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Evolating: A Classic Grounded Theory of Personal Transformation

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## **Evolating: A Classic Grounded Theory of Personal Transformation**

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### **Abstract**

The phases of learning and transformation emerged from this classic grounded theory study of historic transformers and exceptional students revealing the theory of evolving: a multiphase process through which individuals consciously engage in their own transformation and attain otherwise improbable levels of human potential. The theory defines a 6-phase, non-linear process with stages of yearning, engaging, revealing, liberating, rematrixing, and dedicating. While many adults experience the early phases, few proceed through rematrixing and dedicating. The data indicate that evolving among exceptional students who do engage in all the phases predictably leads to a deeper, more accomplished life of greater meaning and purpose. The theory also provides a framework for strategizing learning and growing as well as explaining periods of stagnancy and ineffectual efforts to change attempted by both individuals and institutions. The theory has been used to structure the experiential and academic educational programs of the Foundation, including a graduate-level university curriculum in transformational coaching and leadership and an organizational consulting practice. Further contributions of the theory for the fields of learning psychology, business education, coaching, transformational leadership, and organizational change have been identified as areas for further study, based on this research.

**Keywords:** Classic Grounded Theory, Transformation, Personal Growth, Change, Evolving, Yearning,

### **Introduction**

The desire for transformation and growth is a common yearning within the human experience. While many individuals may aim for excellence, very few are successful in attaining the highest levels of internal development to realize lives of ever-increasing quality, greatness, and meaning.

Understanding what distinguishes the journey of the most accomplished can benefit all adults as well as the educators, coaches, and leaders who work on behalf of their growth.

For more than 35 years in the academic setting, we've studied well-known transformers and observed, mentored, and supported extraordinary individuals in their progression to advanced levels of development and leadership. In this study, we decipher the stages of personal growth and learning that are unique to the highest achievers among us.

Using classic grounded theory (CGT), we analyzed the interviews of exceptional individuals to gain insight into their experiences, phases of growth, and cycles of progress. This multistage, non-linear journey emerged in the theory of evolving: a six-phase process of yearning, engaging, revealing, liberating, rematrixing, and dedicating. Although many adult individuals may encounter and progress through the first four of these stages, fewer advance through all six stages.

In the primary stage of yearning, individuals often experience a vague dissatisfaction or motivational impulse that obscures deeper longing underneath. This impulse clarifies with growing social-emotional learning and extends beyond mere wanting or goal setting to deeper here-and-now expression that can yield a lifelong focus on inner growth. Yearning propels the individual into engagement where action, discovery, and a more profound self-knowledge tap new levels of yearning. Revealing follows engagement and is marked by a wide array of learning, from simple lessons to deeply affecting lessons that shift an individual's view of what is possible. In liberating, individuals continue their transformation by breaking away from deeply ingrained ways of seeing and believing and engage in new, more empowering ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that further redefine their sense of self. Following liberating, select individuals progress to rematrixing, strategically liberating, and dedicating. It is during these phases that they attempt the important work of applying new perspectives to their life. This may lead some to reassess their values and dominant beliefs and re-conceptualize and change how they see, act, and identify themselves. Those who progress into the phase of dedicating recognize that transformation is continuous through the duration of life. They embrace growth as a lifelong process with the capacity to change both individuals and the wider, global community.

### **Methodology**

We began this study as an inquiry to explore the deeper process of transformation experienced by our most successful students.

CGT differs from other grounded theory (GT) approaches in its design, which guards against researchers forcing preconceptions or predefined theories onto data (Glaser, 1992, 2013). CGT emphasizes the importance of researcher objectivity and the qualities of openness and "not-knowing" in approaching the field of study (Glaser, 1992, 2013; Rieger, 2018). CGT emphasizes a rigorous process of constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling and saturation, ensuring that concepts earn their way into the theory and are clearly grounded in data (Glaser, 1978).

### **Selection of Participants**

As faculty, we observed certain students engaged more fully in the learning process and benefited significantly more from programs than did average students. They demonstrated significant, discontinuous transformational moves that seemed highly unlikely and couldn't be explained by learning and growing in and of themselves given the students' original set of thinking, feeling, acting, and professional accomplishment.

We were curious to explore the ways in which exceptional students engaged in the program and created extraordinary outcomes in their lives. Judith Wright, the primary researcher of this study, secured IRB approval from Fielding Graduate Institute and engaged an outside researcher to ensure greater independence and less potential researcher bias in the selection of study participants and initial data gathering (Wright, 2008). The team relied on a process from positive deviance research to identify participants operating above the norm of our student population (Seidman & McCauley, 2003). This process required open-ended interviews with potential participants to determine who best represented the group of exceptional students—the positive deviants. A total of 12 participants were selected from beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels of participation in our programs.

### **Data Collection**

Participants met for three days for approximately 20 hours of discovery learning that generated almost 400 pages of interview data. Beginning with a grand tour question, our open-ended interview process followed the CGT approach and focused on emergent methods.

