

EXPLORING THE IMPLICATIONS OF A HIDDEN DIVERSITY  
IN GROUP RELATIONS CONFERENCE LEARNING:  
A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

by

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DCM, S.J.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Presently, we do not understand enough about the developmentally diverse ways that people experience learning in a structured holding environment. The intention behind this research was to increase our knowledge of the implications of developmental diversity in order to enhance the educational outcomes of Group Relations Conferences (GRC). This knowledge can further participant's capacity for learning and leading in the conference setting, as well as in their own organizations and institutions. The topic of my research, therefore, was participant experience of the holding environment (Daloz, 1986; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Heifetz, 1994; Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) comprised of the supports and challenges provided by the GRC. Specifically, I explored how 18 participants' way of making meaning in a Tavistock-style Group Relations Conference setting was related to their assessed stage of maturational development, focusing on the psychosocial supports and challenges in the setting and in the individuals themselves.

By supports and challenges, I am referring to both internal and external aspects of what Winnicott (1965) described as the holding environment. External supports might include safe physical boundaries, the presence of caring people, time to reflect on

experience, etc. External challenges might include the presence of conflict, diversity, fast-paced change, multiple or overlapping roles, etc. Internal supports might include a resilient and self-authoring sense of one's own capacities for perspective-taking, boundary management, initiative in action, etc. Internal challenges might include a variety of anxieties, fears, and personal limitations. It is essential to be cognizant of the need for and an awareness of the existence of these factors to create an effective environment for adult learning and development.

Group Relations Conferences are experiential learning settings that are used to help recreate the complex social environments that characterize many of our organizations and institutions (Rice, 1965). These environments include complex social diversity (including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.), the potential for multiple levels of conflict (interpersonal, inter-group, inter-systemic), varied roles (formal and informal), and challenging tasks (e.g., forming groups, managing boundaries, working with informal and formal authority, making sense of complex organizational relationships, etc.). The intention of these conferences is to help participants—typically people in leadership and management positions and students of organizational psychology—to understand the conscious and unconscious influences that affect the way they exert their authority as leaders and to consider the way these influences affect both organizational performance and change (Rice, 1965).

While the Tavistock model of experiential learning includes attention to the many forms of social diversity described above, it does not recognize the implications of developmental diversity, namely, the variety of ways that people make meaning of their experience based on diverse “ways of knowing” (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b) or

developmental action logics (Torbert, 2003, 2004). Distinct from the way education literature describes adult learning styles (Kolb, 1984) or multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), these diverse ways of knowing are understood by adult developmental theorists to be determined by the cognitive and affective capacity that a person has available as he or she progresses through distinct stages of growth (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004). These ways of knowing are distinct from what we commonly refer to as I.Q. in that they do not describe what people know, but rather how they know. In other words, diverse ways of knowing, or as I refer to them in this study, developmental action logics (Torbert, 2004), describe distinct phases of evolving epistemic complexity and capacity. This evolving epistemic or meaning making capacity determines the degree to which adults can make sense of and manage the various relational and occupational demands they encounter, and the way in which they handle challenges like conflict and uncertainty (Kegan, 1994).

The lack of attention to developmental differences amongst conference members has several potential implications. It is unlikely that the conference designers or staff sufficiently account for the diverse needs of adult learners as they participate in this challenging setting. I hypothesized that this gap in attention within the model's theoretical foundations and design not only affects the way that participants learn in the conference setting, but also affects the way that the model does or does not succeed in meeting its goal of developing individuals who can navigate through and master the complex organizational and social challenges of our times (Rice, 1965).

I propose that the lack of attention to developmental diversity is a significant gap in the Group Relations Conference as a leadership education setting, and that the use of

the adult developmental perspective is an effective solution to this problem. I made the research problem explicit, with attention to several factors from theoretical and practical perspectives, including the results of recent research. Finally, I provide a brief description of my conceptual framework, methodology, and assumptions, and I present the proposed rationale and significance of my research. In the section that follows, I describe the larger context in which I situate this research, the field of leadership for change.

### Context: Leadership for Change

Leadership oriented toward change is necessary for creative, constructive solutions to systemic organizational and social problems characterized by complexity and ambiguity (Kotter, 1996; Senge, 1990; Senge et al., 2004). In contrast to conventional management for maintained or improved performance, leadership for change is considered from a number of perspectives, for instance: transformational (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Burns, 2003) or vision-driven leadership; timely and transformative leadership (Torbert, 2003, 2004) adaptive leadership for situations and problems for which there is no known solution (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and generative leadership, which creates conditions for the emergence of creative responses to complex challenges (Senge, Jaworski, Flowers & Scharmer, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006). It might be said that leadership, in contrast to management, is largely oriented toward change (Kotter, 1996), and that change usually entails the engagement of uncertainty and the unknown.

One contemporary expert suggests that among the variety of challenges facing contemporary leaders, the capacity to deal with the ambiguity of the unknown in a creative and constructive manner is an essential characteristic that distinguishes great

leadership (Wilkinson, 2006). The creative or adaptive<sup>1</sup> engagement with complex problems entails approaching situations with a willingness to suspend assumptions and judgments long enough to learn and do something new (Heifetz, 1994). However, the kind of learning required for challenges of change leadership is quite distinct from the accumulation of knowledge that we might typically associate with the educative process (Freire, 1970; Freire & Freire, 1973).

Leadership for organizational or social change calls for transformational learning (Elkins, 2003), a process that entails the critical examination of the assumptions and biases that guide our behaviors and the willingness to see opportunities for growth within the often painful and disorienting dilemmas of our time. The transformational learning process involves coming to critical awareness; identifying the constricting limits of old assumptions; reframing and reformulating them to permit more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrating perspectives; and then acting on the basis of these new perspectives (Mezirow, 2000).

What kinds of opportunities exist for such learning and for the ongoing development of leaders who face the challenges of change? There are a few settings in which experiential participation is the potential basis for this kind of leadership education involving the challenge of mental models and the biases, assumptions and behaviors that follow from them. The Group Relations Experiential Learning Conference, as sponsored by the Tavistock Institute and The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems, is one model setting where I have had many intense and fruitful leadership/learning experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Adaptive leadership involves the engagement of problems for which there is no known technical solution, and so involves a learning process for leaders, followers, and key stakeholders (Heifetz, 1994).

### Group Relations Experiential Learning Conferences

In my opinion, one of the most effective means of coming to understand the tensions and opportunities generated by social complexity, the conflict among diverse social and political perspectives, and the anxiety provoked by uncertainty, is through participation in Group Relations experiential learning conferences in the style of the Tavistock Institute of Social Relations (Rice, 1965). The Tavistock tradition of Group Relations training, which began in the United Kingdom after WWII and continues around the world through a variety of affiliate institutions<sup>2</sup>, explores the collective complexity of interdependent relationships constituting social systems, using the group as the unit of analysis, interpretation, and intervention rather than an individual or interpersonal focus. In addition to the unique focus on the group or system as the unit of analysis, this tradition also pays particular attention to the covert or unconscious dimension of organizational life, including the dynamics catalyzed by racial, ethnic, and religious diversity; differences of gender and sexual orientation; and tensions across the boundaries of authority, role, and task (Bion, 1961). In fact, in a review of the past several years' conference titles in the United States, the issue of organizational and social diversity and its relationship to leadership and authority constitutes the most popular thematic focus for Group Relations Conferences in the country.

Conferences based on this theory and tradition of training use an experiential learning model to explore the intense challenges involved in managing differences within social systems (Rice, 1965). The means for this exploration involves the establishment of a carefully bounded environment where participants can observe their own behaviors as

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<sup>2</sup> In the United States, the affiliate is the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems (A.K.R.I).

they engage and explore the challenges associated with leadership in complex, diverse, and often highly ambiguous circumstances. Conferences are usually constructed in such a way as to mirror the social diversity within society and organizations, consciously recreating a microcosm of the world in order for individuals within the collective to become aware of and study their own behavior (Silver, 2001).

According to Silver (2001), these conferences have the potential to promote transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000) by creating conditions for critical inquiry into one's assumptions and mental models as well as heightened self-awareness of one's behaviors as part of the unconscious group dynamic (Klein & Riviere, 1983). Indeed, it is the espoused intention of many conference designers to promote transformation through learning in the service and support of leadership for change (Fraher, 2004). As the literature review to follow describes, there are studies that indicate that significant learning does occur in this setting (Errichetti, 1992; Silver, 2001).

#### A Conference Design Blind Spot: Developmental Diversity

Although, as mentioned, issues of diversity constitute the primary focus of most Group Relations Conferences, there is little, if any, consideration given to either the existence or the implications of what Drago-Severson (2004a) calls developmental diversity, or "the new pluralism" (p. 154). By developmental diversity, I mean that many groups, organizations, and communities consist of members whose developmental maturities span a range in their capacities and competencies for making meaning. For example, Drago-Severson (2004a) describes how people's ways of knowing influence the way they see themselves, the way they make sense of their roles and responsibilities, and

how each person has qualitatively different capacities for self-reflection and perspective-taking. As a result, adults need developmentally appropriate supports and challenges in order to learn and grow (Drago-Severson, 2004a). Furthermore, developmental diversity has implications beyond learning and growth; in fact, the variety of ways in which we perceive the world and make meaning influences every significant dimension of our human experience, including the way we engage, understand, and respond to the organizational and social challenges of our times.

While differences of developmental maturity and ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b) are an important “hidden” form of diversity to acknowledge within any social system, they are only now being recognized in social systems theories and research. The two studies mentioned later in this chapter (Martynovych, 2006; Silver, 2001) are the only examples that apply adult developmental theory as a heuristic tool for interpreting the implications of developmental maturity for the participants’ experience within the groups, and only one (Silver, 2001) explores the implications for Group Relations Conference setting.

### Problem Statement

In light of scarce treatment in the literature, and on the basis of findings in recent research (Silver, 2001), the lack of attention to developmental diversity in the Group Relations Conference setting calls for further exploration and study. As the Group Relations Conference setting is based in part on therapeutic assumptions drawn from

psychoanalytic theory, it might be understood that it is consciously designed as a form of holding environment (Drago-Severson, 2004a; Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965), an educational and development context constituted by psycho-social dimensions that offers the supports and challenges essential for all the participants' learning. However, this is not always the case. Gustafson and Cooper (1990) suggest that the context provides ample challenges without always conveying to participants that they are being supported or "held" in a way that feels sufficiently secure for them to take the risks necessary to learn or to try something new. At times, the group context fails to offer the supports necessary, and the level of learning for the participants is compromised (Gustafson & Cooper, 1990).

This occasional failure may be due, in part, to assumptions about the developmental capacities of the members, specifically, that they all possess the capacities of mature adults. In my experience, some of the "adult" competencies implicitly expected of conference participants include: the capacity to self-authorize, to self-regulate physical and psychological boundaries; the ability to adjudicate conflicting roles; and the ability to grasp, even partially, the systemic reality of the conference. The earliest conference designers worked on the assumption that participants were pioneering professionals in the social sciences who were interested in and capable of exploring the frontiers of the psychodynamic realities of groups and organizations (Bion, 1961; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985; Rice, 1965).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the early conference memberships, the majority of U.S. conference participants today appear to be graduate students in their 20s and 30s.

However, while some attention has been given to the external or social dimensions of the holding environment within the GRC setting,<sup>4</sup> little consideration has been given to the psychological or internal dimension of the individual holding environment. In other words, little consideration has been given to the internal resources that participants draw upon to support their learning, especially in the absence of a perceived sense of external support. Presuming that participants do utilize internal resources, how might these resources differ depending on a particular participant's stage of developmental maturity? These questions call for further study.

Conditions of anxiety caused by fear of conflict, diversity, and uncertainty can undermine all but the most resilient participants' capacity to engage the task, to learn, and to exercise leadership (Langer, 1989). Even though one of the intentions of the GRC setting is to help members reflect on their behaviors under such conditions (Rice, 1965), the perceived sense of scarce resources can provoke adults into regressive and non-adaptive patterns of behavior in the group context. Without sufficient supports, for example the intervention of consultant staff, it is possible that anxieties and defensive routines that members experience could subvert their learning experience (Balint, 1992; Cranton, 1994). At times, this perceived lack of support even results in conference casualties—members elect to leave a conference because the conditions are too overwhelming for them to remain present, let alone to open themselves to learning at that time.<sup>5</sup> For these theoretical and practical reasons, I engaged in research exploring the

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<sup>4</sup> I refer here specifically to the work of Dr. Terri Monroe, RSCJ, at the University of San Diego, who considers the conference setting in this light.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that these participants do not learn, or that their decision to leave the conference is void of meaning for the rest of the participants' learning.

implications of developmental diversity of the participants and the different needs for appropriate supports and challenges each adult has for his/her learning.

While one prior dissertation (Silver, 2001) studied the experience of Group Relations Conference participants using Kegan's (1982, 1994) constructive developmental theory, it did not focus on the way that participants' experience the holding environment with the psycho-social supports and challenges available to them for their learning in that setting. The author of the dissertation does suggest that further consideration should be given to exploring the impact of developmental bridges (Silver, 2001)—educational interventions that help assist participants in risking new interpretations and behaviors within the conference setting.

### Purpose Statement

As a way of addressing this gap in attention to the pluralism of ways of knowing in the GRC setting, I used adult developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004) to explore the implications of this hidden form of diversity, including the relationship between the participants' stages of adult development and their conference experience. My purpose was to understand the experience and learning of 18 participants in a Group Relation conference, focusing on the psychosocial supports and challenges in this setting. I believed that understanding the developmentally diverse ways that people experience the holding environment in the conference setting can facilitate the creation of conferences that better attend to the diverse needs of participants, and thereby further

their capacity for learning and leading, not only in the context of the conference, but also in their own organizations and institutions. My research questions were the following:

### Research Questions

- 1a) How do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand their experience and their learning in the context of a Group Relations Conference?
- 1b) In particular, how do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand the internal supports and challenges available to them in the Group Relations Conference?
- 2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience and their assessed ways of making meaning?

### Conceptual Framework, Methods, and Goals

In this study, the conceptual framework shaping my exploration and analysis of my inquiry consisted of a composite of psychoanalytic, group, and system theories and one hermeneutic lens. The first, that of Group Relations (Balint, 1965; Bion, 1961, 1962; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985; Miller, 1976; Miller & Rice, 1967; Rice, 1965; Wells, 1985), was useful in establishing the dynamics of this unique experiential learning setting, including the theory underlying conference design, the design itself, and the function of the staff, focusing attention on the primary assumptions about how learning occurred in this context.

The second conceptual element was that of adult developmental theory including the underlying principles of constructivism and development (Cook-Greuter, 2002, 2003, 2006; Kegan, 1982,1994), focusing attention on the role of the holding environment (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Heifetz, 1994, 2002; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) in supporting learning as well as the role of adult development in understanding the capacities and competencies (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004) called for in the GRC setting. The latter construct was employed as a hermeneutic lens guiding my sampling strategy, the design of my study, and the process I used to analyze the data.

My methodology consisted of a case study approach (Yin, 2003) that explored the experience of 18 participants using a developmental assessment tool (Cook-Greuter SCTi, 2006), in-depth interviews, and participant observation. I used these means to explore how developmentally diverse participants experienced the supports and challenges of the external holding environment in the conference setting. As adult development theory is the primary theoretical lens that I used, and as Group Relations theory describes the unique context of experiential learning that I am exploring, I provided a very brief introduction to both concepts in this chapter, followed by a more in-depth explication in Chapter II.

### Adult Development Theory

In my research, I used the perspective of adult developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Loevinger, 1976; Torbert, 2003, 2004), a branch of developmental psychology, to explore the ways in which participants in a Group Relations Conference described and understood their experience of this challenging and rich model for leadership learning.

Cook-Greuter (1999, 2003, 2004, 2006) and Torbert (2003, 2004) suggest that one's developmental capacity determines the extent to which a person can handle the challenging tasks of leadership, including the management of conflict; the creation of structures that support knowledge creation and organizational learning; and collaboration across diverse interest groups. These challenges I have been describing as integral to both the socio-cultural milieu and the Group Relations Conference setting (complex social diversity, conflict, and uncertainty) may seem from some perspectives to be obstacles that somehow have to be surmounted at all costs in order for learning to occur. However, with the right conditions of support in place, these challenges may help facilitate what Kegan calls the "curriculum of daily life" (1994), that is, the conditions necessary to instigate learning, innovation, and personal transformation from one way of knowing and making meaning to another.

### Group Relations Theory

Over the years, considerable research has investigated the outcomes of Group Relations Conferences as a unique form of adult experiential learning, beginning with systematic attention to the phenomenon of the group (Bales, 1950; Beck & Lewis, 2000; Mann, 1967; Stock & Thelen, 1958). This was followed by observation to investigate and to explain aspects of social systems theory (Harrow, Astrachan, Tucker, Klein, & Miller, 1971; Klein, Correa, Howe, & Stone, 1983). With advances in recording technology, studies established databases for inference regarding group psychodynamic processes. More recent studies of Group Relations Conference dynamics reflect further applications of phenomenological, ethnographic, and psychometric techniques to study groups as both

social systems and as factors affecting individual conference experience for members as well as staff (Bair, 1990; Granda, 1992; Cytrynbaum, 1993, 1995, & 2000; Culver, 1995; Lipgar & Struhl, 1995). Very few studies (Erricheti, 1992; Martynowych, 2006; Silver, 2001) have taken a qualitative approach to understanding what was meaningful to participant members in terms of their learning. However, while research has begun to focus on the subjective phenomenon of the individual participant learning in the conference setting, the issue of developmental diversity and its implications has not received attention until the past five years.

While researchers have explored the subjective and inter-subjective learning experience of participants using empirical methods such as surveys, psychometric instruments, and phenomenological qualitative interviews, only two (Martynowych, 2006; Silver, 2001) have undertaken the use of developmental psychology to account for the variety of ways that participants do or do not learn in the Group Relations Conference setting. The results of both of these studies suggest the need for much greater attention to the implications of developmental diversity. Of the two studies, only Silver's (2001) actually explores the learning experience within the context of the conference itself.

Silver (2001) used a developmental assessment tool called the Subject-Object Interview (Kegan & Lahey, 1988) and in-depth interviews to explore the implications for the way that participants' stages of adult developmental might play a role in the extent to which they are able to benefit from this unique form of educational setting. Her findings regarding the competencies and capacities for participant learning correlated to Kegan's descriptions of the three adult developmental stages (Kegan, 1982). Silver (2001) emphasized how her research supports Kegan's theory that epistemic capacity needs to be

considered in order to adequately understand human experience. She suggested that the Tavistock design for experiential learning assumes a level of development that is “over the heads” (Kegan, 1994) of many, if not most of the participants in her study (Silver, 2001). As a result, she recommended investigation of “developmental bridges” (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and particular attention to the holding environment as means of supporting transformational learning (Silver, 2001, p. 249).

### Assumptions Based on My Experience

I undertook this exploration as a means of better understanding the implications of developmental diversity in the Group Relations Conference setting, focusing on the importance of attention to the external holding environment provided as a facilitating factor for learning. Herein lie several assumptions: First, I assumed that in most conference settings, including the one I investigated, there is enough developmental diversity among the membership for the external holding environment to be a factor worth consideration; second, I assumed—based on both adult developmental (Torbert, 2003, 2004) and adult learning theories (Cranton, 1994; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Mezirow, 2000)—that an adequate holding environment (Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) is an essential facilitating factor for participants’ learning. Herein lays a third assumption: that the conference setting provided sufficient conditions for some participant members to experience significant learning. A fourth assumption regarded generalizability; that is, while this study investigated the phenomenon of participant experience in one conference, I assumed that the findings can be relevant and

meaningful for other conferences, and perhaps even for other organizational and educational settings where developmental diversity is a reality.

While considerable attention has been given to the external holding environment as a facilitating factor in adult learning (Cranton, 1997; Daloz, 1986; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Mezirow, 2000) and to autonomy and self-directed learning (Tennant & Pogson, 1995), I have not found any investigation of the internal resources that adults call upon as a resource for their learning in this setting. The holding environment is a psychosocial phenomenon comprised of both external and internal elements (Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965). Since the member-participant experience includes both the external supports (e.g. the consultant staff) and challenges (e.g. conflict, uncertainty) present in the conference context, I assumed that the participants also drew upon personal, internal resources as a way of supporting themselves in their learning. As these internal supports emerged in the data, I was also interested in understanding the relationship between the availability and use of these internal resources and the individual participants' developmental maturity.

It should be said that while I began this research with assumptions about the GRC setting as a holding environment, with particular concerns about its adequacy for those participants on the earlier end of their adult development, the findings revised my assumptions. I also discovered a number of features of the participants' experiences that I did not anticipate, and these also called for a revision of my original biases and assumptions. I will present these revisions in full in Chapter IX. Finally, along with the biases and assumptions that I held at the outset of this research, it was also my intention

that this research could contribute to the fields of leadership studies, organizational development, Group Relations, adult development, and adult learning.

### Rationale and Significance of Research

While the unit of analysis in the Group Relations tradition is the collective system, not the individual, Cook-Greuter (2003, 2006) and Torbert's (2003, 2004) theoretical constructs shed light on the variety of ways that individuals experience and make sense of their participation in the Group Relations Conference setting. My research indicated that the participants' stages of development do account, at least in part, for the diverse capacities they have for learning from their experiences in this context. On the basis of the five key findings that I discovered through my analysis and interpretation of the 18 participants' experiences, I make claims that have implications for the theories of adult development, adult learning, and Group Relations, as well as for the practice of designing, directing, and consulting to Group Relations Conferences, and for leadership and professional development.

First, by understanding the extent to which context and adverse contingencies mitigate developmental capacities and instigate cognitive and behavioral regression, adult developmental theorists, adult educators, and people who support both leadership development and organizational change efforts can offer more skillful support for people facing challenges of ambiguity, complexity, and conflict in work and in life.

Second, the findings from my analysis of the participants' experiences suggest that when people resort to coping mechanisms as self-protective measures to defend themselves from anxiety, they do not report learning or effective leadership while in this

defensive stance. Knowing the extent to which such behaviors might limit or inhibit learning and leadership, adult educators and those involved in leadership development and professional coaching can better assist people in identifying and avoiding such behaviors for the sake of greater personal effectiveness and organizational functioning.

Third, the findings in this research suggest that while the supports and challenges available in the conference I studied were sufficient for the participants' learning, these findings also suggested that people experienced particular conference challenges differently on the basis of their developmental capacity. One of the three areas of difference involved the participants' capacity to identify and manage psycho-social defensive processes, for instance projection, projective identification, splitting, scape-goating (Vaillant, 1993). These processes were described first by Melanie Klein (1959) and developed in the object relations literature. The other two differences according to developmental capacity were the participants' their ability to find and then exercise their authentic, personal voice in the conference, and their varying capacities for emotional vulnerability. On the basis of these findings, those who design, direct, and consult to Group Relations Conferences can offer more informed and skillful service to conference members for the sake of their learning.

Fourth, in exploring the variety of ways that participants supported themselves in engaging the challenges of the conference, I found that they employed an array of skillful cognitive and affective behaviors that helped them to learn and lead in the moment. These behaviors, called adaptive self-scaffolds, can be learned and practiced to help people in positions of leadership and others to manage ambiguity, complexity, and conflict with greater mindfulness, skill, and intention.

Fifth and finally, I found that the most significant learning that participants reported from their experience of the conference was their ability, in varying degrees, to identify and manage projective processes, to understand their tendencies to take up specific socio-emotional roles in groups, and to renegotiate those roles with greater awareness and intention. Each of these competencies varied according to participants' developmental capacity. This final finding should be helpful to Group Relations designers, directors, and consultants, as well as to those who provide leadership developmental and professional coaching, to mental health providers, and to anyone who uses psychodynamic theory in their professional work with groups and systems. As competence in these group dynamics skills is dependent on developmental capacity, those who educate others about these dynamics can teach and facilitate learning more skillfully by taking developmental capacity and diversity into account.

The next chapter provides a review of the two bodies of literature that form the conceptual framework that I used in this research.

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of developmentally diverse participants at a Group Relations Conference as they engage the psychological and social supports and challenges, otherwise known as the holding environment (Kegan, 1982; Winnicott, 1965) available to them for their reflection and learning in that setting. By supports and challenges, I am referring the both internal and external aspects of what Winnicott (1965) described as the holding environment. External supports might include safe physical boundaries, the presence of caring people, time to reflect on experience, etc. External challenges might include the presence of conflict, diversity, fast-paced change, multiple or overlapping roles, etc. Internal supports might include a resilient and self-authoring sense of one's own capacities for perspective-taking, boundary management, initiative in action, etc. Internal challenges might include a variety of anxieties, fears, and personal limitations. A person's developmental capacity tends to affect how these supports and challenges are construed according to one's way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a) or action logic (Torbert, 2003, 2004).

In this study, the conceptual framework that shaped the exploration and analysis of my inquiry employed constructs drawn from two bodies of literature and theory: a subcategory of organizational psychology/social systems literature that is known as Group Relations (Bion, 1961, 1962; Rice, 1965) and adult development theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2004; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004) The theory of adult development

was employed for sampling purposes and served as the primary hermeneutic lens that shaped both my research design and data analysis.

In order to establish the context and purpose of this study, I begin the chapter with the Group Relations literature and theory (Banet, 1977; Bion, 1961; Errichetti, 1992; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985; Rice, 1965), which describes the dynamics of this unique experiential learning setting, including the theory underlying conference design, the design itself, the function of the staff and attention to the primary assumptions around the way that learning occurs in this context.

The treatment of adult developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2004; Winnicott, 1965) describes the underlying principles of constructivism and development; the implications of the developmental stages for determining distinct ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a) or action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Torbert, 2004); and attention to the role of the holding environment in supporting transformational learning. As explained, adult development theory was used in the shaping of this study's design and for the purpose of analyzing the data collected.

The following literature review grid (see Table 1) presents the lines of inquiry generated by my research questions and the selection of both these theoretical sources and the particular aspects that were used in this study. The grid is followed by a descriptive and integrative consideration of Group Relations and adult development theory, insofar as each was related to my study. This line of inquiry and the context I described provided rationale for the choices I made in this review.

Table 1. *Literature Review Concept Grid*

<b>Conceptual Inquiry based on Research Questions</b>	<b>Theory/Construct</b>	<b>Theoretical Elements</b>	<b>Theory in Context of Conceptual Framework</b>
What kinds of sense-making of experience occurs/can occur in the context of Group Relations Conferences?	Adult development theory; Group Relations literature and research	The general process, criteria for describing experience, conditions for promoting learning	Learning is related to the ways in which adults make meaning of their experience
How is the Group Relations Conference an experiential learning setting for leadership education?	Group Relations literature and research	The GRC as an experiential learning setting, as a means of leadership education; guiding assumptions about how systems learning occurs	GR theory describes the conditions of this particular setting of experiential leadership learning
How might I conceptualize the internal and external supports and challenges that a participant might experience in this setting?	Adult development theory	Object relations psychology, the holding environment, Ego development theory	Adult development theory describes the dynamic interaction across the boundary of the self between the external conditions and the internal psychological processes involved in meaning making
What are the implications of the developmental stages for ways of knowing in the Group Relations Conference setting?	Adult development theory	The developmental action logics or ways of knowing,	Adult development theory helps map the implications of developmental diversity in an experiential learning setting

Table 1 identifies the areas of inquiry in my three research questions; the theoretical constructs and their particular elements that I used to explore these areas; and the relationship of these elements within my overall conceptual framework. While Group Relations theory describes the unique context in which I conducted my research and the theoretical material that informs conference learning, adult development theory is the hermeneutic or interpretive lens through which I explored the participants' experiences and the relationship between those experiences and their developmental capacity. Next, I introduce both of these conceptual elements briefly.

### Adult Development Theory

In the existing literature on learning in the context of the Group Relations Conferences, there is little if any consideration given to the reality and implications of developmental diversity. By developmental diversity, I mean that many groups, organizations, and communities consist of members whose developmental maturities span a range in their capacities and competencies for making meaning. For example, Drago Severson (2004a) describes how people's ways of knowing influence the way they see themselves, the way they make sense of their roles and responsibilities, and how they have qualitatively different capacities for self-reflection and perspective-taking. As a result, adults need developmentally appropriate supports and challenges in order to learn and to grow (Drago-Severson, 2004a).

While differences of developmental maturity and ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b) are an important "hidden" form of diversity to acknowledge within any social system, they are only now being recognized in social systems theories

and research. After an online literature search using EDUCAT, EBSCO, and ProQuest, using three groups of search parameters including “adult development,” “developmental diversity,” “diversity of psychological development,” “constructive development theory,” “constructive developmental psychology,” “Susann Cook-Greuter,” “Robert Kegan,” “William Torbert,” and “Bill Torbert,” as well as “organizational development,” “group dynamics,” or “group relations,” I did not find any results that satisfied the various combinations of the criteria. A search using Google Scholar and the same combination of parameters manifested a total of 26,100 results, but after a review of several hundred of those articles, I did not find any that combined the use of constructive developmental theory and group relations, group dynamics, or organizational development. Similar searches using ProQuest and Google Scholar for the parameters “constructive development” and “leadership” produced 37 articles and 40,600 articles, respectively. While there is an increasing number of articles and studies that combine constructive development theory and leadership over the past ten years, the two studies mentioned subsequently (Martynovych, 2006; Silver, 2001) are the only examples that apply constructive developmental theory as a heuristic tool for interpreting the implications of developmental maturity for the participants’ experience within the Group Relations Conference setting. Of these two, only Silver’s (2001) considers the conference experience itself.

#### Group Relations Conferences

One of my assumptions is that, given the fast-paced rate of change in both society and contemporary organizations, people across sectors need the kinds of educational

spaces and settings where they can conscientiously explore and learn from the advanced “curriculum” (Kegan, 1994) that contemporary life is imposing upon us through the experience of complexity, conflict, and uncertainty. In my limited experience, organizational settings themselves tend to be so driven by external factors and emergent contingencies that they rarely lend themselves as places for either reflection or learning. At the same time, traditional informational learning through passive study or non-participative forums is unlikely to help provide more than a conceptual basis for understanding the emerging social complexity and its various implications for individual and social identity in a globalized world. In particular, it has been suggested that the challenges of social and organizational leadership these days call for the kind of learning described as “transformative” (Elkins, 2003).

There are however, a few contexts in which experiential participation is the potential basis for the depth of learning that Mezirow (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000) described as transformative, involving the change of mental models and the biases, assumptions, and behaviors that follow from them. Another definition for transformational learning is that which helps adults better manage the complexities of their work and life (Drago-Severson, 2004a).

I have experienced such learning<sup>6</sup> through The Group Relations Experiential Learning Conference (GRC) as sponsored by the Tavistock Institute and The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems. As mentioned in the first chapter, the GRC was the context in which I conducted my research for this study.

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<sup>6</sup> I have participated or consulted in ten of these conferences, several of them residential and one of them international, in Arles, France.

## Group Relations Theory and Research

This introduction to Group Relations provides a brief history of the theory's development, including the primary contributors, key ideas and work in the field, a description of the Group Relations Conference setting, and research on the learning outcomes of the conferences. I focused specifically on aspects of the GRC that are relevant to this study, giving special attention to diversity and the way in which learning is understood in this context.

According to the Tavistock Institute (Tavistock, 2007), one of the founding institutions for Group Relations theory and a prime sponsor of research in this area, Group Relations (GR) is a method of studying and training in the way people perform their roles and exercise authority in the groups and systems to which they belong, whether in work groups, teams, organizations, or less formal social groups. For the purposes of clarity, a group may be said to be two or more people interacting to achieve a common task (Tavistock, 2007). The theory focuses on the interdependence of people and their environment, focusing on the system rather than on the individual as the primary unit of analysis. From my limited perspective, the systemic unit of analysis is a significant challenge for many conference participants to comprehend; this perspective on the challenge of systems thinking is echoed by Senge (1990). In addition to the attention to the systemic level of group interaction, another important basis of GR theory is psychoanalytic interpretation of the way that groups move in and out focusing on their task and a number of different defensive positions, based on unarticulated group fantasies that often subvert the primary, espoused task (Tavistock, 2007). Again, from my

perspective after ten GR conferences, I have found that conference participants often resist psychoanalytically founded interpretations of the group's behavior, preferring instead rational interpretations that focus on conscious rather than unconscious motivations.

Conferences designed for the purposes of educating leaders, managers, and students of organizational behavior about group dynamics use an experiential learning approach to explore the social construction of identity, role, boundaries, tasks, and authority based on both the overt and covert (unconscious) group processes. In my experience, the conferences offer intense, challenging conditions for experiential learning. This research explored whether the intention behind the conference structure and staffing is sufficiently attentive to the implications of developmental diversity for the learning of membership.

What follows is a historical introduction to the pioneering figures of the theory, an exploration of the theoretical assumptions at stake, and the types of learning challenges that arise in the GRC context. The brief exposition of the founding figures of Group Relations that follows helps to introduce the various theoretical dimensions of the theory as they emerge in a historical context.

### History

Group relations was the phrase coined in the late 1950s by staff working at the Tavistock Institute to refer to the laboratory method of studying relationships in and between groups. This laboratory method had been developed at Bethel, Maine, from 1947 onwards by the National Training Laboratory (NTL) (Lewin, 1947b). It was based on the

model of intensive experiential learning that had sprung from the work of social scientist Kurt Lewin, whose group theories had strongly influenced the early Tavistock staff. This early group of Tavistock pioneers was comprised of social scientists and psychodynamically oriented psychiatrists. They drew on many sources, including work by sociologists such as Gustave le Bon (Le Bon, 1896) and William McDougall (1920); psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1922) and Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959; Klein & Riviere, 1983); and social scientists such as Mary Parker Follett (Follett, 1925), and Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1947a, 1947b; Lewin, Adams, & Zener, 1935; Lewin & Gold, 1999).

Gustave le Bon (1896) and William McDougall (1920) provided key observations about group behavior by studying the group-as-a-whole in its wider social system and the relatedness of individuals to that system. Freud's contribution to group relations theory is widely debated, but his work does help to illuminate some of the issues that are not discussed by Le Bon and McDougall—for instance, Freud's view that the family provides the basic psychological and social pattern for all groups. Certainly Freud's contribution to psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis on the unconscious, was important to the development of Group Relations.

Mary Parker Follett (1925) was among the first theorists to apply psychology to the workplace. These developments in the way people thought about work and organizations helped to shift the focus towards the human elements of work and organizational life. Kurt Lewin's field theory (Lewin et al., 1935) provided a way in which the tension between the individual and the group could be studied. Lewin felt that "the group to which an individual belongs is the ground for his perceptions, his feelings,

and his actions” (Lewin, 1947). Lewin felt that groups have properties that are different from their subgroups or their individual members. This finding, and the experiential workshop method of training which Lewin developed, influenced staff at the Tavistock and their development of Group Relations Conferences.

Melanie Klein’s Object Relations Theory (Klein, 1959) was another important influence that built upon and departed from Freud’s theories. Klein felt that people learn from early childhood to cope with unpleasant emotions and the confusion and anxiety they create by using the psychological defenses of splitting and projective identification. Her insights into projection and projective identification are critical contributions to Group Relations theory and a central element in much of the learning that takes place in GRC’s.

#### Models of Group Work: The Basic Assumption Behaviors

One of the most challenging obstacles to understanding leadership, authority, and the dynamics of group processes is that it is difficult to explain much of group behavior in a rational, cause-and-effect manner. The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1961, 1962) made a major contribution by developing models of group work and new theories of group behavior, predicated on the insight that groups operate on two levels: the conscious work level where concern is for completing the task, and the unconscious or covert level where group members act as if they had made assumptions about the purpose of the group which may be different from its conscious level. The basic assumption group’s primary task is to ease members’ anxieties and to avoid the painful emotions that

additional work or the end of the group situation might bring. Bion (1961) identifies three types of basic assumption group behaviors: dependency, pairing, and fight-flight.

In 1974, Pierre Turquet, who also worked at the Tavistock Institute, added a fourth basic assumption to Bion's three (Turquet, 1974). He called this basic assumption oneness, where members of the group seek a feeling of unity from their inclusion in the group and/or the group commits itself to a cause outside of the group as a way of survival. W. Gordon Lawrence, Alistair Bain, and Lawrence Gould developed a fifth basic assumption called me-ness, the opposite of one-ness, where individual group members try to remain separate from the group (Tavistock, 2007). Where members of a group are united in unconscious basic assumption me-ness, they become calm, polite, and withdrawn in group sessions, due to their disengagement from the group process.

With regard to the purposes of this study, it is my experience that it is quite challenging for group participants to become aware of their unconscious collusion in basic assumption behavior. According to Groups Relations theory and its psychoanalytic assumptions about the influence of the unconscious, basic assumption behavior is a kind of coping mechanism that groups employ to defend and sustain themselves when anxieties are raised for members due to conflict, uncertainty, anticipation of loss, etc. (Bion, 1961). But again, in my experience, individuals, let alone groups, are rarely consciously aware of these anxieties and often resist acknowledging that their behaviors may be rooted in fears, fantasies, or needs. This resistance becomes a challenge to learning and might call for particular kinds of support from the staff consultants before the membership can manage their fears sufficiently to return to the explicit group task.

### Key Concepts Related to Group as a Whole: A Systems Perspective

One of the most distinctive elements of Group Relations theory is the attention to the systems level of analysis, otherwise known as the group-as-a-whole approach (Wells, 1985). Banet and Hayden (Banet & Hayden, 1977) summarized the group-as-a-whole approach as follows:

- The primary task of the group is to do what it must to survive.
- The group has a life of its own only as a consequences of the fantasies and projections of its members.
- The group uses its members to serve its primary task.
- The behaviors of any group member at any moment is the expression of his/her own needs, history, and behavior patterns and the needs, history, and behavior patterns of the group.
- Whatever the group is doing or talking about, the group is always talking about itself, reflecting itself.

