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Making the case for a developmental perspective

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Abstract:

This paper introduces the concept of action logics as increasingly complex and flexible systems of meaning making to the management field. It adds the developmental perspective (vertical transformation) to the training and development concept of growth as lateral expansion. It outlines the major shift from viewing people mostly as different types to also considering differences in the differentiation and integration of their meaning making capacity. First, there is a brief overview of the developmental approach, and the assumptions shared in the field of adult development research. Next the spiral Leadership Maturity Framework, and its measuring instrument are described, and the reader is walked through two examples of what it means to interpret the world from different actions logics. Finally the benefits of a developmental perspective are outlined. It is predicted that postconventional leaders can more flexibly and successfully tailor their interactions to the differing needs of those they work with to create greater capacity throughout the system.

"The Never Ending Quest: "At each stage of human existence the adult man (sic) is off on his quest of his holy grail, the way of life he seeks by which to live. At his first level he is on a quest for automatic physiological satisfaction. At the second level he seeks a safe mode of living, and this is followed in turn, by a search for heroic status, for power and glory, by a search for ultimate peace; a search for material pleasure, a search for affectionate relations, a search for respect of self, and a search for peace in an incomprehensible world. And, when he finds he will not find that peace, he will be off on his ninth level quest. As he sets off on each quest, he believes he will find the answer to his existence. Yet, much to his surprise and much to his dismay, he finds at every stage that the solution to existence is not the solution he has come to find. Every stage he reaches leaves him disconcerted and perplexed. It is simply that as he solves one set of human problems he finds a new set in their place. The quest he finds is never ending." (Clare W. Graves; http://www.clarewgraves.com/theory_content/quotes.html)

Different, but equal:

Different psychological assessments and insights about what makes for effective leadership, personal satisfaction and better teamwork have been around for a long time with new arrivals on the scene every year. Mostly these assessments look at how people differ from each other in terms of personality traits: We assess, for instance, people's type (MBTI, Enneagram), career preferences, teamwork, leadership, interpersonal, or learning style. By helping people understand these preferences for themselves and others, we hope to expand their behavioral repertoire and to help them work with and/ or manage others more effectively. In all of these measures we are assured that it really doesn't matter which style we prefer and which type we are. All are equally valid ways of being a human being. What does matter is how well an individual's styles fit the context and the task, and how well he or she can read and interact with people who have different preferences. The greater the capacity to read others' different styles and respond with skill, the better the outcome for everyone involved. We also notice that some people find it easier than others to both learn these distinctions and to modify their behavior to accommodate to others' processing preferences. This is so because they are more aware of their own behavior as well as more artful in dealing with their own and others' interior landscapes. Goleman's work (1995) regarding emotional intelligence speaks to these differences in level of competence and self/other awareness.

Different and better:

We suggest here that another way people differ from each other, the developmental stage, is as important and sometimes more so than how they differ in personality type and preferences. Argyris and Schön (1977), early advocates of organizational learning, brought the concept of mental models to management. They proposed a two level approach of adult reasoning, in which model II was not just different in style from model I, but better, more adequate for dealing with complexity and constant change. Model II reasoning is better than model I because it is more flexible, inclusive, long-term, and dynamic as well as less self-defensive, static and preprogrammed or automatic. Argyris and Schön (1977) argued that people's different mental models profoundly affect how they see others and how they interpret what they see, and therefore, what strategies and defenses they use to navigate work life. Senge (1990) introduced another two-level model. He distinguishes between conventional linear thought and systems thinking which resembles in many ways Argyris' and Schön's distinctions. Both Model II and systems thinking emerge after Model I and linear thought have been mastered. Both Argyris and Schön and Senge advocate that we should develop to the more complex forms of thinking outlined in their theories. They imply that the form emerging later is better than its predecessor in terms of behavioral flexibility and reasoning capacity.

The developmental perspective:

Even before that, Piaget (1954) had studied how children develop into young adults through many transformations while Maslow (1968) had investigated *The Farther Reaches Of Human Nature.* Beginning in the sixties, other psychologists (Loevinger, 1966; Kohlberg, 1969; Graves, 1970) began to focus on how adults develop from the baby's narrow, self-centered view of the world to the mature wisdom and powerful action of exemplary adults. These researchers showed that we can identify not just two different ways of adult meaning making, but several. Each meaning making system, world view, or stage is more comprehensive, more differentiated and more effective in dealing with the complexities of life than its predecessors. Hand in hand with creating new theories about adult development, these pioneers also designed measuring tools to assess differences in meaning making capacity. Drawing on many sources and on their extensive research in the 1960's and 1970's, Loevinger and Wessler (1970) created an effective and efficient measurement instrument to assess adults' stage. Their instrument, *The Washington University Sentence Completion Test* (WUSCT) is one of the most widely used and best validated in the field of personality assessment. It has been used in thousands of research projects worldwide.

