

Introduction

What happens when we have a 'light-bulb' moment?

Why do people at certain times in their life make big changes?

What happens when we make a step change in our development and capability?

And how can we harness this?

In this paper we will explore a remarkable set of data.

This data looks at what happens in these moments and shows that a small number of attitudinal shifts sit at the heart of these changes.

By understanding these shifts and how to create them we can radically enhance our ability to help education leaders learn and change when they most need it.

What is the data?

BTS Spark specialises in developing education leaders and is part of a wider professional coaching company, BTS Coach. As such we employ over 200 coaches who all work with individuals in a wide range of contexts trying to make a change. And, by definition, you only talk to a coach about the things you are finding it hardest to make progress with.

Over the past ten years we have had over 125,000 of these conversations and we keep anonymised records to manage our quality.

This means we have a remarkable database of what it is that people find hardest to change and about what it is that helps them make these changes.

For each conversation we store the big insight and subsequently what kind of action arose.

By analysing these records, a set of clear patterns and insights emerge.

In particular three conclusions emerge;

1. The importance of attitudinal change
2. The existence of 12 fundamental shifts
3. Three levels of mastery which seem to be experienced sequentially.

Summary:

By sifting a database of 100,000 conversations which have been held with people seeking to make meaningful change, a pattern emerges. 12 big mindset shifts that shape and define a lifetime's growth.

Vertical Development

In this article we are using the words 'mindset change' to describe significant changes in the way we see the world. A number of authors have articulated theories of vertical development, for example Wilber¹, Torbert², Cook Greuner³ etc. The attitudinal shifts described in this report correlate well with the developmental stages shown in these models. Which means the Twelve Shifts can be seen as a map of 'how' to attain the key transitions within these models of vertical development.

Attitudinal change

It is clear from this data – and rooted in our philosophy – that the most significant and meaningful change happens not when we learn a new behaviour or tactic but when we change our attitude to something or adopt a new mindset.

Our coaches are trained to do this.

For example we set goals using the acronym MBIR

Mindset **Behaviour**
Impact **Results**

To use an example from a School Principal

Result	To improve student attainment and engagement
Impact (i.e. what impact does he need to have to create this goal)	Heads of department stepping up to lead their teams and coach individual teachers effectively
Behaviour (the behaviour he may need to adopt to achieve this)	Support heads of department to address issues in their teams rather than stepping in and fixing situations myself
Mindset (that would enable this)	Empowering others, letting go and trusting them

Whilst this is a simplistic example it is clear that it is the mindset that will ultimately be the change that drives the goal and therefore, our data is effectively 100,000 conversations all about changing mindset.

Certainly the more significant the mindset change is, the more profound the change of behaviour that ensues.

For example whilst 96% of respondees in our post coaching surveys claim to have changed as a result of the coaching, 41% of them describe this change as being deep and significant.

And you guessed it, these 41% tend to be the ones that experience the strongest change at the attitudinal mindset⁴.

The Twelve Shifts

So we know that there is a strong correlation between changes in mindset and making significant change but there is a much bigger insight in the data.

Competencies, behaviours and other descriptors of great leadership can expand as they seek to encompass the full range of possibilities (some 360° assessments can be painstakingly long as they aim to cover the breadth of behaviours required). Unsurprisingly there is much literature describing and defining leadership behaviours.

But the fascinating thing about attitudinal changes is that a relatively small number of attitudinal changes

seem to recur again and again. There aren't that many big shifts that seem to make a really deep and significant impact on leaders ability to adapt and grow.

In fact there are only 12 of them.

There appear to be 12 big shifts that are possible in the lifetime development of a leader.

And in fact the 12 are so significant that no-one in our data seems to have attained them all. In fact five or six may be enough for most of us!!

So What are The Shifts

Shifts are changes in the way we see the world

For example one education director whom we coached was avoiding giving straight feedback to the principals she line managed. She had been a successful principal previously but had always felt uncomfortable holding feedback conversations with colleagues.

As a result of coaching and deep reflection, she realised that she needed to change her mindset around feedback. In a lightbulb moment, it became clear to her that she was actually doing a disservice to others. *"I realised that by not giving my principals developmental feedback, I was depriving them of the opportunity for professional growth."* She now schedules regular 'personal leadership conversations' with her principals and doesn't hold back from providing them with her own insights on how they could further develop their leadership.

