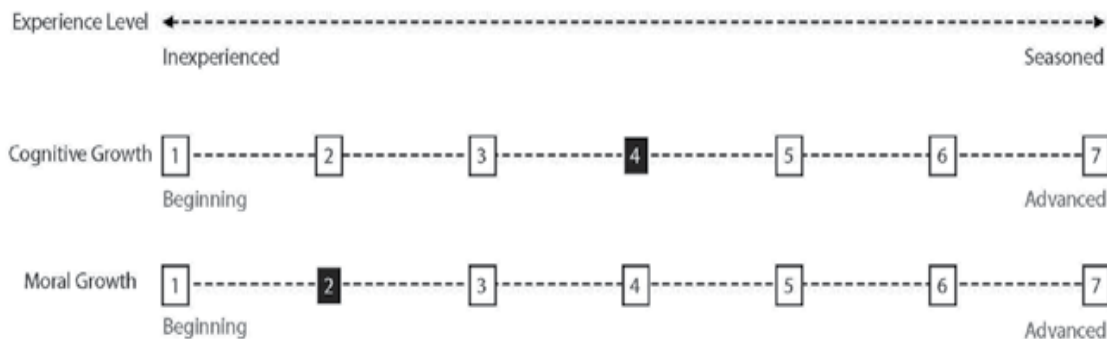


Maturity and Experience Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the growth or maturity of an individual based on increased experiences, the development of informed intuition, and role responsibilities within organizational levels. The diagram suggests the conceptual framework within which one matures as the individual learns and grows with experience (although somewhat limiting in moral reasoning growth as noted below).

The three horizontal lines in figure 1 depict separate planes on which you can assess maturity. Starting at the top, the first line signifies your experience level. Your placement on this line represents the amount and diversity of experience performing tasks relevant to your position within the organization. The second line segment illustrates the stages of cognitive growth. The farther to the right on this line you travel, the more developed your cognitive capacities are. For example, someone on the far-right end of the spectrum has a better ability to think and act swiftly in complex situations than those on the far left. The final line segment portrays the stages of moral growth. Your placement on this spectrum reflects your development in demonstrating good beyond yourself, circumscribed by the similar goods of others.

Figure 1. Strategic Leader Maturity



Most people agree that as a person matures with age, ability to grow cognitively, socially, and behaviorally also improves. For example, in the area of decision making, there is evidence that younger senior leaders often are greater risk takers than older executives. In addition, presumably it takes time to gain experience and expertise that will allow a leader to progress up the organizational hierarchy. This implies that those leaders progressing to positions that are

more senior do so because of learned developmental experiences. Studies in Stratified Systems Theory (SST) demonstrate that executives develop with—adapt and adjust to—the changing performance requirements at each organizational level.

Included in the maturation process is growth in moral and ethical thinking and practice, as well as the development of wisdom. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, Jean Piaget conceived and presented studies that demonstrated developmental stages in infants from birth to 24 months. Building on Piaget, Erik Erikson expanded the developmental concept to eight stages throughout a lifetime (not just childhood). According to Erikson, each stage is a result of a crisis experienced by an individual. The better an individual deals with a crisis, the healthier and better the individual's development. Erikson's eight stages include:¹

1. Trust versus mistrust (experienced in the first year of life)
2. Autonomy versus shame and doubt (2 to 3 years)
3. Initiative versus guilt (3 to 5 years)
4. Industry versus inferiority (6 to 11 years—transition from play to desire for achievement)
5. Identity versus identity confusion (12 to 18 years—Erikson coined the term “Identity Crisis,” efforts to identify a sense of self; he suggests that up to this stage development mostly depends upon what is done to us. From here on out, development depends primarily upon what we do)²
6. Intimacy versus isolation (19 to 40 years—seeking companions and love)
7. Generativity versus stagnation (4 to 65 years—creative and meaningful work is important; many wish to “be in charge,” rather than experience the fear of meaninglessness and inactivity)
8. Integrity versus despair (65 years to death—life has meaning versus a life of failures).

