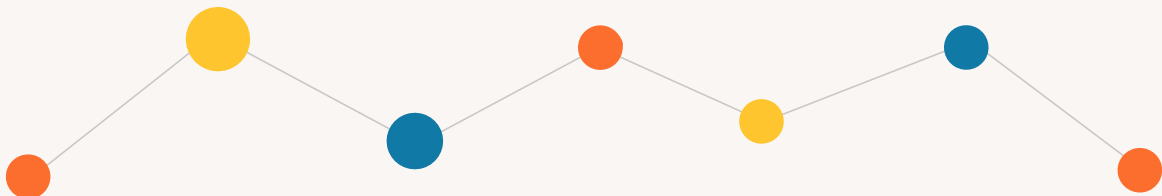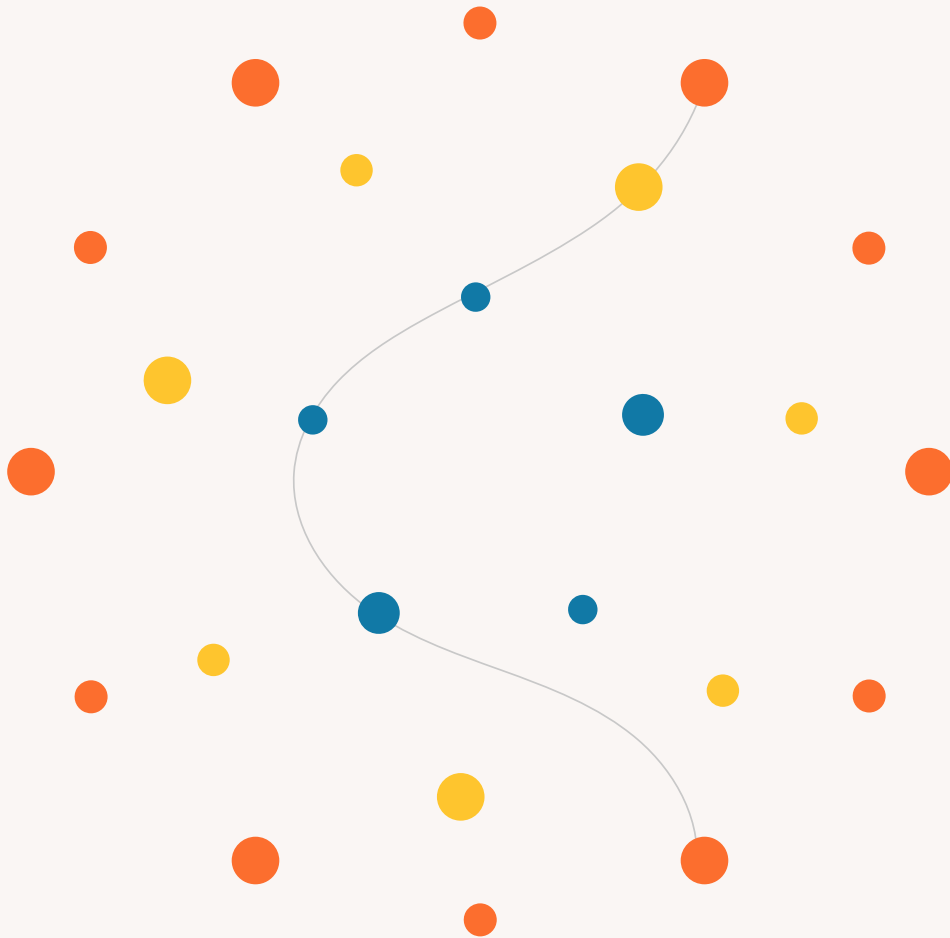# cadra

Observing how leaders think and relate

Findings from the first cohort of Leadership

Profiles in the CADRA Project - CADRA IO3 report
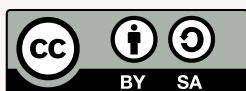
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What is CADRA?

The CADRA project was a three year Erasmus+ co-funded, pan-european initiative, running from December 2020 until August 2023. It explored leadership developmental needs and leadership development and focused on delivering working tools and methodologies to help leaders navigate the challenges of our times.

Index

Abstract

In this report ("Intellectual Output 3") we present our main findings from the first cohort of around 40 leadership profiles ("developmental assessments"[1]) we conducted in 2021 in the Erasmus+ co-funded CADRA project. The profiles qualitatively look at the cognitive (dialectical thinking) and social-emotional (relating to self, other and world) capabilities of the around 40 people we interviewed. The results give an idea of the level of complexity and the scope of responsibility in which today's leaders seem to be capable of acting.

