

Conference of the Birds — Programme Brief for L&D / HR Approval

This document is designed to support your internal budget request. Adapt as needed for your organisation's L&D approval process.

Programme Summary

Programme	Conference of the Birds Executive Leadership Programme
Provider	Francisco Baptista, Executive Coach (ICF PCC)
Duration	6 sessions over 6 months (90 minutes per session)
Format	Small-cohort facilitated sessions (6–8 senior leaders, mixed industries)
Delivery	Virtual (Zoom or client-preferred platform)
Target Level	Director and above
Investment	€2,950 per participant
Procurement	Priced within standard corporate purchasing card thresholds — no procurement process required in most organisations
Languages	English (French, German, Portuguese available on request)

Programme Purpose

The Conference of the Birds is a vertical leadership development programme for senior leaders navigating the transition from high-performing functional leader to enterprise-level leadership. It addresses a well-documented gap in traditional leadership development: the shift from *competence-building* to *meaning-making at scale* — what adult development theory calls the transition from the Achiever to the Construct-Aware stage.

Where most leadership programmes add skills, frameworks, and competencies (horizontal development), this programme surfaces the often-invisible operating patterns that shape how a senior leader makes decisions, manages complexity, holds polarities, and leads through ambiguity. Research from Robert Kegan (Harvard Graduate School of Education), Susanne Cook-Greuter, and Bill Torbert consistently shows that vertical development — increasing the complexity of a leader's meaning-making — produces measurably greater leadership effectiveness than horizontal skill acquisition alone, particularly at director level and above.

In the facilitator's practice data, director-level leaders enter coaching at the Achiever developmental stage — goal-oriented, high-performing, and effective — and are beginning to encounter the limits of that operating system. The programme is designed specifically for that transition point.

Business Case

The Problem This Programme Addresses

Senior leaders at director level and above often encounter a developmental plateau that traditional executive coaching and skills-based programmes do not resolve. Typical indicators include:

- **Retention risk among high-potential senior leaders.** Leaders who have outgrown their available development options disengage or seek external opportunities. Developmental growth is consistently cited as a top driver of senior leader attrition.
- **Succession pipeline readiness.** Leaders identified as succession-ready may demonstrate strong functional expertise but struggle with the systemic thinking, polarity management, and adaptive leadership required at the next level.
- **Leadership effectiveness under complexity.** Leaders operating from a single habitual leadership strategy — control-oriented, perfectionist, or conflict-avoidant — face diminishing returns in VUCA environments. The strategies that drove earlier success become liabilities at enterprise scale.
- **Cross-functional and stakeholder leadership.** Senior leaders who rely on expertise-based authority encounter friction when required to influence without formal control, lead peers, or operate across organisational boundaries.
- **Isolation at the transition point.** Leaders who have undertaken significant personal development frequently report a specific challenge: they return to a team, a culture, or a stakeholder environment that has not undergone the same development. Sustaining new leadership behaviour without a peer cohort holding the same frame is a documented barrier to lasting change.

Why Traditional Approaches Fall Short

Most executive development investments target *horizontal development* — adding skills, frameworks, and competencies to a leader’s existing operating system. The Conference of the Birds targets *vertical development* — expanding the operating system itself. The distinction matters:

Horizontal Development	Vertical Development
New skills and frameworks	New ways of making meaning
Increases what the leader <i>knows</i>	Increases the complexity the leader can <i>hold</i>
Effective for early-to-mid career transitions	Required for senior-to-enterprise transitions
Delivered through training and skills coaching	Delivered through developmental coaching and peer cohort work
Measurable through competency assessments	Observable through leadership behaviour change, stakeholder feedback, and decision-making quality

Research from the Center for Creative Leadership (Nick Petrie, *Future Trends in Leadership Development*), Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, and Torbert & Associates shows that fewer than 15% of leaders in most organisations operate at the post-conventional developmental stages where systemic thinking, paradox tolerance, and adaptive leadership become available. This programme directly targets that transition.

Why a Peer Cohort Rather Than Individual Coaching

Individual executive coaching produces insight. The Conference of the Birds is designed to take that insight further — and to make it durable.