The group-as-a-whole perspective sees the individual as an interdependent social being, influenced by, and at times even governed by, collective forces, rather than as an autonomous, independent entity (Silver, 2001). As a result, the theory challenges prevailing Western philosophical and political biases of the independent, free self.<sup>7</sup> Such a challenge is difficult for some participants for two reasons: 1) for those members whose

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<sup>7</sup> This understanding of the independent relationship between the individual and society is complementary with Kegan's perspective in the embedded nature of the individual within the social surround (1982, 1994). I deal with this interdependent relationship in more detail in the section of the chapter that considers constructive developmental theory.

way of knowing or developmental action logic is still “conventional,” this interdependent understanding of the relationship between self and society is disorienting (Kegan, 1994); and 2) the capacity to grasp the scope and dynamics of systemic realities (Senge, 1990) requires a significant degree of cognitive complexity and may be “over the heads” of many of the participants (Kegan, 1994).

### Theoretical Assumptions about Learning at the GRC

As mentioned, the goal of the GRC is experiential learning that equips the participants to be more skillful and effective leaders and managers, specifically by offering opportunities for transformative learning regarding the exercise of authority in organizations and society. The content of this experiential transformative learning varies but may include: insight into the perils and privileges of one’s social location in the exercise of authority; a deepened sense of the differences between the ways that people construct meaning on the basis of their identity, experience, and role in an organization; an experience of the parallel processes at work between leaders and followers at different strata of an organization; and insight into the covert or unconscious operations of groups to subvert change initiatives.

The approach of this education assumes particular developmental competencies. These I describe in more detail in the second section of this literature review where I consider adult developmental theory (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Cook-Greuter, 2002; Torbert, 2003, 2004). According to Silver (2001), the implicit assumptions of the Tavistock/A.K. Rice model of experiential learning are predicated on a meaning-making capacity rooted in the epistemological complexity available to those operating out of Kegan’s fourth

order of consciousness (1982,1994). The fourth order of consciousness describes a capacity for self-authorship in one's meaning making, for independent self-initiative, and for using one's own experience as a basis of personal authority. Both Kegan and Torbert describe how the ways in which individuals make meaning of their experiences of conflict and of differences are dependent on their developmental capacity (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004). It is only with the fourth order of consciousness, the self-authoring way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a), or the Achiever action logic (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), that there is recognition of the social construction of identity and therefore capacity for awareness of the projections that occur in unconscious group processes (Silver, 2001). Silver (2001) points out that individuals at less-complex stages of development may find these group processes confusing and experience projections as concrete realities.

This incapacity to take perspective on projective processes was considered in the work of Skolnick and Green (2004) that explored the dynamics of diversity and subsequently described the need for a degree of self-knowledge in order to put differences between people in perspective. They used Bion's (1961) theory about unconscious processes as a framework for examining identity and diversity, in order to bring to light how the capacity both to hold polarities of personality traits in tension and to accommodate multiple perspectives requires a tolerance of contradiction, ambiguity, and paradox. Such a capacity requires a level of cognitive complexity that is not available until a person has grown into the Achiever action logic (Torbert, 2004). Even then, such dialectical tensions remain a challenge until they become taken for granted in the Strategist action logic (Torbert, 2004).

As the experiential learning model of the Tavistock-style conference assumes the capacity of the participants to engage the learning from a self-authoring (Achiever) way of knowing, and as the challenges of that learning involve the sophisticated cognitive complexity available beginning with the Achiever action logic (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), these assumptions raise questions about the nature of the learning that takes place in the conference setting. What is the experience of those participants who have not yet developed the capacity either for dialectical thinking (Basseches, 1984) or for the complexity of affectivity that only comes in the late conventional/early post-conventional stages (Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2004)? What supports are necessary to help these participants bridge the gap between their present ways of knowing/action logics and later stages of development?

#### Research on Group Relations Learning

Recent studies of Group Relations Conference phenomenon reflect applications of phenomenological, ethnographic, and psychometric techniques to study both groups as social systems and factors affecting individual conference experience for both members and staff (Bair, 1990; Granda, 1992; McGarrigle, 1992; Crytynbaum, 1993, 1995, 2000; Culver, 1995; Lipgar & Struhl, 1995). Very few studies (Erricheti, 1992; Martynowych, 2006; Silver, 2001) have taken a qualitative approach to understanding what was meaningful to participant members in terms of their learning. However, while research has begun to focus on the subjective phenomenon of the individual participant learning in the conference setting, the issue of developmental diversity and its implications has not received attention until the past five years.

While researchers have explored the subjective and inter-subjective learning experience of participants using empirical methods such as surveys, psychometric instruments, and phenomenological qualitative interviews, only two (Martynovych, 2006; Silver, 2001) have undertaken the use of developmental psychology to account for the variety of ways that participants do or do not learn in this setting. The results of both of these studies suggest the need for much greater attention to the implications of developmental diversity. As mentioned previously, of the two studies, only Silver's (2001) actually explores the learning experience within the context of the conference itself.

Silver's (2001) dissertation was a qualitative study employing semi-structured interviews with a narrative method, in conjunction with the Subject-Object Interview (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman & Felix, 1988) to explore the experience of 22 participants in a Group Relations Conference. Silver's research questions inquired into the meaning of participants' self/other relationships, their experience of conflict and differences, and their openness to change in their self-identity. The study describes eight mechanisms that participants employed to support their learning and demonstrates the importance of epistemological or developmental capacity to those learning processes.

According to Silver (2001), an important finding of the study is the way that her research supports the premise in constructive developmental theory that epistemological capacity needs to be considered in order to understand human experience. On the basis of this insight, she interprets the departure of several participants from the conference as evidence that the Tavistock model of experiential learning is predicated on competencies that may not be available to a large percentage of the conference population, and that

special consideration should be given to creating programs and therapies that contain a bridge for development (Silver, 2001). In particular, she refers to the importance of establishing a holding environment (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Heifetz, 1994; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1988), an evolutionary bridge (Kegan, 1982, 1994) that helps support learning and developmental transformation.

A developmental or evolutionary bridge as described by Kegan (1982, 1994), Drago-Severson (2004a) and others (Daloz, 1986; Heifetz, 1994; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Winnicott, 1965) must support individuals in their current ways of making meaning while at the same time challenging them with tasks of increasing complexity. Furthermore, there must be a degree to which the holding environment also provides a reassuring sense of consistency in order that the individual can take necessary risks to try on new ideas and ways of being, all of which may require letting go of a prior self-identity. In Silver's recommendations for further research, she suggests the importance of investigating the experience of as well as the effectiveness of developmental bridges for supporting learning and transformational growth.

This study explored the way in which developmentally diverse participants in a GRC may require different types of holding environments and developmental bridges, depending on the stage of development in which they are making meaning. In essence, I explored the impact of the conditions provided for the participants' learning and the variation of that impact depending on the participants' developmentally determined ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b).

### Conditions for Supporting Adult Learning

Broadly considered, the recommendations of adult learning theorists (Brookfield, 1986, 1987, 1990; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Cranton, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2006; Daloz, 1986, 1996; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Merriam & Caffarella, 2006; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000) and developmental psychologists (Belenky, 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kitchener & NetLibrary Inc., 2000; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Winnicott, 1965) for supporting learning and growth include the following dimensions: focus on the educator's role for the support of the learner; careful assessment of the unique needs of individuals and groups of adult learners; and concentration on the establishment of developmentally appropriate supports and challenges, known as a holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) or a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). I provide consideration of the developmentally appropriate supports and challenges in the subsequent section on adult development theory.

### Adult Learning and Adult Development Theory

There are several reasons for including a second theoretical construct, that of adult developmental theory, as a hermeneutic lens for this research. First, as I explained, there is a dialectical and interdependent relationship between the capacities and competencies described by adult development theory and the processes and outcomes of adult learning. As the capacity for perspective-taking and critical thinking are constitutive of adult learning (Brookfield, 1986; Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000), and as these are competencies that only become manifest after particular phases of

development (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003), it is apparent that a person's stage of development influences his or her capacity for learning. At the same time, as already discussed, adult learning can in turn lead to the kind of evolutionary growth described by adult development theory—in particular, constructive and ego development theories (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004). The emancipatory dimensions of adult learning—for instance, growth in self-awareness and expanded capacity for differentiated, critical thinking—are directly related to the way that movement into the later stages of adult development affords people greater objectivity about the meaning perspectives and ideologies in which they may have been previously embedded (Kegan, 2000).

This interdependent relationship between developmentally based competencies and the capacities for and outcomes of adult learning also have important implications for the tasks involved in leadership for change and for the kind of experiential learning called for in the GRC setting. Developmental growth entails complexification and re-integration of the “dynamic architecture” that gives rise to our meaning-making processes, the ways we interpret our life experiences (Kegan, 1982, p.53), and such learning and growth have direct implications for the way we take up roles and authority. For instance, the capacity for self-authorship—to be objective and critical about conventional wisdom and to take personal initiative—is precisely the kind of developmental competency needed to exercise leadership in the GRC setting.

Finally, beyond the broad implications of both developmental capacity and learning for leadership, the ability to engage with uncertainty is a particularly important issue for consideration in the use of adult development theory. The challenges of learning

and leadership require us to be able to acknowledge our anxieties and fears, holding steady (Heifetz, 1994) in order that we might intentionally learn our way through (Nicolaidis, 2008) ambiguous circumstances. This is much easier said than done because of the way that anxieties have a marked tendency to inhibit both learning and openness to creativity (Langer, 1989). As Warren Bennis (1989), a prominent leadership theorist, suggests, the collective incapacity to tolerate ambiguity in the face of enormously complicated problems has led most of us to seek instant relief, often at the expense of solving root issues. Given that disorienting dilemmas typically generate anxiety and distress, it is especially important to foster supportive conditions that can help a person to engage in the learning process rather than to regress or entrench in a manner that is not adaptive.

Considering these reasons—the interrelationship of developmental capacity and learning/leading competencies, especially the capacities and competencies demanded in the GRC setting, and for managing uncertainty—adult development theory is helpful for understanding people’s tolerances for uncertainty, their capacities for making meaning in challenging circumstances, and the kinds of supports and challenges that facilitate transformative learning and growth.

### Adult Developmental Theory

In my research, I used the perspective of adult developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 2001; Loevinger & Blasi, 1976; Torbert, 2003, 2004), a branch of developmental psychology, to explore the diverse ways in which participants in a Group Relations Conference described and

understood their experience of this challenging and rich model of leadership learning. More specifically, I employed Kegan's constructive developmental theory as a means of conceptualizing the GRC as a holding environment (Kegan, 1982, 1994) and Cook-Greuter and Torbert's ego development theory (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2003, 2006; Torbert 2003, 2004) as a way of measuring and interpreting the participants' action logics, the ways in which they acted and made meaning of these actions in the GRC. The aspects of adult development theory that I used include: fundamental assumptions about the connections between development and meaning-making (Cook-Greuter, 2002, 2003, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994); the way that the theory frames the relationship between people and their socio-cultural milieu; and the role of the holding environment in supporting developmental growth. I first describe the theory as it applies to the work of Kegan (in particular, the importance of the holding environment), and then I describe the way that adult development is understood and used by Cook-Greuter and Torbert, including the way that they measure it using an assessment instrument.

Constructive developmental theory is concerned with two aspects of growth: the organizing principles that regulate how people make meaning of their experience (orders of development) and how these principles are constructed and reconstructed over the span of time (developmental movement) (McCauley et al, 2006). Developmental movement involves a person's growing self-awareness and increased capacity to reflect on what had been the tacit organizing principle for their way of making sense of the world—in other words, what had been subject is now an object for one's attention and critical evaluation (Kegan, 1982). Such movement leads to a new organizing principle, one to which a

person is subject until it too becomes available for reflection. This process of differentiation and integration leads to a gradual complexification of consciousness (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

Kegan's work (1994) suggests that one's developmental capacity determines the extent to which a person can handle the challenging tasks of leadership, for instance, including the management of conflict, the creation of structures that support knowledge creation and organizational learning, and collaboration across diverse interest groups. These challenges I have been describing as characteristic of the Group Relations Conference setting—complex social diversity, conflict, and uncertainty—may seem from some perspectives to be obstacles that have to be somehow surmounted at all costs. However, with the right conditions of support in place, these challenges may also help constitute what Kegan calls the curriculum of daily life (1994), the conditions necessary to instigate learning, innovation, and personal transformation from one way of knowing and making meaning to another.

Working on the assumption that evolutionary growth does not happen of its own accord but in response to environmental changes and challenges, Kegan (1994) suggests that complex and overwhelming environmental conditions have the potential to evoke, or instigate, learning and growth. He describes this in terms of the way we might meet environmental learning challenges with “a qualitatively greater measure of cognitive sophistication” (Kegan, 1994, p. 287). However, such positive, constructive learning and development is not a foregone conclusion. It requires the resources and aids necessary to support people through the risks entailed in change and growth.

When people feel overwhelmed by such challenging tasks without sufficient support, they tend to lose their capacity and willingness either to learn (Langer, 1989) or to lead in a manner that will bring about effective change (Heifetz, 1994). Under stress and beset by anxiety, leaders will often revert to developmentally regressive patterns of thought and strategies of behavior that reflect unhelpfully simplistic ways of interpreting their reality (Torbert, 2004). Under the auspices of relatively less sophisticated action logics (Torbert, 2004), a leader's behaviors may include the unconscious tendency to avoid conflict even when it is necessary, to resort to defensive routines, and to use formulaic solutions that do not match the needs of the present situation (Argyris, 1990). Such behaviors are not uncommon in the GRC context and, indeed, the intention of the conference design is to provoke such behaviors so that participants can observe, reflect on, and learn from their regressions (Bion, 1965). According to D.W. Winnicott (1965), the presence of external or internal conditions of support is essential for constructive adaptation to environmental or intra-psychic challenges. These supports are dimensions of what he described as the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965).

### The Holding Environment

In this section, I considered the way in which the GRC might be construed as an external holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), beginning with a description of the way the holding environment has been understood. One of the assumptions at the heart of constructive developmental theory involves the relationship between a person's meaning-making activity and the contingencies and demands that are at stake in a person's personal and professional life and relationships, and their occupational and life demands.

With this understanding of the dynamic interplay between a person's meaning-making capability and the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), which is the totality of the surrounding and embedding social and interpersonal world of love, family, work, and play, it is important to consider the quality of the holding environment as a factor in promoting or inhibiting learning, growth, and development.

Inspired by the work of D.W. Winnicott (1965), Kegan considers the dialectical relationship between a person and the all encompassing horizon or milieu of relationships, meanings, values, and influences in which that person is situated (Kegan, 1982). In contrast to the emphasis that the individual tends to receive in Western philosophical anthropologies, Kegan draws attention to the way the individual is never quite separate, no matter how distinct and individuated he or she becomes:

There is never just an "individual"; the very word refers only to that side of the person that has individuated, the side of differentiation. There is always, as well, the side that is embedded; the person is more than an individual. "Individual" names a current state of evolution, a stage, a maintained balance or defended differentiation; "person" refers to the fundamental motion of evolution itself, and is as much about that side of the self embedded in the life-surround as that which is individuated from it. The person is both an individual and an embeddual (Kegan, 1982, p. 116).

This environmental milieu might consist of prevailing social conventions, political ideas, economic concepts, religious beliefs, and unique group dynamics, for instance. While Winnicott focused on the initial holding environment of infants and the way that this environment affects the way that children develop, Kegan sees the holding environment as a constant feature of human experience, such that as we age, we might move from one holding environment to the next (Kegan, 1982).

The specific features of the holding environment that are essential for supporting growth and maturation are: the providence of sufficient security, support, and care

necessary to relieve unhealthy degrees of fear/anxiety; a level of challenge that invites an individual to stretch beyond his/her comfort zones and to experiment with boundaries, to try new experiences, etc.; and a faithful commitment to the person through and across his/her experiences of growth, loss, etc. (Kegan, 1982). A positive holding environment characterized by these features is considered an “evolutionary bridge” that helps a person move from one developmental stage to the next when this is called for by the contingencies of a person’s life (Kegan, 1982). Ideally, though perhaps rarely, a holding environment is characterized by a favorable proportion of these dynamics, such that individuals receive a healthy combination of holding on and letting go, relative to their location in the developmental process and the demands being imposed upon them by their relationships and occupations.

The term “holding environment” is misleading, however, to the extent that it is suggestive of an exclusively external milieu of relationships, conventions, and structures.

Kegan writes:

Constructive-developmental psychology reconceives the whole question of the relationship between the individual and the social by reminding that the distinction is not absolute, that the development is intrinsically about the continual settling and resettling of this very distinction” (p. 115).

The dynamic interplay between the self and the surrounding milieu suggests that environmental supports and challenges are not the only factors in development; internal supports and challenges also play a role in the way a person engages and makes sense of their experience and in the way that they do or do not respond in a constructive, adaptive manner to contingencies, demands, crises, and conflicts. Properly understood, the holding environment is a psychosocial reality comprised of both internal and external forces.

In the absence of a perceived sense of being held or supported by the conference structure or staff, I was interested in exploring the various ways that participants supported themselves by drawing on such internal supports. Endogenous supports (generated from within the self) can be considered from a number of perspectives. I am particularly interested in the role endogenous or internal adaptive (coping with and or overcoming environmental challenges in a way that reflects the ability to handle increasing complexity) resources (tacit assets that can be called upon for learning—especially transformative learning—when the occasion calls for them) play as individuals engage in the challenges of learning in the GRC environment. I envisioned these resources as distinct from but perhaps shaped by the participants' biopsychosocial characteristics: socio-economic status, gender, age, and stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, etc. (Schlossberg et al., 1995), the diversity factors that are often present in the GRC context.

Internal adaptive resources could be considered as types of psychological characteristics; these include ego development, outlook, commitment, and values (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Optimism and self-efficacy, for instance, are two critical aspects of one's outlook and have a marked effect on a person's capacity to manage adversity and loss and to move through crisis in a creative manner (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Seligman (1990) has focused research on how people handle adversity (defined as negative, uncontrollable, and often unforeseen events). According to Seligman (1990), people who feel that they have control over their lives or feel optimistic about their own power to control at least portions of their lives, tend to experience depression more infrequently and achieve more at school or work; they are even in better health

(Schlossberg et al., 1995). Seligman also suggested that individual's explanatory style—the way a person thinks about the relationship between their agency or self-initiating capacity and an event—can explain how some people weather transitions without becoming depressed or giving up.

Other internal adaptive resources might include ability to plan, visualization, conceptual frameworks, self-talk, reflection in solitude, use of a journal, reliance on transitional objects,<sup>8</sup> a sense of self-agency, self-initiated learning, use of narrative or self-story telling, heroic associations, introjects<sup>9</sup> of authority figures; religious belief/faith, self-trust, self idealization, and intuition.

In Silver's (2001) dissertation exploring the experience of GRC participants as they made sense of the relationship between themselves and others in the conference setting, she found that participants relied on eight distinct internally generated processes for adapting to environmental challenges:

1. Contextualizing experience as a way of positioning ourselves with others in a social frame. Participants used a variety of forms of meaning-making orientation ranging from theoretical frameworks, personal issues, awareness of assumptions and even sorting through what was real and what was fantasy.
2. Bounding (limiting) the self in response to an unstructured, ambiguous environment. Participants used this process to define themselves in relationship to

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<sup>8</sup> Transitional objects, first described by D.W. Winnicott (1965) refer to a broad array of objects that people rely on as a defense against anxieties, as a source of comfort and security. While the term "transitional object" has tended to refer to childhood coping mechanisms, such as the use of a security blanket or a teddy bear, it may also apply for a variety of similar means used by adults.

<sup>9</sup> Introjects, a term from Freudian psychoanalysis, describes the psychological mechanism whereby parental types and other authority figures are internalized as a means of helping form the superego, the part of the psyche whose role it is to restrain impulses and guide conscientious, socially acceptable behavior. This term might also be used more broadly to refer to the memory of supportive figures in one's life, and even of one's imagination of religious figures such as Jesus, Buddha, etc.

others' responses through an understanding of fears and vulnerabilities in self and others, and through criticism of the conference itself.

3. Expanding awareness as a means of bringing new information, ideas, and perspectives into the meaning-making constructions of experience.
4. Transacting power dynamics as a way of negotiating relationships with both perceived and given power in the environment.
5. Employing conflict as a way of highlighting the positions in which the self and others are identified, and therefore the nature of separation between self and others.
6. Appropriating gendered cultural narratives in social discourse.
7. Struggling with diversity, which refers to how differences serve to define the self and other.
8. Negotiating identity, which refers to how we continually revise our sense of self through the interplay of relationships in the social context.

Silver's (2001) research describes these interior processes of self/other learning and analyzes the relationship between these processes and the participants' stage of development. In the diagram below, I illustrate the way that I describe the inter-related dynamics of the external and internal dimensions of the holding environment (HE), including these endogenous adaptive resources (Figure 1).

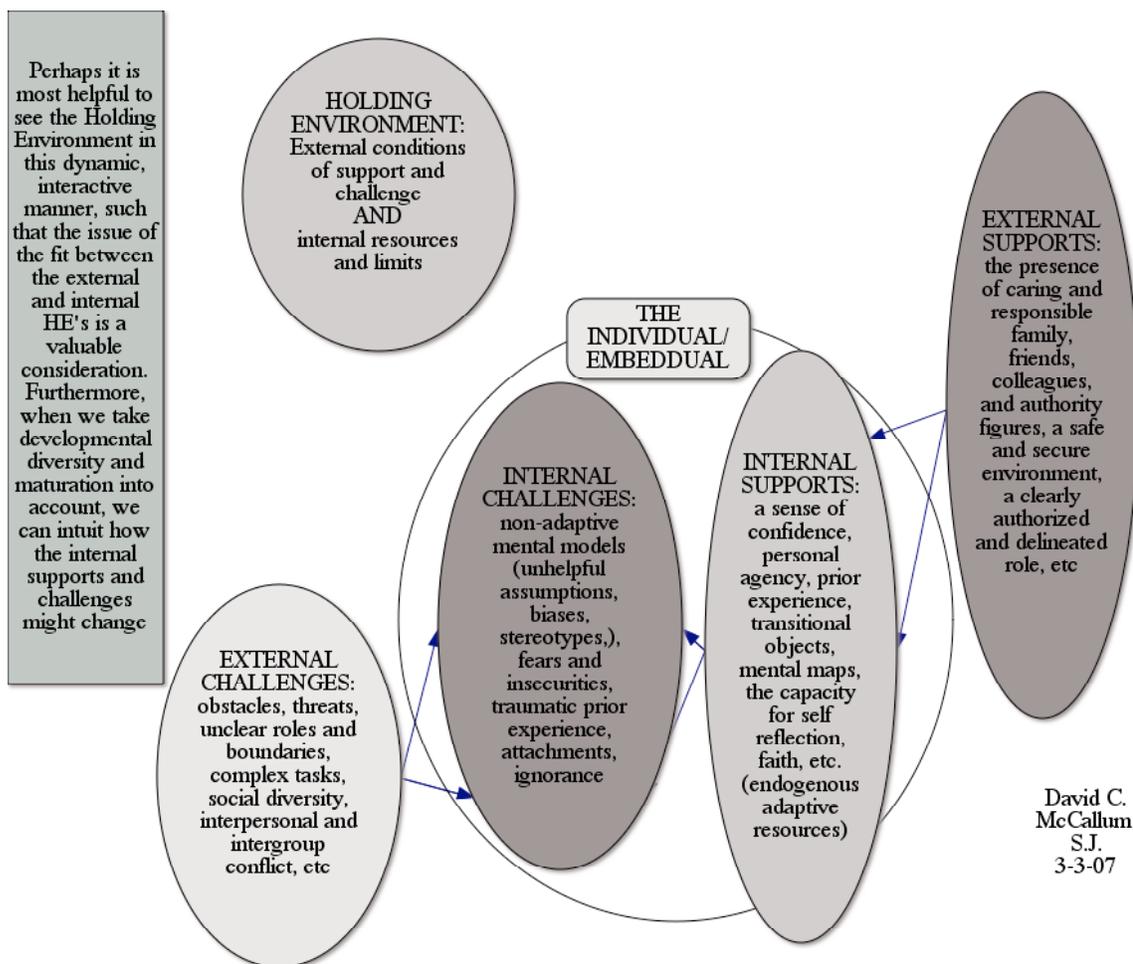
Figure 1. *The Holding Environment: Internal and External Dimensions*

Figure 1 illustrates the way in which the holding environment is not only external to a person, but also incorporates the internal factors. While emotional states such as anxiety or sadness may be instigated or provoked by external environmental factors, and the presence of a supportive social network may help to offset these challenges, there are nonetheless a whole host of internal factors of support and challenge as well. In my study of the participant experience of the GRC setting, I explored the relationship between the internal and external dimensions of the holding environment. When faced with adversity, ambiguity, complexity, and conflict (what Heifetz called adaptive challenges [Heifetz,

1994]) and in the absence of external conditions of support, what are the internal resources a person might call upon to help not only cope with the conditions but learn and lead their way through them (Nicolaidis, 2008)?

### Adult Development Theory and Leadership: Torbert and Cook-Greuter

Kegan's theory has been used to explore the influence of development on leadership effectiveness (Kunhert & Lewis, 1987, 1994), performance (Lewis et al., 2005), behavior (Spillet, 1995), the experience of leadership challenges (Van Velsor & Drath, 2004), and the fit between challenges and developmental competencies (Eigel, 1998). Kegan's theory and the closely related ego development theory of Jane Loevinger (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976) are the theoretical foundations for the applied use of constructive developmental theory by management sciences and action research expert Bill Torbert (2003, 2004) and developmentalist and researcher Susanne Cook-Greuter (1999, 2004, 2006). Torbert and Cook-Greuter use ego developmental theory with particular emphasis on implications for leadership, management, and organizational change.

I used Torbert (2003, 2004) and Cook-Greuter's (2002, 2003, 2006) work for two reasons. First, employing ego developmental theory, Torbert and Cook-Greuter pay special attention to the contingencies that leaders and managers face in organizational leadership roles and to the developmental capacities and competencies required to effectively deal with these demands, especially with regard to leaders' use of power and authority. It should be noted that rather than speaking of developmental stages of meaning-making, Torbert describes distinct evolutionary action logics, which include

both meaning-making and behaviors/patterns of action. As I studied the challenges of learning and leading in a temporary organizational setting (the GRC), where power and authority are central issues, the use of their application of adult development theory is compelling. Second, the tool Torbert and Cook-Greuter use for measurement of the stages of development (an adaptation of the Loevinger Washington University Sentence Completion Test) offered an effective, efficient, and well-researched means of assessing developmental action logics and had advantages for my sampling procedure.

While Kegan, Lahey, and Souvaine (1998) suggest that the Loevinger-based SCT is limited to describing a taxonomy of developmental stages rather than the meaning-constructive activity measured by the Subject Object Interview (SOI) (Lahey, 1988), the only clear advantages offered for the use of the SOI are that they suggest the test is a better indicator of the developmental positions between stages, and that the interview creates conditions for a person's most complex meaning-making. Though not yet substantiated through research, several recent surveys of adult development employing the constructive developmental perspective (Cook-Greuter, 2004; McCauley et al, 2006; Wilber, 2006) compare Kegan's descriptions of the stages of development to the correlative action logics of Torbert and Cook Greuter, as in Table 2.

Table 2. *Comparison of Adult Developmental Constructs: Kegan and Torbert*

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Dependent</b>		<b>Independent</b>		<b>Interdependent</b>	
1) <b>Kegan:</b>	<b>Stage 3: Interpersonal</b>		<b>Stage 4: Institutional</b>		<b>Stage 5: Interindividual</b>	
What is object?	Needs and dispositions		Interpersonal relationships		The autonomous self	
What is subject?	Interpersonal relationships		Autonomous self		The transforming self	
Way of knowing:	<i>Socializing</i>		<i>Self-authoring</i>		<i>Self-transforming</i>	
2) <b>Torbert</b>	<b><i>Diplomat</i></b>	<b><i>Expert</i></b>	<b><i>Achiever</i></b>	<b><i>Individualist</i></b>	<b><i>Strategist</i></b>	<b><i>Alchemist</i></b>
Action Logic	Norms rule Needs	Craft logic rules norms	System Effectiveness rules Craft logic	Relativism rules single system	Most valuable principles rule relativism	Deep processes and inter- Systemic Evolution Rule Principles
Main Focus	Socially Expected Behavior, Approval	Expertise, procedure, efficiency	Delivery of results, effectiveness, success in System	Self in relationship to system interaction with system	Linking theory and principles with practice dynamic Systems Interactions	Interplay of awareness, thought, action and effects; transforming self and Others

Adapted from McCauley, 2008

Table 2 illustrates the way that Wilber (2007) and McCauley et al (2006) conceptualize the similarities between these two developmental frameworks. For the purposes of this study, I identify the ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b) of each action logic (Torbert, 2003, 2004) in the following categories: The Diplomat and Expert are characterized by socializing knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b), such that cultural conventions and external authorities exert more influence on their epistemology and meaning-making than a person's own experience; the Achiever and the Individualist are characterized by self-authoring knowing, such that their meaning-making is primarily

based on their first person experience; the Individualist and the Strategist are characterized by a self-transforming way of knowing, where their first-person experience becomes open to constant revision and increased inclusivity to multiple points of view. And finally, the Alchemist and beyond have the capacity for a self-transcending way of knowing (Nicolaidis, 2008), whereby the ego is self-understood as a construct and becomes more permeable to moment to moment feedback and self-revision. In the following section, I provide greater detail on the modified ego development theory (Loevinger, 1976) that forms the basis of my adult developmental perspective in this study.

#### The Developmental Action Logics

According to Cook-Greuter, the basic propositions of ego developmental theory include the following:

1. People actively construct ways of understanding and making sense of themselves and the world (as opposed to “taking in” an objective world).
2. There are various identifiable patterns of meaning-making that people share in common with one another; these are variously referred to as stages, orders of consciousness, ways of knowing, levels of development, organizing principles, orders of development, or action logics.
3. Orders of development unfold in a specific, invariant sequence, with each successive order transcending and including the previous order.
4. In general, people do not regress; once an order of development has been constructed, the previous one loses its organizing function, but remains as a

perspective that can now be reflected upon (the findings from this dissertation challenge this perspective).

5. Because subsequent orders include all earlier orders, later orders are more complex (they support more comprehensive understanding) than earlier orders; later orders are not better in any absolute sense, but only relative to the circumstances in which a person is situated.
6. Developmental movement from one order to the next is driven by limitations in the current way of constructing meaning; this can happen when a person faces increased complexity in the environment, thus requiring a more complex way of understanding themselves and the world.
7. People's order of development influences what they notice or can become aware of, and therefore, what they can describe, reflect on, and change (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

For the purposes of this research, I present seven of the eight developmental action logics or ways of meaning-making and acting as described by Torbert and Cook-Greuter (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), though only four of the action logics were included in this study (the Expert, Achiever, Individualist, and Strategist/Alchemist). I include detailed descriptions of each of the developmental action logics included in this research in Chapter IV.

#### The SCTi Sentence Completion Tool: History of the Instrument

Drawing on the work of Freud, Jung, Adler, and others who have explored the development of the ego on mature humans, and using her own research in the 1960s and

1970s, Jane Loevinger put forward a developmental assessment that became known as the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCTi), one of the most widely used and carefully validated personality assessments available today (Torbert, 2003). The professional SCTi has been in development since 1983, when W.R. Torbert and S. Cook-Greuter adapted Loevinger's instrument for professionals and explored its use with managerial populations. It uses Cook-Greuter's theoretical distinctions throughout the scale, including the concepts of increasing levels of perspective on the self, or self-awareness, her refinements of the stage sequence at the upper end, and the high-end scoring categories tested as part of a dissertation at Harvard for validity and reliability.

The resulting tool, known as both the SCTi and the Leadership Development Profile (LDP), has been used to "measure" the meaning-making frames of managers and leaders since 1990. The LDP score is determined by the skilled analysis of a subject's responses to 36 unfinished sentence stems. According to Torbert (2003), "...in contrast to many forced-choice psychometrics, subjects often find the sentence completion process to be interesting, challenging, and developmental in its own right," (p. 197). The profile has been used to support individual development, and has been used in team development and other organizational development interventions. For more information on the instrument, please see Appendix D.

#### Advantages of the SCTi/LDP

The SCTi has been widely used since the 1970s and is more thoroughly researched and validated than any other comprehensive developmental measures such as the SOI (Subject Object Interview, Kegan & Lahey, 1986). Unlike the other measures

which are based on theory or old research, the SCTi/LDP was empirically derived from thousands of responses and more than 20 years of cycles of theory and validation. The SCTi is not a probed interview, so it is independent of the interviewer's skill, possible preferences, or personal developmental stage during administration. This is different in the SOI where interviewer bias is of concern, especially at the high end. Extensive published manuals for matching responses, manner of recording process of individual item rating, and clear algorithms for deducing final stage all insure consistency and reliability. Both content and structure are significant. All responses provide interpretable evidence and are scored (no response is also a response).

The rating process is recorded in individual item scores, simple and cumulative distributions, total protocol rating, total weighted score, and percentage distribution responses. This allows for both qualitative and quantitative analyses within and across protocols. An experienced, trained rater takes on average 30 to 60 minutes to score a protocol. The higher the protocol, the more unique the responses and the more time it takes to analyze the components, apply the scoring rules to the completion, compare it to the manuals, comment upon the finding, and assign a score. The SCTi/LDP distinguishes between ten levels of complexity, three pre-conventional ones, three conventional, and four post-conventional, while the 1996 Hy-Loevinger manual stops at eight. The latter study does not include the high end of the scale.

The SCTi "measures" cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of being. It represents the self-system or ego-as-process which orchestrates the various developmental lines as well as the digesting, integrating, and manipulating of internal and external stimuli. An SCTi final rating indicates the subject's overall ego stage or action

logic, or their highest, consistently available mode of functioning. Next, I consider the disadvantages of the SCTi/LDP.

#### Disadvantages of the SCTi/LDP

The SCTi/LDP cannot be readily computer-analyzed because the subtle nuances of meaning and sentence structure are taken into account. It must be scored only by a carefully trained expert. Personality differences, native IQ, education, verbal ability, and culture must always be considered as possible confounding variables. This is also true for other measures of development. The SCTi is not a clinical assessment tool.

Psychopathology is possible at all ego stages. When signs of it are evident in the research protocol, this is noted in the scoring protocol. As mentioned, an expert familiarity with adult developmental theory can influence the way in which a person might contrive responses of greater sophistication and complexity, though measures are taken in the scoring protocol to identify this.

The next chapter presents the rationale for and an exposition of the methodological design employed in this research study, including approaches to data collection, and analysis.

## Chapter III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I provided an exposition of my methodological design and process, including a grid linking my research questions to my data collection and analysis procedures, a detailed description of these analytic procedures, and the rationale for my selection of these methods as opposed to other techniques. I also provide consideration of the potential validity threats and description of the measures I took to attend to these threats in my study.

#### Qualitative Methodology

Faced with a variety of research methods, I chose a qualitative research method that explores multiple, complex dimensions of participant learning experiences (Creswell, 2003) rather than a quantitative approach. I chose the qualitative approach in order to explore the meaning of the participants' experience, to understand the influence of the context in which the research is situated, to generate new insights with regard to established theory, and to inform whether or not there is a relationship between the phenomenon of the participants' experience and their developmental maturity (Maxwell, 2005). I used this qualitative approach because I explored the nature of the participants' experience of the GRC and sought to understand the complex inter-relationships between

participants and the context in which they are situated, the general approach to my study, and the ensuing analysis of the data (Creswell, 1998).

My research questions demanded a probing, detailed investigation into the experience of the participants in an intense educational environment, exploring their experience of the psychosocial resources available for their learning. Such an investigation required inquiry into the nature of the participants' experience, particularly the way in which they constructed the meaning of that experience. Merriam and Merriam (Merriam & Merriam, 1998) state, "qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of the world and the experiences they have in the world" (p.6). This attention to the exploration of meaning-making is at the heart of my study, in particular, the interest in the implication of developmental diversity for the multiple and sometimes conflicting ways that people make sense of their experience.

### Case Study

In this study, I used a case study approach (Yin, 2003) that includes three different sources of data to explore how 18 developmentally diverse participants experienced and learned in the GRC setting. By the phrase "developmentally diverse," I am referring to a hidden diversity among participants, whose assessed developmental levels span a spectrum from the mid-conventional to the later post-conventional stages of meaning-making, according to adult developmental psychology/theory (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2004). I had three reasons for selecting the case study as a qualitative method for my research: 1) to explore the nature of phenomenon using

diverse sources of data; 2) to explore bounded events in context; and 3) to generate new theory. I explain each of these reasons subsequently.

As mentioned, I used three sources of data: the SCTi developmental assessment, observation field notes, and in-depth qualitative interviews. Each of these sources was selected to help me explore “how” and “why” questions and to enable me to understand the internal meaning-making processes of the participants (Yin, 2003). Case studies can be helpful for exploring a situation in its uniqueness, generating knowledge that might not be accessible otherwise (Merriam, 1998). This attention to uniqueness through the case study approach is especially appropriate to the dynamics of the type of conference where I conducted my research, where members and staff are invited to engage in mindful participation in the confusing realities of the present moment<sup>10</sup> precisely that they might experience, learn, and do something new.

The case parameters of this study are limited to a single conference scheduled for July 12-14, 2007, at the University of San Diego (USD), sponsored by the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES). In approaching the research as a case study, I utilized several forms of data, including a developmental assessment<sup>11</sup> of each of the 18 participants’ meaning-making styles, a 90-minute semi-structured interview with each of the participants within two weeks of the conference experience, observation field notes, and reflective memos that take into account observations, reflexivity, and reactivity.

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<sup>10</sup> Several of the events of the conference include the task of paying attention to the “here and now.” Such events are extremely challenging for participants due to the ambiguity and the potentiality of the present moment as it is experienced from diverse perspectives.

<sup>11</sup> The SCTi adaptation of the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (Cook-Greuter, 2006).

