

# *The Bigger Picture: Building upon the ‘Developmental Coaching: Transitions Continuum’*

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## Abstract

This short article aims to develop upon the ‘Developmental Coaching: Transitions Continuum’ framework presented by Palmer and Panchal (2011). The importance of incorporating broader features of change as well as shifting national and international landscapes within this framework will be proposed in terms of their potential relevance to support further understanding of the coachee context.

**Keywords:** *Developmental – developmental coaching – positive psychology – coaching psychology – transitions*

## Abstrait

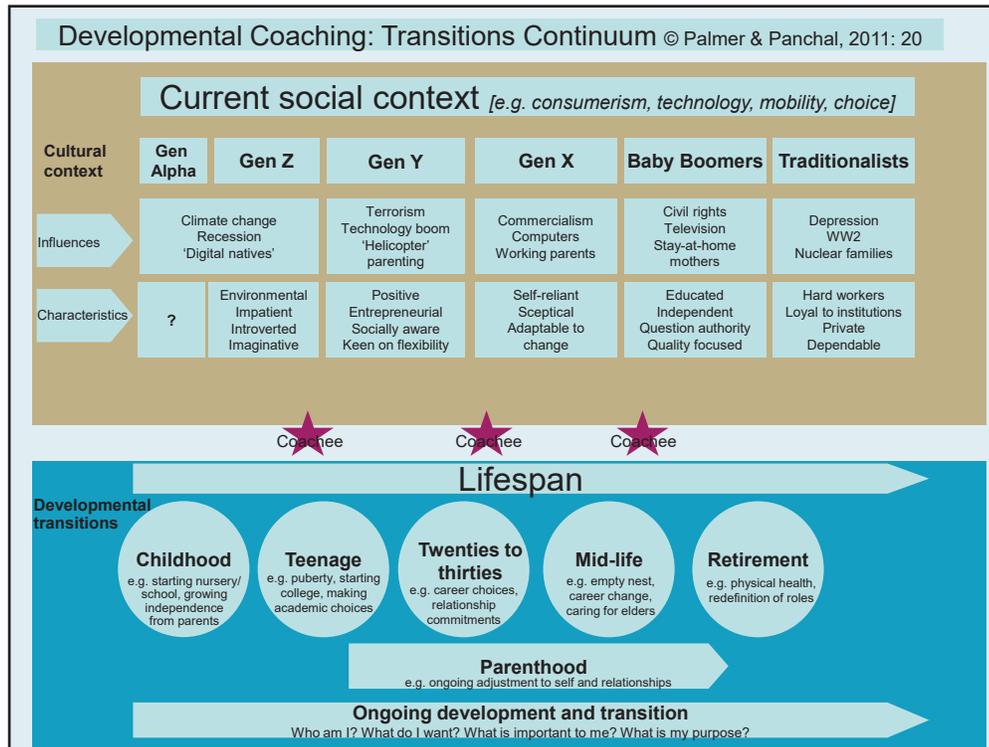
*Ce court article vise à se développer sur le cadre du «Développement du coaching: Transitions Continuum» présenté par Palmer et Panchal (2011). L’importance d’intégrer des caractéristiques plus larges du changement ainsi que le déplacement des paysages nationaux et internationaux dans ce cadre seront proposés en fonction de leur pertinence potentielle pour mieux comprendre le contexte du coachee.*

**Mots clés:** *Développement - coaching de développement - psychologie positive - psychologie du coaching - transitions*

Developmental coaching is an emerging field and to aide our understanding, Palmer and Panchal (2011, p.5) offered a definition suggesting it “... facilitates the effective negotiation of key lifespan transitions, supporting positive growth and development. It draws insight from the relevant broader context influencing the coachee experience of transition, such as cultural factors and generational influences”. The aim here is to highlight a focus upon

key lifespan transition points and the role of developmental coaching to support coachees to navigate and manage change milestones. Although, transitions might also range from tackling daily hassles (e.g. responding to feedback, working with new technology) to negotiating major change (e.g. divorce, redundancy, health, becoming a parent).

A key point to note is that coaching practice should be tailored around each coachee’s perception of their own experiences. For



**Figure 1: Transitions continuum** (© 2011, Palmer & Panchal)

example, what might be subjectively viewed as a daily hassle by one coachee could be perceived as a major life transition by another. Transitions can offer varying experiences and outcomes for each coachee and seeking to determine 'When is a transition a transition?' may be unhelpful for the coachee. Regardless, there is a range of child and adult developmental theories that can helpfully inform our work in this area (e.g. Erikson, 1950; Levinson, 1978) as well as theories from other fields such as transition psychology (e.g. Bridges, 1995), stress and coping (e.g. Palmer & Cooper, 2010) and self-identity (e.g. Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Aligned with the positive psychology paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), working to support transitions within a holistic approach, developmental coaching is focused upon 'positive growth'. A benefit can be that it aims to encourage coachee's insights and action in terms of ways in which their transferable skills, knowledge, resources and past experiences can help them manage change and milestones. A key contribution from positive psychology is the value of focusing on a coachee's strengths

during transitional times (Linley, Biswas-Diener, & Trenier, 2011).