In this example, the education director has had a deep insight into the way that she relates to others. She has challenged her own discomfort with feedback, learnt to view feedback as a gift and developed her own self-confidence in giving effective feedback.

We call this mindset shift "Championing feedback: it's something we both want". It unlocks a deep understanding of the importance of feedback and it has changed the way she interacts with the principals whom she line manages. In turn, this has deepened her working relationships and built professional trust.

Within the data, the 12 shifts occur in four domains

Be New ways of being

Relate New ways of relating to people

Think New ways of thinking

Inspire New ways of setting direction

The **Be** domain is about presence, authority, balance, authenticity and resourcefulness. It is about tapping into the qualities that make us magnificent if we had

only allowed them to shine. It's all about not being afraid to be ourselves and having the confidence to feel that we are worthy.

The **Relate** domain is about influencing, motivating, collaborating and relating. It is all about really being able to get into others' worlds, to let go of the fears that hold us back in relationships and tap into our ability to connect with and build relationships with others.

The **Inspire** domain is about purpose, setting direction, championing change and challenging the way things are done. It depends on moving from a position of powerlessness or lack of purpose to our full potency as an inspirational leader.

The **Think** domain is about deciding, innovating, organizing and planning. It is about moving beyond the mental maps that constrain us (e.g. the need to be an 'expert') and tapping into our true genius.

When we have analysed our coaching conversations with principals and assistant principals, **Relate** typically makes up 50%

of shifts, **Be** 31%, **Inspire** 12% and **Think** 7%. (Interestingly, these proportions appear to be relatively consistent with all levels of education leaders from team leaders in schools right up to systems leaders across large education departments.)

Within each of these domains there seem to be a series of profound shifts that individuals go through as they mature and develop. We have identified twelve of these.

Note: In his 2008 book '*Multiple intelligences*', Howard Gardner⁵ argues that a one dimensional view of intelligence is 'one dimensional'.

Our findings also support a multi-dimensional view and of the our leadership domains, **Think** maps well to Gardner's logical intelligence, **Be** to his intrapersonal intelligence and **Relate** to his interpersonal intelligence.

	Name of Shift	Mindset	Which Impact on...
RELATE	Influencing Others	<i>Other people's worlds are different to mine</i>	Having the flexibility and empathy to deal differently with, and influence, different people.
	Leading Leaders	<i>I am willing to let go and trust</i>	Building openness and trust. Being confident in conflict. Building leadership in others. Partnership and collaboration.
	Catalysing Change	<i>Dynamics go beyond me and you</i>	Influencing power & dynamics. Changing culture.
THINK	Breakthrough Thinking	<i>I can step back and see the simple solution</i>	Making the complex simple. Looking at the whole of a situation, making sense of it and creating a simple, incisive strategy to take it forward.
	Innovation leadership	<i>I am constantly seeking new insight</i>	Innovation leadership. Curiosity and inquisitiveness. Comfort with ambiguity and working in areas outside of expertise. 'Knowing leader to inquisitive leader'.
	Strategic Agility	<i>There is insight in the paradox</i>	Radical ideas. Re-framing thinking. Finding a new paradigm.
BE	Personal Resourcefulness	<i>I can choose my attitude</i>	Resourcefulness. The ability to set the tone by staying open, calm and confident in difficult situations.
	Authentic Leadership	<i>I can be all of me</i>	Authentic Leadership. Knowing who I am and how to leverage this in my leadership. Able to be vulnerable.
	Personal Presence	<i>I am an agent for the whole</i>	Consciously accessing aspects of yourself to influence and shape other's response.
INSPIRE	Vision and Values	<i>I know what I am leading for</i>	Claiming leadership. Creating a sense of identity and direction for others to follow.
	Leaving a Legacy	<i>I am clear on the difference I want to make</i>	Creating a legacy. Personal purpose. Inspire hope and meaning in others (to feel part of something bigger).
	Creating Shared Purpose	<i>I am clear on why we are here</i>	Mobilising different groups around an audacious purpose. Creating shared meaning. Leading transformation.

But these are attitudinal shifts. The same situation can be influenced by very different mindsets. For example if a leader wants to be better at influencing colleagues it may be that the unlocking mindset is about confidence in themselves (**Be**) or about empathy and flexibility (**Relate**).