### Questions I Answered for My Research Purpose

In my first chapter's problem and purpose statements, I noted that there has been a lack of attention in academic research to the implications of developmental diversity for the ways that participants in GRC settings learn; for understanding the internal aspects and dynamics of the holding environment; and for the way in which participants require different developmental bridges to assist them in moving from their familiar habits of mind to newer mental constructs that reflect greater sophistication and complexity. The research questions included in Table 3 were developed to investigate and to understand these implications. The information needed was collected and analyzed by the methods described in more detail later in this chapter. The grid presents an overview of my research questions, the information needed to answer those questions, my data collection methods, and my methods for analyzing the data.

Table 3. *Information Needed and Sources of Data*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Information Needed</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods</b>	<b>Data Analysis Methods</b>
1a) How do 18 participants describe and understand their experience of and learning in a Group Relations Conference?	<p>First-hand reports of the 18 participants' experiences, including descriptions of what they learned</p> <p>Observation of the conference experience in order to understand the context of participants' experiences</p>	<p>One round of 90-minute semi-structured interviews</p> <p>Participant journals (optional)</p> <p>Observation field notes</p>	<p>Use of ATLAS Ti to analyze, code, and synthesize the transcriptions of the interviews</p> <p>Field notes were used to help provide a context with which to frame the participants' responses</p>

Table 3. *Information Needed and Sources of Data (continued)*

1b) In particular, how do 18 participants describe and understand their experience of the internal and external supports and challenges available to them in this learning setting?	First-hand reports of the 18 participants' experiences, including descriptions of what they learned and their experience of the supports and challenges in the conference  Observation of the conference experience	One round of 90-minute semi-structured interviews  Participant journals  Observation field notes	Use of ATLAS Ti to analyze, code, and synthesize the transcriptions of the interviews  Field notes were used to help provide a context with which to frame the participants' responses
2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience in this setting and their assessed stage of making-meaning?	First-hand reports of the 18 participants' experiences, including descriptions of what they learned.  Assessment of the participants stage of development	One round of 90-minute semi-structured interviews  The SCTi (Leadership Development Profile) Sentence Completion Tool	In the second phase of analysis, I used the participants' SCTi scores to begin comparing the emerging codes, themes and patterns with the participants' developmental action logics

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Table 3 illustrates the rationale I used for selecting methods for data collection and data analysis based on my three research questions. The data I collected included 18 SCTi developmental assessments, three days (30 hours) of observation and field notes, 18 90-minute interviews (digitally recorded) with handwritten notes, participant's journals, and seven reflection papers. As I explain further, I used a variety of means to analyze and interpret this data. In the next section, I explain my selection of the site for my research.

### Selection of the Site

My criteria for the selection of a research site included several factors, including access, support, length of the conference, and economic feasibility. For the purposes of this research, I needed to locate an institution that was sponsoring a three-day GRC in the tradition of the Tavistock Institute and the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems, one with a tradition of research and with staff willing to both grant me access and assist me in this study. As GRCs are carefully designed and restricted with regard to access, I needed the express consent of the conference director and the assistance of the conference administrator. Fortunately, I have the benefit of having had several conference experiences sponsored by the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego, and I requested that I be allowed to conduct my study there. Dr. Theresa Monroe, Director of the Leadership Institute at the University of San Diego (USD), accepted my request to conduct my research in the setting of a three-day experiential learning conference at USD sponsored by the Leadership Studies program in July 2007.

The experiential learning weekend provided an intense and yet concise process-oriented event wherein to explore the learning phenomenon with participants. My familiarity with USD, Dr. Monroe, and members of the consulting staff was of great benefit in my ability to perform my study in this location. While colleges and universities around the country and abroad sponsor experiential learning conferences based on the Tavistock/A.K. Rice model, the Leadership Institute at University of Sand Diego offers a conference that is slightly different from the norm. The USD program not only employs a

conference design that basically conforms to the model described by A.K. Rice (Rice, 1965), it also includes various features such as lectures and experiential exercises to assist the participants in their learning. In addition, the availability of these interventions made USD an attractive opportunity to explore the effectiveness of such resources for the participants' learning.

Beyond slight alterations or additions to the original GRC design, Dr. Monroe has begun to direct the conferences with a more explicit attention to the implications of developmental diversity, informed by the perspective of constructive developmental psychology (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2004) and integral theory (Wilber, 1997, 2000a, 2000b). This attention to the role of adult development in particular affects the consulting stance of the conference staff as well as the culture of the conference, as explained in Chapter II. As I focused on exploring the implications of these influences on the participant's experience using the same developmental perspective, the opportunity to conduct my research in this setting was fortunate.

Finally, in terms of financial feasibility, I had access to free lodging for the duration of my entire stay in San Diego.

### The Selection of Participants

The overall membership for the conference (76 participants) was comprised of a population of considerable diversity according to numerous demographic characteristics, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, profession, and age.<sup>12</sup> Before explaining the details of the sampling process I used, it is important to elucidate

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<sup>12</sup> I provide all the available demographic detail on the membership in Chapter Four.

on my use of a one-way blind approach, the intention of which was to maintain the privacy of my participants (to me) during the sampling process and during the conference. With the help of an administrative intermediary (Ms. Beth Yemma, Assistant Director of the Leadership Institute of the University of San Diego), I was prevented from knowing the identities of the participants at any point in the conference. I maintained this “one-way blind” until the conference ended, although two participants in this study made themselves known to me during the conference.

My intention in this one-way blind was that this procedure would facilitate the participants’ freedom from generalized performance anxiety, and to help counterbalance the potential difference in perceived power between the participants and me as researcher. This procedure was effective, because when I asked the participants if my presence was a distraction or a source of anxiety, all 18 reported feeling free from concern about being evaluated by me, and in fact 13 of the 18 did not recall noticing my presence at all after the opening plenary when the conference director introduced me as a member of the research group

Through a qualified third party, Ms. Beth Yemma, I invited all those registered for the conference to indicate to her whether they would be willing to participate in my research. The conference brochure itself indicated that research would be conducted in this setting, that it would entail the completion of an instrument—optional journal keeping—and follow-up interviews, and it invited registrants to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in this study. Those who indicated that they were interested in participating received a letter from me<sup>13</sup> (but delivered through Ms. Yemma)

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix A.

informing the potential volunteers about the nature of the study, the time commitment involved in participating, and the benefits of the study. The recruitment packet sent to each individual who indicated their willingness to participate also included the informed consent form (Appendix B). Volunteers for the study were instructed to mail the informed consent form back to Ms. Yemma or to reply by email to the electronic version of the recruitment packet.

Ms. Yemma invited the 25 volunteers to complete the SCTi,<sup>14</sup> a developmental assessment tool (available in a file for electronic download) and to asked that the form be returned to her five weeks prior to the conference. Four or five weeks prior to the conference, she sent the completed SCTi inventories to Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter, the author of the inventory, for two rounds of scoring; in the first of these, Dr. Cook-Greuter reviewed the entire sample and then sent the inventories for thorough evaluation by two independent scorers (for inter-rater reliability). Following the scoring by these two independent raters, Dr. Cook-Greuter approved their work before returning the participants' scores to Ms. Yemma, who kept the scores confidential.

Of the original 25 members who indicated their interest in being part of my study, by the time the conference began, 17 participants had completed the SCTi and returned informed consent forms in the time provided. One additional participant was invited to participate in the study after the conference because of the unusual role he played in the conference, and he took the SCTi after our interview together.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendixes E, F.

My rationale for sampling in this manner was driven by a desire to increase the chances of developmental diversity and for an economically feasible sample size.<sup>15</sup> My assumption based on previous dissertations (Martynovych, 2006; Silver, 2001)<sup>16</sup> was that with a voluntary sample of 25 participants, I would have a final group containing a developmental diversity spread over the course of multiple developmental stages/transitions (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Torbert, 2004). Specifically, according to Torbert's nomenclature describing the adult stages/transitions of development and their respective action logics or ways of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b), the diversity of the 18 participants included those who ranged from the conventional Expert to one who was in transition between the post-conventional stage known as the Strategist and the construct aware Alchemist, as described in Chapter II (Torbert, 2004). While this sampling method had advantages for the reasons described above, it also may have attracted participants who were more prone to risk-taking on behalf of their learning than other members (demonstrated through their willingness to volunteer, to offer extra time for the interviews and to keep learning journal). As a result, there may be limitations in any generalizations based on this study because of these volunteers' unique personality traits, relative to other members of the conference.

As I have explained, I did not know who my participants were until after the conference ended, and I did not access this data on their developmental profiles until my second round of data analysis. I restricted myself from this information as a means of reducing assumptions about the participants' ways of making meaning during the interview process and to reduce my interpretive bias when I began coding the interviews

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<sup>15</sup> The scoring of the SCTi can be costly.

<sup>16</sup> Both Silver (2001) and Martynovych (2006) used the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) (Lahey, 1988).

(I describe this in more detail in the section on data analysis). This restriction enabled me to form an initial, grounded understanding of the participants' experiences, allowing their own concerns, insights, and themes to take precedent before I compared their styles of making meaning with their developmental profiles.

A week before the conference, Ms. Yemma made contact with the volunteers on my behalf to confirm whether they were still interested in taking part in the study. She provided those who said yes with instructions about keeping an optional learning journal for brief reflections on their experience in the conference, and she asked them to set up 90-minute time slots when I would be able to interview them in the two weeks following the end of the conference. Holding the interviews soon after the conference's end was important to this study as a way of helping me explore the meaning-making that participants did on the basis of the conference experience. My assumption was that the more time that passed after the conference ended, the less vivid the participants' recollection of the experience might be as well as their interest and willingness to participate in the study.

### Data Collection

This case study included the following sources of data: the SCTi, a sentence completion form used to ascertain the participants' developmental way of making meaning; my observation field notes on the group-as-a-whole dynamics during the conference; one round of semi-structured 90-minute interviews that explored how participants described and understood their conference experience; and brief learning

journal entries that described anything the participants found noteworthy during the conference events. In addition, I gleaned data from my written memos in order to gain insight from my research experience and to identify any validity threats. By using these combined methods, I had a very robust and rich collection of data to analyze and interpret. Next, I elaborate on each of these sources of data and the means I used to collect and analyze them.

Each of the means I selected for collecting data was guided by my three research questions. Before describing these means, here is a review of the lines of inquiry included in my research.

- I was interested in exploring the relationship between the participants' experiences in the conference, in particular, the ways that they experienced the external and internal developmental supports and challenges available to them in the conference and their assessed stage of making meaning. For example, in terms of challenges, I explored the potential difference between the ways that people at different stages of meaning-making experience interpersonal conflict, social diversity, and the complexity of the group dynamics in the conference setting.
- I was also interested in understanding the ways that people construe "supports" in the conference setting, including the variety of ways that they might tap into personal, interior resources, depending on their individual stage of development. Such interior resources might include contextualizing their experience, drawing on prior learning, the use of mental maps, or taking moments for reflection.

### The SCTi Sentence Completion Tool

The data collection process began with the administration and scoring of the SCTi (also known as the Leadership Development Profile or LDP, Cook-Greuter, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), a test comprised of 36 sentence stems that participants were invited to complete and submit for careful scoring. As explained in Chapter II, the SCTi is used to elicit information used to determine an adult's meaning-making complexity (Cook-Greuter, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004) by asking him/her to complete sentence stems such as: "raising a family..."; "what gets me into trouble is..."; "when it comes to organizing my time..."; etc. This psychometric instrument and the scoring system used to evaluate it has proven to be reliable in helping to determine a person's developmental "center of gravity" (Cook-Greuter, 2006), their most available and consistent way of constructing the meaning of their experience. In addition, the SCTi was selected as a data collection method because it has been used in particular to help explore the complexity of meaning-making by leaders and managers, the kind of professional population included in this study.

Five to six weeks prior to the conference, the SCTi were given to 25 of the registrants who indicated willingness to volunteer for this study. It was provided in a Word document that is completed electronically, saved, and submitted for scoring. As mentioned, Dr. Cook-Greuter analyzed the completed instruments in two phases. In the first, she viewed the whole sample, gave 20 forms that participants returned to two trained scorers who analyzed each form for inter-rater reliability purposes, and then she checked the responses once more.

As explained, Dr. Cook Greuter submitted the scores from these volunteers to Ms. Yemma as the participants for the study sample. Dr. Cook Greuter and Ms. Yemma<sup>17</sup> retained copies of scores until after I completed the first phase of my data analysis of the interviews. At that point, I accessed the score data and began to investigate the potential connections between my initial interpretations and the participants' assessed stages of meaning-making.

### Observation

As mentioned, I was present at the conference as a member of a research group.<sup>18</sup> While this group was not part of my original research plan, it turned out to be a valuable resource for me, especially due to fact that Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter accepted my invitation to attend the conference and provided feedback on my observations. The group also included a professional leadership trainer and an organizational development scholar. While each research group member brought his/her own interests and inquiries, they were also generous in helping me think through my observations and the meaning I was making of the conference.

At the beginning of the conference, the director explained in his opening remarks to the conference membership who I was, that I was in the researcher role and that my observations would be focused primarily on the system rather than on particular members as such. The field notes taken during my observation of the conference were intended as a

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<sup>17</sup> I requested that Dr. Cook Greuter remove any demographic data from the forms before she sends copies to Ms. Yemma. My intention in keeping two sets of scores was to insure against potential loss of the data.

<sup>18</sup>GRC sometimes include a research group that collects data on the conference.

secondary source of data, allowing me to gain a more holistic sense or gestalt of the interactions taking place in the conference as a whole.

This observation served as an essential means of triangulation (Maxwell, 2005), that is, a means of using multiple data points to provide a more complex perspective on the phenomenon of the conference proceedings. This triangulation using multiple data collection methods provided stronger substantiation of the constructs I employed and of the hypotheses that I generated (Eisenhardt, 1989). Using observation as a means of triangulation, with its emphasis on the subjective experience of the researcher, was also especially helpful in this case because the systemic phenomenon of the conference is both dynamic and complex (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Observation of the conference proceedings assisted me in understanding events and dynamics that conference participants referenced in their interviews, helping me to situate those references in context. Attending to the overall dynamics of the conference interactions provided insight into what is usually a highly dynamic and complex flow of events (Slater, 1961). Field notes were also a helpful validity check on the assumptions that I made about the meaning of particular conference events, and provided a way of checking in with conference staff about the perspectives offered by the interviewees. The field notes assisted me in further developing and adapting interview questions and were a way of keeping my reactions and observations linked to the conference events.

### Documents

There were two forms of documents that I gathered from my participants: optional brief learning journal entries made shortly after the various conference events (small

group, large study group, institutional event, etc.) and post-conference reflection papers of three to five pages. I read both the papers and the journals in order to help me identify key issues, critical incidents, and emergent themes. However, due to the richness of the interviews alone, I only used this data to supplement the material generated in the 18 interviews.

### Interviews

I conducted 90-minute, semi-structured interviews with the 18 participants. The interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability in the 14 days immediately following the conference. I invited the participants to a brief (15 minute) optional gathering immediately following the end of the conference. This was my first face-to-face introduction to the study participants, which provided an opportunity to build rapport with each of them and to determine whether the interview schedule prearranged with Ms. Yemma would still work for them. By the end of the process, I conducted 13 interviews face to face and five by phone.

I arranged to meet with each participant for up to 90 minutes, asking for their permission to record the interview and explaining that the recordings would be kept confidential, though they might be shared with a transcriber and my dissertation committee. The interview was semi-structured, using an interview protocol that explored the areas of inquiry designated in research questions 1a and 1b: the participant's experience of the conference; their perception of what they learned; and the way in which they described and understood the internal and external supports and challenges available

to them during the conference. I used six open-ended questions in a conversational format, employing follow-up questions and probes when necessary (See Appendix D).

The first few questions began with helping the participants reflect broadly on what was meaningful to them about their conference experience, as well as what they learned (Research Question 1a). The second set of questions were designed to lead the participants to consider the dynamics of change that they noticed in themselves and the supports and challenges that they experienced (Research Question 1b). The third set inquired as to what resources they experienced beyond those explicitly provided by the setting and staff (Research Question 1b).

After the interviews were completed, they were recorded digitally, labeled with codes that maintained the confidentiality of the interviewee and transcribed. Eventually, I offered narrative summaries (Maxwell, 2005) of the transcripts to the participants for feedback as a way of establishing the descriptive validity of this initial interview phase.

In the pilot study I conducted in April 2007, I had the opportunity to explore the value and effectiveness of my one-way blind sampling process, the observation of the large group process in a GRC, and the adequacy of the interview protocol. On the basis of my experience, I determined that the observation protocol was a very effective means of apprehending a perspective on the large group process and for providing insight regarding the dynamics of the conference. The two pilot interviews were helpful for several reasons: I realized that within the 90 minutes I was able to add several more sub-questions that invited more depth of reflection; the experience clarified for me that I could not refrain entirely from making assumptions about participant's developmental maturity; I learned several practical things about the use of the recording technology, etc.

Most important, I decided on the basis of the experience that a second round of interviews would be unnecessary, given the richness of the data provided in the first and only round.

The following calendar presents the time line of my data collection process:

*Time Line for Data Collection, Analysis, and Writing*

April 20, 2007	<p>Rolling registration for the University of San Diego Group Relations Conference began, including the invitation to the research study.</p> <p>Candidates for the research study received a letter from me (through Beth Yemma) describing the study, were invited to sign informed consent waivers, and the SCTi returned to Ms. Yemma. She forwarded all the forms to Dr. Susann Cook Greuter on June 10, allowing a month for scoring.</p>
April 20-June 10	Registration; correspondence between Ms. Yemma and the candidates and their completion of the SCTi.

*Time Line for Data Collection, Analysis, and Writing (continued)*

April 30	Defense of Proposal.
May 2	IRB submitted for review by IRB boards at both Teachers College and the University of San Diego.
May 15-June 30	Returned to methodology and strengthened analytic process.
June 10	Up to 25 candidates' completed SCTis, delivered electronically to Dr. Cook Greuter for initial overview, selection, and analysis by two scorers.  At the end of the scoring process, Dr. Cook Greuter indicated 17 of the most developmentally diverse participants for the study.
July 9	All participants for the study were selected and notification began through Ms. Beth Yemma at SOLES; USD. Participants were invited to sign up for interview times between July 16 and 27.
July 13-15	USD conference, data collection in the form of observation.
July 16-27	Data collection through qualitative interviews; gathering of documents in the forms of journals and reflection papers; and writing of memos on observations, reflexivity, etc.

Plan and Methods for Analysis and Synthesis of Data

As it is my hope that this study may contribute to the theory of learning related to experiential learning, to the understanding of the role of the holding environment in offering the conditions necessary for adult learning, and to the theory of adult development, I employed elements of the grounded theory approach first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for my data analysis. After gathering data from participants in this unique context, I built some dimensions of the emergent schema inductively, while for other dimensions I applied theory as lens to interpret and understand the participants' experiences.

## Analysis of Data

Here, I provide a brief overview of the process I used for the analysis of the data.

### Phase 1 (July-December 2007)

1. Open coding of emergent themes from the conference experience and learning as found in the participants' interviews. I used Atlas Ti software in this process of coding for every transcript. The first pass of coding generated emic codes in the participants' own words. In the subsequent coding, I also included etic codes taken from Group Relations and Adult Development theory.
2. I condensed every transcript into 18 narrative summaries, using the three research questions to reduce and limit the data.
3. I made estimates of each participant's developmental action logic and provided rationale linking their descriptions of experience and the theory.
4. I performed analysis of emergent themes from the conference experience for each participant sample

### Phase 2 after accessing the SCTi scores (December 2007-February 2008)

5. I accessed the SCTi profiles for the first time.
6. I grouped the participants according to the action logic in which they profiled and created summaries of sections of the narrative summaries according to five categories: Supports, Challenges, Self-Supports, Learning, and Most Significant Experiences.
7. I loaded all of these five categorical summaries for each action logic into Atlas Ti and began a second coding process, this time with attention to themes across the four action logics represented in my research, including similarities, differences

and any evidence that supported or disconfirmed patterns of expanded capacity from one action logic to the next.

8. I used the coding process to discover what relationships, if any, existed between the SCTi scores and the self -descriptions of the holding environments, as well as other resources employed in the service of the learning.

As mentioned, the data analysis took place in two main phases. In the first phase, I drew on my experience as an observer, but primarily allowed the participant experience to speak for itself. Eisenhardt (1989) cautions against beginning a case study with theories or hypotheses, in order not to bias and limit the findings, and she recommends that one avoid thinking about specific relationships between the variables and theories, especially at the outset. In light of this recommendation, I began the coding process to observe the themes and patterns that might emerge from the transcripts (Seidman, 1991), rather than beginning with themes suggested by the literature. This way of grounding codes in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) helped identify alternative explanations that differed both from the literature and from my assumptions based on prior experience and my familiarity with adult development theory.

The analysis, based on a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss as described in Strauss & Corbin, 1992), began with open coding. This process generated 175 distinct codes that were later condensed into five categories. I followed the open coding process by coding with etic, or theoretical themes from the literature, including: markers for learning such as indicators of perspective shift; references to various group dynamics such as projection and basic assumption behavior; and details/perceptions related to the holding environment or the other resources that people employ to support

their learning. Using ATLAS Ti software, I performed an analysis of each code based on the reasoning used, patterns expressed and intensity or frequency of the concerns expressed. Coding the themes and categorizing allowed me to compare them across the 18 participants' descriptions and offered ways of understanding the data (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Once I had coded every transcript, I used my research questions to create five categories (Supports, Challenges, Learning, Self-Supports and Most Significant Experiences) that I used to reorganize the participants' descriptions of their experience into summary profiles for each participant (Seidman, 1998). These portraits included the features of the data that appear most distinctive and illustrative of each participant's way of making meaning, including excerpts taken from their interview transcripts as well as comments I made about the meaning I was making of each section of the participants' descriptions. I offered these summaries to all of the participants for feedback and as a way of maintaining descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2005) and to reduce the amount of data that I was working with for each participant. Five of the 18 read their narrative summaries and provided comments. I also asked four colleagues who are familiar with the theoretical constructs I used to provide inter-rater feedback by checking four of the summaries with the original transcripts, and they provided comments on whether or not my analysis and interpretations of the participants' experience were consistent with their understanding. I incorporated several small changes (additions) to two of the summaries as a result.

In a second phase of work with the summary profiles, I identified sections of the participants' descriptions that suggested they were meaning-making from the perspective

of a particular developmental action logics. Based on these interpretations, I made estimates of the developmental action logics for each participant. This step was the penultimate part of the analysis of the individual participant experiences, prior to accessing their SCTi results. Once I accessed the scores, I went back to check the accuracy of my estimates. My estimates were 83.3% accurate within one full stage and 72.2% accurate within a half-stage of their actual scores. However, the three estimates that were off by more than one stage also led to a key finding related to the way participants experienced and made meaning of behavioral and psychological regression that I describe in Chapter V. I prepared a report for each member that included their SCTi score and information that developmental coaches use to facilitate the integration of such feedback. All 18 participants were interested in receiving their individual report. After I sent them their reports, I invited those participants who wished to follow up with me if they had questions or desired debriefing. Five of the 18 did so, and these conversations provided opportunities for a second member check on the interpretations I was developing.

Once I had completed my analysis of the individual participant experiences, I began the cross-category comparison of the data by grouping participants according to their SCTi scores, so that I had three participants in the Expert action logic, nine in the Achiever, five in the Individualist, and one in the transition between Strategist and Alchemist (the demographics of these categories are provided in Chapter IV). I created new summaries of the five categories used in the individual analysis phase (Supports, Challenges, Learning, Self-Supports, and Most Significant Experiences) and included sections of transcripts from each participant in the given action logic. In other words, I

created five summaries of all the participants' descriptions of supports, challenges, learning, self-supports, and most significant experiences, for each of the four action logics represented in this study, for a total of 20 summaries. I loaded these into Atlas Ti and began a second coding process to explore similarities and differences across the action logics. This time, I identified a total of 256 codes and key phrases, including 45 etic codes from the theory. As a way of reducing the code list, I collapsed codes by concepts around a core category (for instance, self-supports), then refined the categories accordingly (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The main concept categories were supports, challenges, self-supports, coping mechanisms, fall-back regressions, learning, and group dynamics. Each of these concept categories was constituted by multiple codes.

Throughout the analysis phase, I wrote a series of memos (Maxwell, 2005) regarding the emergent themes, meaning I was making of the patterns in the data, questions that I had, and ideas for implications. At the end of the process of analysis, I developed memos that compared/contrasted the participants' descriptions and the meaning I was making of them with the level of the SCTi scores in order to see what behavior and thinking patterns correlated across individuals in these groups, as well as to determine which behaviors and patterns were discrepant. In these memos, I reflected on how the differing developmental maturity levels affected the perceptions of the conference experience for the participants.

Finally, as I began collecting my memos and cross-checking initial findings with the results of the data analysis, it became apparent that my research questions and the study I conducted generated five claims regarding the participants' experiences and learning in the GRC context, and the relationship between the meanings they made of

their experiences and their developmental action logics. These five claims and the various dimensions that constitute them are presented in detail in Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII.

### Validity and Reliability

In this section, I described the various types of validity threats in my study and the means I used in order to attend to them in a systematic and comprehensive manner. I include attention to my own biases and assumptions as well as to the distinct threats: descriptive, interpretive, constructive, and theoretical.

### Researcher Bias

As mentioned, based on previous experiences, I am very familiar with the context and dynamics of the conference and theoretical constructs of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2004, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004). While this was be an advantage in terms of understanding the context and conference theory, I had to take measures such as the one-way blind sampling in order not to reinterpret the participants' statements according to my assumptions. I can see that my own experience of learning in the GRC context was not everyone's experience, and that in fact I needed to be careful about assuming whether there were obvious, demonstrable links between the conditions provided in the conference setting, learning, and the varying epistemologies available to participants on the basis of their developmental maturity.

My way of counteracting my assumptions and biases based on both prior experience and my familiarity with theory was to admit these threats, to write memos, and to track these assumptions over time, paying attention to the ways they were affecting the research. One measure that I found particularly helpful was to make my thinking transparent to myself as well as to the four members of my dissertation-writing group, especially with regard to interpretations. I did this by writing self-inquiry memos and sharing these memos with the group, which provided independent perspectives that helped me achieve greater objectivity with regard to blind spots.

### Reactivity

I took measures to reduce unhelpful aspects of reactivity, or the relationship that a researcher has with participants and the extent to which the power of the researcher is modulated to allow the participants' experience to take precedent over the researcher's (Maxwell, 2005). I realized that it was important to explore how people were responding to me for the various traits they perceived in me and to explore people's preconceived notions of me. In particular, I was mindful of my dual role as researcher-member/observer in the conference setting, my institutional affiliation with an elite graduate school, and my identity as a Jesuit priest. I was also mindful of reactivity generated by my being a well-educated, 38-year-old white male. Since the implications of social location are a focus of Group Relations theory, I included questions around these issues of reactivity in the interviews.

In terms of the benefits of my conference experience, my various life roles and my relationship to my research for this study, I believe that I brought several assets to the

study. First of all, given that I have been both a participant and a staff member at ten of these Group Relations Conferences, I brought understanding and empathy for the experience of the participants selected for interviews. Also, I have considerable experience working with groups, and from their feedback over the years I believe that I have the capacity to establish conditions that are helpful for people's participation, inquiry, discovery, and growth. Next, I have a relationship with some of the faculty at the University of San Diego as well as with professionals in the Group Relations community on the West Coast, and this was beneficial in enlisting help both in terms of the logistics of my research and in the selection of my participants.

I also believe that as Jesuit I had several doors opened for me at USD because it is a Catholic university. At the same time, however, I recognize that while my vocation as a Jesuit may have been helpful in establishing relationships with some individuals, it could have impeded a sense of mutuality and trust with others. I attended to this by being careful not to emphasize my vocation either in the information I sent to the participants or in the interviews. My affiliation with Teachers College, Columbia University, was never apparent as a source of reactivity, but my dual as researcher and member/observer in this setting was challenging. I paid attention to this potential source of difficulty in memos, as well as through periodic check-ins with the director of the conference, my fellow staff members, and later with participants. I was particularly grateful for the support offered by Drs. Cook-Greuter and Monroe.

One other source of reactivity was regarding the use of the SCTi. It is natural that an inventory that assessed developmental ways of knowing (Cook-Greuter, 2006) can instigate anxiety and lead participants to feel as though there is a value judgment implicit

in the test. Initially, I did not offer more description of the test than to say that it is an instrument to help assess a person's style of meaning-making. In the interviews, I explained about the nature of the assessment. All 18 participants expressed interest in receiving the results of their assessments. Only one of the six who responded after all 18 received their report expressed disappointment with the results. After the conversation with this participant, he conveyed to me how helpful he found the information and our discussion. He also wrote a follow-up e-mail several weeks later to express the same sentiment again and to state that he was making use of the feedback I provided.

#### Descriptive Validity

I made every effort to check that my data was accurate and chronological and that what I described actually happened. In order to attend to descriptive validity threats, I had the digital recordings transcribed verbatim. I worked to make all descriptions as accurate as possible by establishing the context of the descriptions and by offering summaries of the transcripts to participants.

#### Interpretive Validity

In order to establish that another person conducting the same research study might make similar interpretations of the data, I conducted five member checks to explore my interpretations about emergent themes with those five participants in order to strengthen the interpretive validity of my analysis. The five participants who provided feedback asked questions of some of my analysis and helped provide clarifications of what they meant in the interviews. I incorporated these clarifications into my interpretations.

It was helpful to be mindful of the dialectical relationship between the insights, observations, reflections, and questions that I noted in my journals and memo and the data as I was moving through the interpretive process. It was also helpful to keep track of participants whose experiences seem to lie on the extremes in terms of features such as learning, developmental maturity, the sense of the holding environment, etc. One participant in the Individualist category was suffering from a disease that was affecting his immune system, and I found it difficult to provide the sufficient context necessary to present his experience in the same way I did the other 17 participants.

As far as the influence of my previous experience of GRCs, I was very familiar with the aspects of the conference in terms of the participant experience. While this was an advantage in terms of understanding the methodology, I had to proceed cautiously in order not to reinterpret the participants' statements according to my assumptions based on the literature and my own experience. I attended to this by checking in with the five<sup>19</sup> of the 18 participants once I generated the individual summary profiles (Glesner & Pershkin, 1992; Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I worked to insure validity by triangulating data from several sources including the interviews, digital recordings, observation notes, participants' journals, the perspectives of the research group, the conference director, and my three readers.

The chapter that follows introduces the context of this research study, the GRC at the University of San Diego, and the 18 participants who volunteered for this research, including descriptions of the four developmental action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2003, 2006; Torbert 2003, 2004) represented in this study.

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<sup>19</sup> The five participants who provided member checks: Jim, Lisa, Anne, Bridget, and Victor

## Chapter IV

### CONTEXT OF STUDY AND INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce and to explain the unique context of this study, that of the Group Relations Conference (GRC), and specifically the conference as it is designed and conducted at the University of San Diego (USD) through the School of Leadership and Educational Sciences Leadership Institute (SOLES). My intention is to help the reader who may not be familiar with this particular experiential learning environment or the theories of group dynamics that provide the foundation for conference design. I also introduce the distinct developmental action logics included in this study and the 18 participants located in the particular action logics indicated by their score on the SCTi (Cook-Greuter, 1999). Again, my intention is to assist the reader who may not be familiar with this particular model of adult development. The participant experience of the conference is discussed in the next chapter.

#### Group Relations

According to the Tavistock Institute (Tavistock, 2007), one of the founding institutions for the theory and a prime sponsor of research in this area, Group Relations is a method of study and training in the way people perform their roles and take up their authority in the groups and systems to which they belong, whether these are work groups, teams, organizations, or less formal social groups. The theory focuses on the

interdependence of people and their environment, focusing on the system rather than on the individual as the primary unit of analysis and interpretation; for instance, the behaviors of an individual would be situated and interpreted relative to the complex and interdependent dynamics of the group as a whole.

Conferences designed for the purposes of educating leaders, managers, and students of organizational behavior about group dynamics use an experiential learning approach to explore the social construction of identity, role, boundaries, tasks, and authority based on both the overt and covert (unconscious) group processes (Bion, 1962). In my experience of ten GRCs, the conferences offer intense, challenging conditions for experiential learning and can generate considerable insight into the psychodynamics at work in groups (for instance, projection, projective identification, and splitting (Klein, 1959). This research is based on my inquiry as to whether the intention behind the conference structure and staffing is sufficiently attentive to the implications of developmental diversity for the learning of and leadership by the members.

#### The Group Relations Conference (GRC)

At first glance, a GRC may look like any other conference. It has a program, staff, and both large group and breakout sessions. GRCs are designed to provide opportunities for learning by participants taking part in all the sessions and by interacting with other participants and staff members of the conference in a variety of group sizes and settings. The conference is seen as an institution in its own right, and the sessions are designed to mirror real organizational settings. However, in other ways it is very different from all other types of conference.

Most GRCs focus on issues of authority, leadership, and organizational life. For example, the aim of the Tavistock Institute's Leicester Conference is to bring together understanding of the conscious and unconscious processes of work groups in human systems, in order to be more effective in working with the underlying dynamics within and between organizations and between these and the wider, indeed global, society. Some other GRCs have themes of contemporary social issues, such as diversity in the workplace, gender equality, and the role of religious belief.

GRCs are designed to provide opportunities for learning by taking part in a series of group work events in separate systems and in the conference as a whole. Participants are asked to study their own and others' behavior as it is actually occurring in the different events. As participants in this study reported, this task of observation and study in the moment is experienced as ambiguous and difficult. In pilot interviews with two participants at a GRC conference hosted by New York University (2007), the task of being aware of oneself in relation to the group while paying attention to one's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, was described as "extremely challenging" (McCallum, 2007).

At the group level, there is always consultancy by staff members available in the conference events, but each individual member is expected to exercise his/her authority to accept what is considered to be useful learning and to reject what is not (Tavistock, 2007). Through this process, members can reconsider the ways that they gain or lose power and exercise their authority in various organizational systems in everyday life. However, these expected self-authoring/self-managing abilities would seem to be contingent on a person's capacity at a given stage of development or action logic, which I discuss later in this chapter.

The GRC conference does not focus on the individual's personality. Nevertheless, much of the learning will be personal to each individual. Each member may consider, for example, how early experiences of authority with parents or teachers are carried forward and influence his/her own behavior, whether as leader or follower. Some short GRCs are non-residential, but longer conferences (of five or more days) are usually residential. While longer conferences offer greater opportunities for in-depth experiential learning, the more common three-day, non-residential conferences offer nonetheless powerful conditions for transformative learning (Silver, 2001).

### The Conference Design

The design of the GRC is of particular relevance to this study because of the way that the particular structure and staffing of the event may or may not offer the requisite supports and challenges for meeting the developmentally diverse learning needs of the participants. As already described, the Tavistock/A.K. Rice method of Group Relations training is based on an experiential learning model (Bion, 1961, 1962; Rice, 1965), a process of internalization, of incorporating felt experience into the inner world (Rice, 1965). It is assumed by the staff that it is up to the individual participant to determine the pace of how much or how little they will engage the learning, although the phenomenon of participant's anxieties or acting out is often interpreted as a form of resistance to authority, rather than a manifestation of a person meeting the limits of their capacity (Bion, 1961). Successful learning is thought by A.K. Rice to be a cumulative process, indicating "readiness for change that is inherent in any growing and maturing organism" (Rice, 1965, p. 72).

As stated, the intention or “primary task” of the conference design is to provide participants with opportunities to study their own behavior as it is unfolding in the moment, a task that some participants find quite challenging (McCallum, 2007). Ironically, the openness and ambiguity of this task, and the lack of rules for the participants, provokes considerable anxiety. Only the roles of the staff and the physical/temporal boundaries of the conference are clearly defined as a way of protecting participants from anxieties that could potentially undermine the “work” of the conference (Banet & Hayden, 1977, p. 164). The definition of boundaries, authority, roles, and tasks (known as by the acronym B.A.R.T.) actually creates a dynamic, complex structure wherein considerable adaptation and innovation can take place, determined in large part by the degree to which participants restrict (or bound) their own behavior based on conventions, inhibitions, and prior experience. My assumption coming into this study was that the degree to which participants are willing to self-authorize and to lead innovation in the conference setting is due, at least in part, to their stage of development.

The conference method is to construct situations where members are removed from the customs and conventions of their ordinary experience (clarity of organizational role, goals, and protocols) and from the natural defenses they provide against anxiety, in order that they can experience and explore the covert or unconscious forces that influence their personal, interpersonal, and organizational dimensions of life (Rice, 1965). Rice referred to this exploration as “checking fantasy against reality,” the true learning of the conference” (Rice, 1965, p. 73). Another way of thinking about it is that, paradoxically, the conference is a container meant to support people as they are being challenged to stretch outside of their comfort zones and, in many cases, to witness their own regression

(Rice, 1965). The question I raise in this study is whether the supports that are provided by the conference structure and staff are appropriate for developmentally diverse participants.

The role of the staff members (otherwise known as consultants) is to provide opportunities for the projections of fears, fantasies, and authority needs/issues by the participants to manifest and then be the focus of attention and interpretation (Tavistock, 2007). The observations and interpretations of the consultants are intended to be interventions in the service of the group's learning, calling attention to aspects of the group's conscious and unconscious processes. The staff consultants often have psychotherapeutic training, but there is an explicit injunction against expectation that they would be available for individual consultation during the conference.

The conference is organized as a sequence of group and inter-group events, varying in terms of size, configuration, task, and whether or not the membership was self-selected. In some conferences, there are special sessions of a non-experiential format that might employ lecture or presentation to explore issues of diversity such as gender, ethnicity, race, sex, or other matters that might influence personal and professional roles, including the ways that people take up their authority. Generally, conferences are comprised of several standard features (Rice, 1965):

- Small study groups that meet with a consultant; the task of the small study group is the observation of group behavior as it occurs.
- Large study groups that meet with several consultants present; same task as above.

- Institutional events where the participants form a temporary organization through which members explore inter-group behavior and the relationships between levels in the organization.
- Review and application groups that help participants to review their learning and its implications for their professional and personal roles outside the conference.
- Opening and Closing events where the staff and membership initially convene and eventually conclude the experience.

