

# **DEVELOPMENT OF EGO STAGES AND INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY THROUGH DOCTORAL STUDY**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the developmental diversity of incoming and graduating students regarding ego stage and intercultural sensitivity and how students develop in the context of their doctoral studies. It also examines the relationship and correlations between the two domains and how they each develop. In this paper, we report on the results in process in year two of this multi-year longitudinal study.

Keywords: Ego development, intercultural sensitivity, doctoral study, adult development

The objectives of doctoral study are usually understood to involve mastery of a field of study and development of competence in research. Less well understood and assessed are related outcomes involving: i) the development of cognitive, emotional, and identity development (also referred to as the stages of adult ego development), which make possible more systemic, complex, and integrative forms of awareness and thinking; and ii) the development of inter-cultural competencies and sensitivities.

This study, which builds on earlier work by the authors (Lynam, 2014, 2020; Stevens-Long et al., 2012), explores the developmental diversity of incoming and graduating students in these two domains and how students develop in the context of their doctoral studies. It also aims to examine the relationship and correlations between intercultural sensitivity and ego stage development, and how they each develop.

The research design involves administering pre and post developmental assessments supplemented by annual interviews, twice per year focus groups, and developmental debriefs following the assessments. The STAGES model of adult consciousness development and assessment (O'Fallon, 2016) builds on the ego development research of Loevinger (1976), Cook-Greuter (1999), and Torbert (2004). The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and the related Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer, 2007) have been widely used in various organizational contexts.

Ego development theory, and STAGES more specifically, offers an empirically based map of how adults develop cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally and can inform the development of curriculum, and the practices of teaching and mentoring (Cook-Greuter, 1999; O'Fallon, 2016). It also offers a way to assess development within the context of a program. The STAGES assessment has been statistically grounded (with a high level of reproducibility) to correlate with the SCTi-MAP, the most widely used and researched assessment tool of adult human development (O'Fallon, 2016). The STAGES model uses numbers to refer to the perspective taking capacity of a stage of development, such as 3.5 for mature third person perspective which correlates with the Achiever stage. STAGES "reveals a natural sequence of deep 'vertical' structures, as well as iterating, wave-like patterns of development" (O'Fallon,

2016). The model predicts that subtler forms of intercultural sensitivity would be more accessible at the fourth person perspective taking stages of development (Pluralist and Strategist) that recognizes subjectivity, social construction, and the role of contexts (internal and external) in shaping identity and how we make meaning of ourselves and others.

The IDI is based on the Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, 2007) which involves movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, or from a monocultural mindset to an intercultural mindset. This movement is reflected in six developmental stages of denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation, describing increasing levels of awareness of both the similarities and differences between one's own and others' cultures, and the ability to communicate across those differences and adapt to them as appropriate. The instrument reports three scores for each person: their perceived orientation, which indicates where they think they are; their developmental orientation, which reflects their actual predominant mindset based on their self-reported behaviour in response to difference; and their orientation gap, which indicates the difference the perceived and developmental orientations. In the discussion that follows, we refer to participants' developmental scores as they began the program.

Participants in the study include a total of 14 students from two incoming cohorts of students in the Human and Organizational Development PhD Program at Fielding Graduate University. All incoming students in September 2019 and January 2020 were invited to participate, with all who expressed interest being accepted. The pool includes seven people of colour and seven white people, eight were women and six men, 12 were from the U.S and two international students; this is roughly representative of the student body.

As of the end of March 2021, we have conducted pre-assessments and debriefs concerning each instrument, and engaged students in individual and focus group interviews regarding their learning experiences and perceived developmental impacts. In what follows, we report on our initial findings and the questions that are emerging.

The pre-assessments revealed a wide range of levels in both domains, with ego stages ranging from 3.5 Achiever through 5.5 Transpersonal. This is a wide range developmentally, and more developmentally mature than other comparable samples in higher education. However, given the values and orientation of this adult learning interdisciplinary program with some emphasis in social change and social justice, it is likely that students at the 4<sup>th</sup> person perspective or later might be attracted to the program. The IDI stages ranged from polarization to adaptation. Table 1 below shows each person's score on each of the instruments.

While we had expected to find more correlation between the two measures, there are some interesting patterns emerging that may warrant further exploration. Everyone who was at acceptance or adaptation on the IDI was at 4.0 Pluralist or above in their ego development stages, although most at 4.0 and above were at minimization. This suggests the possibility that one needs to be at post-conventional (context aware) ego development stages (4<sup>th</sup> person Pluralist and later) to be at acceptance or adaptation on the IDI, but that it is a matter of capacity, not an automatic or direct causal relationship. In other words, someone at Pluralist or later has the capacity to be more interculturally sensitive, but these capacities need to be developed and embodied. Another observation is that ego development stages are most relevant regarding how people reflected on and made meaning of their IDI score – making it an object of reflection and not a fixed state, and thus potentially changeable. A next step is to explore a relationship between the assessments and how participants describe their experience in the program.

Table 1: IDI scores and STAGES of ego development

	IDI	STAGES
1	minimization	5.5 Transpersonal
2	polarization	4.5 Strategist
3	minimization	4.5 Strategist
4	minimization	4.5 Strategist
5	minimization	4.5 Strategist
6	acceptance	4.5 Strategist
7	adaptation	4.5 Strategist
8	acceptance	4.0 Pluralist
9	minimization	4.0 Pluralist
10	minimization	4.0 Pluralist
11	minimization	4.0 Pluralist
12	minimization	4.0 Pluralist
13	minimization	3.5 Achiever
14	minimization	3.5 Achiever

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