

# **The Insecure Overachiever: Origins, Challenges and a Peer-Coached Pathway to Sustainable Performance for Professional Services Personnel.**

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*Abstract: This paper explores the insecure overachiever archetype commonly displayed by ‘A players’ in professional services. The origins, upsides and challenges of the archetype are reviewed with reference to developmental schemas, self-defeating behaviors and achievement motivation. A peer-coached pathway is offered incorporating Intentional Change Theory, and psychometric and physiological assessment as an emotional/cognitive access point for change. This program enables employers to proactively support ‘A player’ insecure overachievers to deliver sustainable performance and improved client outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Insecure overachiever, schema, emotional & social intelligence, ESCI, developmental frames, intentional change theory, performance, professional services, client services.

## **Introduction**

‘Insecure overachievers’ is a common “high-performance” personality type in professional service firms (Daniel, 1993; Michel, 2015). The insecure overachiever archetype describes individuals with above average cognitive intelligence; an extreme drive to succeed competitively, and a deep need for evidence-based, external validation indicative of underlying compromised self-esteem. Under stress, these attributes are reinforced and may trigger latent self-defeating behaviors and lead to burnout, talent loss for employers, and suboptimal individual performance that affects clients and coworkers. This paper explores the origins, upsides and challenges presented by the archetype. Origins are explored with reference to attachment theory, developmental frames and schemas. Achievement drive and motivation are also explored using the performance-mastery model and referencing known drivers of secure and insecure overachievement. The effect on performance and leadership competencies are examined using aggregated Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) data. Insecure overachievers often rank as ‘A players’ (top performers) in professional services firms (Berglas, 2006). Outwardly successful ‘A players’ often fail to attract the individual support they may need to avoid chronic stress (Berglas, 2006). This can result in compromised performance, interrupted career

progression and in some cases loss of talent for employers (Berglas, 2006; Ket deVries, 2005). Armed with psychological, behavioral and organizational insights, we offer a laser peer-coached support pathway tailored to this archetype. The pathway is designed to proactively support insecure overachievers, enable them to thrive securely, achieve sustainable high performance, and improve their (client) relationships with the aim of protecting individual and organizational ROI.

### **Selected Literature Review**

Research was conducted using Google Scholar, academic journals, popular press and an extensive online media search using the keywords: insecure overachiever, schema, attachment theory, developmental frames, emotional & social intelligence, ESCI, stress, peer coaching, intentional change theory.

#### **Definitions**

Insecure Overachiever. The term insecure overachiever is not well defined in the academic literature.

Business journals provide insights into the behavioral, cognitive and emotional characteristics of the archetype (Daniel, 1993; Berglas, 2006; Nisen, 2013; Markus, 2014; and Dalsgaard, 2014). The archetype is best defined by its attributes and associated behaviors (Table 1). For the purpose of this paper, insecure overachievers are defined as individuals with above average cognitive intelligence, an extreme drive to succeed competitively (exceed expectations), a deep need for evidence-based, elite external validation or status based a degree of compromised self-esteem and an inner ‘fear of discovery’ (impostor phenomenon). Impostor phenomenon describes an inner belief, often with origins in upbringing, that the individual is “not good enough” and so constantly strives for excellence to overcome this fear. The term ‘insecure overachiever’ is ‘half-jokingly’ used in some Management Consultancies (Daniel, 1993; Dalsgaard, 2014) and banks (Michel, 2015; Michel & Wortham, 2016). Research indicates that the archetype is common in other professional services including law and accountancy (France, 1993; Lupu & Empson, 2015) and also in medicine and ‘the caring professions’.

Table 1.

*Definitions - Insecure Overachiever Archetype Attributes and Behaviors*

<b>CHARACTERISTICS AND ATTRIBUTES OF INSECURE OVERACHIEVER</b>		
<b>Source</b>	<b>Specific Attributes</b>	<b>Associated Behaviors</b>
Daniel, R. (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive intelligence</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Drive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intellectual superiority, need to ‘be right’</li> <li>• Need for positive feedback</li> <li>• Competitive need to publicly excel.</li> </ul>
Berglas, S. (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Self Esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inner need for recognition from others</li> </ul>
Nisen, M. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive intelligence</li> <li>• Fear of Failure</li> <li>• Achievement drive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intensely ambitious and very bright</li> <li>• Always have everything mapped out</li> <li>• Attend the best schools and universities</li> <li>• Driven by desire for status and/or fear of failure</li> </ul>
Markus, G. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive</li> <li>• External Validation</li> <li>• Low Self Esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driven to demonstrate own value</li> <li>• Work equates to value as a person</li> </ul>
Dalsgaard, M. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistent high performance</li> <li>• Over-compensation</li> <li>• Stress; feels like a fraud</li> <li>• Fear their demons</li> <li>• Arrogance masks insecurity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic success built on shaky foundations</li> <li>• Over- compensation to prove ‘good enough’</li> <li>• Inner chaos – outer achievement, inner panic</li> <li>• Confrontation avoidance – of self and others</li> <li>• Proud of label – seeks approval from ‘the elite’</li> </ul>

Peer Coaching is defined as a confidential process in which two or more professional colleagues work together to reflect on current practice; expand, refine and build new skills; share ideas; teach one another; conduct research; and solve workplace problems (Robbins, 1991). The peer-coached pathway developed in this paper is designed to support cohorts of self-selected insecure overachievers in professional services firms. The program presents a collaborative quest to refine, expand, and enhance skills, develop new insights and, through experimentation and reflection to develop secure, sustainable ‘ways of being and leading’. The aim is to improve cognitive and behavioural access to emotional and social competencies that enhance team, organisational and client relationships and business outcomes.

**Origins / History**

Origins of Adult Insecurity. Sources agree that adult insecurity has its origins in childhood. The origins and consequences of adult insecurity are examined with reference to parenting models (Lupu et

al., 2017, Berglas, 2006); attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Rutter, 1988; Siegel, 2001), developmental frames (Columbia Coaching Certification, 2017) and schema development (Young et al, 1994; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Fraley, 2010). There is agreement in the literature that parental attachment models form the basis of the archetype and the attributes shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Reference Comparison – Development of Insecure Overachiever Archetype*

Reference	Childhood Behavior	Parental Response to Child	Adult Attributes or Behaviors
<b><i>Development of Punishing Ego &amp; Superego</i></b>			
Ames & Archer (1987) Freud (1992)	Intelligent; delivers outstanding (academic) performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental ambivalence</li> <li>• Withhold positive feedback</li> <li>• Focus on errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extreme success drive</li> <li>• Need for External Validation</li> <li>• Inability to accept success</li> <li>• Perfectionism</li> <li>• Judgmental of self &amp; others</li> </ul>
<b><i>Development of Superiority Complex</i></b>			
Freud (1992) Adler (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Competition to feel superior</li> <li>• Fear of failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authoritarian</li> <li>• Overly critical</li> <li>• Competition with child</li> <li>• Limits positive reinforcement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressively competitive</li> <li>• Belittles others</li> <li>• Intellectual bullying</li> <li>• Defensiveness</li> <li>• Narcissistic grandiosity</li> </ul>
<b><i>Attachment Theory &amp; Schema Development</i></b>			
Vorhaus (1966) Bowlby (1973) Young (1994) Siegel (2001) Clane & Imes (1993)	Seeks approval in form of <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Love</li> <li>2. Support</li> <li>3. Success</li> <li>4. Praise</li> </ol>	Parental response to child – causes insecure attachment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Absent/detached</li> <li>2. Absent/abusive/overbearing</li> <li>3. Critical/unrealistic standards</li> <li>4. Love conditional on performance</li> </ol>	<b>Adult Schema</b> – formed through insecure attachment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emotional Deprivation</li> <li>2. Defectiveness</li> <li>3. Failure</li> <li>4. Unrelenting Standards</li> </ol> <b>Self-defeating behaviors</b> linked to schema <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-isolation, unwillingness to seek help</li> <li>2. Fear of rejection/discovery (Imposter phenomenon)</li> <li>3. Saboteur phenomenon</li> <li>4. Perfectionism, judgment</li> </ol>

Role of the Ego, Superego and Internal Critic. Freud (1992) notes that the development of an extraordinarily punishing superego in childhood leads to an extreme drive to succeed in adulthood.