In 2005, Gene Cohen argued that as one gets older, the better one is at thinking. He emphasizes that, like the body, an individual needs to use or lose one's brain and subsequently his or her thinking skills. He identified four stages:³

1. Reevaluation (35–65 years—individuals reevaluate their lives and meaning)
2. Liberation (55–75—doing something new)

3. Summing up (65–90—giving back)
4. Encore (75–death—reaffirming life).

Also following Piaget's development model was Lawrence Kohlberg's six developmental stages of moral development. Specifically:

Preconventional

Stage 1: —no reason to do right except for “fear of punishment or respect for authority,” or avoiding punishment. Okay to cheat if you do not get caught

Stage 2: self-interest orientation—right is relative to the immediate interests of an individual—or the “What's in it for me?” syndrome. Okay to cheat as long as you show your friends how to cheat as well

Conventional

Stage 3: Social norms—efforts to gain interpersonal accord and identify with what others view as good behavior—“caring based on the Golden Rule and on values such as trust, loyalty, respect, and gratitude.” Not okay to steal cars because it will disgrace your family.

Stage 4: Law and order morality—an appreciation that there is a “generalized moral system that defines the rules and roles.” Not okay to steal cars because it is against the law.

Postconventional Level

Stage 5: Social contract—while still believing that values are relative to one's own group, individuals “uphold these values out of regard for a social contract.” Not okay to steal because it violates the social contract that protects individual human rights and social order.

Stage 6: Principled conscience—“the development of personal commitment to universal moral principles such as justice, equal human rights, and individual dignity.” Okay to steal food if you are starving because human life is more valuable than law.⁴

While originally focused on children, many researchers posit that the six stages of moral development represent a continual process that occurs throughout an individual's lifespan.

According to Kohlberg, a person must achieve each of the six stages in order, one cannot skip a stage, and each stage is a new perspective but includes the integration of previous stages.⁵ Unlike the previous examples, Kohlberg does not identify specific times within a lifespan.

For example, using actual quotations from U.S. congressional debates on a resolution supporting President George H.W. Bush administration's policy on Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Johanna Shapiro of Illinois Wesleyan University used Kohlberg's six stages to evaluate arguments for and against U.S. involvement. Her results are:⁶

Arguments against U.S. involvement:

- “We shouldn't consider war . . . because it would hurt our economy” (Stage 1)
- “because we'll have more money for domestic issues” (Stage 2)
- “because we don't want to appear too militaristic” (Stage 3)
- “because war is killing and killing is against the law” (Stage 4)
- “even though the situation is bad, war is damaging to people and property and society agrees that is bad” (Stage 5)
- “although atrocities have been committed, it would be an even greater atrocity to wage war” (Stage 6).

Arguments for U.S. involvement:

- “We should consider war . . . because our oil is threatened” (Stage 1)
- “because we can gain security of the oil supply” (Stage 2)
- “because we don't want the world to see us as weak” (Stage 3)
- “because the UN has laid down written resolutions which should be upheld” (Stage 4)
- “the situation is extreme enough that society's rights are threatened and need to be defended” (Stage 5)
- “evil is on the march, and it would be morally wrong to allow it to continue” (Stage 6).

The above example demonstrates that adults engaged in the debate operated at all six stages of moral development. Therefore, regardless of organizational position, age, or maturity, moral reasoning and development are specific to the individual and not necessarily associated

with position or age. Yet, growth in moral reasoning can occur as one progresses up the hierarchical ladder, providing the individual reasons and practices to do so. In addition, some researchers criticize Kohlberg's focus on awareness and moral reasoning, by pointing out that thinking about moral issues does not necessarily mean an individual will behave morally.

End Notes

- ¹ David Rock and Linda Page, *Coaching with the Brain in Mind* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 208.
- ² Kendra Cherry, "Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development," *verywellmind*, October 29, 2018. <https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740>.
- ³ Gene Cohen, *The Mature Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).
- ⁴ Elyse A. Warren. *Encyclopedia of Human Development: Moral Development* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, December 11, 2015. http://edge.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/7.8_Moral_Development.pdf.
- ⁵ Anne Colby, J. Gibbs, M. Lieberman, and L. Kohlberg, "A Longitudinal Study of Moral Judgment: A Monograph for the Society of Research in Child Development" (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- ⁶ Johanna Shapiro, "Dr. Kohlberg Goes to Washington: Using Congressional Debates to Teach Moral Development," *Teaching of Psychology* 22 (December 1995), 4, 245–247.