework. Therefore, in our work with leaders, and in our book, we make core distinctions. The key distinction we make (relevant to the business leader audience) is the movement from being primarily authored by others to being primarily authored by self. In other words, the shift from Reactive to Creative is to become self-authored. We also equate the move into self-authorship as the primary work in shifting from conventional to post-conventional leadership. From our experience, venturing any deeper into the complexity and nuances of developmental theory becomes a trap with most business audiences and takes away from the development agenda we are working for them to adopt. *Mastering Leadership* is written from this perspective.

We have always conceptualized Creative Leadership as inclusive of levels 4 and 4.5. At full maturity it is green, Individualist, Pluralist, Catalyst. It evolves through Level 4 (Achiever, Self-authoring) and becomes fully Creative at the first post-conventional stage. Mature Creative leadership, therefore is early post-conventional. Levels beyond that are Integral and Unitive in our model. We see this as consistent with various adult development theories and accessible framing for a business audience, as well as for practitioners who are applying this work in their practice. We also think it is consistent with our practice experience and the emerging research.

Experience: We have a great deal of experience coaching and consulting to Achiever level leaders. While there is a marked increase in their perspective taking capacity (over the Expert), we find that this is still very much maturing. Many/most are still quite subject to the kind of Reactive identity assumptions we describe in the book (my relationships, results and/or intellect define my sense of worth, security and value). This often drives behavior that limits their effectiveness. In that sense, Achievers are growing into and are still very much maturing the self-authoring capacities that usher in higher levels of effectiveness. We agree with Bill Torbert: “Our research specifically points to a link between the post-Achiever frames and the manager’s tendency to propose collaborative rather than unilateral action in response to problems” (Torbert, 2004, p. 109).

Research: There is a lot of solid research establishing the various stage models and the ability to measure distinctions between different levels of meaning making. The research on how this relates to leadership effectiveness and business performance, however, is a young and emerging field. Much more research is needed to firmly and more conclusively establish how the various stages relate to business metrics, leadership effectiveness and to the leadership literature. The early research is encouraging and shows significant positive correlations. The research we present in this book is consistent with current studies. We hope it contributes to the body of research and calls forth much more research.

On pages 54 and 55 of our book, we present our findings on the correlation between Leadership Effectiveness and Stage of Adult Development (measured by the MAP). The pattern in this data is interesting for a number of reasons. First, there is a strong positive correlation (.65). Second, while we do not call this out in the book, there is no difference in effectiveness scores between Experts (3.5) and Achievers (4). The average scores are so close as to be identical. Third, there is a significant jump in effectiveness scores that happens at post-conventional levels (4.5 and beyond). This pattern is consistent with the research Kegan and Lahey (2009) reported in their book, *Immunity to Change*. On page, 24 they summarize Eigel's research on the relationship between "Individual mental capacity and business effectiveness." In this graphic we see a similar pattern to the results we report. There is a significant and obvious positive trend and some, but not a large, difference in measured effectiveness scores from 3/4 and 4. However, at 4/5 there is a significant jump in scores. This pattern also lines up with Torbert's well-known findings from the longitudinal study of the relationship between CEO action-logics and organizational transformation efforts.

In all 5 cases where the CEO was found to be at a post-conventional action-logic, the organization transformed in a positive way... these 5 CEO's supported a total of 15 organizational transformations.... Conversely, the 5 cases with pre-Strategist [Diplomat, Expert and Achiever] CEOs yielded no organizational transformations on average. (Torbert, 2004, p. 112)

Various developmental theories have a different number of stages and draw the lines between stages in different places. It is interesting to note that the Torbert research mentioned above, when it was first reported in an article did not include an Individualist Stage. He now includes this stage between Achiever and Strategist (although the names of stages continue to be updated). This suggests that the field (how the levels are defined, where the lines are drawn, and how the various theories and measurement methods relate) is still evolving.

We needed to make a judgment call about where we draw the line between Creative and Reactive in the most business relevant way. We did so in light of our best interpretation of the theory and research, and in light of our application experience. For these reasons we describe mature Creative leadership as post-conventional. We think this is consistent with the research and with the way the literature is describing extraordinary leadership—Authentic, Purposeful, Visionary, Emotionally Intelligent, Self-Aware, Change Catalyst, etc. When we claim on page 55 that the average Leadership Effectiveness score of Creative level leaders is 65th percentile, compared to our norm base, we include all managers in our sample that were assessed on the MAP at or beyond 4.5.

To arrive at the figure that 20% of leaders are fully functioning at Creative or higher, we draw on a weighted average of the sample populations presented in Susanne Cook-Greuter's paper, *Nine Levels of Increasing Embrace in Ego Development*. Here the weighted average percentage of adults at post-conventional stages is 22.8. For the convenience of our reader we round this to 20%. We think this is a good estimate of the percentage of leaders functioning at the mature Creative level or higher.

In our book we do not make all of these theoretical distinctions apparent. Consequently, as Jonathan points out, we describe the work of developing Creative Leadership as the work of becoming more and more self-authoring. We link this to Kegan's model at level 4, Self-Authoring, because this is a very apt description of the primary work at this stage, and of the development from conventional into post-conventional.

Jonathan suggested it would be useful to mention how we derived the five question Leadership Effectiveness scale. All of the dimensions on the Leadership Circle Profile were developed in collaboration with the Industrial Organizational Psychology department at the University of Bowling Green in Bowling Green, Ohio. They developed and provided this scale.

Everything discussed in this response to Jonathan's review, we believe, is a wide-open area for further research. There is more research needed about how the various developmental models and their different methods of measurement relate to one another. More importantly, there is relatively little research on how all this relates to leadership effectiveness, business performance and the practice of developing more effective leadership. Early research is encouraging, but there is a long way to go. As this body of work expands, and we better refine these important distinctions, we expect to be both contributors and learners on this journey.

Our hope in writing this book is that we can help to bring developmental frameworks center stage and best practice in how we go about developing leaders. We further hope that this will stimulate much more research into the relationship between leadership effectiveness, competency and Stage of Development.

We thank Jonathan Reams for his review of *Mastering Leadership*, and for providing us the opportunity to respond.

References

- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (2009). *Immunity to change. How to overcome it and unlock the potential in yourself and your organization*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.
- Torbert, W., & Associates. (2004). *Action inquiry. The secret of timely and transforming action*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.