Researchers used open coding, memoing, theoretical sampling, selective coding, and constant comparison of concepts with data and with other concepts to identify emerging theoretical constructs and to identify researchers' potential biases and projections that could bias the coding effort. The research team, trained in CGT analysis, met periodically to review and discuss findings and explore the core concepts emerging from these data and to ensure concepts earned their way into the theory.

### **The Emerging Theory of “Evolating”**

The theory that emerged from these data described a transformational process that consisted of clearly defined phases and foundational conditions, dimensions, and predictable manifestations. The phases are not strictly linear, as each phase can be iteratively interconnected with any other phase under specified conditions. The key phases of the transformation process are the following:

- Yearning—a deeply felt affective motivation to experience life more fully. This was identified as a primary motivation that drives the learning process through all phases, and includes specific yearnings to matter, to connect with others, and to make a difference. Yearnings are distinguished from urges, desires, and cravings in that they are internally focused on meeting fundamental human needs rather than externally focused on seeking gratification exclusively from external sources.

- Engaging—actions taken in response to yearning and that address and also influence, deepen, and/or spur further yearning.
- Revelating—discovering, becoming newly conscious and aware of limiting beliefs and patterns, and actively seeking new truths about oneself and the world as well as revealing more of one’s self.
- Liberating—where one becomes free from aspects of their prior conditioning and becomes free to create their life in a more empowering and expanding way.
- Rematrixing—where one integrates and grounds the insights of revelating and the actions of liberating by identifying one’s current operating systems. . .reevaluating values and beliefs. . . seeing one’s life through new lenses . . . and changes how one views or identifies oneself. This is accomplished through strategic liberating and intentional practice.
- Dedicating—the commitment to evolving as a way of life. . .and the decision to engage fully in life and take responsibility for living fully (Wright, 2008, pp. 34-38).

“Evolating” emerged as the core concept that had the most grab for participants and that best explained what was happening through this multi-phased transformational process. The linguistic origin of evolving is in the Latin verb, *evolare*, which “indicates a non-gradual upward movement, flying up or out, the act of flying away” (Wright & Wright, 2013, p. 6).

The notion of a “non-gradual upward movement” suggests that the process is not simply a smooth evolution from one state to another, but rather includes periods of dislocation and radical change. Evolving is formally defined as “the conscious engagement in one’s own evolution in a way that embraces chaotic or extreme transformation. It is the conscious engagement in one’s own evolution with the intent to transform” (Wright & Wright, 2013, pp. 1-2).

### **Evolating as a Basic Social Psychological Process**

The dominant theoretical framework for evolving is what Glaser refers to as a basic social psychological process or one in which a core problem is “processed out” through a progression of stages or phases (Glaser, 1978, 1998). The core problem or concern is the inner conflict between the yearning-based imperative to grow and realize our inherent potential (Wright & Wright, 2013) and the matrix of limiting beliefs, cognitive distortions, moods, behaviors, and addictions that block this impulse. In evolving, this core problem is processed through the phases of yearning, engaging, revelating, liberating, rematrixing, and dedicating. Optimally, these phases culminate in a state of ongoing personal transformation when dedicating repeatedly follows rematrixing.

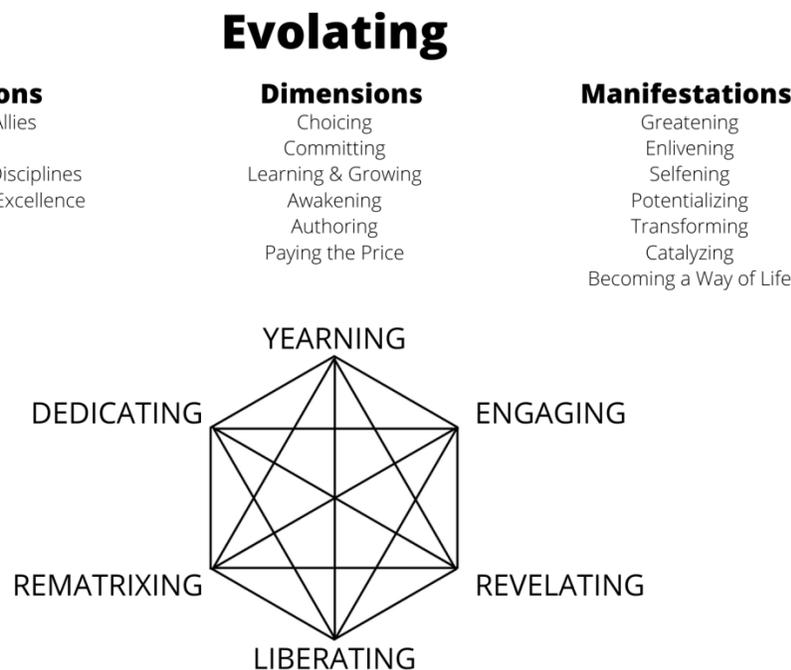
Yet, the process is not strictly linear. Each phase can precede or follow any other phase under specified conditions as defined in the theory. For example, a moment of insight (revelating) can tap a yearning to engage in further testing and application of the insight, leading to new acts of liberating or rematrixing, generally interspersed with subsequent yearning. Or a liberating experience undertaken spontaneously can motivate a process of reflection and self-discovery (revelating), which in turn can activate a yearning to explore new ways of being (rematrixing). Under specified conditions, any phase can be preceded by any other and can result in a transition

to any of the other phases. Glaser (1978) referred to this dynamic as the interactive theoretical framework, which adds an additional theoretical framework to evolving.