While every conference is unique in many ways, there are a number of ways that the experience of a conference may be similar from one participant to another. In order to provide more of the feel of the event outlined above from the perspective of my limited experience, I describe some the traits that are consistent from conference to conference.

#### The “Feel” of the Conference Experience

The conference is usually composed of 50 to 70 member participants and between eight and 15 staff-consultants. The role of the staff consultants is to comment on the aspects of the group process that they experience in the small and large group events, offering interpretations of these dynamics for consideration by the members. It is required that all consultants affiliated with the Tavistock Institute and the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems undergo extensive training. In this training, particular attention is given to the basic assumption group behaviors described earlier. At the same time, individual consultants have the freedom to use interpretations drawn from a number of theoretical bases, including psychoanalysis, leadership and management

studies, and the arts. The consultant's role is to facilitate the learning of the group about its own dynamics, especially related to the issues associated with the exercise of authority.

The opening plenary event is often designed as a relatively familiar conference event, with seating for the membership and, facing the membership, a line of chairs for the staff who take their seats at the beginning of the event, are seated in order of their seniority and role relative to the conference director, and who introduce themselves according to their names and formal roles. There are no nametags for anyone, and the staff often uses a tone of formality. It becomes quickly apparent to first-time members that they have entered across a boundary into a new experience, and that the attention they pay to what they notice and the meanings they are making are the focus of the whole conference.

While the conference director usually begins by reading or sharing extemporaneously the aim and task of the conference, the amount of information and detail offered and the ambiguity of the task often prompt questions, frustration, confusion, and degrees of anxiety among the membership. In some conferences, the first day includes both large and small group experiences as well as a period of reflection on those experiences.

Generally, the large group study event (which includes the entire membership and several staff consultants and where the task is for participants to explore their experience in the moment) is considered very challenging for all involved. Often, as members attempt to lead the group through various means, they are often resisted or attacked by other members who resent or do not recognize their authority. Members also struggle to

understand the ambiguous and constantly shifting relationship between the individual and the group, to hold the complexity of numerous perspectives, and to not flee from the conflicts that arise. The large group event is sometimes described as hostile, chaotic, and frightening as members come to recognize unconscious dimensions of their experiences that are usually masked by conventional organizational structures, at which clear goals, concrete tasks, clearly delineated roles, and well-defined expectations often conceal aggression, competition, sexual attraction, etc.

If the large group experiences are challenging because of the number of people and perspectives involved, the small group experience of eight or ten members at the most is challenging because of the level of intimacy in such a group. Silences, for instance, are sometimes experienced by members as excruciating, and often group members adopt the various basic assumption behaviors described in Chapter II, e.g., pairing, fight-flight, dependency, we-ness, or one-ness (Bion, 1961). In the small group in particular, members often experience frustration with the staff consultant, who does not “lead” them in any way that they are familiar with, thus frustrating the participants’ tendencies to dependency behaviors.

The reflection and application events, which occur several times during the conference, are opportunities for members to look back on their experience over the previous several hours and to consider what was meaningful or challenging about the day, what informal roles did they find themselves taking up, and to inquire into the roles they felt that the group was demanding of them. In this setting, with the help of other members and one or two the staff consultants, who take a different role in this event, a

person often makes discoveries about their own patterns of behavior and connections to the way that they take up their role in their home organization.

In the subsequent days of the conference, the whole membership and staff enters into an “institutional event,” where they collectively form a temporary organization and explore the connections, conflicts and inter-relationships between various subgroups within the system they are building. While this institutional event and its various phases are often described as less threatening than large and small group events, it is nonetheless a potential context wherein to explore the systemic reality of the conference and the dynamic complexity of organizations.

The conference usually moves toward conclusion with a plenary where members and staff share perspectives and explore the meaning of individual/collective experiences, and a final reflection and application event, where members are assisted in looking at how they might transition from the intensity of the conference back into their daily routines, relationships, and work roles.

#### Leadership for Change Conferences at the University of San Diego

While the above description of conference designs provides a general introduction to the ways that these educational settings are understood and organized, the particular ways that conferences are conducted varies depending on a number of regional and philosophical factors. Dr. Theresa Monroe, RSCJ, founder of the Leadership Institute at the University of San Diego’s (USD) School of Leadership and Educational Sciences (SOLES), began conducting the Leadership for Change conferences there in 2000. The conferences at USD are generally congruent with the model described above, although as

pointed out in a recent historical study of “psychodynamic organizations” by Fraher (2004), the author notes how Monroe offers an innovative approach that builds on both psychosocial theoretical foundations, as well as on the latest literature on leadership and organizational life. In order to obtain a more informed perspective on the intention and character of the Leadership for Change conferences at USD, I invited Dr. Monroe and Bruce Irvine, the Director of the Grubb Institute in London, to a public conversation with professionals involved in organizational consulting about the emerging edges of Group Relations work from their perspective.

In the interview that I conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University, on October 5, 2007, Monroe and Irvine offered their perspectives on the purpose of the Group Relations work, the aim of the conferences, and the way in which they construe the conference as a holding environment (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) for the learning and transformation of the whole conference system.

Irvine described one of the goals of the conference as “offering powerful methodologies for transformative action,” “creating spaces where people can look at themselves and the systems they’re part of in a different way” (Interview 10-5-07). Monroe adds, “The conferences are about creating conditions for conversations that matter, for real conversations,” about the interplay of authority, leadership, and power (Interview 10-5-07). She noted that while the conferences are based on a tradition that began after World War II with a very specific agenda in mind, namely, that of helping people move past their dependencies within conventional, hierarchical, and patriarchal institutions, the contemporary context is making new demands of Group Relations. “The

real challenges of the twenty-first century are about developing a capacity for holding complexity without being paralyzed,” Monroe stated (Interview 10-5-07). She continued, “it is about being able to act in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty and being aware of the source out of which you are acting” (Interview 10-5-07). In their opinion, Group Relations Conferences provide a dynamic framework and structure for different types of power to be exercised and explored and for the exploration of the potential resources that the unconscious provides for change at the systemic level.

When asked about the way in which the GRC serves as a holding environment (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) in support of learning, Monroe and Irvine reflected on a number of dimensions. Both Monroe and Irvine acknowledged that holding complexity and acting in the face of ambiguity within organizational contexts can be hard work and, at the same time, under the right circumstances, can be joyful and filled with meaning. Monroe asked, “What are the resources necessary that one doesn’t lose one’s mind and give way to the pressures leaders face to be experts with answers in the face of organizational challenges” (Interview 10-5-07). She considered how the conference conditions create “liminal spaces,” where the felt experience of the interaction is “more than the sum of the parts,” and the possibility of transformation becomes manifest, inviting members to “step aside and, at the same time, pay attention to what is emerging,” (Interview 10-5-07). For both of them, a key feature of the holding environment in the conference is constant reference to the overall purpose of the conference, which then helps staff and members orient themselves, their roles, relationships, and choices toward alignment with that purpose.

When asked about the ways in which Monroe and Irvine of them work to support the learning of members within the conference, Monroe described how she uses her intuition about people's developmental maturity to gauge the way in which she will consult to them, discerning to the best of her ability how to best support that particular individual in their learning at that moment. This discernment will often determine the extent to which she will support and challenge members and the means that she will employ to do so. Monroe employs her intuition in this way when acting as conference director and she actively encourages her consultant staff to do the same. At the same time, it should be noted that this attention to the developmental maturity of the members is not widespread in Group Relations work.

ONE World ONE Spirit: Leadership for Change Conference, July 13-15, 2007

My own experience of the way that Monroe and Irvine design and direct conferences is that the conference work is part of a much larger concern, not only for helping support leadership and transformation in the conference or in organizations, but within society as a whole. To that end, the conference topics Monroe and Irvine select reflect emergent and urgent issues in the larger social field. In the case of the particular conference where I conducted my study, the title of the conference was ONE World ONE Spirit: Encountering Leadership, Freedom, Authority, and Accountability. The following passage is from the conference brochure and identifies the larger context and social field in which the conference is situated:

We experience the poverty of time and an increased pace in world activity. There are increased polarizations within and between religions as well as evidence of increased yearning for spiritual connectedness. We are faced with contradictions—faith and belief are often seen as the source of conflict and

aggression despite the huge evidence of faith, belief and spirituality being resources for healing, repair and transformation. We witness what human beings engaging with each other can achieve, occasions where the human spirit overcomes adversity, and demonstrates the potency of what happens when we mobilize all of our resources to achieve a common purpose (April, 2007).

To the end of engaging such complex and conflictual challenges related to faith and belief, the overarching aim of the conference “is to develop a spirit of enquiry into the lived experience of organizational life in order to promote transformation” (Conference handout, April, 2007). When asked about the meaning of “transformation,” Monroe and Irvine both spoke to the need for dismantling of the mental models that keep individuals and groups from realizing their potential by repeating old, often unjust systemic patterns such as patriarchy or racial hegemony. The conference task is “to provide the optimum space for participants to use their power to exercise their leadership, freedom, authority, and accountability” (Conference handout, April, 2007).

Included below is a graphic description of the conference schedule for the three days, including a key that explains the nature of the events included.

*Table 4. ONE World ONE Spirit: Encountering Leadership, Freedom, Authority, and Accountability*

July 13-15, 2007

	Friday, July 13		Saturday, July 14		Sunday, July 15	
8:15-8:45			(o) RM		(o) RM	
9:00-10:00	OP		LSE	VSSE	WE	
<i>Break</i>						
10:30-11:30	LSE	TOP + VSSE	SSE	CPE	WE	
<i>Break</i>						
12:00-13:00	SSE	VSSE	LSE	VSSE	RTE	
<i>Lunch</i>						
14:30-15:30	SSE	CPE	Conversation with CD	SEMINARS	PD	
<i>Break</i>						
16:00-17:00	WE		WE		RTE	
<i>Break</i>						
17:30-18:30	RTE		RTE			
<i>Dinner</i>						
20:00-21:30	WE		WE			

Whole Conference

(o)RM	Optional Reflection and Meditation
OP	Opening Plenary
WE	World Event
PD	Plenary Discussion

Working Sub-Conference

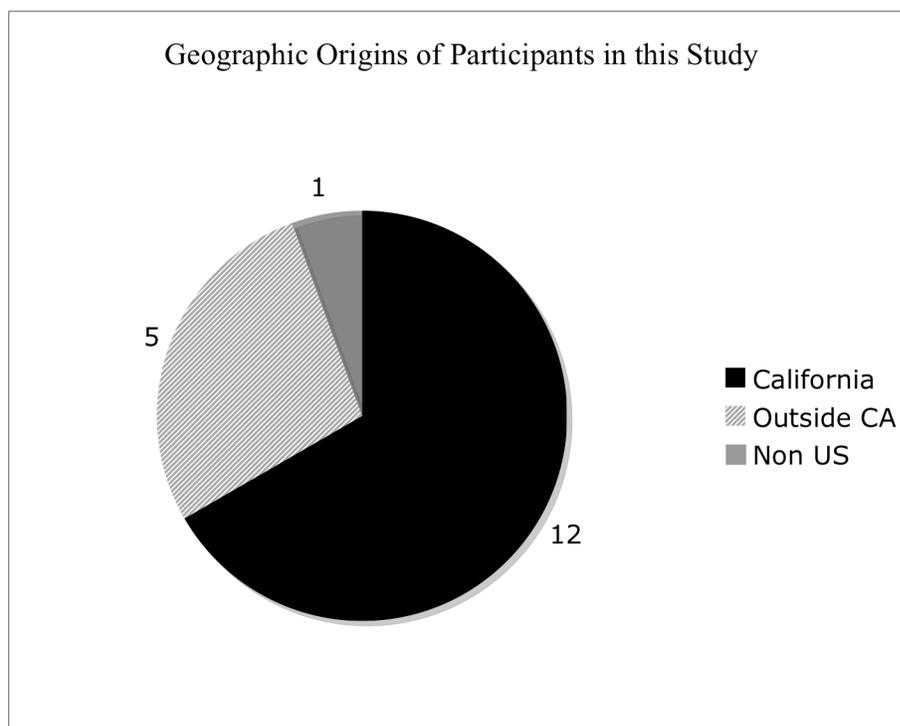
LSE	Large Study Event
SSE	Small Study Event
RTE	Role Transformation Event
Conversation with the Conference Director	

Training Sub-Conference

VSSE	Very Small Study Event
TOP	Training Sub-Conference Opening Plenary
CPE	Consultant Preparation Event
Seminar	Consultation to RTE

The following graphical figures indicate demographics describing the composition of the conference membership, as well as comparison tables with data related to the eighteen participants in this study.

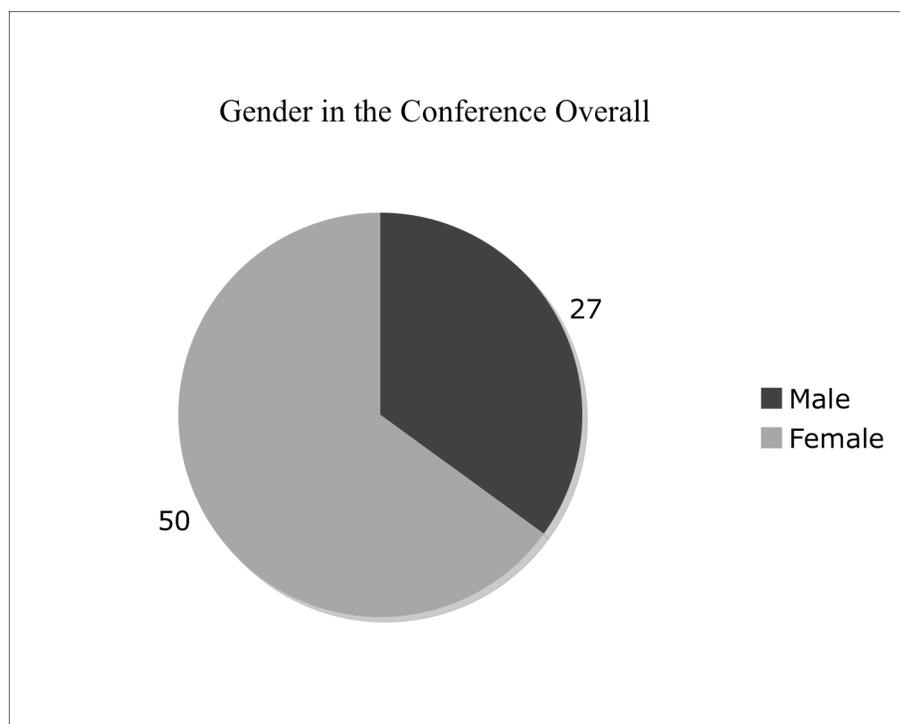
Figure 2. *Geographic Origins for Participants in This Study*



Source: D. McCallum, S.J., 2008

As Figure 2 indicates, the majority of the participants in this study were from the state of California. The next two figures indicate the gender distribution in the conference overall and in my study.

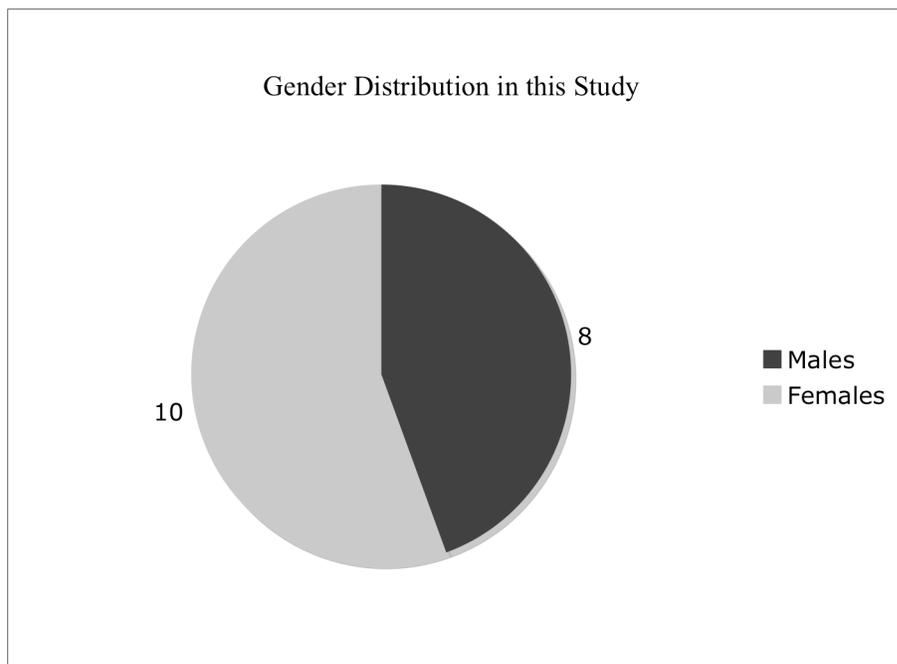
Figure 3. *Gender Distribution for the Conference Overall*



Source: B. Yemma, 2007

There were 50 women and 27 men in the overall conference membership, and similar ratio of women to men in this study.

Figure 4. *Gender Distribution of Participants in This Study*

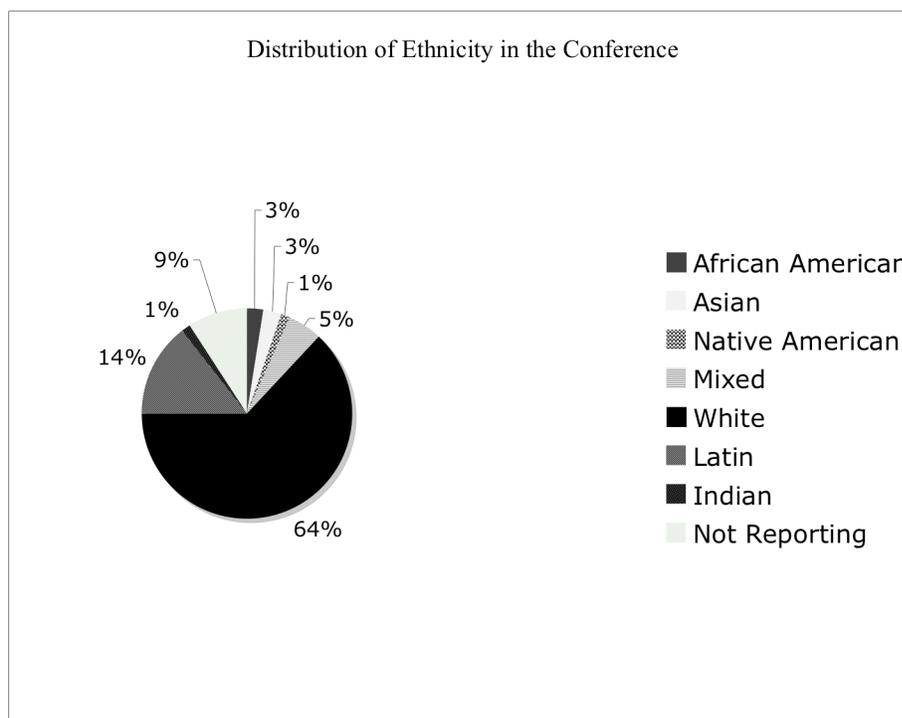


Source: D. McCallum, S.J., 2007

As indicated, the percentage of females to males in the conference overall was 67% to 33%, respectively. The percentage of females to males in this research study was 56% to 44%, respectively. The average age of members in the conference: 35 years old (youngest: 21 year-old Latina female; oldest: 64 year-old Native American male). The average age of participants in study: 38 years old (youngest: 25 year-old white female; oldest: 59 year-old white female).

Figure 5 reports the ethnicities that members self-reported in the conference overall.

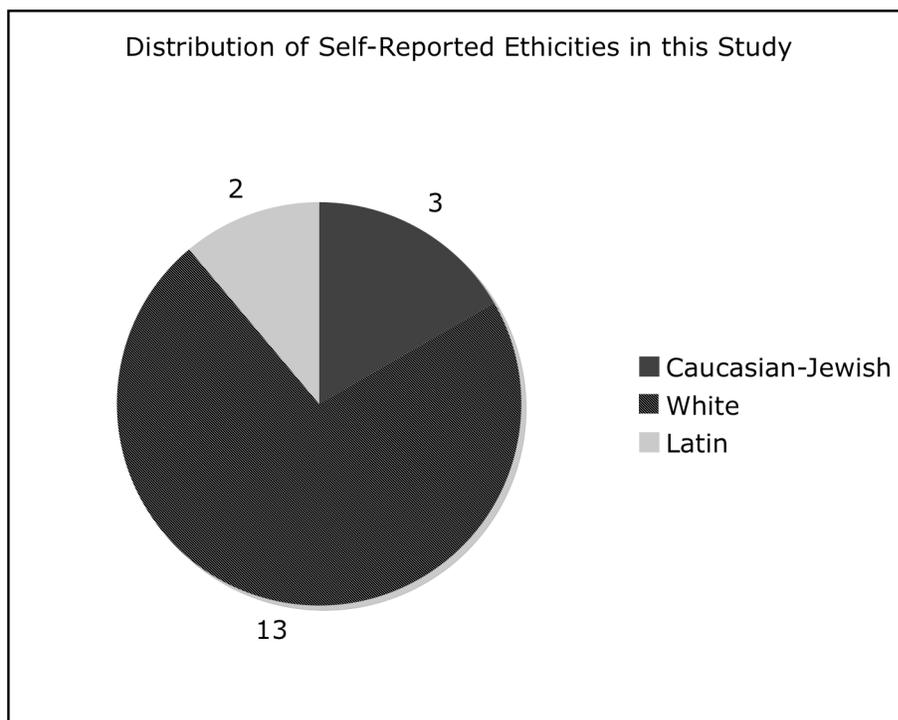
Figure 5. *Ethnicities as Self-Reported by Members in the Conference Overall*



Source: B. Yemma, 2007

Figure 6 reports the distribution of ethnicities self-reported by the participants in this study.

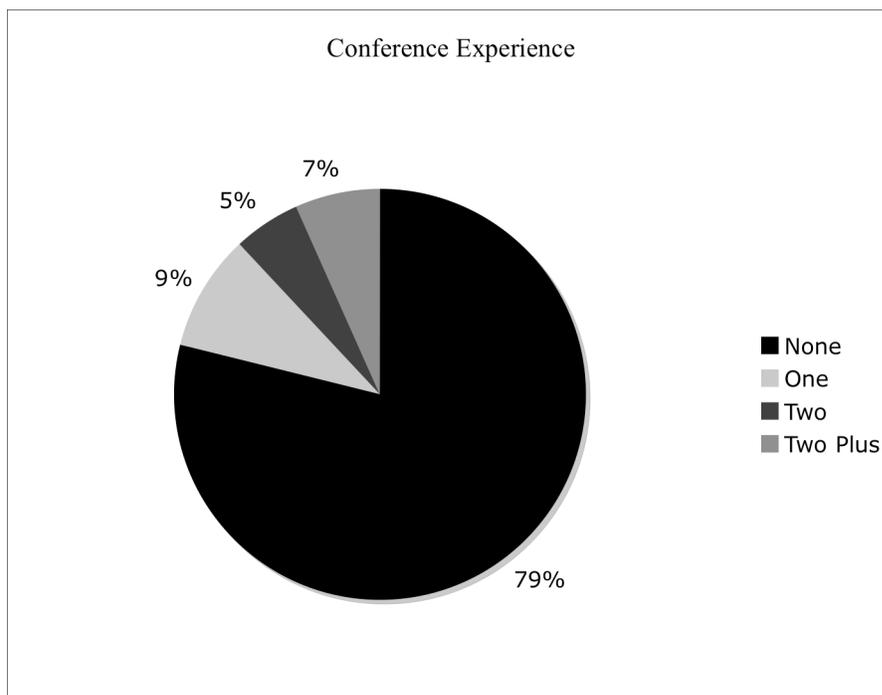
Figure 6. *Self-Reported Ethnicities of Participants in Study*



Source: D. McCallum, S.J., 2007

While the comparison of the demographics of the conference overall and of the members of this study does not yield surprising insights, it should be noted that seven of the 18 participants attended at least one GRC prior to the ONE World ONE Spirit conference in July 2007. This is much higher a percentage of experienced to inexperienced—38% in this study relative to the conference membership overall. See Figure 7 for the distribution of members with previous conference experience in the overall membership.

Figure 7. *Previous Conference Experience for Total Membership*



Source: B. Yemma, 2007

This is the only demographic that was notably divergent in that only 20% of the overall conference membership had prior experience, whereas 39% of the participants in my study had previous experience.

### Developmental Action Logics and Introduction to Participants

In the following section, I used Cook-Greuter's work (1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006) to describe the developmental action logics represented by the participants in this study, and I introduce the participants grouped according the action logic in which they profiled on the SCTi psychometric inventory. As stated in Chapter II, I chose Cook-Greuter's model of adult development for this study instead of Kegan's (1982, 1994) for several reasons. First, Cook-Greuter's model uses an assessment based on Loevinger's

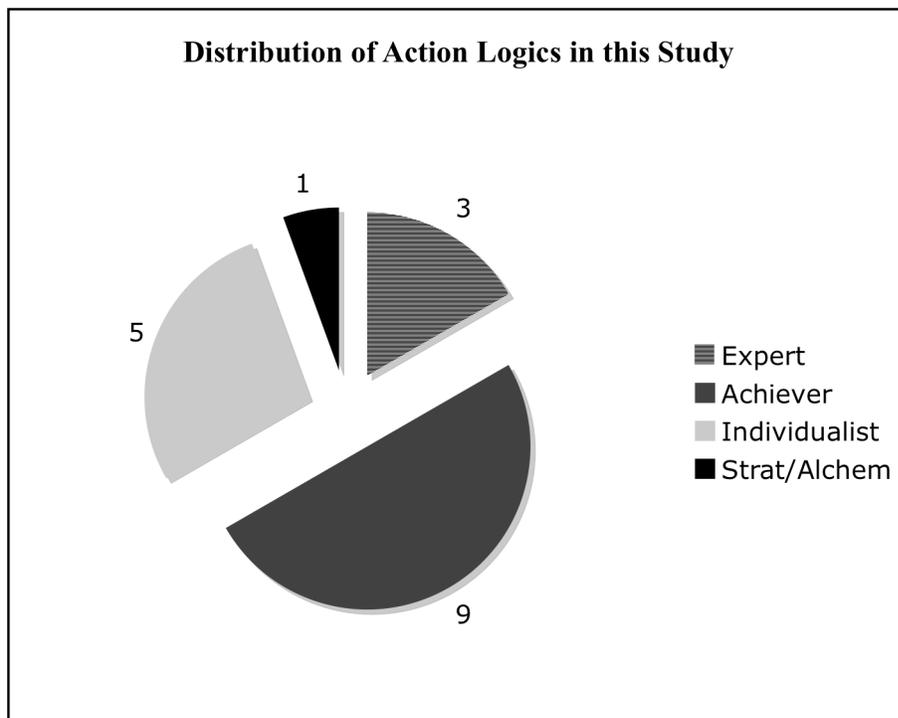
Washington University Sentence Completion Tool (Loevinger & Blasi, 1976), which was more convenient to administer than the Subject Object Interview (Kegan & Lahey, 1986), and it allowed me to remain blind to the developmental action logics of the participants until the second phase of my data analysis.

The professional SCTi has been in development since 1983, when W.R. Torbert and S. Cook-Greuter adapted Loevinger's instrument for professionals and explored its use with managerial populations, making their model particularly useful for my research into the implications of adult development for leadership. It uses Cook-Greuter's theoretical distinctions throughout the scale, including the concepts of increasing levels of perspective on the self or self-awareness and her refinements of the stage sequence at the later end of development, with the late- scoring categories tested repeatedly for validity and reliability (Cook-Greuter, 2006). Finally, I have collaborated closely with Torbert and Cook-Greuter and I find their work especially helpful in the leadership development work that I do professionally.

I began with the Expert, the action logic roughly equivalent to the transition between Kegan's third and fourth order of consciousness (McCauley et al, 2006). The Expert action logic follows the Diplomat, or Conformist (Cook-Greuter, 2006) and precedes the self-authoring Achiever action logic. It should be noted that participants in each action logic may or may not bring prior experience with Group Relations theory or conferences, and that five of the participants were members of a consultant-in-training sub-conference over the course of the weekend. I mention this because previous conference experience is a significant factor in participants' learning experience, according to their self-reports. The following Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of the

developmental action logics represented in this study. It should be noted that there were no participants who scored squarely in the Strategist action logic between the Individualist and the Alchemist, although the person who scored latest in the SCTi profiled in transition between the Strategist and Alchemist.

Figure 8. *Distribution of Developmental Action Logics in This Study*



Source: D. McCallum, S.J., 2008

### The Expert

According to Cook-Greuter (2002), the self-conscious Expert stage characterizes people who are able to step back for the first time and look at themselves in a critical-reflective way as objects, rather than being entirely subject to their experience. A conceptual watershed is crossed when one can take the third-person perspective, allowing for introspection and self-understanding as if one is standing outside of oneself. It also means that persons in this stage need to differentiate themselves from the familiar group

contexts and assert/express their newly discovered personhood. Persons in this stage exhibit stable personality traits with unique characteristics and traits that endure over time. This orientation towards patterns of behavior and the beginning of self-consciousness leads to an interest in sharing one's own special character. Experts become interested in describing who they are in terms of traits, norms, and conventional virtues, but often in contrast to others, such that they are able to distinguish their uniqueness, their own needs and wants. For this reason, experts like to compare themselves to others constantly, generally to boost their as-yet fragile self-sense. Comparing and measuring is also an aspect of the new cognitive capacity for perspective-taking, although again with emphasis on distinction rather than on similarity.

Experts are very adept at finding new and different solutions, better ideas, and more perfect procedures, taking advantage of the capacity to see multiple possibilities and alternative solutions. If managed skillfully, their positive contributions to organizations can be considerable. Because their process is additive, people at this stage cannot prioritize among alternatives or synthesize several possibilities.

While there is a cognitive capacity to look inside oneself, one's defense is to be ultra-rational and to externalize blame. Experts live in a world where things are sure and clear, and they feel very much entitled to impose their views on others.

In the following table (Table 5), I introduce the three participants who profiled in the Expert Action logic according to the score on their SCTi. It should be noted that when I did member checks with participants, Jim was at first defensive about accepting the score he received, yet later responded that the characteristics of this particular action

logic were resonant with him. Kate's score of 3/4 + indicates that she is in transition into the next action logic, that of the Achiever.

Table 5. *Participants Who Profiled in the Expert Action Logic*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender/Age/ Race-Ethnicity</b>	<b>SCTi Score</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Jim	Male/38/Caucasion- Jewish	3/4	Jim was a member of the training sub-conference, preparing for a future role as a Group Relations consultant. He works in the IT field and is also training as a psychologist. Jim had considerable familiarity with the theory of Group Relations and the psychoanalytic tradition.
Steve	Male/53/Caucasion- Polish	3/4	Steve was a member of the training sub-conference, preparing for a role as a consultant as well. He is a former career military officer and is presently an administrator in an institution of higher education. He also had previous experience with Group Relations theory and conferences.
Kate	Female/46/Caucasion- Jewish	3/4 +	Kate is sociologist working in a non-profit organization. She had no familiarity with Group Relations theory and has never attended a conference before.

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### The Achiever

According to Cook-Greuter (2002), the expanded third-person perspective of the conscientious or Achiever stage allows people to explore themselves and events in a linear, historical time. This action logic is a "target stage" for Western culture due to the competencies that it entails (Cook-Greuter, 2002, p. 16). Achievers are concerned with

who they are, how they become that way, and where they are going or what they are developing into. Thinking about one's future and one's goals is important as is being able to explain a chief preoccupation (linear causality). Achievers know how to prioritize, they can coordinate several competing demands (such as "technical perfection" versus "time to market"), and they are able to balance effectiveness and efficiency.

Persons of this mindset are interested in reasons, causes, goals, consequences, and the effective use of time. Rather than one reason or cause, Achievers often look for multiple reasons or root causes in a chain of events. They explore what makes them and others tick through feedback and introspection, learning to understand themselves backward and forward in time. At the same time, their overall emphasis is future-oriented and concerned with improvement, achievement, and goals. Achievers generally believe in the "perfectibility of humankind" (Cook-Greuter, 2002, p. 17) and in the scientific method to uncover truth. Formal operations and abstract rationality are at their peak in this stage. Achievers are willing to work towards the betterment of the world according to what they deem as good for all.

This stage is characterized by a concern to accomplish things with a sense of conscientiousness, responsibility, and expediency, often with a degree of ambition and a bias toward action. Self-esteem is derived more from a sense of achieving one's own goals and realizing one's own expectations than from external affirmation and approval. At the same time, the drive to succeed and achieve can lead to over-extension and exhaustion, such that coming to term with limits is a key learning curve for many in this action logic.

In this study, the Achiever action logic is represented rather robustly by nine of the 18 participants. This is not surprising due to the way in which the Achiever action logic draws people toward opportunities for self-improvement and self-advancement. Most of the participants who profiled as Achievers were female, many of them graduate students in the M.A. or PhD in Leadership Studies at the University of San Diego. Table 6 begins with two participants, Alison and Jeff, who profiled at the earlier end of the Achiever spectrum, and conclude with Susan, a young woman who profiled in the transition from Achiever to Individualist.

Table 6. *Participants Who Profiled in the Achiever Action Logic*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender/Age/ Race-Ethnicity</b>	<b>SCTi Score</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Alison	Female/33/Caucasion	4-	Alison is a psychologist as well as a doctoral student and new mother. She had familiarity with Group Relations Theory through the Leadership course taught by Terri Monroe.
Jeff	Male/47/Caucasion	4-	Jeff is a former military officer who is presently a chief civilian engineer. He had attended a conference previously, and also has a professional coach who uses Group Relations Theory in her practice. He was a member of the consultant training sub-conference.
Sandra	Female/26/Caucasion	4	Sandra is a graduate student. She has a background in outdoor leadership education, but no prior conference experience.
Anne	Female/29/Caucasion	4	Anne has a MA in Leadership from USD and so was very familiar with the theory of Group Relations. She had also attended one conference previously. Anne is involved with corporate human resource development.

Table 6. *Participants Who Profiled in the Achiever Action Logic (continued)*

Clare	Female/35/Caucasion	4	Clare is an educator involved in administration at the secondary school level. She is enrolled in the MA in Leadership program and had familiarity with Group Relations theory through her course work.
Lisa	Female/33/Latin	4	Lisa is a collegiate athletic coach, a doctoral student, and an associate professor. She had considerable familiarity with Group Relations Theory and was a member of the consultant training sub-conference.
Joann	Female/59/Caucasion-Irish	4	Joann is a nun and a professional spiritual director. She had no prior experience with Group Relations Theory or with experiential learning conferences.
Marie	Female/39/Caucasion	4	Marie is a development director for a non-profit organization. She had no prior experience with Group Relations Conferences or theory.
Susan	Female/25/Caucasion/ Italian	4+ 4/5	Susan is a graduate student and also had taken the course by Terri Monroe.

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### The Individualist

According to Cook-Greuter (2002), the Individualist action logic, or stage 4/5, describes what a person can “see” with a fourth-person perspective, meaning that he/she can take into account their own and other points of view with reference to context. People now realize that things are not necessarily what they seemed at earlier stages because the interpretation of reality always depends on the position of the observer. Thus the idea of the participant observer, the observer who influences what he observes, is becoming a conscious concern. One can never be as totally detached and objective as the rational/scientific outlook of the Achievers would have it.

The fourth-person perspective also makes possible the viewing of the whole system of beliefs acquired through socialization; thus, previously unexamined assumptions, cultural conditioning, and personal blind spots become targets of interest and exploration. The same object/event can have different meanings for different observers, for the same observer in different contexts, and/or for different observers at different times. Individuals become interested in watching themselves trying to make sense of themselves.

The fourth-person perspective constitutes an important change in thought mode. Individualists abandon purely rational analysis in favor of a more holistic approach in which feelings and context are taken into account and the process of discovery becomes as engaging as the product or the outcome. Individualists also favor more relativistic or psychological approaches over merely logical ones. The need to explain everything is gone, and mystery and fantasy are again appreciated.

In this study, several men profiled at the early end of this stage, including one participant, Paul, who was suffering from a medical condition at the time of the conference and the interview. In Table 7, I begin with Brian, one of the two younger men profiled as an early Individualist, and conclude with Bridget, the only woman representing this action logic in my sample and the only one with a full 4/5 score.

Table 7. *Participants Who Profiled in the Individualist Action Logic*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender/Age/ Race-Ethnicity</b>	<b>SCTi Score</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Brian	Male/25/Caucasion	4/5-	Brian works in the aircraft industry and is completing an MA in supply chain management. He had no prior background in Group Relations.
Paul	Male/29/Caucasion-South African	4/5-	Paul is an actor and cinematographer. He had no prior experience of Group Relations. Due to a medical condition at the time of the conference and interview, I was unable to use the data I collected from Paul.
Joshua	Male/51/ Caucasian-Italian	4/5-	Joshua is a Roman Catholic priest, the pastor of an urban parish. He had previous conference experience and is familiar with both Group Relations and adult development theory. He was a member of the consultant training sub-conference.
Bill	Male/55/Caucasion-Jewish	4/5-	Bill is a psychotherapist with one previous Group Relations Conference in his experience.
Bridget	Female/47/Caucasian-South African	4/5	Bridget is an ordained minister in a Christian denomination. She had some familiarity with Group Relations theory but no conference experience.

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### The Strategist

While I did not technically have any Strategists represented in this study, Victor profiled in the transition between the Strategist and the Alchemist with enough indicators that he is better described by the later stage. In order to understand the differences between the post-conventional action logics and the ways in which the Alchemist is distinct from the Individualist, it is necessary to understand the fully autonomous Strategist that lies in between. According to Cook-Greuter (2002), the Strategist action

logic represents an enlarged fourth-person perspective that places the individual's experience into the context of ongoing societies and within the whole life course that includes awareness of older generations as well as the children of one's children. With the expanded time frame and wider social networks, Strategists can perceive systemic patterns or long-term trends and are often valued for that strategic capacity.