Full-range developmental thinking has been slow to be integrated into the work place. Torbert (1987) was an early proponent of developmentalism applied to leadership and organizational change work. We will use his model and stage names below to outline the development of professionals because the Leadership Maturity Framework (LMF) is associated with the most finely-tuned, cost-effective and validated assessment tool (The Leadership Maturity Profile) in the field.

With the dawn of the 21st century developmental thinking is finally reaching a critical mass. It is now researched and applied at the leading edge of most professional disciplines. This is in response to a need for profound and rapid change. Much of the impetus to spread developmental thinking throughout society and to solve problems from a more developmentally informed perspective comes out of the Integral Institute, a think tank in Boulder, Colorado, led by Ken Wilber.

What do we mean by development?

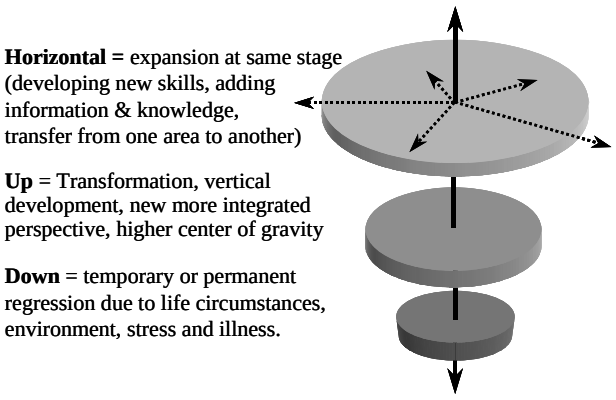
When we talk about development in the context of human development, we distinguish between lateral and vertical development. Both are important, but they occur at different rates. Lateral growth and expansion happens through many channels, such as schooling, training, self-directed and life-long learning as well as simply through exposure to life. Vertical development in adults is much rarer. It refers to how we learn to see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality. It describes increases in what we are aware of, or what we can pay attention to, and therefore what we can influence and integrate. In general, transformations of human consciousness or changes in our view of reality are more powerful than any amount of horizontal growth and learning.

Most learning, training and development is geared towards expanding, deepening, and enriching a person's current way of meaning making. It's like filling a container to its maximal capacity. We develop people by teaching them new skills, behaviors and knowledge and to apply their new competencies to widening circles of influence. Vertical development, on the other hand, refers to supporting people to transform their current way of making sense towards a broader perspective (see Figure 1).

Developmental theories provide a way of understanding how people tend to interpret events and, thus, how they are likely to act in many common and uncommon situations. Although

people may use several perspectives throughout the day, they tend to prefer to respond spontaneously with the most complex meaning making system, perspective, or mental model they have mastered. This preferred perspective is called a person's center of gravity or their "central tendency" in meaning making.

Figure 1 *Lateral or horizontal growth and vertical transformation*



The metaphor of climbing a mountain can serve as an illustration of what it means to gain an increasingly higher vantage point. At each turn of the path up the mountain I can see more of the territory I have already traversed. I can see the multiple turns and reversals in the path. I can see further into and across the valley. The closer I get to the summit, the easier it becomes to see behind to the shadow side and uncover formerly hidden aspects of the territory. Finally at the top, I can see beyond my particular mountain to other ranges and further horizons. The more I can see, the wiser, more timely, more systematic and informed my actions and decisions are likely to be because more of the relevant information, connections and dynamic relationships become visible.

Development in its deepest meaning refers to transformations of consciousness. Because acquisition of knowledge is part of horizontal growth, learning about developmental theories is not sufficient to help people to transform. Only specific long-term practices, self-reflection, action inquiry, and dialogue as well as living in the company of others further along on the developmental path has been shown to be effective.