In individual coaching, the leader does the work and returns to an organisational context that has not changed. New awareness must be translated, often in isolation, to people who do not share the developmental frame. The cohort removes that translation requirement. Participants work alongside peers — from different industries and companies — who have crossed the same threshold. The peer context accelerates progress and provides an accountability structure that survives between sessions and after the programme closes.

Programme Structure

Three Core Development Territories

Territory	Description	Organisational Relevance
Polarity thinking	Developing capacity to hold competing priorities simultaneously — performance and pause, control and delegation, advocacy and inquiry — without forcing premature resolution	Leaders who can hold polarities rather than oscillate between them make more sustainable decisions and create more stable team cultures
Internal leadership pattern awareness	Identifying dominant leadership operating styles (IFS-informed methodology) — the driven achiever, the problem-solver, the conflict-avoider — and developing the capacity to act from choice rather than habit	Reduces reactive leadership behaviour; increases range of response under pressure; improves stakeholder relationships
Self-directed development practice	Practices that sustain developmental awareness between sessions and after the programme closes, when no external structure is present	Ensures behavioural change becomes embedded rather than dependent on ongoing coaching engagement

Session Arc

Phase	Sessions	Focus
Witness	1–2	Self-awareness, leadership pattern identification, cohort foundation
Descent	3–4	Polarity work, protective patterns, the beliefs driving leadership behaviour

Phase	Sessions	Focus
Return	5–6	Integration, choice-based operation, embedding practices for the long term

Between Sessions

- Guided reflective practices (15–20 minutes per week)
- Applied observation exercises linked to real leadership situations
- Peer accountability within the cohort

After the Programme

When the six months close, the cohort continues to meet quarterly — at cost — for participants who wish to maintain the developmental container. This is optional and not included in the programme fee.

Facilitator Credentials

Name	Francisco Baptista
Credential	ICF Professional Certified Coach (PCC) — the most widely recognised coaching credential globally
Specialisation	Adult development, ego development theory (Cook-Greuter), subject-object methodology (Kegan), Internal Family Systems (IFS) informed practice
Experience	1,544 coaching sessions with 342 senior leaders across 14 countries
Industries served	Pharmaceuticals, financial services, technology, insurance, FMCG, professional services, healthcare
Languages	English, French, German, Portuguese
Methodology	Developmental coaching approach drawing on Kegan’s subject-object methodology, Cook-Greuter’s ego development framework, and IFS-informed parts work. Across 110 director-level engagements, the techniques used in this programme — polarity mapping (80% positive outcome rate), internal pattern identification / parts work (86%), naming protective leadership patterns (82%) — consistently produce measurable behaviour change.

Cohort design

Deliberately mixed by industry. The developmental patterns addressed (habitual leadership strategies, polarity challenges, identity-driven decision-making) are consistent across sectors — mixed industry cohorts allow leaders to see their own pattern more clearly in a context removed from their organisational dynamics

Expected Outcomes

For the Individual Leader

- **Increased self-awareness.** Identification and examination of habitual leadership strategies that limit effectiveness at senior levels — over-control, perfectionism, conflict avoidance, identity-driven decision-making.
- **Expanded decision-making range.** Capacity to hold multiple valid perspectives, tolerate ambiguity, and make decisions from a broader base than expertise or positional authority alone.
- **Improved stakeholder relationships.** Leaders consistently report improved relationships with peers, direct reports, and senior stakeholders following developmental work at this level. Team feedback reflects a shift from transactional to developmental leadership behaviour.
- **Greater resilience under pressure.** Increased capacity to self-regulate, recover from setbacks, and lead from a stable centre rather than reactivity — particularly relevant in reorganisation, transformation, and high-ambiguity environments.
- **Succession readiness.** Development of the systemic thinking, adaptive capacity, and relational maturity required for enterprise-level leadership roles.

Illustrative Outcomes (Anonymised, Director Level)

The following represent the kinds of shifts documented across director-level coaching engagements. All details have been anonymised.

- A director in the technology sector moved from personally absorbing all accountability for project risk — what is often described as “hero syndrome” — to distributing ownership systemically. *“I don’t need to be the one who solves everything.”*
- A director in financial services identified that years of tolerating organisational dysfunction had become a self-limiting strategy: *“My tolerance has been enabling the dysfunction and hurting me. Real leadership means confronting people with clarity.”*
- A director caught between two competing internal stakeholder groups rejected a binary identity that had been driving reactive leadership: *“I’m not playing for Business or IT. We are one team.”*
- A director in a cross-functional role stopped absorbing a difficult colleague’s behaviour as personal failure: *“He is how he is. I can only change my own behaviour, my attitude, my organisation of work.”* The shift from exhausting change-effort to self-directed focus was described as a relief.