Cognitively, Strategists have a general systems view of reality, that is, they comprehend multiple interconnected systems of relationships and processes, including those within themselves. The fourth-person expanded perspective on the self includes a sense of one's place in terms of generational history backwards and forwards in time. Thus, other people's perspectives and solutions to social issues as well as the long-term effects of current policies on generations to come are taken into account when making decisions.

The expanded fourth-person perspective allows a person to see or his/herself and others not only as having different personalities in different contexts and at different times, but to recognize that there is a unique, authentic and enduring core to oneself for which one is responsible. Thus, choices are on behalf of this well differentiated core-self whom one celebrates and tries to manifest through one's commitment to self-chosen goals and through continuous self-actualization. In contrast, "self-improvement" is a common concern of Achievers and has to do with becoming a more saleable commodity, a self that fits better into society's expectations or one's self-chosen ideology. Self-actualization actually refers to a need to become more and more congruent with one's deepest desires regardless of currency and expectations of others. It is to become what

one is called to (Cook-Greuter, 2003). What matters is to make oneself into a better instrument to serve the world.

Unlike the Achiever who manages his/her self-identity and attempts to retain clear boundaries, the Strategist perspective allows individuals to view themselves as the central organizer of meaning by participating in multiple, overlapping systems and by flexibly adjusting to various circumstances. By acting on inner, more universal principles rather than socially rewarded roles and functions (like the Achiever), the Strategists are open to more tension and ambivalence while they are simultaneously more willing to grant autonomy to others and are more tolerant of those persons' unique ways of making sense. Intimacy with others is vital, as the authentic self can only be actualized in relationships. Furthermore, the turn toward one's inner life continues to deepen. Explanations of who one is and why one acts as one does become more psychological. The Strategist expresses inner conflict, ambivalence, and self-doubt in vivid ways and describes these experiences with reference to specific situations, rather than in abstraction as in earlier stages.

Compared with people in the earlier action logics, the Strategist generally is more self-aware and is more capable of responding to multiple, complex, and conflicting demands with more foresight and perspective. For that reason, they generally have high self-esteem and project a mature, insightful image in the SCTis. Being aware of one's own vulnerabilities and acknowledging them is part of what gives the Strategist a sense of power. Moreover, alongside this sense of power, Strategists describe a correspondingly elevated sense of responsibility, even though the sense of entitlement to lead and to govern others is often part of the shadow side of the autonomous person.

Strategists often describe their lives as being on a journey or a path. They express some inner conflict by mentioning the warring sections, not just by naming the conflict. They often reveal specific shortcomings and idiosyncrasies and how these affect themselves and others.

### The Alchemist

According to Cook-Greuter (2002), Alchemists are people who have become aware of the pattern of development that encompasses ever-broader realms of experience and thought, and are aware of the mental constructs used to describe experience. They realize that “ego” has functioned as both a central processing unit for all the stimuli and as a central point of reference for one’s sense of identity. Once they realize this fundamental ego-centricity as part and parcel of a personal perspective, it is felt as a constraint to further growth and understanding.

Alchemists start to wonder about the meaningfulness of more and more complex thought structures and integrations/differentiation such as can be imagined with a fifth or a sixth or an nth person perspective. They start to realize the absurdity, or inherent limits, of any theoretical constructs in the representational domain. They recognize that all meaning-making is only an approximation, and that one can easily get into forms of infinite mental regress.

Unlike at earlier stages, Alchemists are aware of the ego’s clever maneuvering for self-preservation. This is the first time in development that the ego becomes transparent to itself. Final knowledge about the self or anything else is seen as elusive and unattainable

through effort and reason because all conscious thought, all cognition, is recognized as a construct and, therefore, split off from the underlying, cohesive, non-dual reality.

By turning further inward, Alchemists start to see through their own attempts at meaning-making, and they become aware of the profound splits and paradoxes inherent in rational thought. The linguistic process of splitting into polar opposites and the attending value judgment can become conscious. Moreover, the constant judging of what is good and what is not creates much of the tension and unhappiness so prevalent in ordinary consciousness.

As mentioned, Victor, a business school professor in his mid-40s is the only participant whose action logic profile is in what Cook-Greuter describes as the second level of the post-conventional stages that follow the Achiever. He is technically in the transition between the Strategist and the Alchemist with a score of 5/6- on the SCTi, although enough of Victor's sentence completions rated in the later action logic that he can be described in this stage. For the purposes of clarity, I characterize him as in transition between the Strategist and the Alchemist

Table 8. *Participant Who Profiled in the Strategist/Alchemist Action Logic*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender/Age/Race Ethnicity</b>	<b>SCTi Score</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Victor	Male/44/Caucasion- Latino	5/6-	Victor is a business school professor who is also completing an MA in Marriage and Family Therapy. Technically, his score on the SCTi locates him in the transition between the Strategist and the Alchemist, though with enough answers scoring in the Alchemist to qualify for this category. Victor had familiarity with the literature and theory of Group Relations, adult development and Integral Theory. This was his first conference experience.

### Summary

It is my hope that by presenting an overview of the conference design and the differences in action logic across the developmental spectrum that the reader will be better able to follow the findings presented in the following four chapters, and better understand the adult developmental frames through which the participants reported their experiences.

## Chapter V

### FINDINGS ONE AND TWO

#### Introduction

The following five chapters present the findings from my study, guided by these three research questions:

- 1a) How do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand their experience and their learning in the context of a Group Relations Conference?
- 1b) In particular, how do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand the internal supports and challenges available to them in the Group Relations Conference?
- 2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience and their assessed ways of making meaning?

In this chapter, I introduce the five core findings as they emerged from my analysis and interpretation of the participants' descriptions of their conference experience. For each finding presented in this and subsequent chapters, I describe and define key terms, include illustrations from the participants' interviews, and provide my analysis and interpretation. In order to portray the participants' experience, I present participant voices that give expression to the experience of the conference from the meaning-making perspective of the Expert, the Achiever, Individualist, and the Strategist/Alchemist action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004).

## Five Core Findings

### Finding One

All participants, no matter what their developmental action logic, describe experiences of what three participants, Sandra (Achiever), Marie (Achiever), and Victor (Strategist/Alchemist) call “fall-back,” a temporary experience of regression as a result of their experience of the various challenges in the conference, which might include interpersonal conflict, an overwhelming sense of anxiety brought on by uncertainty, or feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of perspectives generated by conference members. Another dimension of the same finding is that the ways participants recover or make sense of the regression differs depending on their action logic. Finally, many of the participants reported how their most significant learning experiences were related to these periods of fall-back.

### Finding Two

Related to this first finding about participants’ experiences of fall-back, eleven of the 18 participants describe how they reacted to the challenges of the conference by resorting to coping mechanisms, which were measures primarily directed to their own self protection under challenging conditions. Another dimension of this finding is that there was more incident of this use of coping mechanisms for the participants whose SCTi assessments profiled in the Expert and Achiever range than for those who profiled later in their action logic. Participants described how these coping behaviors interfered with their capacity to learn and lead in the moment.

### Finding Three

Every participant in this study reported that the external holding environment—namely, the supports and challenges constituting the conference—was helpful for their learning. Nine of the participants even described aspects of their learning experiences as transformative in nature, meaning that they felt changed at an experiential level. Another dimension of this finding is that there were similarities and differences across the action logics for what constituted developmental supports and challenges according to the participants' descriptions.

### Finding Four

Every one of the 18 participants in the study described some type of “self-scaffold,” a term used by one of the participants that I found helpful to describe the self-generated supports that helped them meet the challenges they faced in an adaptive or transforming/constructive manner. Another dimension of this finding is the way the capacity for effectively generating these internal supports increased significantly in the later action logics.

### Finding Five

The types of learning that 15 of 18 participants report as most significant are related to the experiences of projection, the exploration of valence, and the potential for them to take up new roles. The term “projection,” a unconscious psychological phenomenon studied by Melanie Klein (Klein, 1959; Klein & Riviere, 1983), describes

the way that people split off or repress unwanted emotions or aspects of their own personality and project these elements onto others. When the person receives the projection and identifies with it at a subconscious level, this is called projective identification (Klein, 1959). Valence is the tendency to take on certain emotions such as anger, sadness or socio-emotional roles such as the care-giving mother figure or the devil's advocate, on behalf of groups (Lewin et al., 1935). The degree to which participants learn their way (Nicolaidis, 2007) through these experiences of group dynamics and the depth of transformation they report differed according to action logic.

### 1. Regression under Adversity or "Fall-Back"

#### Introduction

I didn't want to miss an opportunity to learn, and no one else was even interested in doing it, so I went as the ambassador for our group. It wasn't like I was gung-ho about going, but I was interested, and as soon as I expressed any interest, I got delegated and went. I had no idea what that meant. I didn't realize that meant I would no longer be a part of that group. But my experience with it was really good in the sense that I'm going as this representative, as this leader of my group, but it turned out that I went in and fell back into my role... just a member of a new group and I really don't know these people, so I fell back into my quiet self. And rather than be a strong leader, which I guess in the role I represented, I really didn't contribute that much to the world forum. I kind of went along and I was certainly willing to help in whatever way, but I certainly was going to be looking to the Chair to tell me what to do (#5).<sup>20</sup>

In the passage above, Sandra, a 26 year-old woman who profiled as an Achiever on the SCTi, described how despite her intention to take up her authority to represent her World Event group as ambassador and to exert leadership in the World Forum, the institutional

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<sup>20</sup> #5 refers to the paragraph number of the documents I created summarizing the participants' descriptions of their experiences, according to the five categories: supports, challenges, internal supports, learning, and most significant experiences. Whenever I drew from these summaries, I provided the paragraph reference.

event of the conference, she “fell back” into a familiar role as a follower dependent on the authority of others. Despite the capacity suggested by her SCTi profile—to be an autonomous and self-initiating actor with an internal locus of control (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004)—the new group conditions that she entered into undermined her intention and pulled her back into a dependency dynamic that she would have preferred to resist. Sandra expressed realization about this experience succinctly:

I thought that was really interesting because that’s a struggle that I have had, do have, and will have consistently throughout my life, is my natural inclination is to be a follower despite my motivation to be a leader—I have a really hard time with that, and so that was the perfect example (#7).

In this passage, she expressed how despite the way she found her intention undermined, she learned through her experience of “falling back” that the conditions she found herself in exerted a powerful influence on her sense of competence, let alone her ability to demonstrate her full capacity. I return to Sandra’s experience later, but found this passage helpful as a brief introduction to the first finding.

In the process of listening to and learning from the 18 participants in this study, one of the findings that was most striking to me was their descriptions of what happened to them when the conditions in the conference became adverse or challenging enough that they no longer were able to fulfill their intentions, let alone operate at their center of gravity meaning making capacity. The 18 participants described a total of 52 instances of what either they described in regressive terms. These instances of regression included 21 distinct behaviors that they resorted to when they experienced anxiety, distress, confrontation, or the various other challenges included over the course of the conference.

As a way of referring to these regressions described by all the participants, I use the expression “fall-back,” an emic code that came directly from interviews with Sandra

(Achiever), Marie (Achiever), and Victor (Strategist/Alchemist) to describe periods in the conference when, for example, they found themselves so overwhelmed, inhibited by fear, or frustrated with other members that they failed to self-authorize themselves to take up appropriate leadership roles, to use their voice on behalf of others or, in one case, the person vented his anger in a loud and very aggressive way to the large group. This emic expression captured the phenomenon that they and the other participants described of behaviors that were noticeably less-adaptive than their capacity allows for, though participants did not always identify their behaviors this way, or did so only after the fact..

Due to the way that Group Relations literature already accounts for and describes the various ways that conference members experience temporary regressions and maladaptive basic assumption behavior (Bion, 1961, 1962; Turquet, 1974), the number or distinctions between and among the fall-backs is not an essential feature of the finding. What is most interesting was the fact that all 18 participants, no matter what their developmental action logic, reported experiences of temporary regression. Further, it is notable that while the diversity of types of fall-back behavior was sparser for the five Individualists and the one Strategist/Alchemist, those in these later action logics were not exempt from temporary regression, including displays of aggression, accommodation behavior, or strong conflict aversion. Several of the participants in the postconventional stages (for instance Bridget [Individualist], Joshua [Individualist], and Victor [Strategist/Alchemist]) described their experiences in terms of a regression to childhood patterns.

The following table (Table 9) presents 21 fall-back behaviors reported by the participants (in most cases, including the emic code used by participants), indicating the

type of behavior and the action logics in which this behavior was self-reported. If there is a “yes” in the box, this indicates that at least one participant in the category reported the behavior being described. Each box also includes the number of people describing each behavior relative to the total number of persons in that particular action logic. For example, four of the nine participants in the Achiever category described behaviors that I coded as “playing nice,” a form of accommodation behavior and conflict avoidance. Blank boxes indicate that this code did not surface for any participant in that action logic.

Table 9. *Fall-Back Codes and Incidents across Developmental Action Logics*

<b>Fall-Back Codes</b>	<b>Expert (3)</b>	<b>Achiever (9)</b>	<b>Individualist (5)</b>	<b>Strategist/ Alchemist (1)</b>
Accommodation behavior and approval seeking: “playing nice”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (1/5)	Yes (1/1)
Anger/Aggression/Hostility: “agent of rage”	Yes (1/3)	Yes (2/9)		Yes (1/1)
Apathy: “I don’t really care”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (3/9)		
“Being at a loss/stuck/disoriented”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (3/5)	
“Competitive self-focus”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (1/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Conflict aversion/avoidance”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (5/9)	Yes (2/5)	Yes (1/1)
Conforming to norms/doing things the “right” way	Yes (2/3)	Yes (3/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Copping out/Taking the Easy Route”		Yes (4/9)		
Dependency on authority/others	Yes (3/3)	Yes (3/9)		
“Disappointment”	Yes	Yes	Yes	

/Depression	(1/3)	(2/9)	(2/5)	
“Disconnecting” from others	Yes (2/3)	Yes (2/9)	Yes (2/5)	Yes (1/1)
“It’s not fair!” regression to childhood tendencies and patterns	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (2/5)	Yes (1/1)

Table 8. *Fall-Back Codes and Incidents across Developmental Action Logics (continued)*

“Fog of war” (intense fear, paranoia, fight/flight, “flavor of danger”)		Yes (1/9)		Yes (1/1)
“Hard on myself” (excessive self-criticism)	Yes (1/3)	Yes (2/9)		Yes (1/1)
“Helplessness”			Yes (2/5)	
Mob mentality: “We were a gang!”		Yes (1/9)		
“Personalizing” negativity	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Projection on others”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (6/9)	Yes (1/5)	
Resistance (etic code)	Yes (1/3)	Yes (5/9)		
“Scapegoating others/blaming others”	Yes (1/3)	Yes (4/9)		
“Shutting down/complete withdrawal”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (3/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Stuck in my own shadow”				Yes (1/1)

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This table of codes illustrates how distinct fall-back behaviors (for instance, regression to earlier and in some cases, childhood patterns) can manifest themselves across the action logics. One reason I found this graphic depiction of the fall-back codes valuable is that it

portrays the greater concentration of varied fall-back behaviors in the first two action logics depicted. For instance, the participants in the Expert category describe regressive behaviors covered by 17 out of the 21 codes, and the participants in the Achiever category describe 19 out the 21, while the Individualists describe 11 of the 21, and the Strategist/Alchemist describes 6 of the 21.

It should be noted that as the number of participants in each category varies significantly, the proportion of the participants and frequency may have less significance than the discovery that even participants in the later two action logics report behaviors associated with much earlier stages of development. As a way of illustrating how even the participants in the post-conventional stages experienced fall-back, I present three examples from among the six available in the Individualist and Strategist/Alchemist categories.

In the case of Joshua (early Individualist), a 51 year-old man who is an ordained member of a religious order, he described a moment during the second day of the conference when he received considerable attention from the conference director during the role-transformation event for his group. Earlier, he had experienced being severely criticized by female members of his small group to the point where he felt neutralized and unable to take up authority in the group any longer. The reason for the criticism was that two women felt that he had been insensitive to a third female member who had just told a story about her mastectomy. In the review of this experience in the role transformation event, he basks in the attention that the conference director gives him relative to the others in the group:

That surprised me. Yes. Being connected with the director. That really surprised me. Especially when I really felt so beat up. That was a powerful role-

transformation event. And I could sense in the room real jealousy that I was taking up so much time. So it surprised me how much time the director gave to my piece, like half of the event! [laughs] It was like euphoria! (#197).

What I found interesting here is the way that Joshua, the pastor of a large, high-profile urban church, a person with considerable authority in his context, described his “euphoria” at getting so much of the conference director’s attention and interest, especially when he was feeling beaten up by his peer group members. He was also aware that this extra attention that he was getting was possibly generating jealousy and envy from the other members of his role transformation group, though he did not seem to mind. He even described this disproportionate attention that he was getting from the director with a kind of glee, like a child who received the larger slice of cake than his siblings. This is an example of the kind of behavior that I coded as regressive, though Joshua himself did not name it that way in the interview.

An example of this temporary regression to early childhood patterns occurs for another participant in the Individualist category, Bridget, a 47 year-old woman who is also a clergy person. She arrived at the conference opening late, did not find a members’ information folder waiting for her at registration, and then experienced the large group consultant interventions as a justification for her to feel guilty and blamed:

And then we went into the large study group, and the consultants are doing a very weird thing, [laughs] I thought...which was to feel invisible and that other people were trying to take over and goodness knows. And because I had come late and I was a little discombobulated and I’d just driven down from XXXX and I was tired, I actually hadn’t realized who was the consultants. You know, 20 people introduced themselves, it’s too much information, so I didn’t know who the heck they were. But they were saying that we were excluding them and we were making them invisible, and they were choosing other consultants. Just like [laughs] help me because I really don’t want to do that, I don’t feel I’m doing that, but I can’t work with you if I don’t know who you are. And I found myself getting really panicked about who are you and I asked them to identify themselves—they ignored that. So they were doing this thing of being deliberately provocative to the group and blaming the group, and I just perceived it all. I just

felt blamed, I felt guilty, I felt responsible, I didn't know how to fix it, you know, all that stuff (#19).

Although Bridget provided many reasons for her feeling discombobulated, including the fact that she had just driven all the way from a distant city to San Diego and was feeling tired, I was curious why she would take the consultants' interventions so personally. I asked, "Can you say more about why you took that on? Why that ended up hitting you very personally?" She replied:

Well, I think, I mean that's something I'm busy working on in my own life, which is a thing from my own family background where I was the eldest child. I was often blamed for things that happened, and when accused of things I hadn't even done, everyone would just assume that I'd done it, and so somehow, I was susceptible to taking that (#25).

Bridget brought an awareness of the susceptibility she had for feeling blame, or for being over responsible, though this did not stop her from feeling stuck in that guilt and blame until she was able to compare her perspective with two other women. With the help offered by their alternate perspectives, she made the link between this old pattern and the experience she is having at that moment in the conference:

And then had a bit of a revelation, because in talking to someone afterwards—two women—I was asking, Why do I feel so guilty and so blamed and why were they doing this nasty thing? And one of them said, Interesting, I didn't feel blamed. I just feel sorry for them. [laughs] she said. Then the other one said, Yeah, I'm just pissed off with them. I went, Huh! Because I honestly felt that we were all naughty children and we had all done the wrong thing and we were all responsible and we were all feeling like I was feeling. And that was just like a little girl. Huh! I took that... I don't need to take that (#25).

Here, Bridget demonstrated both how the conference triggered a temporary regression into a childhood pattern, and how she caught herself and recovered with the help of the perspective taking she did with other members. This revelation, that she did not have to take on blame or fall into her childhood susceptibility for being over responsible, becomes a key learning/lesson and the point of departure for what she described as her

most significant experiences. I describe further how other she and other participants link their experiences of fall-back to their learning in the last finding.

A third example of a participant who profited in the post-conventional action logics yet who also described feelings and behaviors of regression to childhood patterns is Victor, a 44 year-old man who teaches at a business school. Interpretation of Victor's SCTi assessment indicates that he was completing the transition from the Strategist to the Alchemist action logic. He was the only participant in my study who fits the Strategist/Alchemist category, and so forms a categorical case of one. We completed our interview together the day after the conference concluded, so his descriptions of his experiences were quite vivid. At one point in the conference during one of the large groups during the World Event, Victor became quite angry with a particular member to whom he vented his rage, albeit with a sense of awareness as he did so. Victor described his experience:

If I had only experienced what I experienced without a way to understand it, something else would have happened. So I would have thought, for example, one possible thing was my manifesting rage, I could have thought, I'm just evil, I'm terrible, people must wonder or think I'm weird--or people are wondering who is that guy? I was the guy that hollered out in the world event, with conviction: 'I HATE YOU!' That was me (#109).

What is interesting to me about Victor is that it sounded as though he allowed himself the freedom to express his anger as if he were a child yelling at someone who had offended him or withheld an object of desire. It is also fascinating that he described a level of awareness and self-understanding while at the same time admitting he felt like he was "possessed by the devil" at the time (Victor, post-interview notes).

Victor also described very intense feelings as the conference came to a close, including a sense of "infantile annihilation danger." While he brought considerable

perspective and subtlety of understanding to this experience, the feelings were nonetheless primal:

I was trying to describe this as sort of a feeling state. It's not fear exactly, it's not anxiety. It's angst? I don't know, it's not angst. I don't know. There's a mournful quality to it. Maybe that was my feeling of the conference ending. There's always the issue of safety in that large group. That issue never went away at the feeling level, and so one way I could soothe myself would have been to say, I'm not going to die here. And so, and so there always was, there always was an issue of kind of like risk. I also, at the same time, felt enough trust in the process to be able to be there and to like wait, you know? So, you know, I did, I was sitting with the danger, you know? There was danger there for me. It wasn't the primal infantile annihilation danger, although it may have had that flavor (#119).

What is most interesting in this passage is the way that Victor described having a relationship to his "feeling state," to the extent that rather than feeling overwhelmed by it, he reflectively sifted through the dimensions of emotion he was experiencing as though he was savoring a piece of chocolate or a glass of fine wine. In his way of relating to his experience, which is characteristic of what Cook-Greuter calls the third person perspective on oneself (Cook-Greuter, 2003), he also noted the intention and actions to "soothe" himself by reminding himself that he was "not going to die," and that he could trust the process. While technically the experience that Victor described is not an example of behavioral regression, these reflective, self-supportive practices are examples of some of the many ways that participants support themselves and hold steady in the midst of adverse conditions. I call these practices and behaviors "adaptive self-scaffolds," a term I elaborate on in the fourth finding.

To summarize this first dimension of the finding regarding the participants' experiences of regression, I learned that every person, no matter how late they profited in their developmental action logic, had moments of "fall-back." For the purposes of this study, I define "fall-back" in the following terms: fall-back is a temporary regression of

undetermined duration that is catalyzed by experiences of anxiety and distress such that individuals behave with a logic of action that is markedly less complex and adaptive than their developmental capacity<sup>21</sup> suggests is possible. In the next section, I illustrate how four members experienced and made sense of their fall-back, including one from each developmental action logic contained in this study. These members were selected to represent the action logic categories in which they are situated for two reasons: first, each of the following members described their experiences of fall-back with particularly vivid terms, and second, each of the following participants demonstrated many of the traits and characteristics characteristic of the action logic they were chosen to represent. I begin with Steve (Expert), followed by Susan (Achiever), Bill (Individualist), and Victor (Strategist/Alchemist).

#### Steve (Expert)

During GRCs, there is sometimes a sub-conference composed of participants who are both members and consultants-in-training. According to five of the research participants who were involved in this sub-conference (Jim, Steve, Jeff, Lisa, and Joshua), these members had a challenging dual role and often struggled with the boundaries involved as they alternated from one role to the next as the conference unfolds. One challenge that they expressed in particular was that of demonstrating their competence to the mentors and experienced consultants who comprised the staff and directorate. According to Lisa, Steve, and Joshua, this challenge instigated anxiety around competence, as well as competition with other consultants-in-training. One of the consultants-in-training, Steve, was a former military officer with extensive experience in

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<sup>21</sup> The developmental capacity as measured by the SCTi.

crisis management education and higher education administration. Yet for all his training and experience in how to deal with intense, high-stakes scenarios, he found himself succumbing to competition with his colleagues. “I kind of pictured everybody in our small study group, the consultant-training-group, as in gates at Delmar (a horse racing track). That was the metaphor, or even sitting around with horses’ heads on their bodies” (#74).

While he acknowledged that competition can often be helpful and bring out a higher level of performance, Steve suggested that at the same time it was not necessarily conducive to learning about group dynamics or teamwork that emphasizes the system over the individual. He related:

We’re supposed to be learning how to be a consultant, that’s what the role is. So again, we’re in this task of practicing the craft, which implies leadership and power and authority. Yet at the same time, we’re in a collegial setting where we’re supposed to be exploring what’s in the moment, and that competition really got underway. It really delayed or inhibited the productive work that was eventually done (#74).

Steve shared later that one of the shortcomings of the GRC approach is that it can lead people to become inordinately self-focused due to dynamics such as competition and anxiety about evaluation. At the same time, he was aware of the way that he too was caught up in the dynamic, “and I was cracking up because I was in the gates too, we’re all racing, we’re all in competition, but we didn’t really know how to race, we really didn’t know how to compete, and we’re really afraid of being looked at” (#74).

While Steve was someone who by both training and disposition tries to put others before himself and to act on behalf of the good of the whole group, he found himself susceptible to the competitive dynamic to the extent that he lapsed into a self-centered focus that was uncharacteristic of him. With time for reflection, he caught himself and

recovered his balance, with focus on his role within the system, rather than on his individual performance. Like Jim and Kate, the other two experts in this study, Steve needed time to notice his regression and to change his mindset and behavior. Participants in the Expert (Jim), Achiever (Lisa), and Individualist (Joshua) categories also described their experiences of the effects of competition as members of the consultants-in-training sub-conference.

### Susan (Achiever)

Susan is a graduate student in her mid-20s who profiled as an Achiever. She had taken coursework that helped to familiarize her with group dynamics and was familiar with some of the popular leadership literature, including the work of Heifetz (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Initially, I was so taken by the intensity of her descriptions of regression that I mistakenly assumed that she was going to profile as an conformist Diplomat, not a self-initiating Achiever (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004). Susan is a self-reported introvert. Yet in the interview, I found her reporting style very lively and dramatic. Her description of one phase of the conference, the beginning of the World Event, provides an example of what appears to be significant fall-back.

The conference schedule included an event that unfolds over the course of two days where the members created a temporary institution or organization for the purposes of exploring the various subgroups within the system, what significance or function the groups held on behalf of the whole, and how these various groups were inter-related. For example, one group might gather around a theme of “unity,” while another group self-selectively gathered of several members of a single ethnic group in order to represent the

theme of identity. In the ONE World ONE Spirit conference, this temporary organization was called the World Event, and it began with an opportunity for the members to form their own groups before leaving the room for other designated spaces where they engage consultants and start their work, forming hypotheses about the system and their role in it.

In the following example, Susan described her experience of the World Event as if she were entering a war zone with actual physical dangers present. Her mention of Risk is to a popular game of strategy that involves the take-over of countries and geographic territories. “Blackhawk Down” refers to a movie depicting the failed intervention in Mogadishu, Somalia, by the U.S. Special Forces in 1993.

I literally felt that I was, like I said, just constantly on a high alert. One of the feelings that was really striking for me was after the world event, we were allowed to form our own groups, and I happened to be sitting around some people that I knew from XYZ, from being a student there and also working there. We all decided to form a group. And almost within seconds, we got up and left the room. Okay, we want to be a group, okay, great, let’s go. And then when we got into our territory, we literally sat there and I almost felt—and I’m not exaggerating, that I felt almost as if we were in a war of some sort. You know, first of all, the use of the word territory, maybe it’s just a Risk association from playing with my family. But then, literally, we sat and we went, Oh, do we need to go back for anyone? Which was so bizarre. What do you mean do we need to go back for anyone? “Blackhawk Down” Did we leave anyone behind? Do we need to go rescue anyone who might be floating around in that not having a membership, trying to find a group? (#10).

In this passage, Susan represented the intense anxiety that some conference members including herself, experienced when asked to form self-selected groups. Group formation is known to stimulate anxieties due to a number of factors including the experience of trying to attract membership, find a sense of existential belonging, secure resources, etc. (Gillette & McCollom, 1990). While other participants like Jim (Expert), Joshua (Individualist), Bridget (Individualist), and Steve (Expert) remained in the room and tried to surface themes that they wanted to explore with other members, Susan and several

other participants including Lisa (Achiever), Alison (Achiever), Anne (Achiever), and Sandra (Achiever) all described leaving the room as fast as they could with members with whom they had prior relationships.

The dynamic that Susan and the other women in the Achiever category described is considered a form of basic assumption behavior known as fight/flight (Bion, 1961), where an individual or, in this case, a group acts in such a way as to literally or figuratively flee from the experience of discomfort, anxiety, or distress. My impression is that the fall-back Susan described, that of the fight/flight, was a regression to the action logic known as the Diplomat, one who seeks security in homogenous groups and through conformity to group norms (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004).

While Susan was not the only one to relate a similarly panicked group formation process, she was the only one to use imagery and metaphors that suggested such an intense state of anxiety and fear. Several times during the interview, she spoke of the experience of the “fog of war” (#86) to describe the paranoia and hyper-vigilance that she felt during the event. For instance, she related, “Like I said, this urgency that literally a kind of one-for-all, who do we need to rescue, who did we leave behind? Taking care of your own. It was bizarre” (#14). It is hard to say why the experience stimulated so much anxiety for Susan because she herself did not offer clear clues. It may be that she has a very low tolerance for the social anxieties involved in the group formation process by virtue of her introversion, a factor of personality or past experience.

As mentioned, other participants who profiled at the Achiever, including Sandra, Alison, and Anne, also described their experience of leaving the room almost immediately with a group that was primarily constituted by familiar colleagues or friends.

They too reflected on the way that there was little conscious decision-making happening at the time as to their reason for choosing the groups and individuals they did. However, Susan described a fall-back behavior that was similar to an Opportunist's concern for basic survival if not for her also describing the social concern characteristic of the Diplomat (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004). This reaction to the challenge of the group-formation process indicated a fairly clear regressive fall-back a full three action logics with little provocation. Susan reported a number of other regressive behaviors as well, including conflict avoidance, "freaking out" (#18) at the discussion of the unconscious, dependency behavior in the face of ambiguity, and suppression of her true feelings as a way of accommodating others.

As was the case for the three participants in the Expert category, neither Susan nor others in the Achiever category described themselves as aware of the fall-back while it was happening, but several of them (Jeff, Alison, Sandra, Lisa) reported how they reflected on their experiences and learned from them after they recovered from the regression. I explore this more in the last finding on the participant learning experience.

In the next example, I present Bill, an Individualist, who related his experience of temporary regression and also the realization that helped him to arrest his fall-back.

#### Bill (Individualist)

The Individualist action logic can be prone to the disorientation and confusion that come with the relativizing way of knowing and the emergence of emotional states that had previously been subordinated by the smooth, functioning operation of one's institutional self system in the Achiever action logic (Cook-Greuter, 2003). Individuals in

this action logic not only experience and acknowledge the multiplicity of perspectives within social groups, they also tend to respect this diversity as intrinsically valuable (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004). This value and respect for diversity can also lead to confusion, helplessness, or paralyzing inability to take directive or decisive action (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004). This tendency can make the identification of fall-back behavior slightly more difficult relative to the disorientation that is often coincidental with passage through this stage. This tendency, not only to confusion, but also the willingness to admit it, was evident in every one of the five Individualists in my research study. Among the four Individualists in this study, I selected Bill, white, middle aged Jewish man—a psychologist by training and trade—to represent the Individualist action logic in fall-back because he spoke so honestly about his vulnerability, and the experience he related about “being invisible” was characteristic of three of the four men in this action logic.

Bill described how, in the wake of his 22 year-old daughter’s death three years prior, he found himself focusing on the empowerment of young women, particularly African American and Hispanic females:

I kind of felt it as a need, but it was really a desire, to help young, younger people, and especially younger minority women, to find their voice and to learn tough lessons about life. I think that came from the death of my 22 year-old daughter three years ago (#10).

But even as Bill advocated on behalf of these young women and commended them to take up their own power, he found himself taken off guard by how “invisible” and “unheard” he had become as a result of his stance. He said, “I was thinking, I just feel so alone in that conference. I feel invisible” (#88). This feeling of being invisible and unheard pulled him into a depressive position for several hours and even kept him awake at night, until he realized that he was complicit in this state in which he found himself:

In fact, one night, the second night, I came back to our bed and breakfast, and I had trouble sleeping and I was really upset. And I finally got to sleep when I realized that I was invisible because of my own doing, through my own actions. That when I instructed the Latinas to not look to me or any other man or any other White man to find their power, that they were following instructions (#88).

What is interesting here is the way that Bill experienced the fall-back into a depressive state that upset him for several hours, but that he was able to catch himself as the culprit of his own suffering, in a sense. This capacity to recognize one's own culpability and then to take comfort in being accountable is an example of the many ways that participants across the four action logics described belying their fall-back and regaining their balance. Jim (Expert), Lisa (Achiever), Joshua (Individualist), and Victor (Strategist/Alchemist) described roughly similar moments when they made decisions to be accountable for their behaviors, their learning, or the effects of their action on others. Where Bill's description differed from those in earlier action logics was in his capacity to take his own principle (in this instance, empowerment of others) as object. This requires the perspective-taking ability that emerges in the Individualist action logic (Cook Greuter, 2003).

Five other participants in the three action logics of Expert (Jim), Achiever (Sandra, Jeff) and Individualist (Brian, Joshua) described experiences of a temporary depressive state due to rejection, disappointment, marginalization, hostility, criticism, loneliness, and loss of agency. These experiences vary in their intensity and duration for each participant, and one participant, Joshua (Individualist), seemed to remain in a low-grade depressive state for much of the conference. At the same time, he was often aware of this state and its effect on his behavior, and several times he made choices to remain engaged in the conference nonetheless. I present more of his experience in subsequent sections.

For the last example illustrating the regressive behaviors that participants report, I return to Victor, the one participant who profiled in the Strategist/Alchemist category.

#### Victor (Strategist/Alchemist)

As described previously, the one Alchemist in the study described an experience of being the “agent of rage” in the large group. After the interview, he offered the hyperbolic flourish that this experience was like “being possessed by the Devil” (Victor, post-interview notes). As someone who considers himself a pacifist and someone who is a “gentle, loving person” (#4), Victor described being loathe to admitting his capacity for anger, let alone rage. He described this “disowned rage” as a form of “constipation” or “blockage” (# 39) that he managed to loosen by allowing himself to take on and vent the anger of the group. Even though he described the experience with intentionality as if this was something he intended to do, in the moment he felt that there was an uncontrolled quality to the experience that lent to its authenticity for him. As a result of the experience, he discovered that as frightening as it was, the experience of feeling and expressing anger did not lead to his greater fears being realized, namely, that he would be socially rejected, or that the anger would consume him.

When asked about his experience of fall-back, Victor described his tendencies both to “play nice” and to stifle dissent with people as a way of pleasing them and maintaining relationships, and to excessive, even at times debilitating self-criticism. Nonetheless, even as Victor described falling back into his own “shadow”—the disowned rage that he reintegrated by opening himself to it and then channeled on behalf of the group—he provided an example for the degree to which a person operating out of the

Strategist/Alchemist action logic tends to be aware of their shadow even as they are experiencing it (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004). In this passage, he described his awareness of the gap between what he knows and what he does:

So, I came in with this prep and with this theory, and I behaved in ways—and I can give you a couple of examples—that betrayed my lack of understanding of the theory. Understanding in the sense of lived experience, not in the sense of understanding that I could put it up on a white board and explain it to you. But I found myself living it as if I didn't know it. And then, the theory, having had that preparation, gave me the opportunity to right then and there, in the moment, see what I had just done and experience. And you know, thank goodness it also helps you like sit there with like your shame and chagrin with yourself. That's the one other advantage of the perspective, is that I have a lot of self-criticism and years ago, I might have just gone into this internalizing behavior and, and then banning the feeling rather than be able to see the feeling. And so I feel like the intellectual preparation was spade-work. And I'm not sure where I am now. I know I'm in a different—well, my felt sense is that I've made some advances (#19).

I found this Victor's description of his experience of the knowing/doing gap in this passage to be a powerful example of the in-the-moment awareness that is characteristic of the Alchemist action logic (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004). He even described being aware of “the shame and chagrin” he is feeling with himself while at the same time refraining from the excessive self-criticism that might have crippled him emotionally in the past. The intellectual preparation that Victor described elsewhere in the interview as his “self-scaffold” was his reading of psychology, the leadership literature, and Integral theory (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Wilber, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2006). Yet, for all the formidable preparation he put in before the conference, he still admitted, rather humbly, to the disparity between what Argyris calls espoused theory and theory in use, or the knowing and the doing (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

While Victor described being prone to many of the same fall-back behaviors described by participants in other action logic categories, what distinguished his

experiences from most other participants was his in-the-moment, simultaneous awareness of his action and his intention.

### Summary of Finding One: “Fall-Back”

In this study, every one of the 18 participants, no matter what their developmental action logic, described experiences of “fall-back”—periods of time where the participant reacted to the challenges posed by the conference environment by regressing to behaviors more consistent with earlier developmental action logics and in ways that were maladaptive or seemingly counter-productive to the situation at hand. For the purposes of this study, I define “fall-back” in the following terms: fall-back is a temporary regression of undetermined duration that is catalyzed by experiences of anxiety and distress such that individuals behaved with a logic of action that is markedly less complex and adaptive than their developmental capacities suggest was possible.