In general, full-range human development theories share the following assumptions:

- Development theory describes the unfolding of human potential towards deeper understanding, wisdom and effectiveness in the world.
- Growth occurs in a logical sequence of stages or expanding world views from birth to adulthood. The movement is often likened to an ever widening spiral.
- Overall, world views evolve from simple to complex, from static to dynamic, and from ego-centric to socio-centric to world-centric.
- Later stages are reached only by journeying through the earlier stages. Once a stage has been traversed, it remains a part of the individual's response repertoire, even when more complex, later stages are adopted.
- Each later stage includes and transcends the previous ones. That is, the earlier perspectives remain part of our current experience and knowledge (just as when a child learns to run, it doesn't stop to be able to walk).
- Each later stage in the sequence is more differentiated, integrated, flexible and capable of optimally functioning in a rapidly changing and complexifying world.
- People's stage of development influences what they notice or can become aware of, and therefore, what they can describe, articulate, influence, and change.
- As development unfolds, autonomy, freedom, tolerance for difference and ambiguity, as well as flexibility, reflection, and skill in interacting with the environment increase while defenses decrease.
- A person who has reached a later stage can understand earlier world-views, but a person at an earlier stage cannot understand the later ones.
- Development occurs through the interplay between person and environment, not just by one or the other. It is a potential and can be encouraged and facilitated by appropriate support and challenge. The depth, complexity, and scope of what people notice can expand throughout life. Yet no matter how evolved we become, our knowledge and understanding is always partial and incomplete.

The Leadership Maturity Framework of human development:

The Leadership Development Framework (LMF) is one such full-range model of mental growth in adulthood that describes the stages of development from egocentric opportunism to wise, timely and world-centric action. Torbert (1987) first developed the contours of the LMF based on a creative synthesis of existing theory and his own original research and adaptation. At the same time, he collaborated with Cook-Greuter who revised and

expanded the WUSCT (1970) assessment tool to better capture professional subjects in organizational contexts. The Leadership Maturity Profile (LDP) goes beyond the original instrument in the range of mature worldviews it covers and in its much broader application. We use the LDP both as a diagnostic tool and as basis for feedback and integrally-oriented change work with clients and organizations.

The LMF is based on research that documents the human potential for life-long transformation. When applied to managers and leaders, the LMF provides a way of understanding how they tend to interpret events and, thus, how they are likely to act in a given situation or conflict. Although people may have access to several action logics as part of their repertoire, they tend to respond spontaneously with the most complex action logic they have available, or from their center of gravity. Under pressure and rapid change conditions, people often resort to behavior patterns from earlier stages. In contrast, moments of perceiving life in ways associated with stages much later than one's center of gravity are rare. These can be glimpsed during peak moments or temporarily manifested under ideal support conditions.

Overall, the LMF framework describes nine ways of adult meaning making. The LMF refers to stages as *action logics* because it focuses on how professionals tend to reason and behave in response to their experience. Most developmental theories also divide the full spectrum trajectory of human consciousness into four main tiers:

(1) Preconventional,
(2) Conventional,
(3) Postconventional,
(4) Transpersonal.

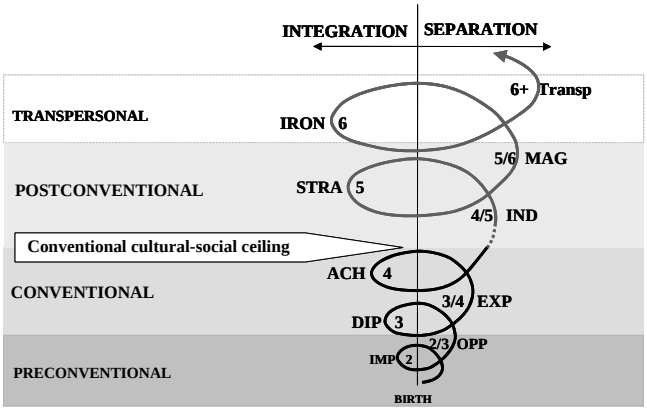
Despite the vast space open for development, most people in modern society function at the conventional stages (~75 to 80%). Only about 10% to 20% of adults demonstrate postconventional action logics. Transpersonal ways of meaning making are even rarer. This is not surprising because any society must rely for its smooth everyday running on a citizenry that works within its existing institutional structures and values. At the same time it is also needs visionaries who can anticipate and creatively adapt to changing contingencies and life circumstances. As the speed and reach of global change and challenge increase, it becomes more urgent for society that more people develop postconventional capacities.

