

## Trend Watch: The Challenge of Development

Nick Petrie took a year-long sabbatical at Harvard University with the goal of answering one question — *what will the future of leadership development look like?* He looked across fields (education, business, law, government, psychology), reviewed leadership development literature, and interviewed 30 experts in the field.



What the leadership consultant and former professional rugby player and coach learned was humbling. "At the start of this project I hoped that I would find some clear answers to what the future of leadership would look like," Petrie says. "The one thing that I have become certain of is that the methods that have been used in the past to develop leaders really, truly, categorically will not be enough for the complexity of challenges which are on their way for organizations (and broader society)."

What does this mean for leadership development?

"We are no longer facing just a leadership challenge. We have a development challenge," says Petrie, now a senior faculty member at the Center for Creative Leadership's Colorado Springs campus. "Managers have become experts on the what of leadership, but are novices on the how of their own development — how to learn, grow and change. As Robert Kegan of Harvard told me, we need to put the development back into leadership development."

With this insight, Petrie has named "vertical development" as a major trend that will influence how leadership is understood, taught and learned.

### Horizontal vs. Vertical Development

There are two different types of development — horizontal and vertical, he explains. Horizontal development focuses on new skills, abilities and behaviors. It is technical learning and competency-based. Horizontal development is most useful when a problem is clearly defined and we have known techniques for solving it.

Vertical development, in contrast, refers to the mental and emotional "stages" that people progress through. Adults do, in fact, continue to

progress through predictable stages of development. At each higher level, adults "make sense" of the world in more complex and inclusive ways, i.e. their minds grow "bigger."

While horizontal development (and competency models) will remain important, in the future it cannot be relied on as the sole, or even primary, means for developing leaders, Petrie suggests.

## Why Vertical Development Matters

Researchers have shown that people at higher levels of development perform better in more complex environments.

A study by Keith Eigel looked at 21 CEOs and 21 promising middle managers from various companies, each with annual revenues of over \$5 billion. The study showed that across a range of leadership measures, there was a clear correlation between higher levels of vertical development and higher levels of effectiveness. This finding has since been replicated in a number of fine-grained studies on leaders assessing particular competencies.

The reason that managers at higher levels of cognitive development are able to perform more effectively is that they can think in more complex ways.

Petrie concurs with CCL's John McGuire, who wrote in the 2009 book [Transforming Your Leadership Culture](#):

"Each successive level holds greater ability for learning, complex problem-solving and the ability to set new direction and lead change. People who gain another step can learn more, adapt faster and generate more complex solutions than they could before. Those at higher levels can learn and react faster because they have bigger minds ... people at later stages are better at seeing and connecting more dots in more scenarios (which means they are better at strategy). That's all. But that's a lot."

Want to learn more? [Download Future Trends in Leadership Development](#), a CCL white paper by Nicholas Petrie. You can also follow Nick on his blog about learning, growing and performing at [www.nicholaspetrie.com](http://www.nicholaspetrie.com).

## What Causes Vertical Development

In their book, [Transforming Your Leadership Culture](#), John McGuire and Gary Rhodes describe vertical development as a three-stage process:

- **Awaken.** We become aware that there is a different way of making sense of the world and that it is possible to do things in a new way (even if we aren't sure of how).
- **Unlearn and discern.** We analyze and challenge old assumptions. New assumptions are tested out and experimented with. We explore new possibilities for day-to-day work and life.

- **Advance.** After some practice and effort, the new idea gets stronger and starts to dominate the previous ones. The new level of development starts to make more sense than the old one.