A second dimension of the finding is that while each participant reported some form of temporary regression, the ways in which participants caught themselves or made sense of the regression differed depending on their action logic. Participants sometimes described this experience of catching themselves in terms of noticing themselves not being genuine, acting out of character, or feeling like they had temporarily forgotten their training, tools, and theoretical resources (knowing/doing gap). Those participants in the Expert and Achiever action logics reported having insight into their temporary regressions after they occurred, while several of the Individualists described having awareness of the fall-back as it was occurring; the one Strategist/Alchemist reported

having acute, moment-to-moment awareness of regressive feelings and behaviors as these were emerging and unfolding.

A third dimension of the finding is that the variety of fall-back behaviors decreased in the two later action logics. Finally, the fourth dimension of the finding reinforced the theoretical premise that while one's developmental action logic does indicate a meaning-making "center of gravity," the participants' capacities were influenced significantly by context and contingency, such that several participants regressed multiple stages before arresting their fall and recovering.

## 2. Use of Coping Behaviors: Missed Opportunities for Learning

### Introduction

While all participants reported experiences of regression or fall-back, my second finding was that some participants resorted to "coping mechanisms" (Alison, Achiever) as a way of helping them manage their anxieties in the conference and regain their "comfort zone" (Brian, early Individualist). Several of the participants reflected on their experience of using these coping mechanisms as a way of protecting themselves and, as a result, described feeling they "missed opportunities" (Sandra, Achiever) for learning and growth. In the following commentary, I provide examples of the way that individuals in each action logic made use of these coping mechanisms and I describe how the use of these behaviors were similar and distinct across the spectrum of the four action logics represented in this research. I selected the following participants to represent the action logic category in which they profiled because of the vividness of their descriptions and

the way in which they both share similar features of other participants' experience and effectively represent the characteristics associated with their action logic (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004).

Kate (Expert)

Kate is a sociologist in her mid-40s from the East Coast. She is self-described as a “skeptic” by trade and by personality, and her description is rich illustration of the way that people in the Expert action logic tend to exhibit a more rational/empiricist approach to meaning-making, often influenced by their professional craft (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004):

I'm very skeptical actually, I'm a researcher by trade too, so I don't basically buy into any assumptions unless I see data. My husband comes home and he said, God, there's a lot of traffic today. It must have been the parade, or something. I respond, 'Well, what makes you think that? And how do you know? Maybe there's always a lot of traffic at this time of day.' That's just—I mean, I'm exaggerating only very slightly (#160).

She continues with the same thought:

And I need to find something credible and integrate it into tenets upon which I base my sense of reality is I have to reference somebody who's like really smart. Like I have to read something from somebody who kind of employs the kind of rigor that I need. So for instance, if I read an article like in a popular magazine about, like *Psychology Today*, I wouldn't even bother like to read *Psychology Today* because there's like nothing, and actually I have never really read it. But that kind of magazine, like there's just no point in me even like reading it because I wouldn't believe anything in it. So I do, I do require like a lot of, a lot of evidence to feel comfortable or a lot of authoritative evidence, like some smart person wrote and I'm reading it and they really sell me on their argument. And then I really take it, integrate into myself, into my own sense of reality. So it's not like nobody can do that, but I'm kind of picky (#160).

I include the long quotation because it provides such an insight into the way that a person in this action logic tends to take a stand toward their own knowledge creation (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004), and how she used her skepticism both as an epistemic tool for constructing knowledge as well as a defense against being gullible or

taken advantage of. For example, note how in the next passage she used skepticism to protect herself from influence by the consultants in the large group:

I was talking in general, that I found people provocative and irritating. But in particular, the consultants I thought actually that by design, their role in the very large group settings was to be provocative. I thought that they just sat there and said things to try and be provocative, like it was part of the design. It didn't occur to me that they were actually expressing their own thoughts! [laughs] I thought it was unimaginable that anyone would sit in a room and express their own thoughts in that way. So yeah, I just thought it was like their role, they were supposed to sit and say provocative things as part of like this group, like the engineering of the group experience (#18).

While Kate went on to describe the “incredible” amount of learning that she took away from the conference, she described how her skepticism/suspicion of the consultants did not really go away, and that she felt that there was a manipulative air to the weekend. She was not alone in this skeptical and suspicious stance, as several of the women who profiled as Achiever (Anne, Marie, Susan, Sandra) also took up this way of keeping their anxieties in a tolerable range.

#### Sandra (Achiever)

Sandra is a white woman, a graduate student in her mid-20s and an employee at USD, who profiled in the Achiever action logic. Her description of her coping behaviors was particularly rich and included her frustration that these behaviors felt like “missed opportunities” for discovery and learning. I included her from among the many participants in the Achiever action logic because she expressed this sense of loss as clearly as she did.

One example of her coping behavior was to keep emotional distance when entering groups, performing an intellectual “cost-benefit” exercise before opening herself

to others and actively resisting a perceived expectation that one should “pour your heart and soul out to these strangers:”

Conceptually, I understood it, but I still, I said, Okay, at the end of this, what am I going to take away from this? What are we taking away from this? And if it was, ‘This is the group that you’re going to be working with for a year on something,’ then to me there’s a vested interest in really connecting with people. That’s what was going on in my head as far as the fact that I needed that end result, I needed there to be a purpose to connect with these people, because otherwise, you’re becoming very vulnerable, and that’s a big step for a lot of people. But if it’s just—I don’t know. What’s the business term? Like the cost benefit to it? It’s like I didn’t see the benefit to that much cost (#43).

Here, Sandra’s coping behavior was to keep her guard up, intellectualizing/rationalizing that since these people were strangers, they were not entitled to know her more than she was willing to let them.

A second coping behavior that Sandra employed was to dismiss the authority of the consultants in the large group because of their use of vulgarity, which she considered unprofessional:

But I had a big problem with some of the language that was used by the consultants, in the sense that while I was there to experience and learn, I also still considered it to be a professional setting, and so I felt that a lot of boundaries were not respected in this sense, simply—and that it was okay to use language that is otherwise not okay simply because you’re in a role (#9).

Marie (Achiever) and Susan (Achiever) had similar reactions to the use of vulgarity by the consultants. However, by dismissing the authority of these consultants because of their perceived lack of conformity to social norms, something that made Sandra uncomfortable, she closed herself to anything valuable that they might offer.

A third coping behavior for Sandra was to seek her comfort zone by associating with people she knew from previous affiliations and relationships, rather than by forming a group with strangers. Again, she was not alone in this behavior, as several other participants described doing the same thing at the outset of the World Event, particularly

seven of the nine participants in the Achiever action logic. Sandra described her experience:

When we started the world event, I thought, “This is ridiculous. What are we doing? It has nothing to do with anything.” But it ended up being probably where I learned the most because just kind of watching my reaction to the set-up of, Oh, you can choose who you want? So I, of course, went with the people that I worked with, and then we went and found our cave and we hid out there. And what I noticed is I’m much more comfortable with people that I have relationships with, but I’m also more inclined to maybe not be as productive because we certainly wanted to kick our feet up and talk about work and pretend that we weren’t at a conference (#17).

Fortunately, when Sandra reflected on her experience here, which may have been a combination of fall-back and coping behavior, she was able to learn from the observation of her action. In fact, shortly after joining this group, she regretted not having stretched herself to join other members. She decided that she did not want this experience to be a “missed opportunity” and chose to take up a leadership role as an ambassador. Sandra shared:

Well, I certainly took a cop-out here. I mean, I really went the easy route and went with these people I know, and I don’t want to not, I don’t want to miss an opportunity to learn and no one else was even interested in doing it, so I went as the ambassador for our group (#19).

I noticed that where Kate (Expert) did not step back to reflect on the way that her skepticism might be a liability, and in fact, saw it as essential to her learning, Sandra was able to see how she would miss the chance to learn unless she made an effort to move beyond her comfort zone. This self-awareness of the potential detriment of the comfort zone was common amongst the Achievers and seemed taken for granted by the Individualists and the Strategist/Alchemist. For example, Joshua, an Individualist, gave expression to the distrust of the comfort zone when he described the effect of a brief conference on Group Relations theory that was situated in the middle of the second day:

It was nice to have something for the head, it was actually very comforting, but it didn't keep the pressure going. It was something I could take home and it's a bit of knowledge and stuff like that, but I could have read an article (#193).

He refers here to the seminar on group dynamics that was available to participants in the afternoon of the second day of the conference. Joshua was aware of the importance of "pressure" as a catalyst in experiential learning and realizes that he might have simply read the presentation instead of taking a break from the intensity of the conference experience.

In the consideration of the Individualist's coping mechanisms, I continue to use the example of Joshua, whose experience represents the disorientation and confusion characteristic of the transition between the Achiever and the Individualist action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004).

### Joshua (Individualist)

As explained earlier, Joshua is a middle-aged white man and a Roman Catholic priest, although he did not wear his collar or identify himself publicly in this way. When Joshua was "outed" as clergy by the conference director because the director felt that this was important and relevant information for the group to have in the group debrief, Joshua was surprised that his privacy was not respected. As a way of protecting himself, he regards the distinction between public and private life very important:

And I also feel that people have no right to know. There is a public persona and private persona. And if that means that you can't be as effective a leader, you can't be effective a leader if you disclose too much, too. So what's the right balance in leadership? I leave with that question still because there's some parts of this conference where connection is so important, and yet there are other parts where you know that you're just not going to connect (#119).

He realized that he had this self-protective bias, and at the same time, rationalized that it was in the service of being an effective leader when in reality was it “safer,” as he said, “Well, it’s true, in my public role I tend to keep out huge pieces of myself. Because...is it safer? Is it—yes” (#117). Nevertheless, during the course of the conference, Joshua noted how this emotionally protective coping mechanism worked against him; people felt frustrated by the “mystery” he maintained around his profession, and they projected on him traits and characteristics, like insensitivity, that led to personal attacks. Joshua said, “They didn’t know where I was coming from or what.” When I asked what impact his behavior had, he responded, “Well, it allowed me to do certain things, in one way, but it also created so much ambiguity for others that they had to just kill me off” (#104). It is possible that because Joshua was feeling as vulnerable and confused as he reported, that he maintained these coping mechanisms as a way of helping protect himself.

#### Victor (Strategist/Alchemist)

In contrast to the participants in the other action logics, Victor, the only participant in the Strategist/Alchemist category, did not report the same way of using the coping behaviors listed above. In fact, in contrast to Sandra, who used napping to relieve the pressure she is feeling, Victor said that he employed withdrawal and napping as ways of consciously maintaining boundaries around his experience and of keeping his energy fresh so that he could return to the conference with full resources. This distinction helps to turn these coping behaviors into “adaptive self-scaffolds,” although both behaviors involved removing himself physically from the space during the breaks. He related his experience of withdrawing:

When the sessions concluded, I withdrew. And not withdrawn, like “withdrew,” but I wanted to keep the experience to be the experience of the conference. I didn’t want to mix in any other experience and then I didn’t want to color the emotional experience I was having. I wanted to keep that intact, so I deliberately didn’t want to compare notes with people (#61).

Victor described his actions and the conscious intentions that inspired him, unlike participants in the earlier action logics who made sense of their actions after the fact. It is as if Victor made the choice to withdraw and seclude himself as part of a conscientious strategy to help him preserve the integrity of his unique experience. Victor continued:

Well, I have an office over here, and so I mean, I didn’t run away from people. I consciously thanked people and in a very authentic expression of gratitude. I would just, on the half-hour breaks, I’d walk over, I have an office across the street. Another way I supported my learning was I took naps, right, at the lunch break. On Saturday I took a nap, and I think on the dinner break. Lunch break on Friday I took a nap, and the dinner break, I think I got a nap in as well ( #63).

While neither his withdrawal nor his napping were used as coping behaviors for the purposes of escape, they provide examples of the ways that participants could use coping behaviors with conscious intention in the self-support of their learning. Interestingly, Victor did not report other coping behaviors except brief retreats into intellectualization when he caught himself and returned to the total experience of the moment, “grounding himself” in the “reality of the present moment” (#103).

### Coping Behaviors by Definition

I define these coping mechanisms as behaviors that are largely self-protective and that helped participants manage their anxiety more than they assisted in leading or learning in the moment. In the following table, I describe these coping behaviors in more detail than the fall-backs in the previous finding because many of the coping mechanisms

are internal and not easy to observe. In each case, I indicate the source of the code, while in Table 10, I provide the incidents of the coping behaviors in each action logic.

Table 10. *Coping Behaviors Described*

<p><b>“Avoidance of stressor”</b>: active avoidance of whatever is causing anxiety, including authority figures, other members, the large group, etc. (Joshua, Individualist)</p>
<p><b>“Agenda-personal”</b>: maintaining a personal agenda without flexibility or adaptation; in other words, stubbornness. (Joshua, Individualist)</p>
<p><b>“Burn-thru mode”</b>: a myopic attention to the presenting problem devoid of surrounding context and systemic conditions that might be generating the problem at a distance from where the symptoms are showing up. (Steve, Expert)</p>
<p><b>“Comfort zone-seeking”</b>: the variety of ways that participants describe their search for equilibrium, peace, a sense of relaxation. (Brian, Individualist)</p>
<p><b>“Conformity”</b>: participants describe conforming to norms as a way of managing fear of isolation, criticism or confrontation. (Susan, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Consistency seeking”</b>: a few participants describe their tendency to return to the same place, people, position throughout the conference. (Susan, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Control-taking”</b>: when under stress several participants attempt to take charge of situations as a way of alleviating their discomfort and the discomfort of others. (Brian, Individualist)</p>
<p><b>“Day-dreaming”</b>: two members describe using visualization of familiar people and places that provide them a sense of belonging, love and comfort. This code also includes “zoning out.” (Alison, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Dismissing others”</b>: when their perspectives diverge from one’s own, or denying the authority of what a person shares on the basis of that person having less experience or expertise. (Jim, Expert)</p>
<p><b>“Disassociation from feelings”</b>: a way that participants internally shut down emotionally, usually an unconscious defensive mechanism. There were many of the participants, particularly the women in the Achiever action logic, who took a self-protective stance by stifling their feelings or distancing themselves from situations where there was a perceived expectation of emotional vulnerability. (Alison, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Intellectualization”</b>: connected to the disassociation from feelings, this happens when participants get caught up in theorization about their experience rather than staying with the whole of their experience in the moment. It also includes rationalizing behavior to one’s self or others, even when the motives for behaviors may be rooted in unconscious processes in the moment. (Jim, Expert)</p>

Table 9. *Coping Behaviors Described (continued)*

<p><b>“Napping”</b>: several participants describe taking naps during breaks as a way of disengaging from the conference or restoring their energy for re-engagement. (Sandra, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Problem-solving mode”</b>: instead of adaptive leadership, participants describe getting caught up in small details. (Anne, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>Resorting to authority</b>: (etic code) rather than taking personal responsibility for situations, participants describe becoming passive and leaving this responsibility to the staff or conference director. (Sandra, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>Resorting to concreteness</b>: (etic code) some participants averse to the ambiguity and subjectivity involved in the use of the psychological idiom or the abstract nature of hypothesis-building report their preference for attention to what is factual and concrete. (Marie, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>Resorting to prior experience/expertise</b>: (etic code) several participants describe moments when they challenge the way things are by referring to what “should be” according to their prior experience or professional expertise. (Kate, Expert)</p>
<p><b>Resorting to structure</b>: (etic code) when some participants become frustrated by the ambiguity or unpredictability of the conference events, they describe getting caught up in attention to the boundaries and structure conference. (Sandra, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“safety-seeking”</b>: several participants describe looking for homogenous groups or small groups with consistent and familiar members. (Susan, Achiever)</p>
<p><b>“Skepticism”</b>: This is a form of intellectualization that many participants describe as a defense against new experiences/unfamiliarity. (Kate, Expert)</p>
<p><b>“Withdrawal/Retreat”</b>: many participants will consciously retreat from conflict by physically or emotionally withdrawing from situations temporarily. Some participants use this retreat with the intention of sizing the situation up and regaining perspective before re-engaging. For others, it may be a depressive withdrawal when wounded emotionally. (Steve, Expert)</p>

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I notice that these behaviors fall roughly into two categories. Behaviors such as safety-seeking, skepticism, and disassociation, among others, seem to be more self-protective mechanisms. Behaviors such as pushing one’s agenda, burn-thru mode, and control-taking, among others, seem like more active means of engaging the conference

challenges from what Heifetz calls a technical, rather than an adaptive stance (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

### Coping Behaviors by Incidence

The following table (11) portrays the variety of coping behaviors that participants described and their incidence among each action logic category. The mark of a “yes” indicates that at least one participant in that category reports the particular behavior. For each incidence within the action logic, I indicate the number of participants in each category who reported the coping behaviors being described.

Table 11. *Coping Behavior by Incidence and Frequency According to Action Logic*

<b>Coping Behavior</b>	<b>Expert (3)</b>	<b>Achiever (9)</b>	<b>Individualist (5)</b>	<b>Strategist /Alchemist (1)</b>
“Avoidance of stressor”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Agenda-personal”			Yes (1/5)	
“Burn-thru mode”	Yes (1/3)			
“Comfort zone seeking”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (7/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Conformity”		Yes (2/9)		
“Consistency seeking”		Yes (2/9)		
“Control-taking/micro-managing”		Yes (2/9)		

Table 11. *Coping Behavior by Incidence and Frequency According to Action Logic (cont)*

“Day-dreaming”		Yes (1/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Dismissing others”	Yes (1/3)			
Disassociation from feelings	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Intellectualization/ Rationalization”	Yes (1/3)		Yes (1/3)	Yes (1/1)
“Napping”		Yes (1/9)		Yes (1/1)
“Problem-solving mode”				
Resorting to authority	Yes (3/3)	Yes (3/9)	Yes (1/5)	
Resorting to concreteness	Yes (1/3)	Yes (4/9)		
Resorting to prior experience/expertise	Yes (3/3)	Yes (6/9)	Yes (2/5)	
Resorting to structure	Yes (3/3)	Yes (4/9)		
“Safety-seeking”		Yes (1/9)		
“Skepticism”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)		
“Withdrawal/Retreat”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (3/9)	Yes (3/5)	Yes (1/1)

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It is difficult to draw many conclusions from the incidences represented in Table 11

because of the disproportionate number of participants in each category. Nevertheless, it is

interesting to see less variety of coping behaviors in the Individualist (9/20) and the Strategist/Alchemist (3/20) categories than in the Expert (12/20) and the Achiever (15/20).

### Summary of Finding Two

The second finding relates to the first in that as participants are confronted by the external challenges of the conference (e.g., group formation processes, interpersonal conflict, competition for attention), the anxiety, complexity, and conflict created a sense of “being at a loss” (Kate, Expert), a state of disorientation that at times led to the fall-back behavior described in Chapter V, or to maladaptive coping mechanisms that helped participants to recover their “comfort zone” (Brian, early Individualist). I define these coping mechanisms as behaviors that are largely self-protective and that helped participants manage their anxiety more than they assisted in leading or learning in the moment.

A second dimension of this finding is that there was more incident of coping behavior in the participants who scored as Expert and Achiever than for those who score later in their action logic. A third dimension of this finding is that while most participants tended to associate their experiences of fall-back with their learning and even transformation, several participants (Anne, Achiever; Sandra, Achiever; Joshua, Individualist) described their experience of having resorted to their comfort zone as “missed opportunities” for discovery and learning.

## Chapter VI

## FINDING THREE

3. A Holding Environment “Good Enough” for LearningIntroduction

Alison (early Achiever), a graduate student in her early 30s at the time of this research, is a trained psychotherapist. She is familiar with the same leadership literature referred to by other participants, including the work of Heifetz (1994, 2002), although this was her first Group Relations Conference. At times in the interview, she described how she found the experience of the weekend distressing, even expressing doubt about whether the staff was providing sufficient boundaries to help contain participants she felt might be “mentally unstable.” At the same time, when I asked about what struck her as most significant about the weekend conference, she responded:

I think the opportunity that the conference offers is an environment where you’re not cluttered by concrete tasks, which is more often the case in other settings. So if you’re in a regular organization or system of any type, you have a purpose that’s usually outcome-oriented in a tangible way. And in the conference, we’re coming together merely to create a whatever, inquiry, [laughs] atmosphere of inquiry into checking out *the lived experience*. And so with the tasks removed, you have time to stop and think about things that you don’t normally think about (#6).

In this passage, Alison shared her impression that the conference environment created conditions for learning because it provided an “atmosphere of inquiry into the lived experience” (quoting an expression used many times by the conference director) rather than a setting where familiar concrete tasks and expectations of tangible outcomes might lead to predictable patterns of action. Alison described this atmosphere of inquiry that, as “ambiguous” and “frustrating” as it was for her, was an environment where she and

others could learn through reflection on their experience. I included this passage as a prelude to the third finding regarding the way the supports and challenges of the conference constitute a holding environment (Drago-Severson, 2004b; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985; Heifetz, 1994; Kahn, 2001; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Winnicott, 1965) to facilitate the learning and growth of the participants.

In this section, I present the third finding, that the 18 participants in my study found that the environmental supports and challenges that constitute the overall external holding environment in the conference were “good enough” (Winnicott, 1965) for their learning. By “good enough,” I mean that the proportion of supports to challenges was sufficient for participants to gain insight, perspective, and understanding into their experience. In some cases, the conference provided conditions for learning that participants even described as “transformative.”<sup>22</sup> Although participants did not always explicitly associate the experiences of challenges with their learning, on reflection they described how the challenges that they faced were in fact as essential to their experience as the supports. I present the summary of what participants reported as supports and challenges and highlight the similarities and differences across the action logics.

### Supports

As in the previous sections, I illustrate experiences of the participants by selecting four exemplar participants who described a range of ways that they experienced the

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<sup>22</sup> Many participants use this phrase (Jim, Kate, Lisa, Marie, Bridget, Victor), though it is hard to say whether or not this is a function of the fact that the expression “transformation” was used often in the literature and language of the conference, that I used it in my interview questions, or whether it came from their own vocabulary.

supports in the conference and whose descriptions of their experiences are representative of the action logic in which they profiled. In some cases, I also add additional perspectives from other participants whose descriptions were either distinct or in contrast to the exemplars. I begin with Jim, who profiled as an Expert on the SCTi assessment.

### Jim (Expert)

Jim, as he has already been described, is a 38 year-old man, who has considerable background in Group Relations theory and psychology, as well as prior conference experience. He remarked many times about how supported he felt in his work with his training consultant and the staff.

In general, I found the consultant training events amazingly supportive. My experience wasn't universal in that other people, I think, felt maybe there was some splitting, but I felt the generativity of the staff. I felt the associate director used some metaphors—of forming hearts and souls of trainees and things, and I was like, It's my heart and soul she's talking about. I felt very moved and very included in that and lucky to be on the good side of that, I guess (#7).

As I present later, Jim had a very painful experience that took place in his World Event group with Bridget, one of the Individualists in this research study. At the same time, when he reflected on his experience of the conference after just three days, he was able to highlight the way he found the consultant training events “amazingly supportive,” and he resonated quite deeply and positively with the associate director’s metaphor of “forming hearts and souls.” For Jim, he only had positive things to say about the conference setting, about the ways that the temporary organization of the World Event was designed and managed, and about the staff and directorate. His experience was so unalloyed that he even wondered if there has been some “splitting” in the training group, referring to Klein’s description of the way that groups sometimes divide up their emotional states,

such that some people are loaded with the positive feelings while others feel only the negative ones (Klein, 1959).

As is characteristic of Experts, Jim paid considerable attention to the authority of the staff and the ways that they take up their roles (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003). He went on to say:

That's why I traveled two thousand miles for it. But I've traveled two thousand miles for a conference before. This conference, I think, exceeded my expectations in the new ways that I talked about... Seeing the love and the presence, seeing the director's passion for the institution, seeing the love and generativity in people...that has a lot of sustaining power and sustains me through learning (#51).

In this passage, Jim spoke quite enthusiastically and with a noticeable sense of gratitude for the way that the conference director and other staff communicated their passion for the purpose of the “institution” and lent their “love” and “presence” in a way that sustained him through what were, in his words, “painful,” even “humiliating experiences of learning in public”.

It may have been this reliance on the support from the staff and certainly his trust in the learning process that allowed Jim to benefit from the experience of intense interpersonal conflict he had with Bridget, an Individualist in this study. He said, for instance:

I've learned things from people, people who I've disliked a great deal, people without many redeeming qualities, yet somehow in the system, I can learn from them. That's an interesting one. I learned from Bridget, yet if Bridget were at my work or somewhere else, I'd have a much harder time learning from her. Even now I have a hard time, but I have faith in the institution. The institution is a smart one, the institution is a good one, and if the institution has this stuff come out, then I'm willing to say I've got to encounter this for real (#49).

I found this description from Jim to be another demonstration of the Expert action logic in the sense that Jim placed so much emphasis on the external “institution,” saying for

instance that if this “stuff,” these hard lessons he encountered, came out of this particular setting, then they must be authentic and important. Rather than putting his faith in his own experience, he deferred to the external authority of the conference in a way that is characteristic of the conventional action logics (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003).

Jim, like Steve and Kate, the other two participants in the Expert category, conceded that for as challenging and painful as the conference was, it was also necessary to undergo such an experience in order to be “nourished” and to grow. He said:

I mean, let’s not romanticize this because I was learning today that’s outside the scope of the conference, but learning is hard. I often don’t feel good while I’m doing it. It often hurts, it often involves some shame. It certainly involves risk, but risk can sound really good, but when you’re doing it... I’m just full of fear and tremble and flush and kind of a mess and feel de-compensated and potentially histrionic or emasculated or whatever. You know, but I mean, I love this. I’m hard to break down. I have good defenses. I have good ego strength or something. At least, I don’t know, I don’t know, but I also know that for my own almost nourishment, I need to get broken down (#51).

I was struck by the powerful terms that Jim used to describe the intensity of the challenges that lead to his learning, and that he actually used similar expression to describe his experience of conflict with Bridget. At the same time, his “love” of this whole experience, a characteristic that I identify as an adaptive self-support, helped him to embrace the challenges for the sake his learning.

While he and the other two participants in the Expert category described the holding environment as sufficient for their learning, these members also may have brought more life experience and professional training than other conference members in same stage of development. Steve, for instance, spoke of the holding environment in specific terms, drawing on the work of Heifetz (1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and described how it was as much the responsibility of group members to create a holding environment for themselves as it was the responsibility of the staff. I found this insight

remarkable because it portrayed a more realistic expectation of authority than I would have expected from a person in the Expert action logic. When I asked him how he defined what a holding environment is, Steve said:

An area where people are allowed and encouraged and nurtured to take the authority or take their informal authority and their personal power to do the work of the group without attribution or retribution, or punishment, or fear. That's the holding environment. I'm free to operate within the boundaries. I'm going to be rewarded and recognized appropriately. I'm going to be gently put in the doghouse when I step outside my boundary or don't meet the goal. And that's, you know, here's my kind of fur-lined foxhole kind of thing. This is where we are and we're all in here together (#146).

Even though Steve's definition was nearly a verbatim account of Heifetz's description of the role of the holding environment in facilitating adaptive work, it also reflected his extensive military training and crisis management experience.

Each of the three participants in the Expert category mentioned the following supports as helpful to their learning:

1. Social supports: the connections the participants brought with them to the conferences (e.g., colleagues, family members that they check in with for comfort and perspective) and new-found peers that they met in the conference for the first time.
2. The encouragement that they received from staff, especially consultants to the Role Transformation Event, as well as the conference director and associate directors.
3. The conference structure itself as a helpful means of promoting experiential learning.

Furthermore, while both Jim and Steve mentioned feedback that they found helpful, Kate emphasized, "I draw on support on a lot of people, from a lot of people. I need a lot of

friends. I need to be networked in socially. I really need a lot of positive feedback from people.” Yet, despite the fact that she only had one friend, Marie (Achiever), in the conference, this was enough for her to experience “tremendous learning.”

### Marie (Achiever)

Marie is a 39 year-old woman who is the executive director of fundraising at the same non-profit organization where Kate works. Neither of them were familiar with Group Relations theory nor had either of them attended a conference like this previously. While Marie is almost ten years younger than Kate, she is a full stage/action logic later in her development, and it this is evident in the way that she described her experience of supports, for instance. She placed greater value than Kate on the “environment of experimentation that the conference provided.” Like participants in each of the other three action logics represented in the study, Marie spoke very appreciatively of her World Event group, but especially of the Role Transformation Event (RTE) and the support she received from the consultant to her group:

I think the world event definitely helped, and they had the role transformation event. It was really helpful. We had a great consultant in our little group. And you know I understand every RTE group operated a little bit differently, and in ours, the first session, we started and just each of us talked about what the different roles that we had seen ourselves in, and then on Sunday when we met with the same group, we started talking about how we can—these roles and how they can relate into our private or professional lives. And it was just really, really helpful (#13).

The purpose of the RTE group is to support participants in processing their experience and applying their insights to their personal and professional lives; therefore, it is not surprising that this appreciation for the RTE was represented in every one of the 18 interviews.

Beyond the RTE group, Marie also reflected more generally on the kind of professional environments that support her in learning, and I found that her description captured the preferences characteristic of people in the Achiever action logic. I included this description of her professional work environment because she related it to what she found in the conference:

Actually, at this job, there's been a tremendous learning curve, but it's been a really respectful environment and I've been-and I'm very respected for the things that I do know, and so the people around me have really given me room to learn the things that are new. And so it's just an environment that's very collegial, that's very respectful, and very optimistic. Like we don't know how to do this yet, but we're going to know, we're going to know soon and we're going to fix this or do this new thing. And so it's just been supportive (# 56).

In this passage, I noted how she appreciated a respectful environment that takes into account her knowledge and experience, while at the same time provided conditions for her to continue learning—collegiality and a positive attitude toward both problems and change. More specifically, she described an experimental environment where there was opportunity to try and to fail:

I'll tell you actually one of the best things about this environment is that there's accountability, and to me, accountability—I know what the expectations are of me, and because of that, I really have a lot of freedom and authority and autonomy in how I go about meeting that expectation. And so no one's telling me what to do on a day-to-day basis, but they are telling me what they expect from me in three months, in six months, in a year. And so I have the opportunity to try—you know, something might not work out, but I have enough time to figure out another way to do it. Or to scrap it altogether. So there is definitely an opportunity to try and to fail (#58).

Marie's emphasis on accountability, a balance of expectations, freedom, and autonomy is characteristic of the Achiever action logic (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004), and while this was a description of her professional work environment, it is relevant because she described the conference environment as a place where such experimentation and learning occurred for her.

Marie spoke of valuing her colleague's presence at the conference, affectionately calling Kate her "partner in crime;" yet, unlike Kate, who described the need for lots of social connection, Marie said, "I think maybe once in the whole entire weekend did we sit next to each other. So I think we were both very open to different experiences, but it was nice to know that at break time, I had someone that I could go confer with." Marie seemed to appreciate that while Kate was in the conference even at a distance, she had the space to have her own experience, which is also characteristic of the degree of autonomy preferred by many Achievers (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004).

While Marie's experience of supports was similar to many of the other participants in the Achiever category, the following summary includes a few supports that Marie did not mention:

1. Social supports: as participants in other action logics mention, supportive relationships with friends and colleagues was appreciated as a source of encouragement, as a relief from tension and as a space for processing experience.
2. References to supportive words or gestures, as well as constructive feedback from the conference director, the associate director and the consultants, especially in the Role Transformation event.
3. Space for reflection: five of the nine participants in the Achiever action logic mentioned their appreciation for space and time made for reflection and/or for opportunities that they took for themselves to reflect.

4. The conference structure: seven of the nine participants in the Achiever action logic commented on how valuable the conference design, structure, and implementation was for their experience of learning.
5. Orientation to the conference aim, roles, and tasks: three of the nine participants in the Achiever action logic mentioned their appreciation for the way the conference director repeated the conference aim, the description of the respective roles of the participants and of the tasks at hand as a way of helping orient the conference's purpose and intention.

#### Bill (Individualist)

I selected Bill to represent the Individualist action logic in discussing the experience of supports for two reasons: one, as a therapist, Bill is sensitive to the relationship of supports and challenges and spoke of his experience with both simplicity and subtlety; and second, like the other four Individualists, he is aware of the role of pain in human growth. When asked about supports, he stated that his “growth comes out of pain.” He also suggested that supportive environments provide opportunities for relationships wherein he can feel and express that pain:

My growth comes out of pain, so when you talk about supportive environments for my own growth, I mean the most comfortable ones are relationships where I can express that and feel that that's heard and in common with friends or family or some co-workers, colleagues. But if I go through not experiencing my pain, then I don't grow (#122).

Even though other participants in earlier action logics also understood the connection between pain and growth, they did not always convey this with the existential awareness and unadorned conviction that I heard in Bill's statement. It is as if participants in earlier stages had a notional sense of the potential value of pain for learning, but those with more

experience, those further along in terms of development, were better able to understand with the heart, so to speak. Bill continued:

So the conference was ideal in that I could feel the pain that I have in large groups and in some organizations, and I think that it was the large groups were ideal for that. They were certainly not supportive and I think that was the most difficult place for anyone to feel supported (#124).

Here, Bill spoke to the way in which support is necessary, but not so much of it that people do not have space to experience the discomfort of perceived adversity.

Interestingly, he mentioned the importance of collaboration as being a characteristic of supportive groups, another trait of Individualists (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004). He noted, however, how he failed to find the collaboration he was seeking in the World Event ambassadors group:

The small groups were much more supportive, most of them anyway. The ambassadors group was a non-supportive. It was one leader, and she sort of entered in a pissed-off [laughs] way because I think she was really in a dilemma about giving up her training role, and she took charge really without listening to anybody else. She was the leader, she was elected the leader. I actually helped her be elected leader, and then I was sorry! [laughs] Because she was not collaborative, as far as I was concerned (#126).

Bill's description of his experience in this ambassadors' group was in marked contrast to his small group, where the members achieved such a level of trust and intimacy that he was able to come to a deep level of insight around the effects of his daughter's death three years prior to the conference. In the ambassadors' group, the task was different the other World Event groups; they were to represent their World Event subgroups in a forum and interact with the staff-directorate of the conference. However, as is characteristic of the Individualist action logic, Bill would have preferred a collaborative team spirit rather than the take-charge leadership that Lisa (Achiever) undertook.

Finally, Bill described how he placed great importance on telling people the truth as it is experienced from different perspectives in groups. He said, “I think when telling people the truth as other people experience it, it is a value that’s held in the group, and that’s supportive of growth” (#128). The value of truth as a perspective grounded in a particular experience, rather than as any form of absolute, is also characteristic of the way that Individualists make meaning (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004; Torbert, 2003, 2004).

In summary, the five Individualists in the study note the following elements as supportive of their learning:

1. Social supports: as participants in other action logics mention, supportive relationships with at least one other member is appreciated as a source of encouragement, as a relief from tension and as a space for processing experience.
2. References to supportive words or gestures as well as constructive feedback from the conference director, the associate director, and the consultants, especially in the Role Transformation event.
3. The conference structure: three of five of the Individualists commented on how valuable the conference design, structure, and implementation was for their experience of learning.
4. While many participants in earlier action logics described challenges as important for learning, one Individualist actually put “pain” in the support category.

5. Relative to the earlier two action logics, the five Individualists in this study reported a greater number and variety of what I call adaptive self-scaffolds, which I describe in the subsequent finding. These adaptive self-scaffolds are mentioned nearly as often as external supports. I develop this point further in the next chapter.

### Victor (Strategist/Alchemist)

Victor's description of the external supports was consistent with the elements described by participants in the Individualist action logic, especially the RTE group, where he noted additionally the importance of one member whose vulnerability with others helped to promote what he calls "a true, authentic exchange." While other participants also described the impact that particular members had on them, I included this quote to illustrate that the ways individuals comport themselves in groups can have a significantly supportive, even transformative, effect on groups:

Well, she had an effect on—she really has this tremendous courage and ability to be real, and to reveal herself and to take these kinds of risks. And I think her presence and her ability catalyzed stuff. I mean, I couldn't say for sure, but you know what? I have a strong feeling that without her presence there, that group might have been qualitatively different. It may not have gone where it went. I'm not sure (#18).

Victor's appraisal of and appreciation for this member's courage and "ability to be real" were quite palpable in the reverent tone he used to describe her impact on him. He credited her with inspiring him to take the kinds of risks he took in terms of his "channeling rage" experience later in the conference.

As other participants also noted, Victor expressed appreciation for the way that the conference structure both generated and contained the perceived sense of ambiguity

in the way that the staff managed boundaries of role, time, task, and territory. What was most interesting was the way that Victor relied more on the self-scaffolds I define and describe in the next chapter than he did on the external supports provided by the conference setting and staff. The summary of external supports for this one participant in the Strategist/Alchemist category is identical to that of the Individualists above.

For a full list of the supports as they were described by participants, please see Table 12.

Table 12. *Supports Defined*

<p><b>“aim/role/task cues”</b>: across the board, participants report finding it helpful to be reminded of the aim/role/task by the director or by consultants. Even though some report feeling confused by the ambiguity of the task, they nonetheless find this reminder of purpose a helpful cue for their reflection. Some participants describe how they remind themselves of aim/role/task as a way of orienting themselves when confused.</p>
<p><b>“being authorized to work”</b>: many members describe the importance of feeling authorized by the director and associate director of the conference. Another version of this sense of being authorized is feeling “legitimate.” This code appears in the Expert, Achiever, and Individualist categories.</p>
<p><b>“boundaries being held”</b>: many participants draw reference to the support they experience from the boundaries of the “institution,” as they are maintained by the conference staff.</p>
<p><b>“consultants/staff/director”</b>: most participants name individual consultants, the director, or the associate director as being supportive of learning, particularly in the Role Transformation Event. There were nearly twice as many descriptions of the consultants being supportive of learning than there were describing consultants as challenges.</p>
<p><b>“feeling well held/loved”</b>: several participants who have had prior conference experience, training, and relationship with the conference staff report how powerful it was to feel well regarded, and even loved by members of staff, including the conference director and associate director.</p>
<p><b>“mentors”</b>: this code refers to the previous two.</p>
<p><b>“Role Transformation Event”</b>: every participants describes how supporting the RTE was for their learning, mentioning consultants by name, as well as group members, and differentiating the event for the kind of space it affords for reflection and feedback.</p>
<p><b>“social supports”</b>: this code refers to the numerous ways that participants found other</p>

members, family, friends, colleagues, or teachers to be helpful.