- A director whose physical symptoms of stress had persisted for months shifted from conflict avoidance to setting clear boundaries. The physical symptoms resolved within the coaching period.

For the Organisation

- **Retention of senior talent.** Investment in developmental growth at director level directly addresses a primary driver of senior leader attrition: the absence of development options matched to post-achiever needs.
- **Leadership pipeline quality.** Participants develop the vertical capacity required for the organisation’s most complex leadership challenges — cross-functional leadership, transformation leadership, ecosystem thinking.
- **Cultural multiplier effect.** Leaders who have done developmental work at this level consistently shift how they lead their teams. The investment in one leader’s development extends into team culture, stakeholder relationships, and organisational influence.
- **Complementary to existing L&D investment.** This programme does not replace skills-based coaching, 360-degree feedback processes, or competency frameworks. It works at the developmental layer underneath those investments — increasing the leader’s capacity to use the frameworks already in place.

Alignment with Common Organisational Frameworks

Organisational Priority	How This Programme Addresses It
Leading through change and transformation	Develops capacity to hold ambiguity, manage polarities, and lead from centredness rather than reactivity
Building a coaching culture	Participants experience and internalise a developmental coaching stance — modelling it for their own teams
Self-awareness and emotional intelligence	Surfaces invisible operating strategies and builds the capacity to choose responses rather than react from habit
Systems thinking and enterprise leadership	Develops the meaning-making complexity required to operate across boundaries, influence without authority, and think systemically
Resilience and wellbeing	Addresses the root patterns driving overwork, perfectionism, and identity-driven exhaustion — rather than adding resilience techniques on top of unchanged behaviour
Diversity of leadership style	Expands each leader’s range beyond their default pattern, creating more adaptive and context-responsive leadership

If your organisation uses a specific leadership competency model (e.g., Leadership Circle Profile, Hogan, Korn Ferry, VACC), the facilitator can map programme outcomes to your framework on request.

Participant Profile

This programme is designed for leaders who:

- Hold director-level or equivalent responsibilities, with significant organisational scope
 - Have completed at least one round of executive coaching or structured leadership development
 - Are identified as high-potential, succession-ready, or navigating a critical leadership transition
 - Demonstrate strong functional performance but face development challenges that skills-based approaches have not resolved
 - Are willing to engage in reflective, cohort-based developmental work
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Logistics and Administration

Cohort size	6–8 participants
Industry mix	Deliberately cross-industry; no two participants from the same organisation
Session frequency	Once per month
Session duration	90 minutes
Platform	Zoom (or client-preferred platform)
Cohort cadence	Two cohorts per year — autumn (October start) and spring (March start)
Pre-work	1:1 intake conversation with the facilitator to confirm fit and establish individual focus (included in programme fee)
Certificate	Certificate of completion provided on request for CPD/CPE records
Confidentiality	All session content is confidential. No content, individual assessments, or session notes are shared with the sponsoring organisation without explicit participant consent.
Invoicing	Invoice provided for organisational billing. VAT where applicable.
Procurement	At €2,950, the programme fee falls within standard corporate purchasing card thresholds in most European organisations. No procurement or tendering process is required in the majority of cases.

How to Proceed

1. **Participant contacts the facilitator** directly or via the programme website.
2. **Intake conversation.** The facilitator holds a 30-minute conversation with the applicant to confirm mutual fit and discuss the organisational context.

3. **Organisational approval.** This document, along with the programme website, provides the materials needed for L&D or HR budget approval.
4. **Enrolment confirmed** on receipt of organisational purchase order or individual payment.
5. **Pre-programme intake** begins 2–4 weeks before the first session.

For questions about organisational sponsorship, cohort timing, or framework alignment, contact Francisco Baptista directly: francisco.baptista@gmail.com

Programme provider: Francisco Baptista / Conference of the Birds Credential: ICF PCC Last updated: May 2026