Subsequent constant, comparative CGT inquiry into each phase revealed the key conditions, dimensions, and manifestations that characterized the process across all phases of transformation. With this context, we can more easily see the relationships among the constructs and variables that define each phase and the interconnections between the phases. What follows is our analysis of the phases with their respective properties, stages, dimensions, and manifestations.

**Figure 1**

*Phases of Evolving with Dimensions, Conditions, and Manifestations*



### **Conditions, Dimensions, and Manifestations of Evolving**

#### **Conditions of Evolving**

CGT research identified several conditions as key to yearning-based transformation that results in the outcomes we observed. These included a culture of allies; structures, disciplines, and tools; and a commitment to excellence. These are necessary conditions without which the evolving process does not take place.

#### ***Culture of allies***

A community of dedicated co-voyagers is a fundamental condition of evolving. It provides the *context* to optimize the learning process and simultaneously emphasizes the *content* of social-

emotional learning as its focal point. Students learn the fundamental relational skills of being present with one another, being empathically aware of responses and points of view, and holding each other with positive regard. This variable is present through all the phases of evolving. However, it's most prominent during the revealing phase when learning requires that students give and receive feedback to see their current state of functioning and orient themselves toward the vision of who they can become.

### ***Structures, disciplines, and tools***

Optimal living requires specific structures, disciplines, and tools to guide daily living with transformational intent. In our study, the environment included such resources as seminars and trainings, coaching, learning labs, and growth assignments. Study participants also engaged in a structured curriculum of performative learning assignments that supports individuals in challenging limiting beliefs and orienting toward new possibilities for themselves.

As challenging limiting beliefs is a key focus of the program, relevant structures, disciplines, and tools also included templates for identifying and modifying self-limiting beliefs and cognitive distortions as well as tools for implementing intentions to change habitual behavioral patterns (Gollwitzer, 1999) and structured processes to enhance conscious, purposeful living and leadership development.

While these activities were available to all students, participants' engagement and results surpassed other students' engagement. They developed structures and disciplines to participate in and benefit more fully from these activities. These included but were not limited to developing vision, designing strategies, planning and tracking their progress, and engaging support.

### ***Commitment to excellence***

Finally, a commitment to excellence is a key motivational factor that fosters the evolving process and personal transformation. The participants in this study were all exceptionally strong in this area, engaging at deeper levels in their growth assignments than others. Commitment to excellence inherently leads to transformational learning and growth as it requires that an individual stretch into new areas that they had previously thought impossible.

Excellence in this context does not primarily refer to task and technical skill performance, although these factors are included. It refers rather to the excellence in living well, which is about developing the evolving skills that lead to living an excellent life.

### ***Dimensions of Evolving***

The key dimensions of evolving across all the phases include choicing, awakening, authoring, committing, learning and growing, and paying the price (Wright & Wright, 2013). These dimensions come into play in each phase as individuals progressively develop their levels of skill.

"Choicing" involves the skill of consistently choosing options that lead to further growth and learning. In each moment, we have the choice between stasis and growth. We can choose to do what we typically do based on our established habits and preferences, or we can make the

growth choice to do something novel. Those that excel in the evolving process consistently make growth choices that lead to yearning-based engaging, revelating, liberating, and eventually, rematrixing and dedicating.

“Awakening” is defined as the perpetual state of becoming more alive, present, conscious, and engaged (Wright, 2008). Participants in this study demonstrated a heightened aliveness and awareness of their emotions and yearnings in the here-and-now, which spontaneously motivated their choices to learn and grow and to author greater, more expansive lives.

“Authoring” is the integration of choicing and awakening as a process of consciously creating one’s life. Committing is the progressive process of consciously creating one’s life as a deliberate practice. Initially, study participants began by committing to more narrow goals such as feeling better, solving an immediate problem, or reaching a goal. As they continued to engage, discovered more about themselves (revelate), and took action to challenge their limiting beliefs and self-limiting behaviors (liberating), their commitments broadened and deepened. In the phases of rematrixing and dedicating, participants deepened their commitment to becoming more fully their authentic selves—that is, selfening. They dedicated themselves to principles, values, and a sense of higher purpose that facilitated their emergence as transformers and leaders (Wright, 2008). They became strong influencers and leaders and operated with a sense of purpose and mission in all areas of their lives.

The two final dimensions of evolving include ongoing learning and growing and being willing to pay the price: to sacrifice or invest time and resources to fully engage in the process. Our findings indicate that all dimensions are essential properties of the transformational process. Each one involves skills that need to be developed in order to support the evolving process. The degree to which individuals develop these skills to a level of excellence is the primary determinant of genuine transformational growth.

