ADEPTION™

How adults (actually) develop.

ADEPTION INSIGHTS SERIES

Unpacking insights and themes from the real life experiences, challenges, goals and reflections of thousands of leaders — to support better leadership development journeys.

2024 © Adeption All Rights Reserved.

How adults (actually) develop

This insight series report is designed to answer two important questions we hear from leadership development professionals:

What conditions contribute to the development of leaders?

When leaders talk about pivotal moments in their personal and leadership journeys, they seldom mention development initiatives, interventions, or content. Instead, they talk about a) the challenging situations that forced them to change, b) having people believing, supporting, and guiding them, and c) having the space to reflect and take stock. We incorporate what leaders say contribute to their development through using vertical development.

What impact does vertical development have on leaders' development journeys?

Adeption's Be Conscious, Be Curious, Be Better (B3) framework combines insights from neuroscience, behavior-change, and lean and agile practices, with vertical leadership development. Our direct experience working with thousands of leaders for over a decade strongly supports the impact of B3 and vertical development on growth.

To understand the effectiveness of our approach, we explored more than 1200 responses from leaders on our platform to questions about their growth experiences. In this report, we analyze the themes we found against the principles of our approach.

ABOUT THE APPROACH

B3 METHODOLOGY

B3 is a continuous learning framework that helps learners focus development on their current context, access new approaches and ways of thinking to navigate goals and challenges, and continuously get better through deliberate experimentation, practice and reflection. After a series of cycles, the learner becomes more self-sufficient in improving how they lead and manage. B3 is a powerful framework anyone can learn, but it has the most impact in a supportive environment, where experimentation and learning in the flow of work is encouraged, enabled, and role-modelled at every level. Read more about this learning framework in Back to the Future (Carl Sanders-Edwards).

VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Vertical development is grounded in adult developmental theory which has shown that humans naturally develop through predictable leadership mindsets. Each mindset differs in how individuals tends to think, act and lead. In addition to growing new skills and capabilities (horizontal development), leaders who grow their ability to access a broader range of leadership mindsets have an increased ability to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace.

CONDITIONS FOR VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT

The three primary conditions required for vertical development are:

- **Heat Experiences:** Complex situations that disrupt usual ways of thinking
- **Colliding Perspectives:** New worldviews, opinions and ways of thinking
- **Reflection:** Integrating and making sense of this new way of thinking

Read more theory and practice in The What + Why of Vertical Development and the Vertical Development Position Paper Part 1 and Part 2 (Nick Petrie).

POSITION PAPER

Back to the Future Position Paper. Read More

QUICK READ

The What + Why of Vertical Development. Read More

POSITION PAPER

Vertical Development Position Papers Part 1 and Part 2

2024 © Adeption All Rights Reserved.

ADEPTION INSIGHTS

We asked participants from different development programs to reflect on experiences where they have grown personally, and **identify what specifically contributed to their growth and change.** An analysis of the data identified 12 recurring themes.

The themes draw clear parallels to the three primary conditions required for vertical and adult development. A further parallel that emerged is the **significance of the developmental ecosystem** — the culture and systems that an individual operates within. The 12 themes and how they relate to the conditions for development are illustrated below.

WHAT HAS **CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER** OR PERSON?

Percentage of leaders who mentioned each theme

Figure 1. Percent of participants who mentioned each theme in their response (multiple themes allowed per response). Grouped by associated vertical development condition.

Percentage of leaders who mentioned each vertical development condition

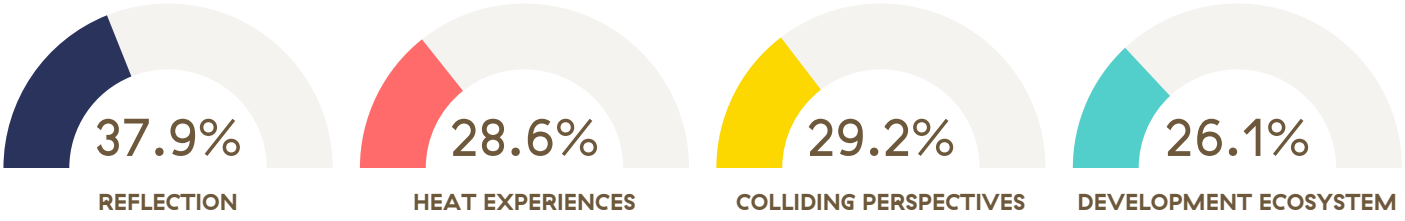

Figure 2. Percent of participants who mentioned each of the four vertical development conditions in their response (multiple themes allowed per response).

The sample size used in this analysis is significant. The findings support the validity of both vertical development and Adeption's B3 methodology — which emphasizes development as a continuous process and the importance of building lasting support systems.

2024 © Adeption All Rights Reserved.

IN ACTION

The analysis of responses reveals a wide range of practices that leaders are applying within each theme. This supports our perspective that learning should be tailored to the individual and their circumstances (contextual), rather than following a one-size-fits-all approach. Growth is most effective when leaders focus on behaviors, challenges or situations that matter to them. Below are reflections from leaders (thematic to protect anonymity) intended to inspire ideas on how to support leaders through the growth process.