Childhood origins include exceptional performance that meets with parental ambivalence, withholding of

positive feedback or drawing attention to the ‘one or two errors’ made on a ‘near perfect scorecard’ (even jokingly). In these cases the message transmitted to the child is, ‘*You can do better.*’ Childhood pressure from authority figures to perform translates into adult insecure overachievers who self-impose this pressure upon themselves.

When an adult insecure overachiever is placed in an intellectually competitive environment under the pressure of performance evaluation their superego delivers the same extreme drive to succeed to gain external validation mirroring their childhood experience (Berglas, 2006). The crucial insight is that validation is external although it is the adult’s harsh internal critic (superego) combined unreasonable standards from childhood (perfectionism) that delivers the internal message ‘*You can do better.*’ This ensures that success is never fully experienced. Insecure overachievers remain psychologically trapped. Having received inadequate success validation as children, they struggle to accept or believe positive external validation as adults. A fundamental feeling that their achievement is inadequate combined with a super-ego that focuses on ‘*What’s missing?*’ vs ‘*What’s been achieved?*’ generates internal conflict and stress (Freud, 1992; Dalsgaard, 2014). Behaviorally, insecure overachievers tend to focus on lower performance review scores and discount higher scores or objective success as ‘a fluke’ or undeserved (Ames & Archer, 1987). Positive feedback may also cause embarrassment; the reaction of an insecure child unused to praise. For insecure overachievers, outward perceptions of elitism or high status jobs are important external measures of success serving to validate self-worth (Berglas, 2006). It may also be that external measures like high status jobs seem reliable as once they are achieved they are unlikely to be withdrawn and provide hard evidence that the individual is “good enough”. These feelings are likely to be temporary as the ‘glow’ of the new role fades and a new set of higher achievement criteria reveal themselves.

Superiority and Inferiority Complexes. Adler (2013) states that insecurity in achievement is seated in childhood inferiority or superiority complexes. As children we experience a basic need to feel superior and work hard to avoid feeling inferior. Secure (parental) attachment leads to appropriate management of feelings of inferiority so that the need to feel superior is overcome as a natural part of development. In the

case of insecure attachment this does not happen. Powerful authority figures (dominant parents or carers) make it difficult for the child to securely address feelings of inferiority. This causes the formation of defensive complexes that may include narcissistic grandiosity. Adler (2013) indicates that dysfunctional inferiority or superiority complexes cause adults to feel inadequate. This '*Not being enough*' is a key attribute of the insecure overachiever and positive external feedback fails to silence the harsh internal critic (Freud, 1992; Berglas, 2006). Paradoxically insecure overachievers often gravitate towards organizations that rely heavily on performance evaluation. This is a double-edged sword for this archetype. On the one hand, this provides an opportunity to gain external validation. On the other it perpetuates stress and feelings of insecurity (fear of discovery) resonating with childhood experience. As a result, insecure overachievers in professional services firms may feel (literally) 'at home' in their jobs.

Attachment Theory, Core Schemas and Beliefs. A schema is a framework of controlling beliefs developed in childhood derived from a child's cognitive and emotional interpretation of itself in relation to its attachment figures and environment (Young & Klosko, 1994). Disrupted parental/adult attachments (Bowlby, 1969; 1973), a lack of adequate positive reinforcement, and cognitive 'failure' focus (Siegel, 2001) leads to the formation of powerful schemas (Young & Klosko, 1994). These childhood interpretations of the world generate repeating adult responses and a range of self-defeating behaviors.

Core childhood schemas are typically activated under stress. Here, the limbic system and relevant cognitive neural pathways activate psycho-physiological responses rooted in (insecure) childhood experience (Young et al. 1994; Siegel, 2001). In adults schemas may be triggered in situations bearing little resemblance to the childhood trigger situation but 'feel' the same. Core schemas present as a series of patterned behavioral responses reflecting childhood coping mechanisms that are effectively 'hard-wired' (Young & Klosko, 1994). Table 3 shows the four most relevant core schemas for insecure overachievers. These schemas are not an exhaustive list; Young & Klosko (1994) define seven more. Insecure overachievers may display any of these schemas depending on their developmental environment. Without self-awareness and effective intervention, schemas and self-defeating behaviors may be reenacted throughout adulthood and negatively affect performance at work and in life.

Table 3.

*Insecure Overachievers - Core Schemas (Young, J.E. & Klosko J.S. 1994)*

<b>CORE SCHEMAS OR LIFETRAPS – INSECURE OVERACHIEVERS</b>			
<b>Schema</b>		<b>Core Beliefs</b>	<b>Origins and Core Beliefs</b>
Emotional Deprivation	<i>Child</i>	<i>'I never get my needs met'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of (maternal) nurturing/presence</li> <li>• Deep sense of loneliness or detachment</li> </ul>
	<i>Adult</i>	<b>Harsh internal critic</b> <b><i>'I'm unlovable/unworthy'</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Helping' professions e.g. clients, patients</li> <li>• Avoids close relationships, deprives self</li> </ul>
Defectiveness	<i>Child</i>	<i>'I'm worthless.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absent parent leaves, child blames self</li> <li>• Abusive parent abuses, child blames self</li> <li>• Over-critical parent figure points out 'flaws'</li> <li>• Internal sense of 'being a disappointment'</li> </ul>
	<i>Adult</i>	<b>Harsh internal critic</b> <b><i>'I'm not good enough (a fraud).'</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fears/expects rejection</li> <li>• Fears 'discovery of flaws'; impostor syndrome</li> </ul>
Failure	<i>Child</i>	<i>'I'm not as good as others.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical parent with overly-high standards</li> <li>• Internal sense of 'falling short' (school, work, sport)</li> <li>• Belief of failure relative to peers</li> </ul>
	<i>Adult</i>	<b>Harsh internal critic</b> <b><i>'I'm a failure.'</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tends to self-sabotage and create failure</li> </ul>
Unrelenting Standards (Perfectionism)	<i>Child</i>	<i>I'm never good enough.'</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental love conditional on performance</li> <li>• Parental model high/unrealistic standards</li> <li>• Shame, criticism used if expectations not met</li> <li>• Perfectionism compensates for feeling defective, deprived, or like a failure</li> </ul>
	<i>Adult</i>	<b>Harsh internal critic</b> <b><i>'I'm a disappointment (to myself/others).'</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High standards, judgment (of self &amp; others)</li> <li>• Perfectionism; striving for excellence</li> <li>• Emphasis on money, status, order, achievement etc. at expense of happiness</li> </ul>

Emotional Deprivation is a common insecure overachiever schema. Parents may be physically and/or emotionally absent (Young & Klosko, 1994) or parental work may take precedence over emotional connection in 'high performance families' (Lupu et al, 2017). In both cases, the child feels inadequately (often maternally) nurtured. Adults with an emotional deprivation schema experience a harsh internal

critic: *'I'm unlovable (or unworthy)'* and may be drawn to jobs in professions that provide positive reinforcement, demonstrable public outcomes and/or enhanced social status. This includes medicine, nursing, social work, psychiatry, counseling, and professional services such as consulting, banking, law and accounting. All these careers carry a strong results focus; described as 'giving back' or 'having impact'. Success in such fields provides objective proof of individual value. Adults with an emotional deprivation schema may also display a learned pattern of emotional detachment with their co-workers – task vs people focus. This manifests as an unwillingness to seek support and give and/or receive empathy (Young & Klosko, 1994). It can lead to feelings of isolation that reinforce the schema (*'I'm unlovable (or unworthy)'*). These behaviors may be reflected in the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) ratings for empathy, emotional self-awareness and inspirational leadership (Goleman et al., 2002).