### **Manifestations of Evolving**

The theory identifies seven manifestations of evolving that reflect fundamental outcomes of the transformation process. These include greatening, enlivening, selfening, potentializing, transforming, catalyzing, and evolving as a way of life (Wright, 2008).

Greatening is a powerful explanatory variable in the study. The exceptional participants lived lives of increasing quality, velocity, productivity, breadth, and depth (Wright, 2008). They experienced ever-expanding depth, meaning, and results in many areas of their lives: ever-greatening sense of self, relationship intimacy, career success, and leadership influence. At one point during data analysis, greatening appeared as a potential core variable. After further analysis, it was clear that evolving was about more than increasing quality, velocity, productivity, breadth, and depth of experience—it was about the transformational process that resulted in greatening.

The other key manifestations identify predictable outcomes of the evolving process:

Enlivening—becoming increasingly more vital, more present, and experiencing life more fully and vividly.

Selfening—continually expanding their sense of self, self-knowledge, self-expression, self-acceptance, genuineness, and authenticity.

Potentializing—continuing to experience and create more possibilities, discovering and developing more of their gifts and talents, taking advantage of more opportunities, developing more and more as they expand their potential.

Transforming—knowing something they didn't know before, doing something they wouldn't have done before, becoming someone they wouldn't have been before; transforming their worldview, ways of thinking and believing, and behavior; transforming themselves, their relationships, their jobs, and other areas of their lives; a continual process of emerging.

Catalyzing—becoming a change agent for others in their lives, catalyzing the growth and development of others, becoming natural leaders and contributors, being a positive influence on the world around them.

Phases becomes a way of living—internalizing and integrating the phases of yearning, engaging, revelating, liberating, rematrixing, and dedicating where they become a way of life and a way of being.

### **Summary of Phases of Evolving**

In summarizing the phases of evolving, we found that simply identifying the general characteristics of each phase was insufficient to provide the full explanatory power of the theory. We found that the data relating to each phase revealed sub-theories of conditions, properties, stages, and manifestations that profoundly influence the process and outcomes within each phase. As our larger purpose was to use the theory to enhance our student programs, identifying these critical variables proved to be essential. As such, the following sections provide an overview of these phase-specific sub-theories, each of which contributes to the overall explanatory power and utility of the theory. We've captured the details in summary charts to ensure that presentation of the theory is as parsimonious as possible without compromising the integrity of the theory.

#### **The Phase of Yearning**

Four categories of yearning characterized participant experiences: undefined longing, vague dissatisfaction, a problem to solve, or a goal to achieve. Undefined longing typically surfaced as "a feeling of, 'Is this all there is?'"—a sensation of emptiness and or meaninglessness. . . a longing for something more in life" (Wright, 2008, pp. 54-58). Across all categories of yearning, there was a sense of something missing in life and wanting more. These included responses of feeling ambivalent about material success, sensing one's life was headed in the wrong direction, engaging in soft (or hard) addictions, and often blaming external circumstances or others for what wasn't working in their lives.

We identified two essential conditions and related skills for yearning that are foundational to yearning-based-learning. These manifested as the ability (1) to distinguish yearning from craving, and (2) to engage to satisfy longings, solve problems, and achieve goals. Yearning related to meeting deeper spiritual and existential-developmental needs, such as the yearning to exist, matter, be seen, belong, make a difference, and to create (Wright, 2006). Yearning awakens us to action. If we don't act or engage on our yearnings, evolving does not take place (Wright, 2008).

There are sufficient data to consider each phase a theory unto itself, with its own structure. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide further detail. By sharing the tables and graphics of aspects associated with each phase, we provide a high-level overview and a demonstration of the richness of evolving that warrants further study. Although every phase stands alone, each relates to the others in distinct ways. For a more detailed account of the content, see earlier work of Wright (2008).

**Table 1**

*Categories and Conditions of Yearning*

<b>YEARNING</b>	
<p><b>CATEGORIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undefined Longing</li> <li>• Vague Dissatisfaction</li> <li>• A Problem to Solve</li> <li>• A Goal to Achieve</li> </ul>	<p><b>CONDITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yearning vs. Craving</li> <li>• Acting on Yearnings</li> </ul>

**The Phase of Engaging**

Engaging is the process of consciously acting on yearnings to experience deeper satisfaction, accomplishment, meaning, and purpose in one's life. The theory indicates an engagement continuum from unconscious pseudo-engagement to deeply mutual, yearning-based engagement with oneself and others. Evolving takes place only when the person becomes conscious of their feelings, thoughts, and actions in the present moment; is able to identify and follow yearnings; and participates in activities or ways of being to fulfill those yearnings.

**Table 2**

*Stages and Conditions of Engaging*

ENGAGING	
<p><b>STAGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tasting</li> <li>• Testing</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Applying</li> <li>• Re-engaging               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Questing</li> <li>- Presencing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>CONDITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address True Yearnings</li> <li>• Risking</li> <li>• Re-engaging               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consistent Successes</li> <li>- Moving through Barriers</li> <li>- Consistent Support</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### The Phase of Revelating

Engaging with yearnings orients a person inward toward what’s happening within and between themselves and others in the present moment. It initiates a process of self-discovery. Specifically, it initiates the phase of revelating, where individuals engage in the process of discovering who they are in any given moment—including their vision of what is possible and the beliefs and barriers that limit their emergence (Wright & Wright, 2013; Wright, 2008).