The interviews and resulting leadership profiles, which we conducted twice per person over the course of 3 years to observe changes, show that a large number of leaders have difficulties to show the required thinking and relating capabilities that we could consider needed to face today's local and global challenges. While looking at the results, we also found that one can probably assume that the capacity to think dialectically, and the capacity to relate to self, other and world are influencing each other, making it either easier or harder to develop one's way of meaning making in a way that meets the challenges we are facing.

Introduction

Our ability to make decisions and to understand complex systems in a dynamic environment, crucial for high-level executives, depends to a great deal on our cognitive as well as social- emotional capabilities. If we cannot think through the challenges we are facing from multiple perspectives, we have difficulties to act appropriately. If we make decisions in order not to be disliked or to be seen as a certain kind of person, we have difficulties to act according to the demands of the cause, instead of our own.

This is an essential factor that is not well recognized or taken into account by behavioural approaches to assessment. These capabilities lie at a level deeper and more fundamental than mere skills, since they connect to our meaning-making processes and influence how we use our skills and competencies in the first place.

From this vantage point, we can deduce that the assessment of skills and competencies only is not enough to predict success at work. If the requirements and responsibilities expected exceed a person's

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[1] We do not use the term "developmental assessments" anymore. It became clear to us that the term "development" is too laden and difficult in its use, especially when it is referring to the concept of an individual. We have also largely put aside the terms "assessment" as well as "measurement" for they suggest an assumed accuracy of process that from our perspective is not possible when it comes to observing life while living (double meaning intended).

capabilities to think and relate to others and the world, they will have difficulties to act appropriately even given the necessary skills. In other words: we frame our reality and our experiences in ways that either promote or hinder our capacities and competencies.
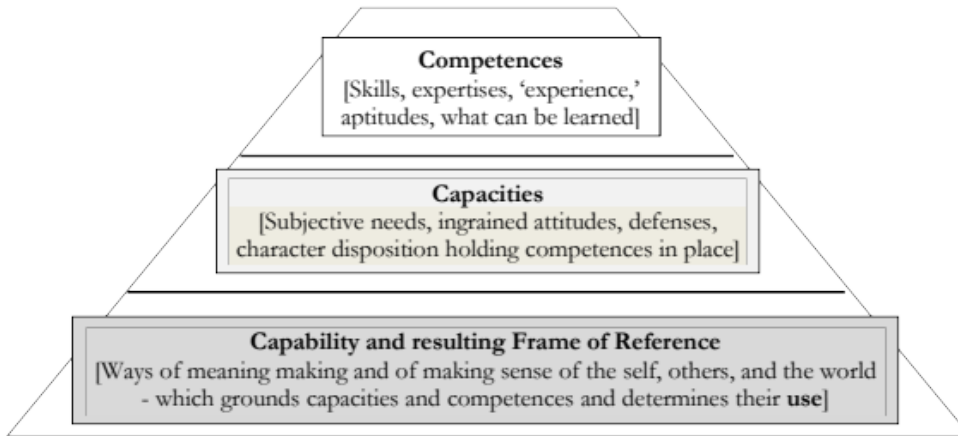

Fig. 2.6 Pyramid of Human Capabilities

(Laske, 2009, p. 84)

Methodology

Over the course of the CADRA project, we interviewed around forty people and evaluated their ways of thinking and their ways of relating to self, others, and the world in a social-emotional way. These 40 people are leaders in their fields and would be considered of above average capability and competence based on their positions and achievements. The results of our conducted leadership profiles show that a high percentage of these people find it very difficult to think about and understand the connections and relationships between diverse systems and operational procedures as well as to relate to themselves, others and the world in a way that is appropriate to the complexity and diversity we are facing.

Over the course of the 40 semi-structured interviews conducted, we observed the "capability and resulting frame of reference" (see above graphic), thus, the ways of meaning making and of making sense of the self, others, and the world. Through learning about these ways of thinking, relating and meaning making it becomes possible to tailor for example training and coachings to meet the potential of a person well. Observing the "thoughtscape" (landscape of the capability to think in various ways), we can help a person become more fluid in their thinking, thus understanding their world and worldviews and their becoming in a way that enables different ways of relating.