Emotional Deprivation and Defectiveness schemas share traits where the child, and later adult, requires external validation to silence their internal critic (*'I'm unlovable/unworthy'* or *'I'm not good enough'*). Defectiveness has its origins in parental abuse, detachment or enmeshment where the child fails to develop secure sense of self (individuation), resulting in a strong need for external validation.

Unrelenting Standards and/or Failure schemas are common in overachievers reflecting insecure attachment. Both schemas are driven by an 'unattainably' high bar for success. In childhood, performance standards and expectations set by authority figures were unreasonable/unattainable. Children exposed to 'helicopter parenting' (over-involved, expectations-driven) may display these schemas. In all cases there is an ingrained cognitive bias to focus on *'What's missing?'* (e.g. marks on a test or performance review) or imperfections in achievements (*'What could have been done better?'*) while ignoring or downplaying positive outcomes. Success is never fully experienced and validation, no matter how positive, fails to silence the internal critic. In adulthood the internal critic reflects the voice of the parent or authority figure(s) (*'I'm not as good as everyone else.'*) or (*'I'm a disappointment to myself/others.'*). The critic is comparative and externally focused. Adults with these schemas strive for perfection to avoid failure (real or perceived) and/or being *'discovered a fraud'*. Without awareness or intervention they remain trapped

in a repetitive cycle. To mitigate an internal sense of falling short they push harder to achieve success (drive), ignore positive feedback (schema), feel they are failing (low self esteem) and drive harder to avoid this. This increases stress, affecting relationships with self and others. Feelings of falling short perpetuate a sense of shame, guilt and fear of discovery resonant with childhood experience (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; McLeod, 2007). Over time, these feelings may be buried or discounted but the underlying schema(s) can still drive the individual. Fear of discovery or ‘*feeling like a fake*’ despite success is the definition of the imposter phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978) or neurotic imposter syndrome (Berglas, 2006) and is a core characteristic of the insecure overachiever. Table 4 relates core schemas and resulting behaviors to insecure overachiever attributes.

Table 4.

*Insecure Overachiever – Attributes aligned with Schemas*

<b>DEFINITIONS AND DRIVERS OF ACHIEVEMENT</b>		
<b>Schema</b>	<b>Behavioral Characteristics</b>	<b>Archetype Attribute</b>
Emotional Deprivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tends to ‘helping’ professions e.g. clients, patients</li> <li>• Avoids close relationships, deprives self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation external</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>
Defectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fears/expects rejection</li> <li>• Fears ‘discovery of flaws’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imposter syndrome</li> <li>• Insecurity</li> <li>• Internal chaos</li> </ul>
Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tends to self-sabotage and fail</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External validation</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>
Unrelenting Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perfectionism; striving for excellence</li> <li>• Emphasis on money, status, order, achievement etc. (at expense of happiness)</li> <li>• High standards, judgment (of self and others)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive intelligence</li> <li>• Extreme drive/perfectionism</li> </ul>

Stress and Schema Activation. Schemas are activated under stress making insecure overachievers in professional services firms particularly susceptible. Goldsmith (2015) highlights the presence and unawareness of environmental triggers as a key barrier to adult behavior change and growth. In extreme cases triggered schemas cause an internal ‘reality’ at odds with the corporate environment. Case studies support this (Berglas, 2006; Kets de Vries, 2005). In such cases ‘A players’ effectively ‘implode’, may

leave their organization, abandon a successful career paths, orchestrate failure or take a lesser position thus living out their expectation of failure. Collectively these behaviors are described as ‘saboteur syndrome’ (Vorhaus, 1966). Understanding the challenges of the archetype and applying timely support offers an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for these individuals and their organizations.

Developmental Frames. While Attachment Theory and Schemas provide insights into behaviors and their childhood origins, developmental frames offer specific access points during coaching. Table 5 aligns nine developmental frames against the attributes and core schemas for insecure overachievers. The key insight is that while developmental frames offer insights into new lines of enquiry, schemas and attachment theory deliver an integrated picture of the underlying origin of the behavior. An insecure overachiever can present multiple developmental frames, especially under stress. At a ‘meta-level’ understanding frames and schemas may offer valuable insights for clients. For this reason, it is useful to be aware of the relationships that exist between them. Schemas also offer insights into the origin of self-defeating behaviors forming a basis from which to develop powerful ‘meta-questions’ and reframing. Observing or listening for ‘the child inside the adult’, related behaviors and coping strategies enables a coach to employ a deeper level of questioning during conducting situation analysis.

Table 5.

*Developmental Frames, Schemas and Insecure Overachiever Attributes*

<b>DEFINITIONS AND DRIVERS OF ACHIEVEMENT</b>			
<b>Developmental Frame</b>	<b>Behavioral Indicator</b>	<b>Insecure Overachiever Attributes</b>	<b>Possible Core Schema</b>
<b>Substantive</b> (Values, beliefs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong opinions</li> <li>• Strong (irrational?) emotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competitive success drive</li> <li>• Need for validation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Deprivation</li> <li>• Defectiveness</li> <li>• Failure</li> </ul>
<b>Outcome</b> (Achievement, results focus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future goals</li> <li>• Past achievements</li> <li>• Status</li> <li>• Not ‘in the moment’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive for success</li> <li>• Need for status</li> <li>• Low self esteem (Fear of discovery)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional Deprivation</li> <li>• Defectiveness</li> <li>• Failure</li> </ul>

## DEFINITIONS AND DRIVERS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Table 5. Contd.

### *Developmental Frames, Schemas and Insecure Overachiever Attributes*

<b>DEFINITIONS AND DRIVERS OF ACHIEVEMENT</b>			
<b>Developmental Frame</b>	<b>Behavioral Indicator</b>	<b>Insecure Overachiever Attributes</b>	<b>Possible Core Schema</b>
<b>Aspiration</b> (Legacy, Broad Outcome/Impact)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on broad set of interests or needs</li> <li>Thirst to leave a legacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have impact</li> <li>Help clients (client comes first)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional Deprivation</li> <li>Defectiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b> (Plan/How to?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concerned about ‘<u>how</u> to do’ vs ‘<u>what</u> to do’</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive success drive</li> <li>Risk mitigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unrelenting standards</li> </ul>
<b>Identity</b> (Story of Self related to Other)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on group identity (based on difference)</li> <li>Identifies with specific group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive success drive</li> <li>Low self esteem</li> <li>Strong need to belong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure</li> <li>Unrelenting standards</li> </ul>
<b>Characterization</b> (Other vs Self)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on defining others</li> <li>Informed by historical experience (interpretation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive success drive</li> <li>Low self esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure</li> <li>Unrelenting standards</li> </ul>
<b>Loss/Gain</b> (Risk vs Reward)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflects perceived risk and reward – self vs others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competitive success drive</li> <li>Low self esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure</li> <li>Unrelenting standards</li> </ul>
<b>Learner/Judger</b> (Mindset)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quick to judge ‘facts’ vs consider other perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defensive protection of self/ego</li> <li>Low self esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unrelenting standards</li> </ul>
<b>Saboteur or Evocateur</b> (Failure/Success Bias)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harsh inner critic</li> <li>‘Unable’ to take risks, enjoy relationships/success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low self esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Failure</li> </ul>

Achievement Motivation origins offer insights into how to support insecure overachievers under stress where schemas may be active. Achievement models are explored using the achievement goal framework (Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984). This references the role of ego in goal achievement (Elliot, 1999). Table 6 defines the three ‘psycho-behavioral’ models for goal achievement: the performance approach goal, performance avoidance goal and mastery approach goal.