In general, postconventional individuals are more likely middle-aged, more educated and/or experienced, and they have achieved higher levels of professional standing than their conventional counterparts. Developmentalists would interpret this to mean that people with later-stage action logics have achieved success for themselves and their organizations because of their capacity for more integrated and complex thinking, doing and feeling. They have a broader, more flexible and more imaginative perspective on the whole organization and its multiple contexts. They tend to cultivate relationships with many stakeholders, see promising connections and opportunities in novel places, and deal with problems in adaptive and proactive ways. Initial research with leaders who are at these postconventional action logics shows that their companies do better than those run by their more conventional counterparts. See Torbert (1987), Rooke et al. (1997).

Figure 2 depicts how the nine stages that are addressed by the LMF evolve through the four tiers of a full spectrum model of consciousness. However, only the seven most commonly encountered action logics in the corporate world will be referred to in the rest of this paper. These range from the preconventional Opportunist, through the conventional action logics of Diplomat, Expert and Achiever, to the postconventional stages of Individualist, Strategist and Magician (or Alchemist).

Table 1 gives a brief overview of each of the seven main action logics. It shows what rules each logic applies as well as the main perspective and focus of attention at each level. You can find more information about my work and applications of the LMF on http://www.cook-greuter.com/ and in a book by Torbert and Associates (2004) that offers many additional, more in-depth descriptions and case studies. The percentage distributions given in Table 1 are from my Harvard research study. They are reflective of a general adult population with subsamples drawn from many diverse occupations from artists to accountants, from college students to CEOs, from prisoners to priests.

Figure 2 *The spiral of development in the leadership maturity framework*



In general, every content or topic that can be considered is viewed and acted upon differently by people at different stages. Two examples pertinent to management and training serve to illustrate this point. A developmental perspective allows the manager to better align his or her interaction with the capacity of the receiver and to better account for various reactions and possible conflicts.

No matter how skillfully a superior tries to critique an Opportunist employee, any such attempt will be reacted to as a personal affront or threat to their sense of self and power. The aggressive Opportunist will fight back, argue, and blame something (bad luck) or others (so and so screwed up) for the failure, but never admit to having made a mistake or needing correction.

Table I *Brief overview of each of the seven main action logics*

Stage / Action Logic	**Main focus**	% adult population *n*=4510
Magician - deep processes and intersystemic evolution rules principles	Interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effects; transforming self and others	2.0
Strategist - most valuable principles rule relativism	Linking theory and principles with practice, dynamic systems interactions	4.9
Individualist - relativism rules single system logic	Self in relationship to system; interaction with system	11.3
Achiever - system effectiveness rules craft logic	Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals, success within system	29.7
Expert - craft logic rules norms	Expertise, procedure and efficiency	36.5
Diplomat - norms rule needs	Socially expected behavior, approval	11.3
Opportunist - needs rule impulses	Own immediate needs, opportunities, self-protection	4.3

Some examples of how different action logics matter

First, let's look at how someone's understanding and response to the concept of "feedback" changes with increasing development (see Table II)

Table II *How understanding and response to feedback change* with *increasing development.*

Magician	View feedback (loops) as a natural part of living systems; essential for learning and change; and take it with a grain of salt.
Strategist	Invite feedback for self-actualization; conflict seen as an inevitable aspect of viable and multiple relationships
Individualist	Welcome feedback as necessary for self-knowledge and to uncover hidden aspects of their own behavior
Achiever	Accept feedback especially if it helps them to achieve their goals and to improve
Expert	Take it personally, defend own position; dismiss feedback from those who are not seen as experts in the same field (general manager)
Diplomat	Receive feedback as disapproval, or as a reminder of norms
Opportunist	React to feedback as an attack or threat.

he more withdrawing type will try to avoid direct confrontation with the boss and instead manipulate the situation and other people behind the scenes in order to protect him or herself. Diplomats, on the other hand, tend to listen respectfully to any criticism, say "Yes, I understand," but meanwhile feel put on the spot and defensive as they want to please and fit in. They tend to avoid conflict at all cost and cannot yet reflect on their behavior and its consequences. In order to help Diplomats save face, feedback is often best given in concrete behavioral terms and in group settings without naming individuals.

Let's now look at what **methods of influence** people at different stages might use (Table III). To reiterate a basic developmental tenet, people at later action logics can understand people from earlier stages, but the reverse is not true. From the perspective of a Diplomat, an Achiever boss is a problem as soon as he or she asks for initiatives and independent decisions. That is precisely what Diplomat employees are not yet ready and capable of doing. Instead they desire to be supported, to follow rules and regulations, and to loyally uphold existing culture and practices. Diplomats will find Individualist leaders even more disconcerting as they provide less guidance and are likely to "break" the rules. Experts and Achievers also often find Individualist and Strategist managers strange because they often seem aloof or out of touch with the immediate, practical and action-driven concerns of their more conventional colleagues.