REFLECTION

A significant 15.5% of all answers mentioned reflection. Leaders describe the value in reflecting on **other peoples perceptions** of their approach, how this practice helps them **course correct** daily and **overcoming change blindness.**

HEAT EXPERIENCES

Key themes included **composure, purpose, courage and perseverance** in the face of significant change. Leaders frequently mentioned the importance of **support networks,** including their one up manager.

COLLIDING PERSPECTIVES

Flexibility, active listening, and how leaders "show up" are key themes. Many leaders describe realizing that **others share similar challenges** as breakthrough moments that help them become more open-minded.

REFLECTION Which of these conditions do you experience less of in your day-to-day life? What action can you take using one of the skills, behaviors, or competencies described here?

DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

These findings articulate a fourth condition in addition to vertical development. Our coaches share their ideas on how to use these insights to build strong and supportive development ecosystems:

- The answers in this report reinforce what we hear from participants every day – **It matters more if our manager cares as well.**
- **Our environment shapes a lot of what we do.** — and we can also shape our environment. One example is how leaders in our programs often start to develop a common language that — over time — can impact the culture and wider system they operate in.

> **Peers, support teams, and leaders are all critical to involve. These social and organizational support systems will remain in place after a program has finished, keeping the development cycle going.**

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Adeption has delivered leadership development experiences to thousands of leaders, empowering them to 'learn how to learn' and continuously develop their capacity and effectiveness. Coaching conversations on our digital platform help leaders unpack their challenges and experiment with new approaches through deliberate on-the-job practice. **Questions analyzed:** We identified 14 programs that included questions similar to "What specific things have you found made the most difference in helping you grow and adapt as a leader over time?" and "Think of a time in your life when you really grew and developed as an individual What do you think contributed to that growth?". These were open-text questions (i.e. people could write whatever they wanted, at any length). A thematic analysis was performed on a sample of answers from 1293 people. 12 recurring themes were identified, and responses were manually read and tagged with all themes mentioned in their response (i.e. multiple responses possible). Those with none were tagged Other topic.

2024 © Adeption All Rights Reserved.

Theme definitions (a leader's answer mentioned): **Becoming more self-aware and mindful (Reflection):** Being more aware and in control of their emotions/reactions. Reflective practices. Awareness of their impact on others. Better able to slow down. May mention mindfulness/meditation. **Being Open to Change and Learning (Colliding Perspectives):** That having an open-mind or being open-minded to change/learning/adapting helped them grow. Having a growth mindset. **Developing with Peers in a Cohort (Colliding Perspectives):** Being in a structured program with peers with an emphasis on working and reflecting with their peers. **Discovering Actionable Frameworks/Tools (Colliding Perspectives):** Being provided with or guided to useful (leadership/management) tools and frameworks that help them in practice. **Facing an Uncomfortable Challenge (Heat Experience**): Going through a challenge or time that was uncomfortable and beyond what they thought they could do. Were stretched out of their comfort zone. **Having a Leader/Mentor Supporting my Development (Development Ecosystem):** Having either a specific leader/coach/mentor that took time to support their growth. May also mention that org. culture encouraged development. **Hearing and Considering Others More (Colliding Perspectives):** Listening to others more (active listening), wanting to hear from others, more aware that other perspectives exist and have value. **Psychologically Safe Culture (Development Ecosystem):** That feeling able to be vulnerable and open about their struggles/challenges/failures made them more willing to try/ask for help etc. **Purposeful and Prioritized Development Time (Reflection):** Being able to schedule or take time to focus on development/priorities/leadership goals/purpose etc. May mention "defining themselves" as a leader. Feeling in control of their time and that feeling less busy/stressed helped. Having work/life balance, a chance to switch off. **Receiving Constructive Feedback (Reflection):** That receiving quality constructive feedback regularly helped them to grow/develop. May mention that they appreciated positive and negative feedback. **Situation Required Me to Change (Heat Experience):** Put in a situation where they had to change. What they were doing wasn't working, so had to change. Failed or risked failure if didn't change. **Strong Team Dynamics and Relationships (Development Ecosystem):** That leading or being in a well-functioning team enabled them to develop. Creating relationships unlocks strengths for them as leaders. Delegating to their team grows their abilities/perspectives. **Other:** No part of answer fits in any theme

ABOUT ADEPTION

How Adeption can help you grow agile leaders for the future of work.

ASSESSMENTS

A scalable solution for individual or team growth as a one-time development boost or regular pulse-check.

WORKSHOPS

Designed to enable behavioral shift through iterative action and experimentation in the "flow of work" while fostering collective leadership intelligence.

PLATFORM

The digital platform uses AI to scale development and support pull-based learning. A coach on-demand, leaders access tools, insights and support at their point of need.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Using our B3 methodology across all touchpoints, programs are designed to grow agile leaders within a supportive development ecosystem.

TALK TO US

2024 © Adeption All Rights Reserved.