Table 6.

*Definitions – Achievement Drivers*

<b>DEFINITIONS AND DRIVERS OF ACHIEVEMENT</b>			
<b>Authors/Sources</b>	<b>Key Terms</b>	<b>Definition &amp; Characteristics</b>	<b>Achiever Type</b>
Nicholls (1984) Dweck & Bempechat (1984) Dweck (1986) Dweck & Leggett (1988)	Performance Approach Goal <b>POSITIVE</b>	<i>Attaining</i> competence relative to others <b>External Focus - gain competence (achieve comparative positive outcome)</b> - Negative set of processes or outcomes - Withdraws effort in face of failure - Surface processing of study material - Decreased task enjoyment	Insecure Overachiever  Internal Focus or Under Stress
Ames & Archer (1987) Elliot (1999)	Performance Avoidance Goal <b>NEGATIVE</b>	<i>Developing</i> competence relative to others <b>External Focus - avoid incompetence (avoid comparative negative outcome)</b> - Negative set of processes or outcomes - Withdraws effort in face of failure - Surface processing of study material - Decreased task enjoyment	Insecure Overachiever  Internal Focus or Under Stress
	Mastery Approach <b>POSITIVE</b>	<i>Attaining</i> competence/task mastery for self <b>Self-determined Focus - attain task mastery or competence for its own sake</b> - Persistence in face of failure - Deep processing of study material - Enhanced task enjoyment	Secure Achiever  Insecure Overachiever Image/Outcome Focus

Secure Achievers display a mastery approach to achievement; meaning that they pursue learning, competence and achievement for its own sake and the sake of self-improvement. Their learning focus is separate from their sense of self-worth. In contrast, performance goal motivations (approach or avoidance) are comparative and may be related to activation of failure or unrelenting standards schemas. “Overachievement” is somewhat nonsensical for the secure achiever as there is no threshold by which overachievement is defined or required. Once a set of objectives has been achieved, there is satisfaction and freedom to leave one pursuit and commence another.

Insecure overachievers may appear to present a mastery approach goal consistent as this is consistent with organizational expectations. However under stress, if a core schema is triggered, achievement drive may shift from achievement '*for its own sake*' to an urge '*to prove oneself to others*' (to gain external validation). This changes the achievement motivation from the mastery approach to performance goal motivation. Here, competency is achieved through competition with or at the expense of others. Competitive success is a core attribute of the insecure overachiever. Even under stress, insecure overachievers may present a combination of performance and mastery approaches to goal achievement. This is not reflected in their reactions to facing failure (real or perceived) where those with an avoidant/approach performance goal motivation may tend to give up, insecure overachievers redouble their efforts possibly at the expense of relationships (task vs people focus), personal health and the feelings of others (Young et al. 1994). That said, under extreme or chronic stress insecure overachievers may orchestrate failure (saboteur phenomenon) to avoid the trigger situation (performance goal motivation). Feedback from clients and ESCI results confirms this and is also noted by Berglas (2006).

Insecure overachievers differ from secure overachievers, as their drive to overachieve aims to compensate for internal insecurity through delivering more than is required ('exceed expectations'). This suits professional services firms well (Daniel, 1993). Support for insecure overachievers combining stress management and awareness of schema triggers may serve to avoid self-sabotage under extreme stress.

Overachievement Bias. Table 7 shows achievement attributes of overachievers (Eliot, 2004; 2015). Secure overachievers are optimistic and validation is internal. They have innate secure self-confidence and expect success, spending little time dwelling on what didn't work, acting and exploring options despite obstacles. In contrast, insecure overachievers have a cognitive bias towards 'understanding failure'. Success is 'proved' by external validation (but not necessarily 'believed'). Goals, plans, and rigorous analysis serve to mitigate failure and risks. Professional services firms place a premium on problem solving, analysis, feedback and risk mitigation. 'Exceeds expectations' is a commonly used phrase to frame outcomes as successful or not feeding the insecure achievement bias of the archetype.

Table 7.

*Definitions – Common Habits of Secure and Insecure Overachievers*

Overachiever Attributes	SECURE	INSECURE
	Behaviours and Tendencies	
Work smart vs hard	‘Play’ at job	‘Strive/work’ at job; boil the ocean
Goal setting	Directional – avoid rigid goals Internal motivation	Goal driven, defined outcomes External motivation
Do vs Plan	Bias to action; incisive analysis	Bias to planning & careful analysis
Irrational Confidence	Self assured Internally validated	Dependent on external feedback, performance review and validation
Success Review	Minimal Cognitive bias towards ‘ <i>what went well</i> ’	Detailed Cognitive bias towards ‘ <i>where I failed</i> ’
Stress & Resilience	High resilience - minimises stress Uses daily rituals to de-stress Healthy self compassion	Low resilience Works through chronic stress Lacks self-compassion
Outcome Focus	Thrives on success – delivers outcomes Task vs people focus	Strives for success – deliver ‘impact’ Task vs people focus
I + Team	Thinks exceptionally, teaches others	Thinks exceptionally, tells others
Drive to Achieve	Driven by self-belief	Driven by fear of failure/discovery
Risk Bias	Views risk equivalent to reward Comfortable with uncertainty	Tends to be risk averse Risk assessment and analysis critical

**Related Concepts**

Emotional and Social Skills Competency Inventory (ESCI). The ESCI was used to investigate emotional and social patterns for the ‘insecure overachiever’ archetype. It comprises twelve competencies that may be used to differentiate outstanding from average performers. Competencies divide into two groups: relationship with/to self and relationship with/to others and four clusters: 1) self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Cognitive intelligence is an entry requirement in professional services firms (Daniel, 1993). Today, emotional and social competencies are widely accepted as differentiators of ‘great’ and ‘good’ leaders (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). As client relationships are core to professional services business models (and therefore ROI), understanding ESCI patterns for insecure overachievers offers insights for competency building and support.

Figure 1.