Revelating is the phase in which the core conflict at the heart of the evolving process comes to focus. On the one hand, it is inspired by yearning, and orients a person toward becoming more fully themselves and living with greater purpose and meaning. These are the fruits of a dedicated, yearning-based engagement in life.

On the other hand, even as they yearn for *more*, a person approaches barriers of limiting beliefs and related fear responses, moods, soft addictions, rationalizing behavior, and so forth that would otherwise reinforce system stasis and ultimately system entropy. This represents the fundamental conflict between the internal growth imperative expressed by our yearnings and the matrix of limiting beliefs and related feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that are the legacy of our social conditioning (Wright, 2006).

A person in this phase of the learning process begins identifying and challenging their matrix of limiting beliefs and visioning who they are capable of becoming. This process of selfening—of becoming our authentic self—is an important manifestation of the evolving process that comes into focus during the phases of revelating and liberating (Wright & Wright, 2013; Wright, 2008).

### Table 3

*Stages, Conditions, and Manifestations of Revelating*

REVELATING		
<p><b>STAGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aha-ing</li> <li>• Revealing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transparency</li> <li>- Genuineness</li> <li>- Being Seen</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Dis-believing</li> <li>• Visioning</li> <li>• Awakening</li> <li>• Getting the Game</li> <li>• Embracing the Game               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Re-Revelating</li> <li>- Being an Agent of Revelating</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>CONDITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being around Truth</li> <li>• Accepting Truth</li> <li>• Engaging in Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>MANIFESTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selfening               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-knowing</li> <li>- Self-accepting</li> <li>- Self-compassion</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clarifying Yearnings</li> </ul>

### The Phase of Liberating

The revelating phase completes itself in liberating action when a person has discovered a limiting belief to challenge and challenges that belief with actions such as assignments designed to evoke a hitherto denied yearning. Following the uncovered yearnings leads to new thoughts, feelings, and actions that play a role as the individual works to realize their emerging potential and move toward becoming their more genuine and authentic self. In the liberating phase, a person becomes

more free to express themselves, to tell the truth, to express their emotions more freely, and to discover what they think, feel, and believe, rather than rely on prescribed roles or rely [exclusively] on unconscious programming from their families and early socialization. (Wright, 2008, p. 103)

It is the phase when a person steps into the process of authoring their life, operating from the freedom to “create their own life, consciously choosing their lifestyle, way of being, behavior, actions, and beliefs” (Wright, 2008, p. 105). In liberating, a person consciously engages in the process of living authentically and thinking critically about who they are becoming and the emerging values and principles they are choosing to live by.

#### Table 4

Modes, Stages, Conditions, and Manifestations of Liberating

<b>LIBERATING</b>			
<b>MODES</b>	<b>STAGES</b>	<b>CONDITIONS</b>	<b>MANIFESTATIONS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaking Free From</li> <li>• Becoming Free To</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening the Cage Door</li> <li>• Stepping out of the Door</li> <li>• Exploring the Unknown</li> <li>• Re-habiting</li> <li>• Re-Liberating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Risking</li> <li>• Audacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self Expression</li> <li>• Authoring</li> <li>• Expansion</li> <li>• Flowing</li> </ul>

### **The Phase of Rematrixing**

Rematrixing is strategic liberating with the intent of transformational change and development. It is the phase when the incremental steps of revealing and liberating become the foundation for a conscious process of personal transformation across all areas of life. Rematrixing involves the active process of shifting the fabric of a person's life and ground of being—one's matrix—in order to incorporate and solidify the results of revealing and liberating (Wright & Wright, 2013; Wright, 2008). It is an ongoing process that occurs continuously and discontinuously. It is continuous with the processes of revealing and liberating as the phase where students consciously engage in their development with the intent to transform. At the same time, it is discontinuous and interactive and can occur incrementally and cumulatively at any point in the evolving process.

From rematrixing, a person can move into any other phase. During rematrixing, a person can re-awaken to new yearnings, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that were unimaginable from a previous perspective. Engaging in new ways of being can stimulate the individual to reveal at yet deeper levels with new emergent insights and enhanced personal transparency. Most importantly, this phase can lead a person to deepening dedication and commitment to their own process of becoming that is central to personal transformation. Likewise, the subsequent phase of dedicating influences the phase of rematrixing and all the other phases of the process, as a person deepens their levels of yearning-based engagement.

Rematrixing results in personal transformation and the transformation of the relationships, groups, teams, and organizations in which a person participates. Individuals at this level consistently expand their scope of vision and influence, often inspiring others by example and consciously engaging with others in a mutual journey of personal and systems transformation. It is during this phase that personal transformation tends to naturally progress into transformational leadership.