**“small group”**: while all members describe the challenge of the large group, and a few members described the challenge of emotional vulnerability in the small group, several members describe positive experiences in their small groups.

**“space for inquiry”**: this code refers to the way that many participants described and valued the reflective environment provided by the conference and several events in particular, like the RTE.

**“vulnerability of others”**: while many members described the challenge they experienced in terms of being personally vulnerable with others, several members described how helpful it was to experience the vulnerability of others.

**“WE group”**: many participants described how helpful and supportive their experience of their self selected World Event groups were for their learning.

**“the unconscious”**: at least one member describes feeling energized by the notion of the unconscious as a potential asset and support.

### Challenges

I found that there was noticeable differentiation in the particular challenges that participants described and how they experienced these challenges across the four action logics. In this section I present the 27 codes used to describe challenges as well as definition and comment. I also provide a table that presents the incidence of these codes in the four action logics, followed by commentary.

Table 12. *Challenges Defined*

<p><b>“Age”</b>: two participants, one a 59 year-old white woman who profiled as an Achiever and a 55 year-old white male who profiled as an Individualist, both shared the sense of their age being felt as a challenge to their participation in the conference.</p>
<p><b>“Ambiguity”</b>: every participant no matter what their action logic described ambiguity as a challenge. Specifically, people referred to uncertainty around aim, role, and task, as well as their being evaluated and in terms of how events would unfold.</p>
<p><b>“Anger”</b>: many participants described feeling varying degrees of discomfort with their own anger let alone the displays of anger or hostility from others.</p>
<p><b>“Being at a loss”</b>: is a code that describes the felt sense of disorientation that participants reported as they were confronted by experiences of ambiguity, conflict, and complexity.</p>

Table 12. *Challenges Defined (continued)*

<p><b>“Being heard”</b>: this code is related to the experience one Individualist reported regarding his inability to be heard by the large group due to the fact that he was a middle-aged white male. This code is distinct from “finding one’s voice,” in that this member felt he had already found his voice. This code is also distinct from “using one’s voice,” which refers to the fact that someone has a voice but is choosing when and where to use it.</p>
<p><b>“Complexity/systemic perspective”</b>: participants from every action logic described the challenge of trying to hold/grasp/understand the complexity of their personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels of experience.</p>
<p><b>“Conflict”</b>: participants in every action logic reported the challenge that interpersonal and group level conflict poses, and there are several Achievers as well as one Individualist who reported attempts to actively avoid conflict.</p>
<p><b>“Consultants”</b>: participants who are new to Group Relations Conferences reported experiences of frustration and anger at the behavior of consultants, which they described as provocative, manipulative and calculated. Four participants—one Expert and three Achievers—also reported their experience of being put off by the consultants’ use of vulgarity or sexual innuendo.</p>
<p><b>“Competence/doing a good job”</b>: many members, especially those in consultant training roles, described the pressure that they put on themselves to perform competently. This code is also associated with the competitive dynamic which several participants described as challenging.</p>
<p><b>“Disconnection from others”</b>: participants who do not come to the conference knowing people ahead of time and those who either pull away from or are rejected by others described this disconnection as challenging.</p>
<p><b>“Diversity issues”</b>: several participants, including one Expert, four of the young Achiever females and one Achiever male, described the challenges they experienced in the conference with regard to issues of race, gender, ethnicity and privilege.</p>
<p><b>“Emotional vulnerability”</b>: while there was one Expert and one Individualist who reported the challenge of being emotionally vulnerable, it is striking that it was one of the most dominant challenges across the board for every participant who scored as an Achiever.</p>
<p><b>“Exclusion”</b>: this code refers to the experience of one Expert and one Achiever, both women who were from out of town and were first-time conference attendees, who felt excluded on the basis of the cliques formed and the way that members and consultants used the “psychological idiom.”</p>

Table 12. *Challenges Defined (continued)*

<p><b>“Finding one’s voice”</b>: this code refers to the way that a few participants described the challenge of finding their own distinct perspective/voice, especially relative to others who were already fully self-authoring. Two young women who profiled as Achievers reported this challenge.</p>
<p><b>“Group dynamics”</b>: this is a broad code that refers to a number of dimensions of the group experience, including the group formation process, basic assumption behaviors, being scapegoated or “killed off,” etc.</p>
<p><b>“Helplessness”</b>: this code refers to the way that participants self-described being helpless or powerless to change their own situation or the situation of others. It was interesting that the three times that this expression was used, it was by the Individualists. Related is to this is “invisibility.”</p>
<p><b>“Invisibility”</b>: this code is associated with age and gender. It refers to the experience of a middle-aged white male who felt like the men in the conference were largely invisible.</p>
<p><b>“Knowing/doing gap”</b>: participants from every action logic reported the experience of discrepancy between their values, beliefs, priorities, ideas, etc (espoused theories), and their actual behaviors (theories in use).</p>
<p><b>“Large group”</b>: participants in every action logic described how challenging they find the large group.</p>
<p><b>“Low self concept/excessive self criticism”</b>: this code refers to the way that some participants experienced an internal challenge around their own self-concept/sense of efficacy and their tendencies to be excessively self-critical.</p>
<p><b>“Projective identification”</b>: most participants described the challenges they experienced as a result of the projections that they received from others.</p>
<p><b>“Psychological idiom”</b>: participants who were new to Group Relations described feeling put-off, mystified or excluded by the heavy use of psychological/psychoanalytic jargon by both consultants and other participants.</p>
<p><b>“Reclaiming disowned aspects of self”</b>: this code refers to the most difficult challenge that the person profiled as Strategist/Alchemist reported in the conference. He was speaking specifically of disowned rage.</p>
<p><b>“Resisting my valence”</b>: many members from across the various action logics described the challenge of working against their habitual behaviors, roles, and patterns of action.</p>
<p><b>“Shadow”</b>: this is the term used by the one Strategist/Alchemist in the study to describe the unwanted and disowned aspects of self held by individuals and groups.</p>

Table 12. *Challenges Defined (continued)*

<p><b>“Spirituality”</b>: while spirituality is generally described as an internal adaptive self-scaffold for participants, there were two young Achiever females who reported feeling put-off by the overt focus on spirituality.</p>
<p><b>“The unconscious”</b>: several members including one Expert and three Achievers described feeling generally put-off by the attention paid to the unconscious.</p>
<p><b>“Using one’s voice”</b>: this expression was used by the Individualist female who understood that she had found her voice, knew how to use it, and was now concerned with when to speak and when to be silent.</p>

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What follows is a table (13) illustrating the incidence of codes used to describe particular challenges across the four action logics. Some of the key challenges that participants had are already well known; for instance, the experience of the large group dynamic is generally understood as overwhelming and complex for members, and, indeed, all the participants in the study confirmed this, generally using similar language and expression to do so. Also, the work of Argyris (1990) draws attention to the ways that people experience a gap between their “espoused” theories and their “theories in use,” or their actual behaviors, especially under conditions of duress. Several participants in each of the four action logics described this gap as well in terms of knowing one thing and doing another.

In the commentary that follows, I focus in particular on the ways that different participants in these action logics described their experiences of ambiguity, conflict, and complexity, the three main categories of challenges that I found in my coding process. I also draw attention to the ways that certain challenges patterned themselves depending on the action logics, in particular the ways that participants described projective processes, the issues around voice and emotional vulnerability. A “yes” response indicates that at

least one participant in each action logic reported the particular code as a challenge. The proportions in the box indicate the number of participants who reported the particular challenge out of the total number in a give action logic category.

Table 13. *Challenges across the Action Logics*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Expert (3)</b>	<b>Achiever (9)</b>	<b>Individualist (5)</b>	<b>Strategist/ Alchemist (1)</b>
“Age”	Yes (1/3)	Yes (1/9)	Yes (1/5)	
“Ambiguity”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (4/5)	Yes (1/1)
“Anger”	Yes (2/3)	Yes (4/9)		Yes (1/1)
“Being at a loss”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (5/9)	Yes (3/5)	
“Being heard”		Yes (2/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Complexity/ systems perspective”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (5/5)	Yes (1/)
“Conflict”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (5/9)	Yes (3/5)	Yes (1/1)
“Consultants”	Yes (1/3)	Yes (3/9)		
“Competence/doing a good job”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (7/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Disconnection from others”		Yes (4/9)	Yes (2/5)	
“Diversity issues”	Yes (1/3)	Yes (7/9)		
“Emotional vulnerability”	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (3/5)	

Table 13. *Challenges across the Action Logics (continued)*

<b>“Exclusion”</b>	Yes (3/3)	Yes (5/9)		
<b>“Finding voice”</b>	Yes (2/3)	Yes (3/3)		
<b>“Group dynamics”</b>	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (5/5)	Yes (1/1)
<b>“Helplessness”</b>			Yes (2/3)	
<b>“Invisibility/connected to whiteness and age”</b>			Yes (2/3)	
<b>“Large group”</b>	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (5/5)	Yes (1/1)
<b>“Low self-concept/ excessive self-criticism”</b>	Yes (1/1)	Yes (1/1)		Yes (1/1)
<b>“Projective identification”</b>	Yes (2/3)	Yes (7/9)	Yes (4/5)	
<b>“Psychological idiom”</b>	Yes (1/3)	Yes (3/9)		
<b>“Reclaiming disowned aspects of self”</b>				Yes (1/1)
<b>“Resisting my own valence”</b>	Yes (2/3)	Yes (8/9)	Yes (2/5)	
<b>“Shadow”</b>				Yes (1/1)
<b>“Spirituality”</b>		Yes (2/9)		
<b>“The unconscious”</b>	Yes (1/3)	Yes (3/9)		
<b>“Using one’s voice”</b>			Yes (3/5)	
<b>“Knowing/doing gap”</b>	Yes (2/3)	Yes (5/9)	Yes (1/5)	Yes (1/1)

In this table (13), a variety of the challenges are predictable, based on Group Relations theories, including the large group event, the struggle with diversity and race issues, conflict, etc. Other challenges are not necessarily covered in the theory but are notable in this study; for instance, the knowing/doing gap, finding voice, and emotional vulnerability appear as challenges among the participants, I explore these challenges in the sections to follow.

### Three Key Categories of Challenges: Ambiguity, Conflict, and Complexity

When I began the process of reducing my list of 65 discrete codes for describing challenges, categories began to emerge in terms of the types of phenomenon to which participants were alluding. Three main categories of phenomenon were cued by the repetition of key words that came up in the interviews, specifically, “ambiguity,” “conflict,” and other synonyms, and “complexity,” which I also associate with the “systems perspective.” Ambiguity is a category comprised of 15 codes (e.g., “not knowing,” “feeling of chaos,” “being at a loss,” “uncertainty”). Conflict is comprised of 35 codes (e.g., “aggression/hostility,” “killed off,” “getting crapped on,” “gender war”). Complexity is comprised of 25 codes (e.g., “diversity issues,” “multiple perspectives,” “systems perspective,” “holding complexity”). There is some overlap for the ways that particular codes fall into more than one category; for instance, “being at a loss” shows up in all three.

As I studied the categories and the codes I associated with them, I began to see how significant these three categories of challenge are for participant learning, and that the ways that individuals express the tolerance for these challenges appears to be

contingent upon two factors: developmental action logic and the relative “position of strength” (Bridget, #61) that participants are experiencing at the time depending on internal factors such as confidence, as well as external conditions and context. While this is not a new finding in the literature of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994), I thought it was helpful to highlight the influence of these two factors for the sake of the Group Relations literature, which does not take these factors into account.

### Key Challenges Differing across Action Logics

Certain challenges pattern themselves differently across the action logics, depending in particular on the ways that participants describe projective processes, on the issues around voice, and on varying tolerances for emotional vulnerability. The following section includes examples of the ways that participants in the four action logics described these particular challenges.

#### Projective Processes

As mentioned earlier, projective processes is the term used by Klein (1959) to describe a complex psychological phenomenon that entails both intra-subjective and interpersonal dimensions, principally the ways that individuals and groups tend to disassociate from unwanted emotions and social-emotional roles, and then, under conditions of duress, project these unwanted aspects onto others. One common and well-known example of this projective process is that of scapegoating, where usually one

person and sometimes an outside group is blamed for a particular group's anxiety, failure, or unwanted status.

In the Expert action logic, I noticed that all three participants paid attention to the projections that they received, especially the negative ones (e.g., being thought of as a “histrionic Jew,” or a “killing machine”), but there was no reference to the projections that they may have had on others. For example, this passage illustrated the way that Steve experienced conflict between these projections of him by members of his training subgroup and the way that he might have wanted to accept or reject them. In particular, this projection was related to role:

And what I took in from that was how powerful projections are, and that the conflict between me accepting my projection and understanding it and seeing how the group uses my projection, and what role I play in that, versus the reality of my own life and what kind of conflict that sets up. So that was extraordinarily meaningful to me because I think at some subconscious level I struggle with that, because I know what I look like, I know how I behave and what I project, to a certain degree, but I never know to what extent. But now I've got a pretty good glimpse, I mean somebody that knows me at many different levels (#68).

Steve is speaking of the way in which one member of his group, a white female in her mid-50s, suggested that as a former military officer, “he could kill her with his bare hands.” This is obviously an example of an unwanted projection. Although Steve was able to sort through the place of projections vis-à-vis actual roles and was fairly aware of the projections he receives as a middle-aged white male, his experience was nonetheless eye-opening for him.

This attention to being on the receiving end of projections was similar for Kate and Jim, and indeed was valued as a key learning experience for each of them, but without the reciprocal attention on the ways that they may have projected onto others. What was especially interesting was that two of the Expert participants, Steve and Jim,

had had considerable exposure to the theory of group relations and Jim in particular is in a counseling psychology graduate program.

In the Achiever action logic, there was a difference between the three participants who had had previous conference experience, and the six who had not in terms of their respective levels of awareness of their own projections. One example of an early Achiever who experienced and described being on the receiving end of projections is Alison, a white woman in her early 30s who has had professional training as a psychologist and is familiar with group dynamics:

In one of my small groups, there was a Latina female who, from the very first minute in our small group, expressed some discontent towards me, some irritation with me. My sense of her was she had a chip on her shoulder. The first comment she made in our small group was that I was aligning myself with the males in the room. And through the course of the two days in our small groups, we talked through some of the things, and she said at the end, You represent—it's not—she recognized, "It's not actually you. I don't even know you really. It's what you represent." And she never named what exactly what that represented, but it just, it was that kind of awareness for me of the fact that I represent things to people without meaning to. Here's someone who I would have just passed on the street and thought—or even the little bit I knew about her—I would have respected her and thought, Great, I'm sure we could be friends. But just because of who I am or what I represented, there was hostility towards me (#21).

Here, Alison spoke quite eloquently of this new awareness of the ways that she was on the receiving end of negative, even hostile projections by people, and that this process was not something she intended. At the same time, at no point in her interview did she make any reference to her projections upon others.

By contrast, Brian is a young white male who profiled as a late Achiever/Early Individualist and had no prior experience with Group Relations theory or conferences. He was "loaded up" with negative projections by young Latina women who rejected him for being white, male, and so forthright in his attempts to lead their small group. He expressed this experience with a particularly apt description:

I guess what surprised me after my initial experience on my first day, with such profound frustration and anxiety, was the fact that by the end I kind of appreciated it, and how much I actually got out of it, despite the fact that I couldn't even identify exactly what I learned at the end. Like when that last day was over and it's like, Okay, we're done, I couldn't identify exactly what I got out of it. Like I felt, like I felt like I was a bag stuffed with junk and there's lots in there, but I couldn't tell what it was, and then it just sort of—as I analyzed in my normal life afterwards—I identified this or that, like things that I've learned, but at the time, it was just so compacted in there into that weekend, that I didn't get the time to appreciate all I learned until I got a chance to reflect in a more relaxed environment (#126).

Here, Brian described how these negative projections from the Latina women filled him with frustration and anxiety, and that he felt like a “bag stuffed with junk,” which is a remarkable metaphor for the way that he experienced the projective identification with this negativity, unable to set up a psychological boundary to protect himself, or differentiate between his own thoughts and feelings and the projected aspects that he had taken in from the group.

However, in contrast to Alison, who is at the early end of the Achiever action logic, Brian also demonstrated awareness of how he projected upon others and provided a description of that here:

It was sort of what my learning ended up focusing on because that's what my World Event group was discussing, and because that's what I sort of took hold of in the Role Transformation Event—how people were projecting upon me and what feelings I was projecting upon other people based on what they were saying to me. A lot of times, I was projecting hostility on people when maybe they weren't so hostile to me, they were just being genuine in how they were feeling, based on what I was saying and doing. And maybe they weren't hostile, they were just trying to share and be open. So I learned a lot about projections (#50).

Profiled on the later end of the Achiever action logic, despite his relatively young age, Brian described his learning about the reciprocal nature of giving and receiving projections. He spoke of the help he received in the RTE to see his own role in projecting his hostility. However, while the same RTE resources were available to the other

participants, those who profiled earlier in their action logic did not make the same connection.

Five of the nine participants in the Achiever action logic also demonstrated their capacity to avoid projective identification, in other words, to block unwanted projections. Jeff, for instance, generated one of the codes I used to describe this process when he stated, “that was not my crap,” referring to the way he has a tendency to get loaded up and overwhelmed by the sadness in groups and was working to differentiate his emotions from those of others. Lisa was able to successfully push back on judgments made of her by the conference director that might have undermined her confidence to act as the chair of the World Event Forum. And Marie described at length how the theme of her World Event group, “My Other,” was precisely the issue of identifying, giving back, and re-owning projections.

Three of the Individualists described similar defensive capacity as they too demonstrated the capacity for generating “semi-permeable” (Bridget) boundaries that help them to defend themselves from projective identification. While this ability seemed to be first available to several of the participants in the Achiever action logic, it was not present in a consistent way until Bridget and Joshua, who both described a number of ways that they defended themselves from negative or unwanted projections. I describe this in further detail in the section on learning but provide two examples here. First, Bridget described the way that she dealt with a hostile confrontation with Jim (Expert):

So it was almost like he was in a tool shed and he just started throwing everything he could at me! Pow-pow-pow. Oh, I said to him, I can see how strongly you feel about this and I care about that, but I don't feel as strongly as that. And he said to me, You're just saying Fuck you! And I said, I don't think that's what I'm saying. That's certainly not what I'm feeling. He said, This is data, I want you to take this as data. I said, Well, I just think this has got something to do with you, not with

me, and so I'm going to ask the group if they feel that I am saying, Fuck you. And they all said things like, No, we don't feel like you've got any attitude. We feel like you're just being direct and straightforward, and we wish we could do that actually! Then he felt terrible because now he felt ganged-up on by the group. Anyway, so the more he pushed me to what felt to me like to join with him in his anxiety, the more I decided I wasn't going to do that, and I wasn't going to take on all these things he was trying to get me to take on, and so I said to him, I really don't want to receive your stress or join you in it. I want to acknowledge it but say that I'm not in it. And it just really, it was really intense. But I felt really tremendously good because my tendency would be to mother him and to look after him and to take care of his feelings. So for me to say, No, actually, this is your thing, this is my thing, and I'm not going to join in, was difficult, but less difficult by this point. And so I felt exhilarated. He felt terrible and he kept telling me how terrible he felt and how terrible I was to have made him feel this way, and if I would just share in his anxiety, he would immediately feel better. And I said, I'm absolutely sure that's true, but I'm still not going to do it (#39).

Here, Bridget describes how Jim attacked her for not rescuing him from the group's judgment that he has been too self-involved, and beyond that, for her unwillingness to "take his data," because she is differentiating between his issues and her own.

Bridget's experience of pushing back at Jim's apparent desire for her to join him in his anxiety, or to "mother him," which is a familiar socio-emotional role, was a new one for her. Later, Bridget described the experience of dealing with this projective attack as "exhilarating," because it was such a novel experience for her. She described this newfound capacity to deal with such challenges in this way as "transformative" in the sense that it felt like an emerging new ability that she now has and can exercise when she chooses to.

Joshua, a priest, also demonstrated a capacity to achieve perspective on projective dynamics by attributing them to external dynamics and therefore by not personalizing them. For example, at the end of the conference, when a participant addressed another Roman Catholic priest who wore his clerical garb, he seemed to have overlooked the fact that Joshua was also a priest. Rather than feel neglected or invisible, Joshua attributed

this to the way the other priest played his role in such a way as to absorb most of the projections, positive or negative, that members might have had:

There were personal things, there were interpersonal things, and there were systemic things. I thought it was interesting, even at the end of the conference, one of the people in my World Event group, and in my very small event—I thought it was very funny, we were talking and he went over the man in the collar and thanks him because he never got to work with a member of the cloth before. Meanwhile, I'm standing there and he worked more with me than anybody else in the conference! And now I looked at that as still a continuation of the system (#69).

Joshua was able to do two things here: he kept perspective on the fact that the system dynamics are characterized by certain patterns of projections whereby some people have a valence or tendency to play particular roles in a group where others do not, or at least not to the same degree, and that projective patterns are largely impersonal. Both Bridget and Joshua demonstrated a capacity to deal with projections that was more sophisticated and effective than those participants who profited in earlier action logics.

The one Alchemist in this study demonstrated all the capacity of the early action logics, and, in addition, he described his interest in and ability to reclaim disowned/unwanted feelings or characteristics. Victor, an early Alchemist in transition from the Strategist, described how the experience of reclaiming his disowned rage was central to his learning. Further, he described how questioning a major assumption allowed him to be “liberated” and expanded his perspective:

That was freakin' liberating... my role was acting as an agent of rage on behalf of the group. And I did it, I was drawn to that role, in retrospect. What I see as a valence for anger, expression of it—Sort of like the part that I disowned, I want to jump on it and carry it for somebody else, right? 'Cause it's really mine. So this is a perspective-expanding experience (#39).

The result of this experience of reclaiming his disowned feelings was described in very positive terms:

I feel revitalized. I absolutely feel revitalized. I don't know if I'm capturing it... it's as if my authentic being was being blocked, and that's been removed. And also I would say that I have dis-identified with that rage. It's like I'm not rage, you know? I can have it. It can come through me, it can be expressed. And then another shattering of the big assumption is this can happen and I won't be shunned (#43).

Although Victor was the only participant who profiled beyond the Individualist action logic, his capacity to recognize and then reintegrate the disowned emotions that are usually the content of projection was apparently another step beyond the Individualist capacity to fend off unwanted projections. He also demonstrated the ability to “open” and “close” his psychological boundaries at will, examples of which I provide in the fourth finding.

By way of summary regarding projective processes, participants in this study demonstrated the following awareness and capacity, according to their developmental action logic (see Table 14).

Table 14. *Awareness/Capacity with Regard to Projective Processes by Action Logic*

<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Expert (3)</b>	<b>Achiever (9)</b>	<b>Individualist (5)</b>	<b>Strategist/ Alchemist (1)</b>
<b>Awareness of receiving projections</b>	Yes (3/3)	Yes (9/9)	Yes (4/5)	Yes (1/1)
<b>Awareness of generating projections</b>		Yes (1/9)	Yes (5/5)	Yes (1/1)
<b>Ability to avoid projective identification</b>		Yes (5/9)	Yes (3/5)	Yes (1/)
<b>Ability to identify and re-integrate disowned emotions</b>				Yes (/1)

It appears that, based on the incident and frequencies represented in this table, the capacity and awareness of managing projective processes increased for the participants in this study from one action logic to another. While the three of the participants in the Expert action logic were able to recognize when they were receiving unwanted projection, it is not until the Achiever action logic that participants not only had this awareness, but five of them were able to defend against these unwanted projections and one of them was even able to account for his own projections. This capacity appeared for participants in the Individualist action logic based on several of their descriptions. Moreover, the one individual in the Strategist/Alchemist transition reported the additional capacity to identify and re-integrate his own unwanted emotion.

### Finding and Using Voice

While adult development theory acknowledges the evolution in a person's capacity to give expression to their own self generated meanings and expressions (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; Torbert, 2003, 2004), it was interesting to find examples that confirmed the theory as well as one that showed how the issue of voice becomes more complex in a large group or system. One Expert, Jim, and two early Achievers, Susan and Alison, gave expression to the challenge of "finding" their voice; one Achiever, Anne, described choosing to "use" her voice; and two male Individualists, Bill and Joshua, struggled with "being heard" because they believed the group did not seem hospitable to their perspectives

As adult development theory describes how one's personal voice evolves as one moves into the self-authoring stages, I present here the two examples of discrepancy, where Bill and Joshua, the two Individualists, struggled with being heard.

Joshua, after being confronted for an apparent lack of sympathy for another member, experienced losing his voice and struggling to re-engage in the conference without success. The quote begins with my representation to him of what I was hearing and then follows with his unambiguous reply:

Me: So I have here, a challenge to find the group at the beginning of the event, right? To find a voice or role after being shut down? Is that right? As a challenge or source of some anxiety?

Joshua: Oh my God, yes (#159).

Likewise, another middle-aged white male in the conference, Bill, also struggled to be heard by other members in the conference, particularly young minority women. When asked what was most challenging, he responded that the "most challenging thing was to be heard" (#86). What was interesting in both cases was that while both men as Individualists were fully self-authoring and had a perspective to share, their voices were not always welcome. What became apparent was that one's capacity to be heard in the group may not only be a matter of developmental capacity, but also considers social identity, role, and other factors.

### Emotional Vulnerability

The last of the findings related to the major supports and challenges that participants reported is the interesting differences in the ways that they described their relationship to emotional vulnerability across the action logics. While I might tend to associate the comfort level that individuals have for emotional self-expression as a factor

of personality or of gender, there was an interesting pattern in the data where the three Experts and the nine Achievers tended to struggle with vulnerability, whereas two of the Individualists and the one Strategist/Alchemist expressed little or no embarrassment or anxiety about affective transparency. Because the increasing capacity for emotional vulnerability for the later action logics is already described by developmental theory (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003; Torbert, 2003, 2004), I focus on and illustrate ways that participants in the Expert and Achiever action logics struggled with this challenge for the sake of those who design, direct, and staff experiential learning programs.

As described earlier, Jim (Expert) described the amount of anger that he was feeling due to an interaction with Bridget (Individualist) who did not meet him halfway and join him in his anxiety. As a result of his fear of the “danger” of these feelings, he described a longing for the “authorities” to come and rescue the group:

And then I had this big fight, this sort of blow-out with Bridget, and of course, it probably felt dangerous. I was probably the only one feeling rage in the room. So it was probably dangerous, I mean, it was ultimately dangerous for me encountering the strong feelings inside myself. My subjective experience of it was just that there’s too much bad shit in this room for you to leave. Don’t leave us! And that’s a dependency thing, so that, you know, again, on this cusp of self-authority, authorization, internal locus of control, that’s a place where I feel very regressed. And wishing for authority (#45).

This passage from Jim’s interview provided a powerful insight not only into the fear he had of his own emotionality, but also the challenge that he experienced as an Expert “on the cusp of self-authority, authorization, internal locus of control...” to take responsibility for his feelings and the consequences of his angry self-expression. Neither Steve nor Kate, the other participants in the Expert category, expressed such strong emotions in the conference and generally maintained more emotional distance. Steve used apathy as a

defense and Kate used skepticism (as explored in Chapter V under the section on coping mechanisms).

Amongst the Achievers, nine out of ten participants described feeling uncomfortable with the display of strong emotion—their own or others'. In fact, the strong incidence of this discomfort with their own emotionality and aversion from other members who expressed strong emotions was both a predominant challenge and a key learning curve for the participants in the Achiever action logic. I provide samples from several of these participants.

For Sandra (Achiever), a white female in her mid-20s, if she did not see the long-term value of opening up to the group, she had a hard time investing or taking the emotional risk of opening up. This cost/benefit of thinking about vulnerability struck me as a strong indicator of the pragmatic rationalism characteristic of the Achiever action logic (#25). The same sentiment was articulated by Susan, a self-described introvert, who not only struggled with opening herself up, but also resisted expressing anger, hostility, or criticism:

Right. I think that, I think a role that I play generally is to be somewhat of a peacemaker, really kind of smooth over conflicts and not be one to begin them. But again, I felt like, especially reflecting on those moments where I was really feeling something, and like I said, to my detriment holding something in, that I could have released by just, you know, You know what? I am really frustrated. I can't hear you. Can you please speak up? Not that that would have guaranteed anyone would have spoken up, but at least I could have put that on the table (#28).

Curiously, even though Susan described her need for safety and “consistency” in small groups, she was also wary of the group being too small or “intimate:”

I think small, like five or six, like a small, small group, enough that there's different voices and people bring different things that can be helpful and supportive at any given time. And that it wouldn't be too intimate then, you know, if I'm imagining an event like this. A one-on-one, like I said, didn't work for me. And did I say consistency? (#92).

Susan was fairly unique among the Achievers in the degree to which she expressed a need for safety, consistency, and level of trust in small groups, but not in her general preference for these factors, which other Achievers also shared.

Jeff, a white male in his late 40s, expressed a valence or tendency to take up the sadness in groups, and he described how incapacitated he became in this conference as a result of one such group experiences:

I would say on Day two, in my very small group, I probably had the biggest challenge of the weekend. I'm very susceptible to sadness, and one of the females in the group started talking about the breast cancer that she had had and the removal of both breasts, and it just whacked me. It literally incapacitated me for the rest of that session. I came in here very much wanting to be open with emotions, but I was not going to cry, tears-wise. I think I did everything else but cry. The session ended. The thirty-minute breaks are great. The other conferences that I've had have been like fifteen minutes breaks between events. The thirty minutes were really good. They gave me a chance to go out, try to recover, did okay, and then went into a RTE session, and was just still whacked out for fifteen minutes of that session (#4).

Jeff came into the conference knowing about this tendency, but nonetheless he experienced feeling overwhelmed, not only by the feelings, but also by his frustration with himself, which is something that he is trying to address with a professional coach. It is interesting that it is sadness that he prefers not to express and not anger, which is considered more socially acceptable for men.

While there are numerous other examples of similar situations with other Achiever participants struggling with their emotions or with being emotionally vulnerable, this last example is an illustration of the way in which the challenge for Achievers may not be so much the expression of emotion per se, but the way in which this expression is not aligned either with the image that they have of themselves or with social conventions based on gender—in this case, the social norm that women do not express rage in public. Anne is a white female in her late 20s who had prior conference

experience and had familiarity with Group Relations and leadership theory. She described how she struggles with the accusation that she had rage against the men in the conference:

I don't know. I think I've really been trying to think of what data do I have about the accusation of rage because it came up from two people. One was the conference director, and so of course, I must have rage if he says it, right? And my instructor, who I really respect, and so I've been really thinking about that. I didn't—there were points where I did feel anger towards white men, and this is so foreign to me. I'm usually never that person, but I even came up in my small group where I said it out loud. I'm like, I don't know what's going on, like I'm usually not this person. But I think I'm pretty good at holding steady, yeah. But then you know, when I got in the room with my friends, I'm more like a volcano and it spews out (#19).

For Anne, whom I found to be very placid and even-keeled in the interview, this experience of being like “a volcano” might suggest that she had a valence for expressing the group's rage on their behalf.

In contrast to the Experts and Achievers, the five Individualists in the study and the one Strategist/Alchemist did not report experiencing emotional vulnerability as a challenge. While one Individualist, Joshua, did express the challenge he faced of knowing where and when as a leader he could express his inner self without suffering repercussions for his authority, the absence of any mention of vulnerability as a challenge suggests to me that these participants in the “self-transforming” (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003; Torbert, 2003, 2004) action logics of Individualist and Strategist/Alchemist did not experience any felt discrepancy between such emotional expression and their self-image.

Summary of Finding Three: A Holding Environment “Good Enough” for Learning

All 18 of the participants reported that the combination of supports and challenges constituting their conference experience were sufficient for their learning, such that all 18 reported the way they drew insight and understanding out of their participation in the weekend. While most participants described similar aspects of the conference as supports, there were also reports of some distinctions in the ways that participants from one action logic to another construed and relied upon these external factors. Also, there was a noticeable difference in the way that the six participants in the post-conventional action logics, the five Individualists and one Strategist/Alchemist, relied on an increased number of self-generated supports, relative to the external ones available to them. I explore this further in Chapter VII. While participants described key challenges that were largely shared across the four action logics represented, there were several challenges that the participants described with clear distinctions from one developmental stage to the next. They included the distinct ways in which participants in each action logic experienced and made sense of projective processes, found and used their voice and expressed their emotional vulnerability.

## Chapter VII

### FINDING FOUR

#### 4. Adaptive Self-Scaffolds that Support Learning and Leading

##### Introduction

In response to the research question inquiring into the nature of the internal resources that participants used to support themselves in the absence of environmental/social supports, the research data indicates that all 18 participants in the study described some type of “self-scaffold” (emic code from Victor, Strategist/Alchemist, #101) that helped them meet the challenges they faced in an adaptive manner, whether or not they had external support available. At the same time, the capacity for effectively generating these internal supports increased significantly in the later action logics. In the subsequent sections, I define adaptive self-scaffolds and the difference between them and the coping mechanisms. I provide a list of these self-scaffolds and define them, presenting the way that they show up for the various action logics, and illustrating the key ones with examples.

##### Adaptive Self-Scaffolds Defined

In contrast to the coping mechanisms that participants employed as means of staying in or returning to their comfort zones, adaptive “self-scaffolds” (Victor, #101) are cognitive/affective behaviors that help participants to modulate their stress and anxiety in order that they might continue to engage the challenge they are facing with intention and

purpose. This capacity for conscious and purposeful engagement and reflection in action at times led to a constructive transformation of situations, conflicts, crises, etc. Many of these adaptive self-scaffolds seemed to entail a level of cognitive and affective development whereby a person can differentiate him/herself from an issue, a conflict or a problem, while remaining fully present to it; in other words, it entails the capacity to take perspective on experience whilst in the middle of it. This capacity allows participants to take critical distance, to consider other viewpoints, to examine their role and accountability, to see the issue from a more systemic perspective, etc. There are both cognitive and affective aspects to this capacity to step outside oneself temporarily to take perspective for the sake of more timely, effective, and systemically informed action.

#### How These Self-Scaffolds Appeared in the Data

Prior to beginning this research, I was interested in understanding better the kinds of resources that people employ to help them effectively engage situations even when under pressure. Specifically, I was curious to know what kinds of behaviors might help leaders meet the challenges they face in a “timely and transforming way,” to use the title of Torbert’s (2004) book. During the interview, I asked various versions of the following questions: “In x situation, how did you support yourself?” or “What if any internal resources did you use to handle x situation?” Participants gave 76 distinct responses, though many of them overlapped or were synonymous with others. I reduced the list and examined it for ways that these responses could be categorized.

Four general categories of self-scaffolds emerged: personal power/capacity, which are attributes of the person, developmental capacities, or conferred traits; self-

awareness/experience, which are qualities and characteristics associated with awareness and learning; cognitive behaviors, which are habits of both cognition and affect that help participants differentiate themselves from others or take perspective on situation; and purpose/intention, which are various ways that participants elect to be in relationship with themselves, with others and with the process or situation in which they are involved.

While there were a few responses that were not easy to categorize, such as “faith in a loving God/universe,” which seems to be both a personal power/capacity and an example of purpose/intention, most codes clearly fell into one category or another. A complete list of these self-scaffolds, their descriptions and their incidence/frequency across each category follows a presentation of the participants’ experiences.

### Adaptive Self-Scaffolds in Action

In the following examples, I present participants’ descriptions of their use of adaptive self-scaffolds or personal “resources” as they engage the challenges of ambiguity, conflict, and complexity in the conference. As a way of highlighting the similarities and differences in the ways that participants employ these resources, I present the samples grouped by action logic.

#### Expert Self-Scaffolding

The following are examples of the way that two of the three Experts employ self-scaffolds or internal resources. I begin with Jim, a 38 year-old white Jewish male involved in IT research and development who is studying for his Masters degree in

counseling psychology. In addition to his training in psychology, he did cognitive preparation by reviewing the literature of Group Relations, which primed him to frame his experiences in the conference: “I was reading, I was reading, doing the readings prior to the conference on the plane here, and I started thinking” (#21). Also, he brought considerable ripeness to this conference experience, which closely followed on the heels of another conference he had attended a few months before; “Well, in this conference, a lot of things that began to emerge in the last conference coalesced and solidified. And it’s only eight weeks ago” (#31). Jim also described how he believed he has the ego strength necessary to handle the challenges of the conference, and that he loves learning:

I mean, let’s not romanticize this because I was learning today that’s outside the scope of the conference, but learning is hard. I don’t feel, I often don’t feel good while I’m doing it. It often hurts, it often involves some shame. It certainly involves risk, but risk can sound really good, but when you’re doing it, I’m just full of fear and tremble and flush and kind of a mess and feel decompensated and potentially histrionic or emasculated or whatever. You know though, I love this. I’m hard to break down. I have good defenses. I have good ego strength or something. At least I also know that for my own nourishment, I need to get broken down (#51).

Jim described how he has developed the capacity for “naming” his experience and for sifting through subtle layers of emotion/feeling/sensibility. This naming process is a way of objectifying and differentiating his experiences, helping him to avoid making things personal, or getting stuck.

I’ve become better at naming. Like I can say, Wow, you know, that really made me feel flush, it made me tremble, it brought tears to my eyes. I feel really ashamed now. You know, I feel like I took a risk and got kicked. I feel—that will at least, the way they talked about roles flowing. You know, that keeps it flowing, that doesn’t just damn it up (#57).

While Jim brought many resources to his experience to help him when in the midst of intense challenges, he also acknowledged a fragility in his sense of self-security, and there were instances in the conference where none of his resources were enough in the

moment to avoid a hostile encounter with Bridget, another participant—his “fall-back” experience.

Another Expert, Steve, is a white male, a former military officer in his 50s. Given his prior experience and training, he described feeling prepared for the anxiety in the conference.