*Aggregated ESCI Results – Professional Services n=29*

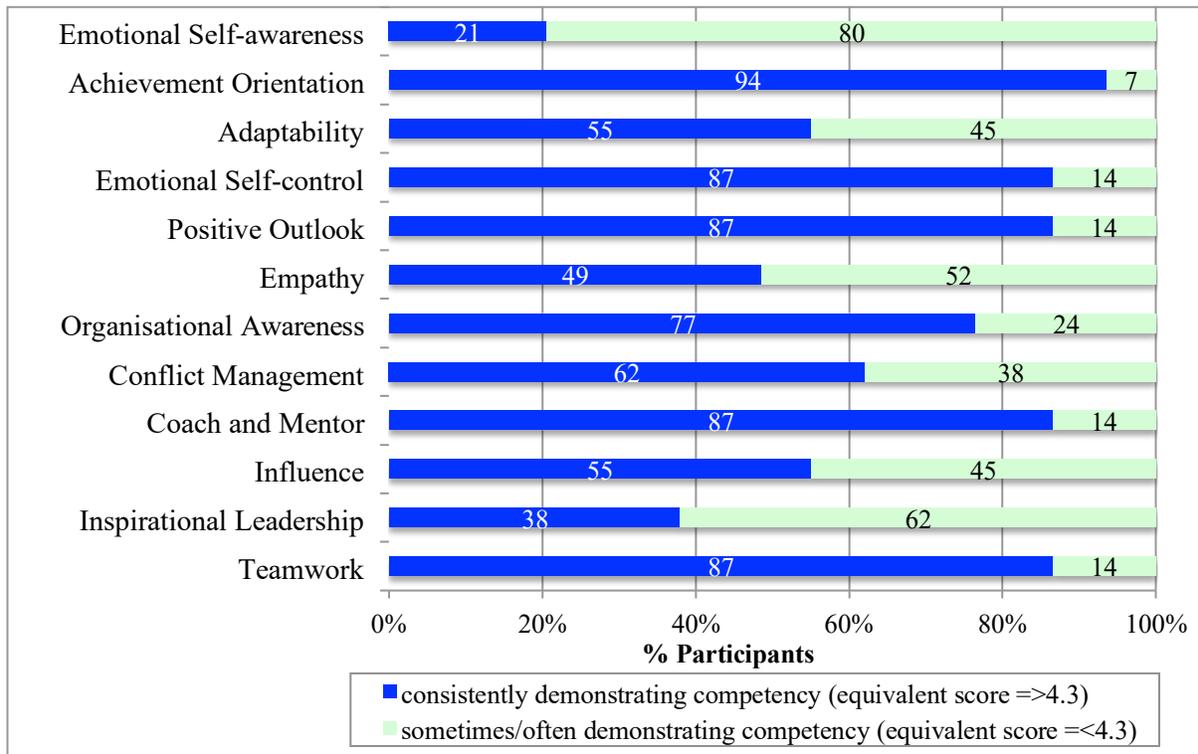
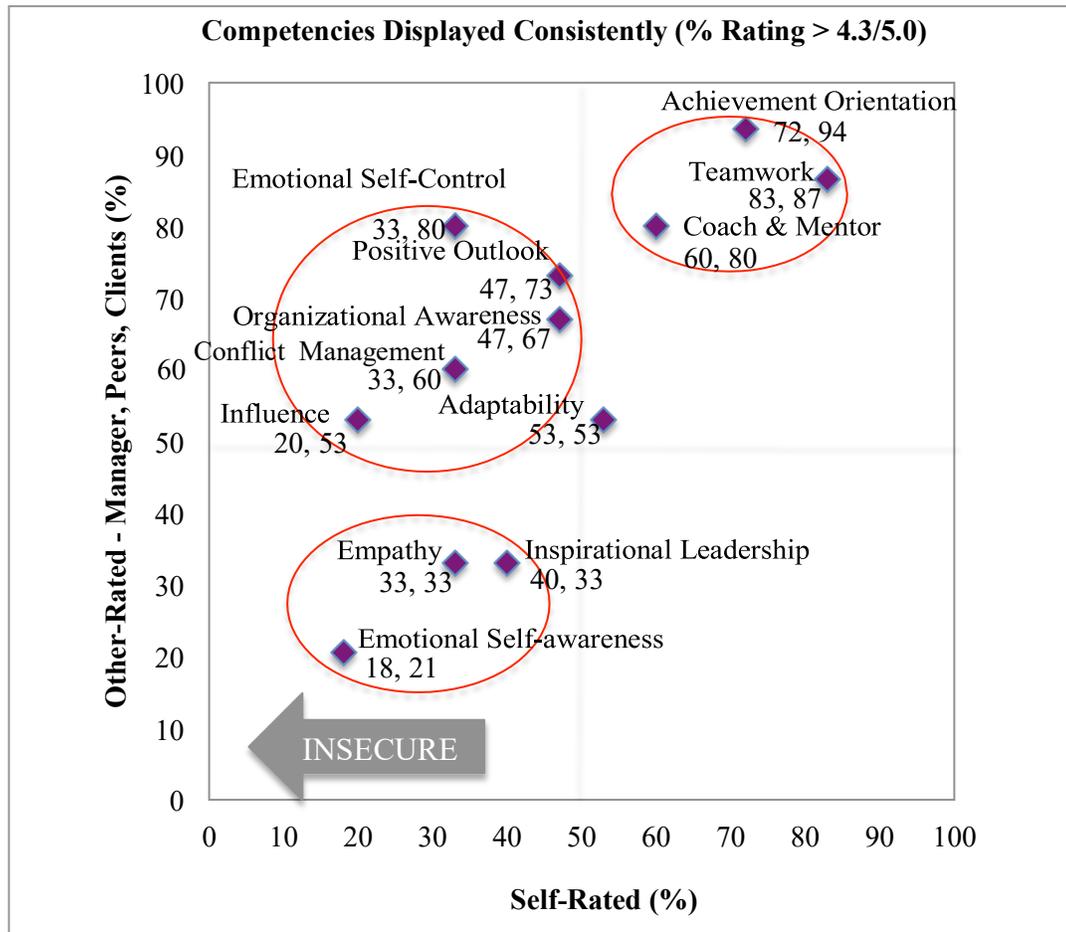


Figure 1 shows inconsistent, lower ratings in three core competencies: emotional self-awareness, empathy and inspirational leadership. These competencies relate to tapping into an authentic set of emotions in self and in relation others. Lower ratings are suggestive of a link to two core schemas: Emotional Deprivation and Defectiveness that interfere with secure relation to self and others (Young, 1994).

Figure 2 compares self-rating with ratings from others (client, manager, peers combined) and shows that individuals underrate themselves in ten of the twelve competencies vs external raters. This suggests a strong negative perception of own performance consistent with high stress, insecurity and triggered schemas. It reveals a possible disconnect between internal feelings and the successful, 'under control' perception created for others. Individuals may experience internal distress at tightly managing external perception while fearing discovery, as supported by Dalsgaard (2013).

Figure 2.

ESCI Results – Competency Self Ratings vs Other Ratings in Professional Services n=29



These results show a large disparity between individual ratings for Emotional Self-control (33%) compared with a high external rating of 80%. This may be indicative of the inner chaos referred to by Dalsgaard (2013) where the individual employs extreme self-control to manage stress while compromising or ignoring functional feelings of stress to maintain an organizationally acceptable mask of control. Such an internal-external disconnect is consistent with the neurotic imposter syndrome (Berglas, 2006). Repressing internal (di)stress can become habitual and result in a degree of emotional detachment consistent with task vs people bias and resonant with detached parenting models. This would resonate with low Emotional Self-awareness ratings caused by habitual detachment. In schema analysis such a state is referred to as the ‘detached protector’ where there is a cognitive disconnect between thoughts and

feelings (Young, 1994). This pattern is also inauthentic and might explain the lower ratings for inspirational leadership where authenticity is a key trait (Kruse, 2013).

The classic insecure overachiever attributes, drive and the need for external validation, are reflected in high ratings for Achievement Orientation and the external ‘helping/supporting’ competencies: Coach & Mentor and Teamwork. Achievement Orientation delivers the highest consistency scores of all the competencies (self 72%; other 94%). Coach & Mentor (60%, 80%) and Teamwork (83% 87%) are rated high both by individuals and others. The developmental pattern of insecure overachievers providing help or ‘having impact’ in the hope of receiving external validation is consistent with the Emotional Deprivation schema. It also should be noted that ‘Teamwork’ is an explicit evaluation category on professional services performance reviews and for this reason may attract special performance focus.

Pathway Development & Intentional Change Theory. Intentional Change Theory (ICT) is built around the theory of adult self-directed learning (Boyatzis, 1999; Goleman, 2011; Boyatzis, 2006; Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006) and underpins the coached pathway developed in this paper.