"The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think."
- Gregory Bateson

Model

The framework we worked with is the "CDF" - "Constructive Developmental Framework", developed by Otto Laske, who builds on the work of Roy Bhaskar, Michael Basseches and Robert Kegan. From this model, we used the cognitive, and the social-emotional instruments, to determine the cognitive capabilities of our interviewees and the social-emotional continuum they are using to relate to self, other and the world. The results of these instruments allow us to observe the conceptual construction of the world, which relates to our scope and freedom of action. The instruments each consist of a semi-structured one hour interview that produces a text, which can be analyzed for different thoughtforms (see below) or realms of meaning making (see below).

Our Findings

### Cognitive capabilities and our findings

Otto Laske (Laske, 2009) describes four classes of dialectical thought forms, which people are using to think about the world. These classes or "moments" of dialectical thinking are called:

- **Process** - regarding emergence and disappearance, constant change and patterns of becoming and passing
- **Context** - regarding wholes and their parts in various structural categories
- **Relation** - regarding the connections, interdependencies, and relationships between parts and wholes and their common ground(s)
- **Transformation** - regarding living systems, and their organisation as well as the development of systems through balance and breakdown,

A highly capable thinker distinctively shows the balanced use of thoughtforms in all four moments, thus becoming able to look at a given situation from various viewpoints considering manifold perspectives and interdependencies.

Distribution of Dialectical Thinking in Leaders

Cognitive Interviews (DTF)
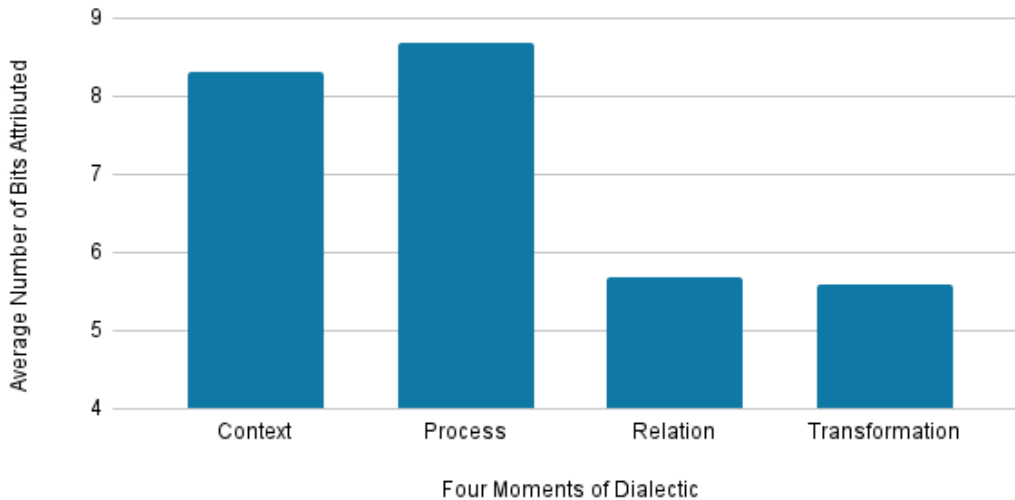
The chart above shows the use of the above mentioned dialectical moments across all interviews in the first cohort. It points towards leaders being well capable of thinking in processual and contextual terms (a way of thinking that is highly incentivized through our[2] predominant culture of work and leadership). It also shows how both relational and transformational thinking are used much less in comparison to the regular ways of thinking.

We are, obviously, very capable of a way of thinking that deals with ideas, static situations and their parts and with dynamic processes. The essential take-away from this chart is yet, that the cognitive capabilities of leaders to understand the interactions and relationships between diverse systems as well as how they are changing and organising are quite low. Which leads to the question of how capable we really are of thinking through the challenges we are facing in the first place. Apparently, the ways of thinking we are applying to make sense of our world are neither very suitable nor appropriately mapping the realities we are confronted with.

> *"We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them."*
> *- Albert Einstein*

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[2] Our culture of work and leadership refers here to "western", educated, industrialised ways of doing business and the corresponding ways of understanding leadership and management that have spread across the world.

Social-emotional capabilities and our findings

In the social-emotional instrument of the Constructive Developmental Framework adult development is described in a continuum of overlapping meaning-making systems that influence how we interpret our experiences in life.