Table III *Methods* of *influence used by people at different stages*

Magician	Reframe, turn inside-out, upside-down; clowning; holding up mirror to society; often behind the scenes.
Strategist	Lead in reframing, reinterpreting situation so that decisions support overall principle, strategy, integrity and foresight
Individualist	Adapt (ignore) rules where needed; or invent new ones; discuss issues and air differences
Achiever	Provide logical argument, data, experience; make task/goal-oriented contractual agreements
Expert	Give personal attention to detail and seek perfection; argue own position and dismiss others' concerns.
Diplomat	Enforce existing social norms; encourage, cajole; require conformity to protocol to get others to follow.
Opportunist	Take matters into own hands, coerce, win fight

Different strategies, structures and tools and different kinds of interventions are necessary both to support people at the level at which they are already operating and to facilitate transition towards greater integration and wider worldviews.

In turn, the level of development of the managers, consultants, and coaches constrains what they can see, understand and how effective they are in their efforts to help others develop and mature. While Individualists generally appreciate diverse views & are eager to listen to many voices, only Strategists can take a fully developmental perspective on self, others and organizations, and comprehend the complex dynamics of interrelated systems. Strategist leaders are also better equipped than those with earlier action logics to engender transformational change in others and to make timely and effective decisions based on input from multiple constituents, short and long term strategic considerations, and to do so under conditions of pressure and ambiguity.

Benefits of a developmental perspective:

As I have tried to show with a few illustrations, a developmental perspective is useful in many ways. It aids the work in organizations on multiple levels. It often provides a more powerful explanation for misunderstandings and conflict among people than personality type and style alone. People with identical personality profiles on the MBTI, for instance, can differ by several levels on a developmental scale. Goleman (2000) offers an interesting hybrid between style and stage using different levels of emotional intelligence to describe six leadership styles. His research showed that leaders with the greatest emotional intelligence (high self-awareness, self-management and social skills) – that is those who would also likely test high on a developmental test – had the most positive effect on working climate. His "coercive" style has much in common with the Opportunist action logic while the "authoritative" style is comparable to the Strategist capacity.

Having the additional information about a person's center of gravity within the developmental spiral can make a significant difference in how we interact with them, how we support, challenge and coach them. It also affects what we can reasonably expect of them and, in turn, of ourselves as their leaders, coaches and coworkers.

A developmental perspective allows for a better match between people and their functions and tasks. Experts, for instance, do especially well in situations where they can exercise their expertise in routine contexts or excel at applying their knowledge to improve existing technology or procedures, be that as an officer of an agency or as a nuclear engineer in a laboratory. Individualists are best employed in situations where looking at underlying assumptions and diverse thinking benefit the organization. Often they do best when they are left alone to ponder multiple approaches and to come up with novel solutions. Strategists will be particularly effective when a longer-term perspective is needed and the diverse claims of many stakeholders have to be reconciled through collaborative inquiry. Generally, postconventional leaders will be in a better position to guide their organizations to successfully change and adapt in complex environments and through turbulent times than conventional leaders.

In conclusion, I submit that the developmental perspective offers a framework for understanding and assessing the current capacity and the growth potential of individuals, teams, and whole organizations. It allows the creation of development plans that are tailored to the clients' specific needs and growing edge. An ideal plan supports both horizontal consolidation and expansion, *and* it facilitates transition to the next, more complex meaning making stage. If we align an intervention with the client's level of preparedness for insight, self-reflection, and for modifying his or her behavior based on their action logic not just their "type" or "style," both intervener and recipients will be better served. While developmental testing may be used in the UK for selection purposes, there are constraints in the US against employing it for that reason. However, there are many instances where training professionals as well as internal & external consultants can make major contributions by looking at individuals, executive teams, groups and whole organizations through the lens of a developmental framework. Developmentally tailored interventions can go a long way towards positive results. They are able to address long-standing conflicts not otherwise amenable to change.

Finally, while lateral development and skill training have been the traditional domain of Training and Development, developmental interventions deliberately aim at both lateral growth and vertical transformation as necessary correlates to life-long learning and adaptation to the ever greater demands of a rapidly changing global society.

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