ICT comprises five stages of discovery:

1. Discovery of ideal self and personal vision (dream)
2. Discovery of real self, comparison to ideal self and assessment of strengths and weaknesses
3. Creation of a learning agenda and plan to achieve the vision
4. Experimentation and practicing new behaviors, thoughts, feelings, and/or perceptions
5. Trusting support from ‘resonant relationships’ to fully experience and process new learning

Our laser peer-coached pathway builds on the five stages of discovery and learning to offer a basis for growth for insecure overachievers. The aim is to develop a sense of ‘intentional security’ leading to sustainable achievement in high stress work environments (and broader life).

Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors (PEA and NEA). Our pathway leverages the neuroscience that underpins intentional change. As humans we are wired to search our environment for threats to survival. Perceived threats stimulate the amygdala in our ‘primitive brain’ activating the neural pathways of the task positive network (TPN). The sympathetic nervous system, that governs our

physiological response to threats preparing our bodies for ‘fight or flight; (freeze or faint)’, reacts within microseconds (Boyatzis, 1999). Our physical field of vision reduces to  $\sim 70^\circ$ , stress hormones are released, pulse rate increases, breathing shallows and immune function is impaired. This ‘stress state’ occurs well before our higher brain (pre-frontal cortex) engages to evaluate the situation. Together these responses describe the arousal of the negative emotional attractor (NEA), Table 8. This ‘stress arousal state’ may be tracked by measuring heart rate variability (Morales et al, 2015).

The reaction of the limbic system to perceived threats precedes the engagement of the higher brain (pre-frontal cortex) by milliseconds. When the higher brain engages it generates cognitive threat assessment, problem solving and evaluation. However, our bodies may already be in a state of ‘fight or flight; (freeze or faint)’. The engagement of the amygdala and primitive emotional responses ahead of cognitive processing is termed the ‘amygdala hijack’ (Goleman, 2011). This goes some way to explaining feelings of panic, anxiety, physical reactions and ‘emotional outbursts’ experienced under stress. An out-of-proportion response to stress (at work) may signal an amygdala hijack and triggering of core childhood schema(s). The stressful situation being experienced resonates with an earlier stress situation that triggers a core schema, defensive coping strategies and (possibly) self-defeating behaviors.

The opposing physiological recovery state (‘rest and digest’) is governed by the parasympathetic nervous system (Boyatzis, 1999). This relates to the stimulation of the neural pathways of the default mode network (DMN). This is the antagonistic neural pathway to the task positive network; one pathway operates to exclude the other. In this state, the body and mind recover and recharge; field of vision expands to  $270^\circ$ , heart rate stabilizes and resting physiological processes resume. In this state the positive emotional attractor (PEA) is aroused (see Table 8). This state supports opportunity generation and is a necessary precursor for behavioral change (Boyatzis, 1999; Goleman et al, 2002).

Table 8.

*Characteristics of the Positive and Negative Emotional Attractors (PEA and NEA).*

Positive Emotional Attractor – PEA	Negative Emotional Attractor – NEA
Default Mode Network (DMN)	Task Positive Network (TPN)
Parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)	Sympathetic nervous system (SNS)
Focus on...	Focus on...
Ideal Self (how you see yourself)	Real Self (how others see you)
Strengths, opportunities, dreams	Gaps, weaknesses, threats
Possibilities, dreams, optimism, hope	Problems, expectations, pessimism, fear
Learning agenda, excitement	Performance improvement ‘shoulds’
Resonance	Dissonance, annoyances
<b><i>THRIVE</i></b>	<b><i>SURVIVE</i></b>
<i>Almost all desired behavior change starts in the PEA</i>	<i>Sustained stimulation of the NEA leads to chronic stress and poor outcomes</i>

Employing the PEA facilitates effective intentional change. There are several ways to do this cognitively. Any effective change program incorporates some of these methods.

Table 9.

*How to Stimulate the Positive Emotional Attractors (PEA and NEA).*

<i>PEA Stimulants include...</i>	<b>Actions</b>
Mindfulness	Focus on what is...(beautiful, joyful, ‘good for the soul’)
Playfulness	Honor your inner child through playfulness
Hope	Take intentional actions consistent with your dreams
Humor	Lighten the mood with laughter, comedy
Stroke a (furry!) pet	Cats, rabbits, dogs, ferrets etc.
Listen to music	Put your headphones on; turn your brain off!
Walk in ‘nature’	Take in the fresh air: at the beach, round the block, to the park!

## Summary of Major Findings

- Insecure overachievers are a valuable source of talent for professional services firms based on their high cognitive intelligence and psycho-emotional drive to succeed and ‘deliver impact’.
- The archetype is best defined by its attributes: above average cognitive intelligence, extreme drive to succeed competitively (exceed expectations), a deep need for evidence-based elite external validation and status driven by compromised self-esteem and an inner ‘fear of discovery’ (imposter syndrome).
- The archetype has developmental origins characterized by four schemas each accompanied by a harsh internal critics, and two well-documented syndromes; including:
  - Emotional Deprivation – *‘I’m unworthy’*
  - Defectiveness – *‘I’m not good enough’*
  - Failure – *‘I’m not as good as others’*
  - Unrelenting standards – *‘I let myself/others down’*
  - (Neurotic) Impostor phenomenon – *‘I’m a fraud’*
  - Saboteur syndrome – *‘Look, I am a failure’*
- Schemas triggered under stress result in compromised relationships to self and others. This is accompanied by self-defeating behaviors such as unwillingness to seek help, self-imposed isolation (anxiety and depression), fear of discovery/failure, approval seeking and a negative cognitive bias towards feedback and positive external validation.
- Insecure overachievers display unbalanced self-perceptions backed up by ESCI analysis including:
  - Consistent underrating of own performance vs ratings by others (ten of twelve competencies).
  - High rating for ‘externally-focused competencies’: Achievement Orientation (Drive), Teamwork, and Coach & Mentor (helping in order to gain validation).
  - Low rating for ‘internally-focused competencies’ such as Emotional Self-awareness, Empathy, and Inspirational Leadership that is based on secure relation to self and others.

Together these are indicative of some of the known ‘unbalanced’ behaviors of the archetype

- The upside of this archetype for employers is
  - Extreme drive to succeed and exceed expectations: generation of client results ‘no matter what’; often at the expense of self, health, and relationships (task vs people focus).
  - Insecure drive to over-deliver to gain external validation, positive feedback, career progression, external ‘trappings’ of success, improved status compared with others.
  - High cognitive intelligence (problem solving, drive to solution) that differentiates professional services employees from their clients and is the basis for wealth generation and ROI.
- Challenges of the archetype for employers include
  - High potential for stress and burnout caused by unbalanced drive to succeed/exceed expectations.
  - Potential self-sabotage (saboteur phenomenon) when validation needs are unmet.
  - Leaving the organization due to fear of failure or discovery (imposter phenomenon), disbelief in positive validation, assumption of failure where none exists, inability to manage stress/distress, independent decision to ‘cut losses’ and leave.
  - Fractured client relationships caused by drive to over-deliver (task vs people bias). Pressure on clients that may not subscribe to the archetype (and organizational) norms and find themselves judged and under excess pressure to adopt new work ethic and results bias.
  - Negative impact on client relationship and perceptions. Trading-off high cognitive intelligence for emotional and social competencies indicated by low Emotional Self-awareness, Empathy and Inspirational Leadership ESCI ratings (revealing insecure relation to self and others).
- A laser peer-coached pathway offers a clear opportunity to explore patterns of behavior and beliefs common to the archetype and support insecure overachievers to change these patterns.
  - Peer cohorts offer a supportive environment for sharing, learning, insight generation and co-designing new ways of being and leading, and strengthen professional networks.
  - The program leverages Intentional Change Theory and contemporary neuroscience to build awareness of negative and positive emotional attractors (NEA/PEA) and harness the PEA as an important path to experimentation, learning and practice.