The main distinction element and threshold determining how we act based on our internal meaning making system we use in this report is the moment in which we base our decisions on our own set of values, that has grown over the life-span due to our experiences and reflections (self-authoring) rather than mainly on real or imagined expectations of others (socialised) (Kegan, 1998). A social-emotionally highly capable person bases their decisions on a contextual and well thought through conglomerate of perspectives taken into account, weighing this with their own internal value system, that is not any longer purely adopted or inherited, but taken conscious ownership of. A non self-authoring person with a "socialised mind" bases their decisions primarily on real or imagined expectations of others, while the discomfort of making inconvenient decisions and of standing alone is too painful to be borne.

The graphic below shows the distribution of self-authoring versus non self-authoring scored texts in our interviews. A bit more then half of the interviews produced social-emotional text that suggests[3] that the interviewed persons will probably act overly dependent on the real or imagined opinions and directives of peers and superiors (also internalised) when making decisions. Even among those interviewees at levels of management where strategic, more than unit- or enterprise-wide decisions are required, the evaluations showed that some do not decide based on their consciously owned value system and judgement and do not risk the disapproval that would come with it.

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[3] Caveat: It is important to mention that we hold the conviction that EVERY (human) action is actually an INTERaction based on the interdependence of various contextual elements. Thus we do not label a person and we do not measure the development of a person. We produced text and in this production of text two people were involved, which made a certain conversation possible or even impossible. This text has then been scored by two other people, whose interactions are also based on the interdependence of various contextual elements. So we refrain from making statements about people or groups of people, but we describe what analyzing the produced text is suggesting.
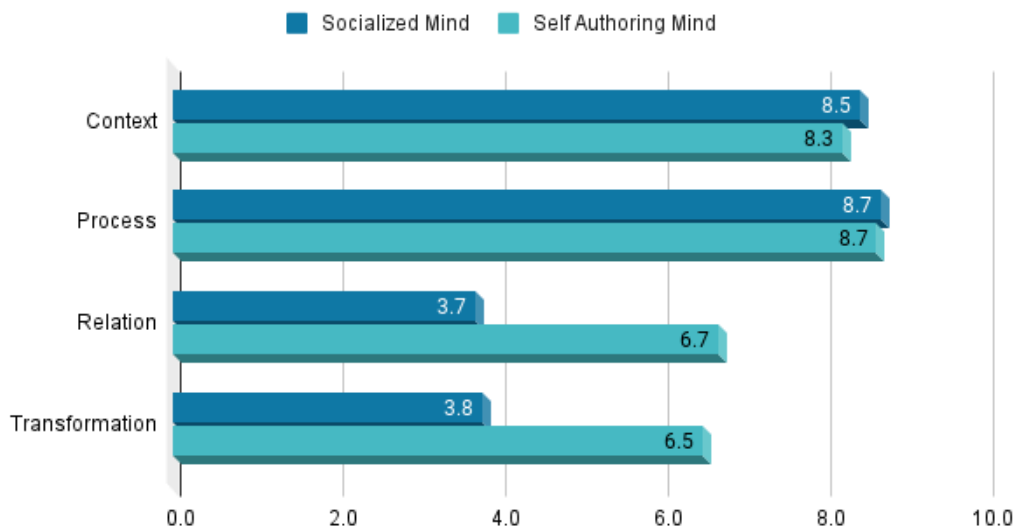
Percentage of "Self Authoring" Leaders vs. "Socialized" Leaders
Social Emotional Interviews (DTF)

Self-Authoring Mind
48.1%

Socialized Mind
51.9%
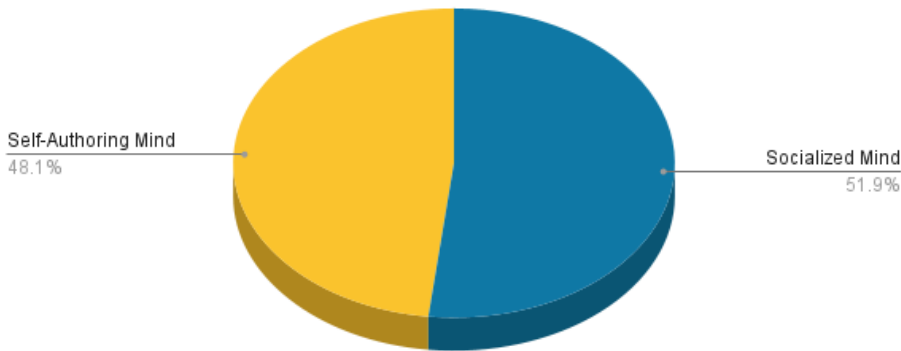
The relationship between cognitive and social-emotional capabilities and our findings

Correlation Dialectical Thinking/Self Authoring Leadership

The data from the first cohort of interviewed leaders shows a correlation between the capability to think in broader and more diverse terms and the capability to relate to self, other and world in a more grounded way. These findings have been described by Otto Laske and Iva Vurdelja (Laske, 2009; Vurdelja 2011) already. From the data gathered, we cannot conclude though, which of the two (cognitive or social-emotional capabilities) is the enabling factor or how they are influencing each other. It would be interesting to look further into this at a different point in time.