The stages of rematrixing include reorienting, restructuring, reforming, and reidentifying. During reorienting, a person recognizes and challenges their current matrix of beliefs, reweighs their values, and re-visions the life they yearn to create. This includes restructuring their current matrix in alignment with the vision of the new matrix they are creating. Such a step demands a

person exercise their cognitive skills of revealing, analyzing, and strategizing changes. These strategized changes manifest in liberating and rematrixing, leading the individual to re-form and reidentify their sense of self. These constructs represent the properties of personal transformation in this phase:

**Table 5**

*Stages and Manifestations of Rematrixing*

<b>REMATRIXING</b>	
<p><b>STAGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reorienting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognizing the Current Matrix</li> <li>- Reweighing the Values</li> <li>- Re-visioning</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Restructuring               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyzing</li> <li>- Strategizing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Re-forming</li> <li>• Reidentifying</li> </ul>	<p><b>MANIFESTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transforming</li> <li>• Paying the Price</li> </ul>

**The Phase of Dedicating**

We recognized that rematrixing was not the final phase of the theory. Some participants made the leap to engage in this transformative process, only to fall back into old habits as the old matrix re-asserted itself and their disciplines waned. We found that dedicating was crucial to participants sustaining the process of rematrixing as an ongoing way of being.

Dedicating is the commitment to evolving as a way of life. At this point in the transformation process, a person realizes that evolving is not only something one does, but rather something one commits to as a way of life and a way of being. Without this commitment, transformation ceases and is generally limited and even lost. Dedicating involves the recognition that as people, we are in a process of continual becoming and that transformation requires a dedication to this ongoing process of self-development and personal evolution.

Evolating means embracing a life of constant challenge; learning, growing, and serving. There is no "retirement" from evolving. In this process, there is always more to learn, do, and experience, as well as more to gain and contribute to our world—all of which lead to a continually enriched and excellent life.

**Table 6**

*Properties, Stages, and Manifestations of Dedicating*

<b>DEDICATING</b>		
<p><b>PROPERTIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devoting</li> <li>• Choicing</li> <li>• Persevering               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disciplining</li> <li>- Overcoming Blocks</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Investing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expending Resources</li> <li>- Paying the Price</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Up-flipping</li> <li>• Purposing               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Principled Living</li> <li>- Missioning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>STAGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-interest</li> <li>• Authoring</li> <li>• Serving</li> <li>• Agent of Evolving</li> </ul>	<p><b>MANIFESTATIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evolving as a Way of Life</li> <li>• Unique Contribution to the World</li> </ul>

### **Conclusion**

#### **Applications of the Theory**

The theory has a broad range of applications—practical and theoretical—to effect small- and large-scale transformation throughout one’s life. They range from the very specific, immediate, and practical to the larger, more abstract, and world-transformative possibilities. As a theory that explains, describes, and predicts stages of transformation, the theory is already being used as an effective and powerful guide in mapping individual growth and development.

The theory provides a dynamic model and a tool of self-evaluation for those undertaking their own personal development. By identifying the phases of development they have completed, the phase they are currently in, or the phase they have failed to enter, individuals can get a clearer view of the path they are on, the steps ahead, and the challenges they may face. Without the benefit of the evolving theory, those undertaking personal growth work may stop short of their potential because they fail to realize they need to repeatedly continue to another phase to get the results they desire. For example, a person who attends an introductory training but fails to experience real change in their life may now be able to see that they simply did not use their yearning to launch into the stage of engaging. By understanding this, they can choose differently.

Similarly, if a person has repeated insights and successes in revelating, but has not experienced a transformed life, they may find that they have not yet entered the rematrixing phase in which they set up systems that transform experiences and insights into an everyday reality.

The theory provides an important counterpoint to the quick fix mentality so prevalent in our culture. As a society, we promise easy solutions—buy a new car or dress or candy bar and you will be happy. The theory flies in the face of this dominant paradigm of simplistic, external solutions. Evolving shows what it really takes to live a great life, which provides individuals,

organizations, businesses, and institutions with a new framework and incentive to transform their behavior and ways of being.

As more individuals embrace their own evolving, the potential to transform personal relationships, families, businesses, organizations, and politics increases exponentially. Such transformations have already been effected by evolvers in their own spheres of influence, sparking yearning in those around them. Evolvers become agents of change who inspire evolving in others. Living their own great lives sets an example others may emulate.

Just as the theory can be used as a map to guide transformation and a diagnostic tool to pinpoint where development may be impeded, it may also be applied to larger systems or sets of systems. The theory may be employed by organizations and institutions through declarations of mission or commitments to a higher purpose. For example, the yearning of an organization may be expressed in its mission or purpose statement. An organization experiencing exponential growth may need to rematrix in order to put the new systems in place to leverage and sustain its new power and retool its original mission.

On an even larger scale, the theory represents a significant contribution to the literature that attempts to answer long-held, universal questions: How are we to live? How do we live a great life? How do we live the best life possible? Rather than allowing these questions to remain hypothetical, we can begin to apply the theory—and by applying it, evolve the theory itself. The application of the theory itself has the capacity to propel these universal questions into as yet unforeseen territory.