## **Application and Implication for Coaching Practice**

This paper explores the insecure overachiever archetype, and its attributes, benefits and challenges for employers. A laser peer-coached pathway is offered to enable professional services organizations better support to their insecure overachiever 'A players'. This pathway has been developed in response to a pilot conducted within professional services clients.

Understanding the internal world of the insecure overachiever is the crucial building block in building an effective support pathway. This includes understanding any core schemas that may be at play affecting individual beliefs and behaviors that affect performance under stress.

As a core attribute of the archetype is cognitive intelligence, reflection on objective data (stress evaluation and ESCI ratings) is a useful entry point to create curiosity and a window to experimentation. Awareness is key to change. Participant awareness of self-defeating beliefs and behaviors affords an opportunity to explore how these may affect performance (and happiness). Setting a clear overarching intention (dream/hope) provides a powerful framework for exploration and experimentation and is consistent with arousing the PEA. Based on participant awareness of their real and ideal self-adoption of a weekly commitment and a 'new way of doing' experiment challenges fixed ways of thinking, being and doing. This is carried out in the context of 'what matters most' to the individual (their dream) within the context of the organization.

Assessments are used to engage participants in self and group reflection. This includes two stress assessments and the ESCI.

Stress Assessment. Acute stress is evaluated using the Holmes & Rahe Stress scale (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Miller & Rahe, 1997; Selye, 1956) to reveal any acute life stressors (birth, death, divorce) that are in play. Ongoing (chronic) work-related stressors indicated by the balance between sympathetic vs parasympathetic nervous system activation is examined using HRV monitoring. This enables participants to visualize objective data on how stressors and their stress responses affect performance. This may also be reflected in ESCI scores for empathy and emotional self-awareness. Group awareness of the unwanted effect of stress on performance affords an opportunity to explore self-

compassion. (Self) compassion has been observed to be an under-used skill for insecure overachievers and is consistent with low empathy ratings on the ESCI. It is also consistent with Emotional Deprivation and Defectiveness schemas where ‘care’ is directed externally and the self is ignored (unlovable or unworthy). Reversing this pattern through awareness and experimentation with (self-)compassion (consistent with the arousing the PEA) is a powerful access point. This exploration generally falls in Week 6 of the Pathway. Compassion is an underused skill for this archetype where drive to achieve and gain external validation are extreme, often at personal cost.

Peer Coached Pathway - Structure and Content. Peer support is crucial in facing and challenging core schemas or beliefs. When tackled alone stress generally increases, there is a sense of increased isolation that reinforces a general tendency of this archetype to avoid asking for help.

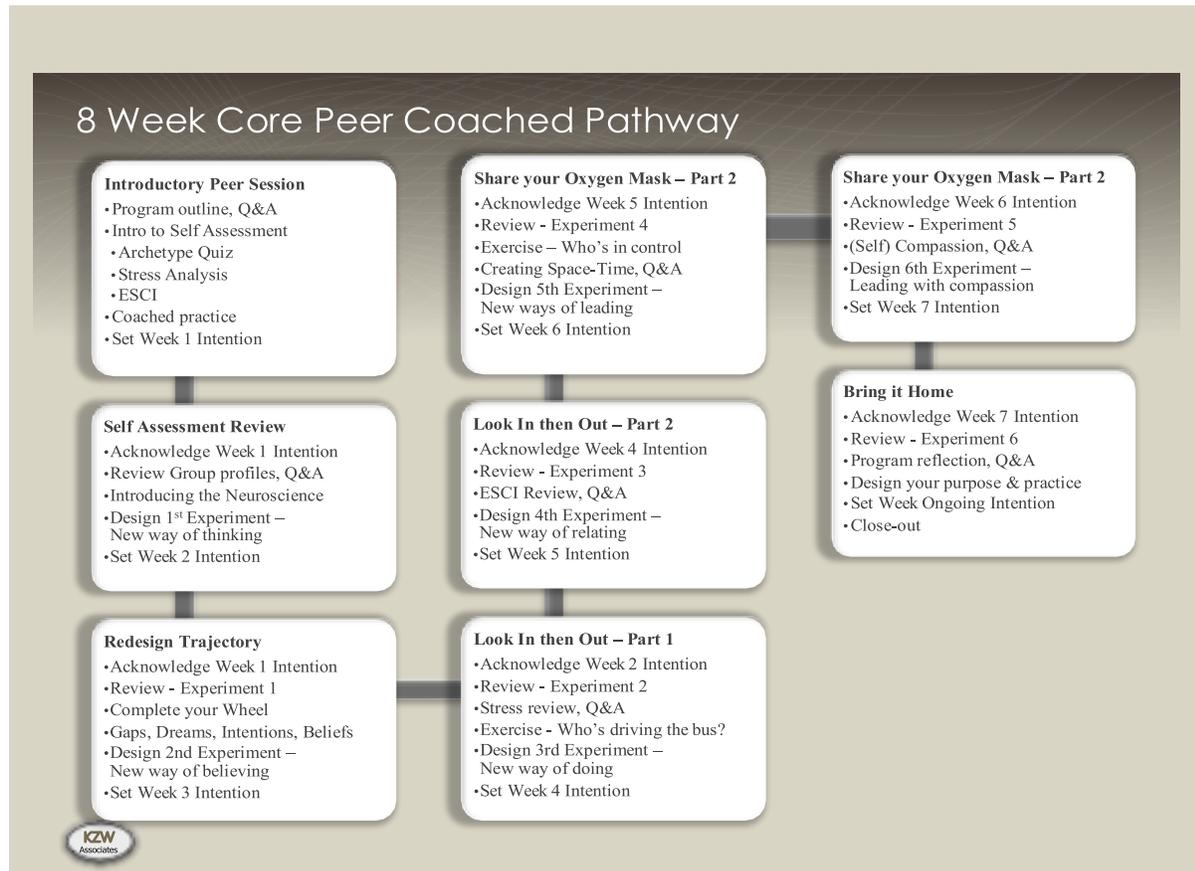
A co-creative pathway is a powerful way to enable A players to learn from each other in an ‘elite’ cohort built around safety, trust and shared experiences. This plays to a need to feel safe and amongst equals. Participants ‘draw their own map’ to achieve their intentional outcome (dream) and achieve this through reframing and experimentation with others.

The Program combines group and one-to-one coaching sessions. Group sessions comprise four parts: introduction and reflection, new perspective gained through a learning topic, experiment design and intention setting for the coming week. Each session follows the natural form of the coaching process from context, through content to conduct. The overall pathway follows the pattern of discovery consistent with intentional change theory with opportunities for discovery, insight, experimentation, learning and success.

One-to-one sessions offer additional support, personal review and insights from reports and analysis (stress reports: acute life events and chronic stress assessment using heart rate variability); an archetype quiz (supports identification of core schemas via beliefs); and the ESCI (competency strengths that can be built on to address challenges). The overall pathway and a detailed breakdown are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3.

*8 week Laser Peer Coached Pathway for Insecure Overachievers*



Enhancing Guiding Principles. This section reviews how the peer-coached pathway relates to the CCCP guiding principles.

Focus on the Client's Agenda. The Pathway brings together a cohort of 'A players' from professional services firms who are experiencing challenges or are at a common transition point and self-select as insecure overachievers. The pathway aims to support clients in challenging their ways of thinking, being and doing. It focuses strengths that can be used to address areas of struggle, stress or feeling stuck through comparative coaching towards an ideal outcome (dream). Each client shares their 'story' and develops their 'dream' or core intention. Every action from that point on is related to the intention/dream. Group support supports client accountability for commitments and intentions. One to one sessions afford an opportunity for coach and client to check alignment of actions with the client agenda.