Offering a model to support their definition of developmental coaching, Palmer and Panchal (2011, p. 20) presented a 'Transitions Continuum' as shown in Figure 1. This important contribution sets out relevant features and context that might be scene-setting to developmental coaching including social and cultural context, generational factors and influences and common developmental transitions we might experience across the lifespan. A life transition point can be defined as '... key turning points that many of us are likely to experience across the lifespan, with varying degrees of opportunity and challenge' (Palmer & Panchal, 2011, p.4).

A practical question asked by Panchal and O'Riordan since 2008 has been 'How much 'big picture' knowledge is useful to us as coaches and coaching psychologists?' Reflecting upon this, it appears that the flow and shift of local, national and even international changes could be useful to incorporate within the 'Transitions Continuum'. The aim being to further support the

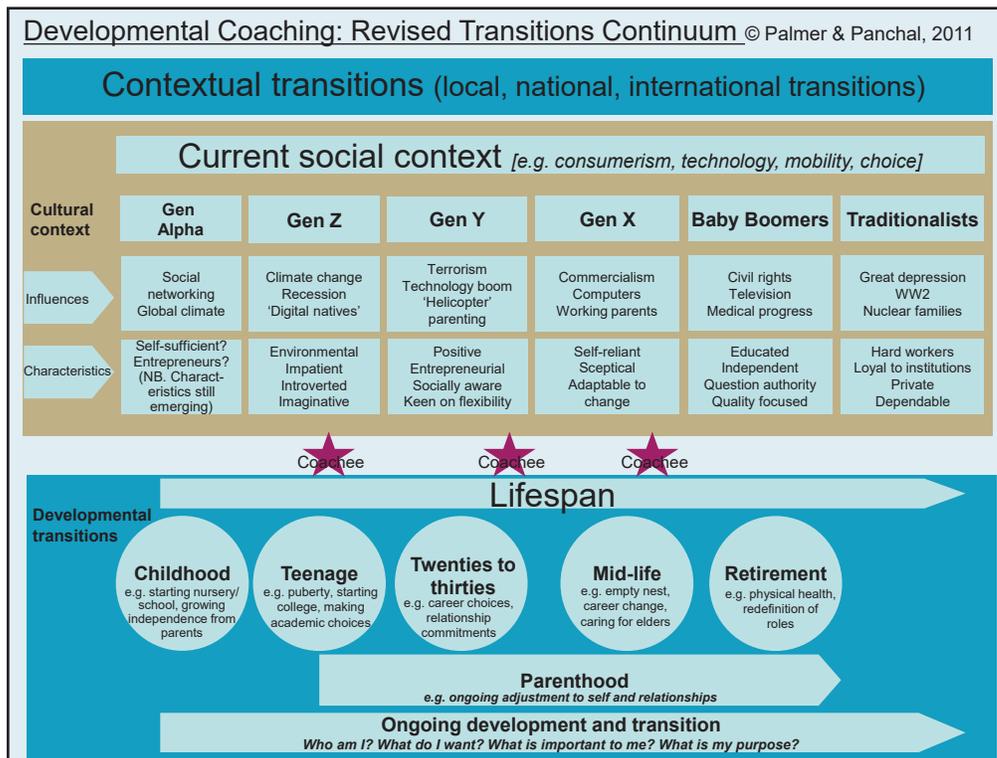


Figure 2: Revised transitions continuum (Adapted © 2011, Palmer & Panchal)

coachee to understand the influential and contextual factors that might (or might not) be involved in their transition process. This could include political decisions, national and/or government policy and global change.

So, given the pace of world change and our increasing existence within a global village with a 24/7 newsfeed, it may now be timely to move beyond the combination of generational factors and life transitions as the developmental and social context when working with coachees. Whilst the broader change landscape might be dynamic and rapidly shift, it could be an oversight not to include this content within the coaching conversation.

Incorporating a bigger change landscape within the 'Transitions Continuum' framework could offer additional meaning in relation to the universal context for the coachee and help to better support them to negotiate the process of transition or milestone event. An illustrative example to reflect this positioning might be a coachee experiencing a job move in 2016, with the bigger picture context being the uncertain times leading up to

and following the Great Britain Brexit referendum decision.

Equally, the outcome of a government's policy or reform could see a shift and perceived change that might impact significantly upon the life course of a coachee, such as same sex marriage laws. Fear of terrorism due to the current global political climate could impact on a coachee's decision to travel. The deaths of many well-known and famous people in the first part of 2016, may have led people to ask important personal developmental questions in terms of their own purpose and meaning of life.

Figure 2 aims to develop upon the Transitions Continuum to incorporate this broader landscape of change and transition.

### Conclusions

Further discussion and development is needed in terms of the relevance of including this wider-reaching change landscape within the 'Transitions Continuum' framework. This is beyond the scope of the current article but will be addressed by the authors in later publications. ■

## Biographies

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