### **Contribution to Extant Theory, Research, and Practice**

The theory of evolving expands upon central theories of psychology and transformational learning to provide an integrative understanding of the process of personal transformation. Aspects of Freudian developmental theory, Adlerian, humanistic, existential, and positive psychology are all found in the phases, dimensions, and manifestations of evolving. Evolving theory helps clarify a fundamental conflict in Freudian theory between the forces of socialization, that require suppression of our *élan vital*, and our emerging fundamental impulse of aliveness, the individual's yearning for more life and expanded self-expression (Freud, 1989; Hall, 1954/1999). It provides a structured understanding of and resolution to the fundamental human conflict between the imperatives of social conformity and the transformational imperative toward growth and expanded consciousness and self-expression.

It likewise emphasizes the central role of consciousness and increasing self-awareness as essential in tapping the often-unconscious, repressed yearning to experience greater aliveness that is foundational to the evolving process.

The notion of rematrixing in evolving theory also builds upon Alfred Adler's conception of social interest (Adler, 2011)—how we only become our best self when we have concern for others—which is what naturally happens as we engage in the dedicating phase of evolving, where the rematrixing process comes to lifelong engagement. This is the phase where we strategically continue to challenge our limiting beliefs and systems of defense that lock us into our

fundamental lifestyle, and where we develop a more expansive vision of who we can become. The stages of rematrixing and dedicating come to lifelong fruition in developing our sense of purpose and contribution to the world. Evolving naturally leads from individual self-interest to leading others as an agent of transformation.

Theories of humanistic and existential psychology build on these insights from Freud and Adler in further clarifying our fundamental imperative toward growth and transformation. Many of Abraham Maslow's aspects of self-actualizing people can be seen in manifestations of evolving, including the focus on a special motivation which he referred to as "being-motivation" that inspires self-actualization and self-transcendence (Maslow, 1968). The affect of yearning can be characterized as an example of being-motivation in orienting us toward our higher potentials.

The theories of existential and positive psychology also support this notion of an underlying transformational imperative (Wright & Wright, 2013). The dimensions of choosing and authoring our lives are central to theories of existential philosophy and psychology, including the notion that we are responsible for creating our lives and discovering our sense of meaning and purpose in our everyday choices (Frankl, 1959/2006; Sartre, 1943/2021; May, 1953; Yalom, 1980). Positive psychology likewise provides a theory of well-being that includes positive affect, engagement, relationships with others, accomplishment, and meaning—all of which are central to the process of evolving (Seligman, 2011/2013). While the theory of well-being emphasizes the independence and distinctness of each of these dimensions of a great life, evolving theory demonstrates how they are all integrally related as part of a unified process. Yearning can be seen as the core generative affect that motivates engagement, connection with others, the pursuit of excellence, and the discovery of personal meaning.

Evolving theory also expands upon the themes of transformational and experiential learning theory. Mezirow's theory of learning as transformation emphasizes shifts in point of view and habit of mind as defining features of transformational learning (Mezirow, 2000). Evolving theory adds a depth-dimension, focusing on shifts in our fundamental matrix or lifestyle as the foundational point of view and habit of mind that we are continually seeking to transcend.

Evolving theory also identifies yearning as the underlying motivation of this process. As we become conscious of deeper yearnings to matter, to be known and to know ourselves, and to make a contribution to the world, we naturally confront our limiting beliefs and resistances to growth and change as evidenced in revealing. This naturally creates what Mezirow (2000) referred to as "disorienting dilemmas" (p. 22) that motivate the learning process of personal transformation (Taylor, 2000). Evolving theory helps us better understand the nature of this motivation as an ongoing potential in each moment as we tap yearnings to become more than who we have historically been.

Evolving theory also provides a new framework for exploring the depth-dimension of transformational learning that has been addressed by a number of researchers, including most notably R. D. Boyd and John M. Dirkx (Boyd, 1991; Boyd & Dirkx, 1991; Dirkx, 2012). These studies focus on the "relational, emotional, and largely unconscious issues associated with the development of the individual, interpersonal interactions, and social development" (Dirkx, 2012, pp. 116-117). Evolving theory provides a new framework for research in this area, focusing on

transforming our fundamental matrix of apperceptions and limiting beliefs developed in childhood in our families of origin (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Evolating theory also builds significantly on Vygotsky's theories of performative transformational learning. Evolving theory identifies a culture of allies as central to the learning process. It draws on Vygotsky's notions of the more-knowledgeable-other (MKO) as an agent of transformative learning, holding vision for what is possible for others and supporting them through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where they are able to accomplish things that would not have been possible to do on their own (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Vygotsky's theories, like Adler's, earn their way into the theory as building blocks toward a general theory of personal transformation. In Vygotsky's framework and in evolving theory, transformation is a multi-dimensional process that transforms the individual, the teacher, the school or learning organization, and the world (Wink & Putney, 2002).