Three levels of Mastery

The idea that all of us continue to develop through our lives is hardly new. Many researchers from Maslow through to Torbert¹ have articulated this and it has become a widely accepted part of the development world. They have defined a series of stages for adult development. Remarkably our data maps almost perfectly onto these stages. The vast bulk of it falls into three levels.

Level one is about moving from a world view that seeks to understand what good looks like and emulate it, to moving to a much more self-aware perspective where we take responsibility for our own impact, shape our own

future and are able to be much more flexible and responsive to the diversity of people and challenges in front of us. (This would correspond, in Torbert's work, to the transition between 'expert' and 'achiever'.)

Level two is about moving from a world where our sense of self and our achievements are too closely linked to a much more authentic and full sense of self and of our broader purpose. This allows us to connect with others in a much more open way and to feel much more curious, open and innovative in the way we think about our work. (This would correspond, in Torbert's work, to the transition between 'achiever' and 'individualist').

Level three is about moving to a world view in which our sense of self and the context we are operating in is once again joined and also further expanded but this time we are able to shape the culture, to spot the dominant logic and challenge the way people see things or to create meaning across groups.

It is aligned to the Torbert shift described as from 'individualist' to 'strategist' and, in his research, there is a strong correlation between this level of development and the ability to lead transformational change.

Learning is non-linear and happens when the time is right

Most big education systems have a version of the 'leadership pipeline'⁶ and can articulate the changes in capability that leaders need to attain to reach different levels of leadership.

A simple vision of this might describe the changes from 'leading self' to 'leading others' to 'leading leaders' to 'leading systems'. At each stage new capabilities are demanded along with an expansion in both awareness and world view. For example, when we move from leading self to leading others we need to focus less on the task and more on motivating others.

Traditionally, leadership development has focused on these transitions such as becoming a people leader or moving into a first principalship role.

This has been helpful as most of us can see where we are now and where we would like to be so as to help identify the next shift we want to make.

There is some truth in this. For example, we find that when we are working with successful teachers to support them to move into their first leadership role in their schools, over 90% of our support is on level one shifts. By contrast, when we analyse our coaching data from coaching senior education systems leaders, we see that 35% of the shifts they are working on are level two shifts.

But the danger here is that it assumes there is a correlation between promotion/seniority and mastery. We all know experienced leaders who, whilst they may be quite brilliant at the 'think' dimension, still operate at a more

basic level of self-awareness. And of course we know other leaders whose strengths and weaknesses are the other way around. Because people are immensely different and develop at different rates the leadership pipeline map is inevitably flawed. This is why many recent writers have been talking about learning agility⁷ (i.e. the ability of individuals to adapt and change).

Our data reinforces this. It shows that these shifts need not be quite as linear as the leadership pipeline suggests. Whilst there is a correlation between seniority and the kind of shift required, real life change is more focused. For most people one shift is paramount at any one time. And this shift is situational dependant on the individual, their role and the context they operate in.

Summary

Thankfully in a world of increasing complexity, it turns out that the secret of human development is less complex than we may have thought. Lasting change is all about changing mindset and lasting changes in behaviour are almost always rooted in a change at this level. There are only a small number of mindset shifts internally that define our true response. In fact there are twelve of them and these shifts sit at the core of meaningful development.

This means that, if we are genuinely seeking to help others change, we would be better to focus in on the shift that is right for them and to laser in on the mindset at the heart of it.

If we can do this then we are likely to make a true impact on unlocking the potential of those around us, and building more effective leadership of our schools and education systems.

Rosie Connor and Jerry Connor, April 2019

Sources:

- 1 Rooke D & Torbert W, "Seven Transformations of Leadership", Harvard Business Review, April 2005
- 2 Wilber, K. (2000). Integral Psychology. Cambridge, MA: Shambhala
- 3 Cook-Greuter, Susanne (1985). "Ego Development: Nine Levels of Increasing Embrace". Loevinger, J. Paradigms of Personality (1987)
- 4 These numbers are taken from a sample size of 7476 returned coachee questionnaires
- 5 Gardner, H. (2006), Multiple Intelligences. Basic Books, US.
- 6 The classic work on leadership pipeline is Charam R, Drotter S & Noel J, "The Leadership Pipeline", Jossey-Bass 2001
- 7 See for example, Eichinger, R. W., & Lombardo, M. M. (2004). Learning Agility As A Prime Indicator Of Potential. Human Resource Planning, 27(4), 12-16.