What we can say is that from our perspective gained throughout the project, it seems to be easier to "train" or "influence" cognitive/dialectial capability, than the social-emotional maturity of a person, so if the capabilities are influencing each other (which we assume here), the starting point of practice would be the cognitive realm.

Missing Pieces

Otto Laske's Constructive Developmental Framework contains a tool to observe the psychological dimension of a person's developmental ream, called the "Need-Press-Analysis", which we did not use/apply during the CADRA Project. Hanzi Freinacht (Daniel Görtz and Emil Einar Fries) describe in their book "The Listening Society" various other dimensions of development, which would also be interesting to research further in their influence on each other and the overall maturity[4] of a person.

During our interviews, we could sense that sometimes there were "barriers" to thinking in a certain way or to reflecting about the internalised others, which we interpreted as pointers to traumatic experiences, but did not go further into, since the scope of the project did not contain these dimensions.

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[4] We use the term maturity with an ecosystemic lens. Maturity then describes the capacity of a system to hold and entertain various, diverse, even contradictory relationships at the same time, contributing to the resilience and inclusivity of the system.

Conclusion

Today's world is changing rapidly. Organisations and businesses are under pressure, through multiple challenges from various contexts and have to deal with multiple and diverse demanding environments. Hence, the expectations towards those who direct organisations and processes are changing and growing as well.

Over the course of the last 3 years in the CADRA project, we looked for leaders who are in the midst of these organisations and decision making processes: politicians, business leaders, NGO leaders, startup leaders, leaders in global activist networks. Almost half of the interviewed people were partners in our CADRA project, so we took a sincere look at our own capabilities, too.

The findings are not very different across genders or across the mostly European countries the people come from.

Our findings show consistently that the gap that Gregory Bateson and Albert Einstein point to in their quotes IS existing. We HAVE these difficulties to "think through change" (Vurdelja, 2011), we do not necessarily decide based on informations about and from the whole, but based on our own dependent egos.

How are we then going to approach the various challenges we are facing as humanity and transition into a mode in which life can thrive together? There is a glimpse of understanding we derived from the CADRA project:

Outlook

We set the CADRA Project up in a way that we could

- Look for the **needs** leaders have in terms of development[5]
- Observe **capabilities of leaders** in terms of thinking and relating[6]
- Accompany these leaders, **practice and apply formats and develop tools**, so that thinking and relating can improve[7]
- **Observe the respective capabilities of these leaders a second time**, after 1-2,5 years, to look into potential changes or shifts[8]
- **Build an online platform**, on which people can self-assess and validate the developmental realm they mostly operate in[9]

- [5] See "Inner Development Goals Report" or "Intellectual Output 1"
- [6] This report
- [7] See "Inner Development Goals Toolkit" and other tools we published under "Intellectual Output 5"
- [8] See "Observing Developmental Shifts" - Report for "Intellectual Output 4"
- [9] See "StoryMatcher - Report" or "Intellectual Output 6"

- **Gather and cohere practitioners** in the field of adult development and cocreate a lasting network, learning with and from each other[10]

Throughout the course of the project, we practised "developmental methodologies", built a peer learning cohort for leaders, trained ourselves in various formats and methodologies, and at the end of the project looked at the shifts in the leaders' capabilites we observed at the beginning.

We found that thinking and relating capabilities **did** improve over time. We especially realized that **learning about dialectical ways of thinking and more integrated ways of relating** to self, other, and the world improved the cohorts ways to think more broadly and handle life's challenges and the decisions needed to be made.

You can read more about our findings from the second leadership profile round in the report [Observing Developmental Shifts - Intellectual Output 4](#).

You can read more about the tools and methodologies we applied and find the respective descriptions and reports on our [website](#).

- [10] See [Inviting practitioners in the field" - Report or "Intellectual Output 2"](#)

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