Revelating, phase three, also presents a new way of understanding the relationship between experience and conceptual reflection in personal transformation. The prevailing models of learning as transformation focus on shifting the learner's conceptual frame of reference rather than their way of being. Mezirow (2000) makes this the defining feature of transformative learning. David Kolb (and later Elaine Cox) emphasized the experiential grounding of transformative learning but emphasize the dynamic of moving from the immediacy of experience to abstract conceptual reflection and then to action (Cox, 2013; Kolb, 1984).

Evolating theory focuses on personal transformation as a shift in our way of being, grounded in the immediacy of experience in behavior change. Revelating, liberating, and rematrixing explain a process of becoming more revealed to ourselves and others as we connect with our yearning to become more fully ourselves as we challenge limiting beliefs and follow yearnings. It focuses on sensory-grounded presence to ourselves as a process of emergence in the present moment and developing a vision of our becoming as the focus of personal transformation. As such it does not require abstraction from experience, but rather discernment of our process of emergence in the here-and-now and creating an experientially grounded vision and set of actions to facilitate that process of becoming.

### **Implications: The Power of the Theory**

The theory has implications for individuals in groups, communities, organizations, and institutions alike—regardless of their endeavors, goals, or missions.

The theory explains why some individuals experience bigger lives, greater motivation, seemingly boundless energy, greater optimism and enthusiasm, and a sense of abundant potential, while others seem to languish or achieve less than desired results despite applying the same resources, energy, and time to similar activities. The theory can explain why some organizations and businesses thrive with vibrant, engaged, fully striving employees with a sense of purpose and commitment, while other organizations seem mired in dysfunction with unmotivated employees performing at lower levels with little sense of satisfaction and fulfillment.

The theory helps explain what motivates us and what doesn't—why throwing more money and quick fixes at problems is often ineffective, or why sometimes doing more, doing better, doing it longer and stronger doesn't necessarily work.

The theory explains why some individuals may "get stuck" in their personal growth work no matter how much they seem to be doing, while others in the same programs with similar resources seem to sail ahead, experiencing greater satisfaction and fulfillment. Just as it explains why some students are more successful than others, it may also explain why some employees thrive while others seem to languish, despite being given the same levels of remuneration and benefits.

The theory has been used to structure the experiential and academic educational programs of the Foundation, including a graduate-level university curriculum in transformational coaching and leadership and an organizational consulting practice. Further contributions of the theory for the fields of learning psychology, business education, coaching, transformational leadership, and organizational change have been identified as areas for further study, based on this research.

### **Areas for Further Study**

The ongoing emergence and development of the theory has revealed a myriad of fertile areas for future research, each of which will contribute to an even more expansive and powerful understanding of what people experience as a great life, and the processes they undertake to generate it. Recommendations for further study include:

- GT research studies on each phase of the theory (yearning, engaging, revelating, liberating, rematrixing, and dedicating), theory subphases, and each of the dimensions, conditions, and manifestations. Our study introduced new data about these elements. Further research could uncover nuances and implications and generate greater understanding of, for example, the many interrelationships and influencers among the elements—phases to dimensions, dimensions to outcomes, phases to outcomes, and so forth.
- Studies of the tools that are utilized to live a great life. What are they? What impact do they have? Are certain tools more helpful at certain phases? Are certain tools more helpful across, rather than within, phases? If so, which and when? More research and data related to these points will enrich the theory and help to maximize the potential for evolving. The research can begin with a deep exploration of the current tools used by our foundation, given that those have already been proven to lead to evolving. It could then expand to other tools and technologies of development and change. These studies could spawn new, more effective tools to be utilized in support of the evolving process.
- On a practical level, a map or other diagnostic tool to assist individuals in identifying their progress on the path of evolving and clarifying their next steps to move toward experiencing a great life. This same mapping tool could then be used to serve those around them—family members, co-workers, and so forth—helping them to awaken their

yearning and assist them on their quest for a great life. Such a tool could support larger organizations and institutions in their transformation, as well.

- Development of a curriculum that maps our current program to the theory and then restates it in a newly clear and potent way to guide students through the process of evolving. Embracing the theory itself could become a core part of the curriculum, further empowering individuals to take the reins of their own growth journey. Fostering a culture where the stages of evolving are understood and embraced will likely propel our foundation to its next stage of evolution.
- As an adjunct to the curriculum, a separate study might be conducted that focuses on students who have not fully engaged in the evolving process. CGT research could be conducted to formulate a general theory that then could be used both as a mapping and diagnostic tool to facilitate and support those students who wish to shift the trajectory of their growth and development and enroll them in the evolving process.
- The development and implementation of a curriculum to train faculty, leaders, and coaches in the theory, so that they can use it to guide students through the process of evolving and become more effective in their own leadership, coaching, and service.
- Exploring the implications of evolving for the theory and practice of transformational learning, including issues of motivation and psychological depth, the affective dimension of adult learning, and the experiential grounding of personal transformation.
- Exploring the contributions of evolving theory to the fields of learning psychology, coaching and leadership. Research in these areas is currently underway as we continue to develop our graduate-level curriculum in transformational coaching and leadership and related educational practices.

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