Building Commitment through Involvement. Pathway design supports this through weekly intention setting and experimentation to keep clients on track in the context of their dream. Weekly reflection and group sessions build commitment both to the cohort and to individual growth.

Earning the Right. Peer coaching is built around the cohort working to support each other. The more vocal members of the cohort tend to ‘share’ first and these early demonstrations of openness effectively ‘give permission to participate’ to those who are less forthcoming. The group dynamic blurs the coach’s need to ‘earn the right’ as comfort levels within the cohort increase over time. The coach acts as a moderator inviting the cohort to share and question as well as asking brief, insightful questions. One-to-one sessions offer a further opportunity to support and based upon the client’s experience in the cohort.

Core Competencies. The Pathway utilizes all elements of the coaching process and core competencies. This is critical to successful Pathway delivery. Alignment of the Coaching Process with the elements of the Pathway is shown in Table 10.

Developmental Frames need expansion beyond those described in the core competencies and mental models. Schemas are included as they go deeper than the developmental frames introduced. Whilst impostor and saboteur frames are included, the four core schemas identified are indicative of this archetype offer rich insights into the relationship between self and others and challenges that may exist. This is important in informing the design of personal experiments that address schema-driven beliefs, thought processes and behaviors common to this archetype under stress.

Catalyzing Transformation. Transformation of beliefs and behaviors is challenging. It is crucial to find a ‘sticky’ entry point to engage clients to enable growth and experimentation. The defining attribute of the archetype: cognitive intelligence provides such an entry point. High cognitive intelligence can manifest in resistance and skepticism even if clients have self-selected. Practice suggests that a defined process and timeframe combined with observational ‘hard’ data and scientifically rigorous contemporary neuroscience engages the cognitive bias of the archetype. Data related to self and others provides an intriguing basis for engagement increasing client willingness to explore and experience growth.

Table 10.

*Mapping the Peer Coached Program to the Coaching Process*

Coaching Process & Tasks	Peer Coached Program Content/Week	Outcome
<b>Entry &amp; Contracting</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Inquire intentions, challenges</i></li> <li>• <i>Surface hopes &amp; concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Clarify expectation, intention</i></li> </ul>	<b><u>Week 1 - Introduction</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program &amp; Cohort Introduction</li> <li>• Establish reasons for joining</li> <li>• Q&amp;A; clarify concerns, questions</li> <li>• Set program intention (dream)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify purpose</li> <li>• Define personal Intention(s)</li> </ul>
<b>Developmental Frames</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Clarify relation self to others</i></li> <li>• <i>Determine capabilities</i></li> <li>• <i>Build capacity for growth</i></li> </ul>	<b><u>Week 2 - Self Assessment</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to archetypes/schemas</li> <li>• Introduction to neuroscience</li> <li>• Archetype Quiz (archetype, schemas)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build self/group awareness, schemas</li> <li>• Explore ways of thinking/ perceiving</li> </ul>
<b>Situation Analysis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identify questions for data collection &amp; feedback</i></li> <li>• <i>Co-create data collection</i></li> <li>• <i>Diagnose situation</i></li> </ul>	<b><u>Weeks 1 – 3 - Assessment &amp; Trajectory</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wheel of Life - ‘what is’ vs ‘dream’</li> <li>• Acute &amp; Chronic Stress analysis (Holmes &amp; Rahe Stress Scale; HRV tracking)</li> <li>• ESCI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection</li> <li>• Early insights - stress, current trajectory vs dream</li> <li>• Intentions vs gaps</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Invite to review feedback</i></li> <li>• <i>Urge clients to interpret</i></li> <li>• <i>Facilitate hunches re. disparities</i></li> </ul>	<b><u>Weeks 4 &amp; 5 - Look in then Out</u></b> Discuss & review (group & 1-2-1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress reports</li> <li>• Group &amp; individual ESCI</li> <li>• Explore strengths &amp; areas to build</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New insights into cause &amp; effect, cost &amp; benefit</li> <li>• Insights into self-defeating behaviors</li> </ul>
<b>Exploring options</b> <i>Imagine future possibilities</i> <i>Practice - feed-forward to explore possible futures</i> <i>Prompt cost-benefit analysis</i>	<b><u>Weeks 6 &amp; 7 - Share your Oxygen Mask</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use insights, explore new ways of doing</li> <li>• Understand effects of limiting beliefs</li> <li>• Explore self-compassion as a tool</li> <li>• Co-create new lenses to test</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New ways of leading, self-care, creating space, tapping into the PEA</li> </ul>
<b>Planning</b> <i>Integrate insights, define focus</i> <i>Co-create goals and plan</i> <i>Reaffirm intentions, align values &amp; beliefs</i>	<b><u>Weeks 1-8 – Planning Experiments</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design experiments to explore new ways of leading, self-care, creating space and tapping into the PEA</li> <li>• Align with overall intention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly intention and experiment aligned with personal program intention (dream)</li> </ul>
<b>Action Strategies</b> <i>Help discover ongoing learning</i> <i>Challenge &amp; support</i> <i>Celebrate success &amp; growth</i>	<b><u>Weeks 1-8 – Review Actions Taken</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group reflection &amp; feedback on success of weekly experiments</li> <li>• Reflect on alignment with beliefs</li> <li>• Acknowledge progress &amp; learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared reflections</li> <li>• New insights/options</li> <li>• Identified challenges</li> <li>• Celebrated successes and learning</li> </ul>
<b>Growth &amp; Renewal</b> <i>Create self-reflection</i> <i>Translate insight to commitment</i> <i>Find ways to self-renew</i>	<b><u>Weeks 1-8 – Reflections &amp; Insights</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal journals</li> <li>• Group reflection</li> <li>• Share &amp; support progress &amp; learning</li> <li>• New commitments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflections &amp; Insights</li> <li>• New options to act</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>
<b>Execution</b> <i>Hold attention on commitment</i> <i>Recognition teachable moments</i> <i>Model flexibility, adjustment, adaptation of actions</i>	<b><u>Weeks 1-8 – Review &amp; Tweak Outcomes</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback on commitments &amp; actions</li> <li>• Share learning moments &amp; review</li> <li>• Tailor actions to be more effective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Redesigned weekly experiments</li> </ul>

## Conclusions

The insecure overachiever archetype is developmentally complex. A laser peer coached Program offers employers an opportunity to proactively support time-poor insecure overachiever 'A players' to sustain performance, increase feelings of personal security, improve client relationships, and protect ROI.

Awareness must be developed and attention paid to underlying schemas common to this archetype. These are more complex than developmental frames although they reference saboteur and impostor syndromes. Schemas are core to personal identity and must be handled carefully. They may be usefully explored through questioning perceptions and sharing stories of stressful situations that yielded less than ideal outcomes. A 'like' cohort of insecure overachievers enables a safe environment for exploration. Understanding the relationship between stress, triggers and core schemas is useful for experimentation and intention setting to address self-defeating behaviours.

Understanding contemporary neuroscience, the task positive and default mode networks (TPN and DMN), negative and positive emotional attractors (NEA and PEA) provide cognitive entry points for action and experimentation. Cognitive engagement of the PEA is a useful skill in reframing and questioning perceptions and uncovering the activity of schemas under stress.

Programs to support skills and individual growth in insecure overachievers must utilise the tenets of intentional change theory. These include discovery of the real and ideal self, mapping to an intentional resonant individual dream, experimenting and learning through involvement and practice, and reaching out for help and support. The Pathway laid out in this paper is built upon these adult learning foundations.

Experience to date indicates that cognitive engagement through data and reflection is an effective approach

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