I brought in an understanding of how this system and the process was designed with various impermeable boundaries, but within that, a great deal of, again, ambiguity and unknown. So although we had very clear time boundaries and really there’s an unwritten set of rules of behavior and what’s acceptable behavior and those kinds of broader boundaries, but there’s some impermeable boundaries. It’s not an unbounded system, but how tasks are undertaken within those boundaries is fairly ambiguous and ill-defined. And having experienced it before, I was prepared for that anxiety and it didn’t bother me as much, so I brought that with me (#22).

Steve was also acutely aware of the importance of context, that this system was different from past systems he’s experienced, and that it was producing a “whole different set of emotions.”

This system behaves differently, so what’s putting into me—what’s put into me by the system and how I process it induces a whole different set of emotions for that system, for that particular system. And the laundry list of what I’m capable of feeling or responding to or emoting, that was that one for that system, you know. It’ll be a different one for a different system (#32).

In response to the question of how he supported himself in the conference, Steve described a combination of crisis management techniques and adaptive behaviors that he employed to get perspective. Of particular note is the way that he became oriented to the role he was given and how he worked to firm up the holding environment for others:

Oh, I’m a—oh, I’ll tell you exactly what I do. I go into full retreat. I just go into the role that I’ve been given. I separate myself from the group. I get a little back so I can see it clearly. I give myself an opportunity to study it and then I create in my mind, probably at some subconscious level, a plan of action to make it right. And actually, I work very hard at bringing people back into the holding environment through friendly banter. Not too particularly personal, but we’re kind of all clowns-on-the-bus kind of language and this is driving us all crazy, but at

the end of the day, we've got to get on the way. You know, it's my role, that's what I do, so I'll separate myself. It's kind of a lonely thing because you're over here and people are off doing the whole group thing (#156).

Perhaps due to a combination of his training and his maturity, Steve spoke of the importance of putting the success of the system and the well-being of others before himself, a tendency that he shared with several other participants:

It means that within that situation, the people involved with that—in solving that problem, have to be in the holding area. It's not about you. It's about the success of the system. So it's always more effective if you spend less time worrying about yourself and a little bit more worrying about the people around you (#164).

Steve demonstrated this by sharing how he tried to help create conditions of support that hold people while they are in the thick of difficult situations, though I found that generally, he spoke more from his life experience than about specific occasions in the conference setting itself.

### Achiever Self-Scaffolding

While the two Experts describe several of the self-scaffolds, they had a harder time locating examples from their conference experience to illustrate how they employed these resources. By contrast, the participants in the Achiever action logic provided a combination of descriptions that were more abstract or general, and those that were specific, concrete, and contextual. I present a selection of examples from Lisa, Jeff, Marie, and Joann.

Lisa, a 33 year-old Latina woman, entered the conference as a consultant-in-training, but she chose to forgo this role when she had the opportunity to lead the temporary institution called the World Forum. She made this decision conscientiously, knowing that there would be repercussions for her forsaking the role that she had been

assigned. When she reported feeling unjustly criticized by the director, she described holding her anger, orienting to role and task, using the experience as data for her group's hypothesis and not personalizing the judgment she felt:

This is to where the director comes in to address our group that's now formed and finally has a life and we made some boundaries and we're feeling good, right? And I had addressed my group before he had entered and said, Just so you guys know, this is what I did. This is what I gave up to be this chair, and so I think I am now going to hold this role strongly and I invite you to join me, and let's get some work done for this world event. I gave up a big thing to do this, but I felt it was important so let's all kind of take that and go forth. So I kind of had given that little spiel to them, and everyone's all motivated. And so here comes in Bruce, the director, manager of the management team, and says to the world forum something like, L. lost sight—or your chair—I don't know if he named me—your chair lost sight of her goal and aim, and is sitting before you and now will have to hold herself accountable for that. So I'm sitting there and I'm just livid at this point, but you know, kind of trying to hold it because, again, you know, I feel like—play the role or not play—but be the role of the chair for this group. And we still have a task, this plenary. And so I could feel my group, though, too, just also enraging at the director, and so that kind of gave me comfort. We kind of got a lot—I got a lot of comfort through them over the next day and a half. And so we again talked about it on the break, and I just kind of—I'm trying to let it go. I said, You know what? I'm going to use that as data, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to let that go, I'm not going to take it personally. I'm going to use that as data and let's continue to do the work. And I think that was sort of the pivotal moment (#75)

Here, Lisa spoke powerfully of how she dealt with complex and difficult decisions, using the various self-supports to hold steady between conflicting roles and priorities, let alone in the face of direct criticism from the conference director. Her capacity to recognize and yet also contain her anger demonstrated her emotional intelligence in this situation. Lisa continued to explain what it was like to hold all the dimensions of the experience and not allow the heat of the moment to obscure her role and the task:

I really tried to hold it. And this is, I think, the moment or the hours where I felt like I really got the work. And again, not to say that I did it effectively or competently, but I felt like I knew what the work was, which was holding all these pieces. Hold that anger, that personal anger, and thinking what's that going to mean next week when I'm in this intimate training with him too? And then hold the piece of my group wanting to defend me, and them fighting with each

other. But then don't forget there's a task that we have to do, but at the same time, you've got the ambassadors still sort of struggling with their ego and my authority. I'm working on task at the same time, just trying to hold these pieces (#83).

This expression, holding these pieces, suggested to me that Lisa had a highly differentiated sense of the responsibility she was taking up and of the tasks involved.

When asked how she explained her newfound ability to hold all this complexity and stay on task, she described a sense of her readiness for being stretched in these ways:

I'm not really sure if it's partially just my own readiness and feeling of competence. I think I'm ready for the next step in my career life. So I think it's also being at a personal, professional place to be able to recognize that this is an open door and I can go through it now (#97).

Lisa employed numerous self-scaffolds in addition to the ones described, even though she "fell back" when she struggled with a moment of intense emotional vulnerability, like most of the other Achievers. When she did so, she brought her spirit of inquiry and asked: "What does it mean? What's the experience? Then, what do you do with it to go forward and not lose sight of your purpose and task? That's kind of how I try to see it," (#121).

She also described her internal motivation, her love of learning, her developmental capacity to hold multiple perspectives, and her theoretical background in the related literatures of adult development, Group Relations and Integral theory.

Jeff is a white male in his late 40s and a chief engineer. He had one prior conference in his experience and is engaging a professional coach in his workplace who taught him a practice to help him deal with his own vulnerability to being overwhelmed by his emotions:

It's just that you acknowledge the emotion, you don't judge the emotion. It's there, it's part of you. And you just accept it and move on. And over time, it helps, I would say, not to manifest as strongly. I try to identify, acknowledge, accept, embrace the emotion. It quiets it down. I mean, we're talking kind of fuzzy stuff now, but quiets it down. It allows me to recognize, I have this

emotion. Where is coming from? What's my responsibility for it? Because it's not all mine. With the interdependence stuff—It's being caused by both parties or all the collective, I guess you would say. And it allows me not to be immobilized by it. Just it's there. Recognize it. Now press on. And that's easier said than done sometimes. I mean, even recognizing is hard sometimes (#36).

He recognized that in an interdependent system, it was essential for him to differentiate his feelings from those of others, and to attempt to continue to recognize this distinction to the best of his ability. Jeff also brought a self-awareness of his trouble spots: “Yeah, and I have like four different areas in which I get myself in trouble. Three of them are (automatically) helping people, teaching people, and taking responsibility that's not mine” (#162). By this, he meant that he has a tendency to help people when it might be better for them to learn to do things themselves, to take on a teaching role even when it is uncalled for and to be overly responsible.

Marie is a white female in her late 30s, and this was her first conference experience. Even though she found the conference unlike anything she'd ever done before, she placed her trust in the process and in her capacity to take something positive from the weekend:

Again, in that situation (of the large group), it was that there's some process here that's been tested and retested and tested again, and clearly this works. So that was one resource—I'm just going to trust this. I'm frustrated, but I'm going to be open, that this could be a great experience for me (#148).

She also placed faith in the woman who is head of her organization as who was present in the conference as a consultant, as well as in her capacity to learn her way through what she did not understand. She reported, “I believe all of the learning that occurred was certainly very individual, but I certainly have the belief that everything about this conference was deliberate... I had some confidence that whatever was going on, I would eventually get it” (#172).

Finally, Joann is a white female in her late 50s and a member of a Roman Catholic religious order. She described how she arrived late to one of the large study event sessions and how the only seat available was in the center, a spot that meant she and the others sitting there would likely have been in the spotlight of people's attention. As an introvert, this was her least desired place to seat; however, she steadied herself by "being like Jesus:"

I realized at some point as I was sitting there, that this really is a hot seat, you know, being in the center, you feel the energy and the focus coming towards the center. But I also remember thinking, you know, but this is okay, I can be like Jesus, I can let this energy flow through me and go on and come out peacefully somehow, so that was my sense of that (#38).

She elaborates on this mindfulness:

I think the first is just recognizing the presence of God and just praying for the spirit to be with you, so that's something real. And I think listening to what people are saying, and trying to think about where people may be coming from in that. Well, the other thing is connecting to people...you talk to somebody kind of in a normal way, as a person, [laughs] instead of just being thrown into this group dynamic thing that's going on. So that really helps to normalize the whole situation. So getting to know people in a more casual way. I think it's just being open to the spirit and just realizing who you are in part of, in terms of the larger whole. That you're there in terms of the larger whole and being open to the spirit and trying to be of God somehow (#98).

While spirituality could be employed as a kind of retreat from the heat of the conflict in the GRC setting, Joann seemed to employ her mindfulness of God's presence and her intention to embody God's presence as a resource to help her stay engaged and connected in a way that was aware of the group dynamic, but not stuck in it.

The self-scaffolds of the Achievers included the same resources described by the Experts, however, the difference became evident in the ways that they were employed and in the extent to which these resources led to results in the moment. Where the self-scaffolds described by the Experts were often described apart from instances where they

were enacted by the participants in particular situations (perhaps because there were few instances where they were able to employ these resources successfully in the moment), the Achievers tended to be specific about the context and contingencies that they were facing as they employed these resources with self-satisfying effect. Another key difference between the participants who profiled as Experts and Achievers is that the capacity for self-authorization, personal initiative, internal locus of control, and mindfulness in the moment seems to have expanded in the transition from one stage to the next. While this is already known in the theory of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994), the extent to which this expanded capacity allows for self-scaffolding evidenced as a new dimension.

Preceding the presentation of the Individualist adaptive self-scaffolds, I consider the differences between the Achiever's internal resources and those of the Individualist.

### Individualist Self-Scaffolding

As was the case between the Experts and the Achievers, the Individualists in the study employed many of the same self-scaffolds, albeit with varying degrees of success or satisfaction. It is possible that the Individualists may be more open than the Achievers in terms of acknowledging and reporting their inability to support themselves as times, or to bridge the knowing/doing gap. As was the case in the difference between the ways that Achievers and Individualists had different tolerances for expressing emotional vulnerability, it seems that the five Individualists in this study were more at ease admitting when they failed to effectively engage situations. Another interesting difference between the Achievers and the Individualists is that when reporting the value

of these self-scaffolds that they employed, two of them expressed how the risk of using them was that they could have inhibited learning through anxiety or discomfort.

Bridget, a white South African woman who is an ordained minister, describes how she brought theoretical background and training to this first conference experience, yet she reflected on the way that this might have inhibited her learning by insulating her from the anxiety that comes from being in unfamiliar situations:

I probably should just make a small disclaimer before I answer that, which is that although I didn't do any reading about the conference—apparently there was some reading sent out that somehow I forgot to read it. I have done reading in the past though. I was at G. Seminary at one point, and they were about to do a Tavistock conference as just part of a group I was in, and I ended up not doing the conference, but I did some background reading. And so now I'm sure that that was hugely helpful in a way, and maybe unhelpful. Helpful in a way that I wasn't feeling completely lost, like some people were. I have a vague sense of what was happening and why. So my anxiety, I guess, was a bit reduced by that. And I felt for the people whose anxiety was all over the place because they just didn't have a clue. And so one of the things I just struggled with, or didn't struggle with but was aware of, was that because I knew a little bit about what was happening and why, I could easily just detach myself into role of observer rather than allowing myself just to go through all the feelings I would have gone through more if I hadn't had a clue. So I just say that as a piece of information (#15).

Relative to all the participants in the earlier action logics—including those who had prior conference experience—Bridget was the first to state that this familiarity with the theory of Group Relations could have been unhelpful for feeling the full intensity of the experience. This awareness was striking to me, as participants in the earlier action logics did not qualify whether or not the familiarity with the theory could have been both an asset and a liability for their learning.

Bridget also described feeling at peace with herself and as having a freedom from the need to be liked, which allowed her to speak her mind in a way that was less self-conscious than for participants like Susan and Sandra (Achievers):

Honestly, I don't know if this is all a defense, but I am somebody who's relatively calm, able to feel valuable and at peace with myself, generally speaking. I mean, I'm certainly not—as you've just heard [laughs]—together in all these things, but—and I also don't desperately need to be liked (#135).

Interestingly, Bridget describes her sense of calm and of personal value, not as a support as much as a potential defense. She described having a sense of self that is not dependent on structures or roles and a sense of an internal locus of control, characteristics that she associated with a developmental capacity beyond that of a young male member who left the conference early:

I think so, since pretty much my adulthood, yeah, and some of it is probably defenses that I've developed, too. I'm aware of that. When I was a child, I wasn't that secure and I just decided somewhere in life I was going to like myself and even if other people didn't. So I kind of went around in this feeling of, I'm okay and other people will see it, if they have any sense, and if not, okay. And what was clear to me about J. based on what he shared with us was that he never had any sense of self or a voice or a life before he went into education and got his degree. And that the things he's learned about how you work in groups and how you create structures and how you create ground-rules and how you do ground-breakers and all of that stuff has given him his sense of identity or his sense of competence. So when we took that away from him, it just floored him. So I guess I'm getting my sense of my locus of control or whatever it is from somewhere else than that structure or that, that structure or lack of structure (#137).

Another of Bridget's self-scaffolds was a newfound capacity to resist her valence for over-responsibility for the well-being of groups and for getting activated by groups to be the leader on the basis of her social location or vocation. While I describe her work around this valence more extensively in the next finding on learning, this passage describes how she employed her new-found resource, the “flexible poncho” that allowed her to maintain a boundary against the large group's projections:

I made the decision that I didn't want to be in that role. I was going to choose not to take on the role, and it was hard. I really felt enormous pressure just to say things or to start the group or to, you know, all kinds of stuff. But that I wasn't going to—in fact, I just wasn't going to speak the whole hour. I made that decision at the beginning. And there were two pieces to that. One, I didn't want to get sucked into that role or make the leadership happen from the center (of the

circle). And secondly, I wasn't going to be blamed, this was my new thing, right? I wasn't going to receive all this pressure and stress and feel responsible. And so I almost saw myself as having like a poncho on, a very flexible poncho because I was going to be involved, engaged, intrigued, and listen and so on, but I wasn't going to receive any of it. And it was like a reflecting poncho, so whatever came at me was just going to go back to whoever sent it or someone else! [laughs] It wasn't going to go to me (#14).

Elsewhere, she likened this capacity to maintain a semi-permeable psychological boundary to building up one's stomach muscles so that one could absorb a punch without damage. As mentioned previously, relative to the earlier action logics, this was the first example of a participant describing how she actively resisted projective identification (as opposed to a valence for a socio-emotional role) while in the stressful conditions of the large group.

Joshua, a middle-aged white male who is also an ordained priest, provided a rich description for the way he employed self-scaffolds, specifically choosing not to flee, using prayer to steady himself, and making the choice to be accountable for his experience and his learning. What was most interesting was that he employed these resources as a way of helping himself recover from fall-back experiences of conflict, rejection, and disconnection.

When—oh, this is very important. When I was disbarred from the training group—I never went back, I never found the wherewithal to go back or to put myself forward. And was I so devastated? And so the way I wandered around—it didn't support the learning, it supported my survival. I felt so—when I was told that I had to find a group, I wandered aimlessly alone, and not knowing the building either, to find some place. And there were some people I knew I did not want to listen to. I just had this intuitive, instinctual event that it would just be more conflict. Now, I wound up getting conflict in the place where I wound up anyway! But so, it was as if I was geared up for this conflict. Now your question was how did I support myself through that? I don't know. I think I just stayed put in the rest of the World Event events—that was how I supported myself (#89).

Joshua made a more or less conscious choice to “stay put” and to ride the conflict out rather than continuing to flee from it. He also used prayer and recourse to religious or spiritual reference points.

I was sitting next to the man—J. I think—took the chair and everybody was attacking him to move and I wanted him to move simply because I felt like I was getting the collateral damage. And so I didn’t want people to lynch him. So that fear motive—I just sat there and prayed. Even when I was roaming around looking for a group, I said I haven’t been in this position in a long time, so disconnected. But then looking at it in terms of gospel experience, the analogy with a more religious dynamic, it helped to make sense (#123).

This reference to the Christian Gospel helped Joshua situate his experience in a meaningful perspective for him, so that he could draw strength from the significance he found in this perspective. He also chose to be accountable to his learning, even when it might have felt safer to avoid engagement with another group after being attacked for his lack of sensitivity: “I mean, it’s interesting to me that I didn’t choose to just continue to roam around. Then I felt like I wouldn’t have been doing any work, so I didn’t choose that. I still chose accountability” (#125).

It is very interesting that, like two of the Achievers, Lisa and Clare, and Bridget, another Individualist, Joshua was able to spot developmental distinction relative to others, and that this became a way of understanding people, of being tolerant and empathetic. Here, after mentioning his ability to spot developmental difference in others, I asked for examples:

I’m trying to think. Well, there were a lot of times of looking at people in the group, I think I didn’t have to so much consciously to make the connection because it’s more a part of me now. Like younger people. Like Paul drove people crazy. He didn’t drive me crazy at all. The one time the younger kids drove me nuts was when they all left as a group in the beginning, and it wasn’t like other conferences where people put up what they wanted to do and you went over, and there was more structure to that. Just people just fled, and that bothered me. I think I went to my World Event group because it was like, Jeezawhiz, we’re one world, one spirit, and have we so lost the title of the conference! The idea that

they're young and other evidence came in about their youth and their perspective...it helped me understand them. The rigidity actually with the priest that was in the group, I realized the level of his ability—although I saw great transformative learning from him (#135).

Here, Joshua referred both to Paul, the Individualist in this study, whose behavior had a polarizing effect on many members in the conference, and to a Roman Catholic priest who wore his clerical uniform throughout the conference. Relative to his own development, Joshua described as having struggled with this conference experience to a greater degree than he had in the two previous conferences that he had attended over the past ten years. This particular experience was marked by a high degree of disorientation and an inability to connect with other participants. This disorientation suggested to me that Joshua was newly emerging into the Individualist action logic, and the loss of the self-certainty associated with his former action logic was extremely confusing to him, especially in an environment where multiple perspectives were brought front and center.

A third Individualist, Bill, a middle-aged white man who is a psychotherapist, described using several of the adaptive self-scaffolds that have already been mentioned, but he introduced another one that had not been described by anyone else. Based on his recommendation for patients to draw strength, confidence, and resiliency by imagining powerful individuals whom they respect and admire, he did the same for himself. He shared, “I try to remember and to picture others who know me and love me and respect me, family and friends (#150). Whenever I got too anxious, I did that” (#154). He related this practice to his work as a therapist.

It's essentially something I discovered in my work as a therapist because I do a lot of work with people in divorces, and a lot of times, women who have been emotionally and physically abused have to exchange children often with dads who have abused them, and they're really frightened, but they have to do it anyway. And I ask them to think of the strongest, most capable women they do, whether they're real people or actresses in roles or politicians or whoever they are, and to

picture themselves surrounded by a group of these women who they know and respect, and that that group comes with them each time they go to this exchange. So when I came upon that one day, I started applying it to myself (#160).

When asked about whether this internal representation worked as a kind of transitional object, he replies, “Well, yes, you could say that, and what it really is a sort of internalized object. So you know, I should have a shirt that says, I am my own transitional object!” [laughs] (#162). This internalized or transitional object is a feature of the developmental process and helps assist individuals in feeling the security needed to take risks and confront challenges (Kegan, 1982; Kernberg, 1976; Klein, 1959; Winnicott, 1965). The use of imagined representations of Jesus or Buddha or other enlightened figures is very likely a similar internal object that helps support people in times of stress or adversity, and the conscious use of such introjections may empower them to take action inspired by these exemplars.

#### Strategist/Alchemist Self-Scaffolding

As might be expected from the theories of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Kegan, 1982, 1994), Victor, the one participant profiled as a Strategist/Alchemist, demonstrated considerable cognitive capacity for self-awareness and generated a wide variety of adaptive self-scaffolds. In fact, he was the one who used the expression “self-scaffold,” which I have taken as an emic code to name these adaptive, internally generated resources. In presenting examples of the resources he employed, I drew from parts of the interview where Victor described some of the challenges he experienced. In the first, he actually described the final plenary discussion when the membership and the staff gathered to share hypotheses about the collective experience from various vantage points. In this section, he described the challenge of

generating and grasping the systemic perspective, but also the spirit of inquiry he brought and the intuitive sense of the relationships between the parts and the whole:

The plenary discussion...I mean, the closing, the tense relationships or just the dissolution, the imminent dissolution of the institute. But I didn't know what really was going on in the body, and the analogies, the images I hold of us all being holons, parts of this larger whole, and so I was aware that there was something to get that I didn't get. I also knew it was there in the room and I was struggling to try to piece it together. I'm sure there were some people that had more and better pieces of it. But I think for all of us, that session was a building of understanding. So Terri Monroe, the director, you know, folks further on down the path probably had ideas, had hypotheses, but they were shaped and informed by that activity too. So anyhow, yes, totally in the dark! [laughs] But I knew there was something... that something was going to happen. I knew there was something in here (#114-115).

Using reference to Integral Theory (Wilber, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2006), Victor described trying to grasp the interdependence of parts to whole in the system and the meaning of the relationships between different elements. Rather humbly, I think, he himself did not propose to have a grasp on the systemic perspective but considered the possibility that others might. His acknowledgement of being “totally in the dark” was paradoxically the necessary condition for him to actually have new insight into the meaning at the system level.

Another challenge that Victor described is the sense of the open-endedness at the end of the conference and the particular “flavor” of the danger (#119) that there were people in the conference that he would have to face at work the next day. It was interesting that there was no absence of fear or risk for him, yet, at the same time, he reminded himself that he was not going to die there, and that he had trust in the process:

I was trying to describe this as sort of a feeling state. It's not fear exactly, it's not anxiety. It's angst? I don't know, it's not angst. I don't know. There's a mournful quality to it. Maybe that was my feeling of the conference ending. There's always the issue of safety in that large group. That issue never went away at the feeling level, and so one way I could soothe myself would have been to say, I'm not going to die here. But at the same time, I'm on the faculty at this institution, so it

isn't exactly that I'm going to go away and never see these people. There's people up there on the consultants who are my faculty, who are going to be my teachers in the graduate program I'm in. There are people up there who I have other professional relationships with. There are people in the room I have personal relationships with. And so there always was an issue of risk. I also, at the same time, felt enough trust in the process to be able to be there and to wait, you know? So I did... I was sitting with the danger. There was danger there for me. It wasn't the primal infantile annihilation danger, although it may have had that flavor. It had that flavor (#119).

The passage above helps to illustrate that while a person in the Strategist/Alchemist action logics is not exempt from intense experiences of fear, anxiety, or danger (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2004, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), the capacity for tolerating such emotions and for "sitting in them" with patience and awareness appears distinct from the earlier action logics.

In the next passage, Victor described his cognitive preparation through the reading of the literature of adult and societal development, Group Relations, Integral Theory and adult learning theory. In particular, he mentioned the use of assumption testing method taken from Kegan and Lahey (2001).

I've been exploring issues around the levels of spiral dynamics and have been reading Ken Wilber's stuff and have accelerated of late the pace of the stuff that I'm consuming. This has been largely an intellectual enterprise. I just read. I read two books in this last week, plus all the other stuff that I read. I re-read Kegan's *In over Our Heads*. I read Kegan and Lahey's book about transforming through the language. And I also read a hundred and thirty pages of this Group Relations book, the McCollum and Gillette book. I came into the conference [laughs] with a bit of a game plan in the sense that I made explicit my big assumptions—the sorts of the things that are going to hold me back (#9).

I found fascinating the fact that Victor employed the assumption-testing method at various points of the conference, wielding this powerful yet challenging learning tool as if it were as simple as using a hammer. At the same time, he was also aware of the knowing/doing gap and the ways that he forgets his capacity under conditions of stress—essentially, he described both the experience of fall-back (another emic code I took from

his interview) and the way that he caught/recovered himself using the theory combined with an acute self-awareness of his capacity:

So I came in with this prep and with this theory, and I behaved in ways— and I can give you a couple of examples that betrayed my lack of understanding of the theory. Understanding in the sense of lived experience, not in the sense of understanding that I could put it up on a white board and explain it to you. But I found myself living it as if I didn't know it. And then, the theory, having had that preparation, gave me the opportunity to right then and there, in the moment, see what I had just done and experienced. And you know, thank goodness it also helps you like sit there with like your shame and chagrin with yourself. That's the one other advantage of the perspective, is that I have a lot of self-criticism and years ago, I might have just gone into this internalizing behavior and, and ban the feeling rather than be able to see the feeling. And so I feel like the intellectual preparation was spade-work. And I'm not sure where I am now. My felt sense is that I've made some advances. (#19).

Victor described his desire to create “crutches” to support and sustain his learning, “In my personal life, I am going to try to consciously explore ways that I can preserve this or, or create some kind of braces or crutches or something so that I can somehow not fall back down out of this” (#45). As mentioned before, some of these crutches include intellectual preparation, reflection time in solitude, and self-care, and he reassured himself in the moment that despite the intensity of his feelings, he knew that this experience wouldn't kill him:

Oh, another thing in my basic assumptions. This experience, I will not die, there is no real threat to me—you know, so it's not a basic assumption, it was a sort of scaffold that I built in. It says, No matter what you feel at any point, remember that there is no threat. My physiological response will indicate otherwise, but cognitively think about it. This conference, at a Catholic University, we didn't have to have metal detectors and bomb-sniffing dogs here. The people didn't come armed. [laughs] (#101).

In addition to actively testing his various assumptions, he also made a point of meditating as a means of “getting in the moment” and of knowing when to open or close his psychological boundaries:

I did test that assumption. I tested assumptions related around conflict, and it's exhilarating... not only sort of like giving myself over to being this conduit of rage, but at one point in the small group experience, I had to meditate—a practice of understanding what it means to stay in the moment. And what it means to stay in the moment is that you're always finding that you're not in the moment. It's periods of being out of the moment, realizations that you're not in the moment, which are in the moment, and then periods of being out of the moment. So those small group sessions didn't pose that much of a challenge to me—sit, focus on the breath, things that keep you right there. And so I was sitting in that group and I would open, I'd feel an opening, or feel like opening, or feeling okay to sort of open the membrane, to use this boundary metaphor. And then other times, depending upon what was going on, I would feel the need to close, and I manifested this sort of physically. Consciously. Unconsciously (#103).

It was striking to me that Victor could admit the lived feeling of contradiction that comes with practicing mindfulness in the moment. The passage above also suggested that the degree of awareness that the Individualist, Bridget, demonstrated around her capacity to generate a psychological boundary was very likely a step along the way to being aware of how to “open” and “close” that boundary as Victor described. He continued that by consciously adopting the posture of holding the boundary in the large group; he adopted a self-reassuring role that helped him to feel safe and held:

Let me also add that in those spirals, I took a posture and an attitude that I was holding a boundary, that I was kind of like being a container, in the sense of, of like being a safety guard somehow, some sort of a protector or maybe, and maybe that's reassuring myself. This sort of posture or this attitude was really a kind of a relaxation and its opposite is anxiety. I would also characterize it as an attempt to contact the ground of being. All of those things suggest safety and holding and are sort of self-therapeutic (#109).

Victor demonstrated a degree of cognitive capacity and self-awareness that was markedly greater and more sophisticated than those of the other participants, and it was in the careful analysis of his transcript in particular that I became more aware of the potential for adaptive self-scaffolding that is possible under conditions of duress.

### Summary

What follows is a list of the self-scaffolds according to category (1. personal power/capacity; 2. self-awareness/experience; 3. cognitive behaviors; 4. purpose/intention) , including definitions, followed by a description of the ways they are employed in and across the action logics.

#### *Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Personal Power/Capacity*

1. <b>“Age/level of development”</b> : three participants referred to the ways that their age, experience and developmental capacity were assets. The participants who mentioned this were all Achievers (Lisa, Clare, Joann)
2. <b>“Self-authorization”</b> : four participants recognized how the capacity to empower themselves to take up authority or initiative in situations was a resource that they were either striving for (Jim, Expert) or were possession of (Anne, Lisa, Achievers; Brian, early Individualist).
3. <b>“Competence”</b> : participants who had a sense of their own skillfulness and ability demonstrated a personal confidence that was markedly different from those who had a low-self concept. This sense of competence was contingent on the situation that the participant was facing. Again, it was a key feature of the late Expert, and Achiever action logics.
4. <b>“Flexibility”</b> : one participant, Anne (Achiever) described how she was able to adapt to whatever condition she is thrown into when she feels empowered.
5. <b>“Freedom”</b> : participants described their freedom from worry about what people think about them or whether they are liked (Bridget, Individualist), freedom from fear of evaluation (Kate, Expert), freedom to exercise authority and to be accountable (Lisa, Marie, Achievers) and freedom to find one’s own way to fulfill the aim and task (Marie, Achiever; and Brian, early Individualist).

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Personal Power/Capacity (continued)*

6. <b>“Inner locus of control”</b> : two participants spoke of how this was an asset for them relative to others participants who did not have this (Lisa, Achiever; Bridget, Individualist).
7. <b>“Internal motivation”</b> : one participant noted how her internal motivation to be at the conference was an asset relative to other members who were not at the conference because they wanted to be but because they are required to be (Lisa, Achiever)
8. <b>“Intuition”</b> : one participant described how he allowed his intuition to guide him through the conference (Paul, Individualist)
9. <b>“Knowledge as power”</b> : several women in one particular World Event Group described how they were empowered by a sense of their own intelligence, education and knowledge of group dynamics (Alison, Anne, Lisa, Achievers), and another spoke of the power of her credentials (Kate, Expert).
10. <b>“Personal resiliency”</b> : various members described feeling a sense of their own ability to bounce back from failures or mistakes and expressed a confidence that they would be able to endure stressful situations (Jim, Expert; Lisa, Jeff, Achievers; Bridget, Individualist; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)
11. <b>“Position of strength”</b> : various members described feeling empowered by a sense of their relative strength insofar as various conditions were in place in their lives, including having a felt sense of being loved and esteemed by others (Lisa, Achiever; Bill, Bridget, Individualists)
12. <b>“Positive self-regard”</b> : several members described having a positive self image of themselves (Jim, Expert; Anne, Lisa, Achievers; Bridget, Individualist)
13. <b>“Privilege”</b> : several members expressed their growing awareness of the privilege that they believed they had on the basis of their social location, in this case as attractive white women of middle or upper middle-class socioeconomic status (Alison, Anne, Sandra, Clare, Achievers), as a young white male (Brian, early Individualist) or, to a lesser extent, as a middle-aged white male in a professional occupation (Bill, Individualist).
14. <b>“Right/left brain balance”</b> : two members spoke of how they believed they had equal capacity and skill in analytic and synthetic cognitions to be both methodical and detail-oriented as well as creative “big-picture” thinkers (Anne, Achiever; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Self-Awareness/Experience*

<p>1. <b>“Cognitive preparation”</b>: participants in each action logic described how they use theory as a way of helping them frame and make meaning of their experience. They made reference to adult development theory, group relations theory, Integral theory and leadership theory.</p>
<p>2. <b>“I know who I am”</b>: several participants spoke of knowing who they were such that they did not need to put on a façade to try to please others or to compete (Joann, Marie, Achievers; Bridget, Individualist)</p>
<p>3. <b>“Learning vicariously”</b>: several members described paying attention to the experience of others and drew from this observation lessons for themselves (Susan, Joann, Clare, Achievers)</p>
<p>4. <b>“Love of learning”</b>: two members in particular spoke of their love for learning and the way that this awareness/attribute helped them to take risks for the sake of the learning (Jim, Expert; Lisa, Achiever).</p>
<p>5. <b>“Prior experience”</b>: members in every action logic made reference to the importance of life experience and, in particular, their experiences in prior conferences.</p>
<p>6. <b>“Realizing who you are in the larger whole”</b>: two members spoke of paying attention to their place in the larger whole and how this helped them to be realistic about the limits of their power/influence as well as to be accountable (Alison, Joann-Achievers, Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)</p>
<p>7. <b>“Ripeness”</b>: several participants described having a sense of readiness to benefit from the experiences, the learning and the transformation that they experienced in the conference (Jim, Kate, Experts; Lisa, Joann, Jeff, Achievers; Bill, Bridget-Individualists; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)</p>
<p>8. <b>“Self awareness of what gets me into trouble”</b>: participants in every action logic described having self awareness of different blind-spots, bad habits and problematic patterns that they believed they had.</p>
<p>9. <b>“This is not my crap”</b>: three members described the awareness that the projections that they were receiving were not their problem (Jeff, Achiever; Bridget, Joshua, Individualists; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist). This code is connected to participants’ capacities to generate internal psychological boundaries to help them differentiate between what emotional and psychological dynamics were their own or were those of others.</p>

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Cognitive Behaviors*

<p>1. <b>“Internal boundary”</b>: I saw myself having myself wearing a very flexible poncho”: following from the code “this is not my crap,” some participants in the later Achiever action logic and two of the Individualists described the way in which they differentiated their emotions and psychological dynamics from those of others (Bridget, Joshua, Individualists; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist).</p>
<p>2. <b>“Contextualization”</b>: participants described how they situated the conference experience in a context that provided limits and boundaries for the sake of their functioning (Steve, Jim, Expert; Clare, Achiever; Bill, Individualist; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)</p>
<p>3. <b>“Differentiation/objectivity”</b>: participants demonstrated varying degrees of capacity to differentiate themselves and to objectify their experience so that they could remain engaged without being overwhelmed by their emotions or anxieties. This capacity seems to have become more and more available as one moves into the later action logics because the incidents of this code cluster toward the later end of the Achiever action logic and remained prominent for the Individualists and the Strategist/Alchemist.</p>
<p>4. <b>“Identify, acknowledge, accept, embrace”</b>; <b>“naming issues and emotions”</b>: three male participants used both of these codes to describe the ways that they sorted through the different dimensions of their experience in order to stay connected with negative feelings of grief, anger, regret, etc., and then to integrate them (Jim-Expert; Jeff-Achiever; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)</p>
<p>5. <b>“Introspection”</b>: participants in each action logic described the value and importance of reflection, although some expressed a greater need to withdraw and to be alone (Steve, Expert; Sandra, Susan, Joann, Achievers), while others seemed to be able to be reflective in the midst of the action (Lisa, Achiever; Bridget, Joshua, Individualists; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist).</p>
<p>6. <b>“Perspective-taking with others”</b>: several female participants (Kate, Expert; Alison, Anne, Clare, Lisa, Sandra, Susan, Marie, Achievers; Bridget, Individualist) described how they checked in with others as a way of testing the validity of their own perspectives. While I consider this behavior closely related to external “social supports,” the choice or habit of testing one’s own perspective was described by these women as a personal resource. Even though none of the men reported doing this, this is not to say that they did not exercise this habit.</p>
<p>7. <b>“Taking the systems perspective”</b>; <b>“getting on the balcony”</b>; <b>“figurative withdrawal/retreat to size the situation up”</b>: participants in each action logic spoke of the attempts that they made to take in the system perspective while in the midst of situations. No participants claimed to have had the ability to do this skillfully or as a matter of regular habit, and in fact, most related that do this was a challenge, including the Strategist/Alchemist.</p>

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Purpose/Intention*

<p>1. <b>“Accountability”</b>: several members in the Achiever and the Individualist action logics described the importance of “being accountable,” whether to themselves, to the aim of the conference or to the group members.</p>
<p>2. <b>“Aim, role, and task... orienting to-”</b>: participants in each action logic described how they would remind themselves of the aim of the conference, their member role and the task at hand as a way of orienting themselves in conditions of ambiguity, confusion or disorientation.</p>
<p>3. <b>“Assumption testing”</b>: two participants (Bridget, an Individualist, and Victor, the Strategist/Alchemist), demonstrated how they actively test their personal assumptions.</p>
<p>4. <b>“Being like Jesus/Buddha of compassion”</b>: three participants (Joann, Achiever; Joshua, Individualist; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist) described how at various points in the conference they consciously intended to be “like Jesus” or “the Buddha”. This mindful reference to religious figures gave them a behavior model to imitate in the midst of stressful circumstances.</p>
<p>5. <b>“Breathing”</b>: several participants described trying to pay attention to their breathing while in the middle of anxiety-provoking large group situations. (Joann and Clare, Achievers, as well as Victor, Strategist/Alchemist described how this attention to their breath helped them to stay present and grounded during the conference at key moments).</p>
<p>6. <b>“Embracing the experience”</b>: while one member (Clare, Achiever) described the struggle to embrace the experience of the conference and not use her cynicism to keep emotional distance, another (Lisa, Achiever) described her intention to be open to and embracing of the totality of her experience, including aspects that she found frightening or uncomfortable. She also used the expression “holding complexity” as does Victor, Strategist/Alchemist.</p>
<p>7. <b>“Finding the positive in the negative”</b>: several participants described their intention to look for the learning that could be gained from challenges and difficulties, and one (Bill, Individualist) described how all of his most important learning comes from suffering. A variation on this is the way that one participant (Lisa, an Achiever) described her intention to “stay positive even when things are crazy negative.”</p>
<p>8. <b>“Getting grounded/centered”</b>; <b>“holding steady”</b>: a few participants described ways that they choose to continue to engage challenging situations by paying attention to their breath (Clare, Joann, Achievers), by paying attention to their role, or by “connecting with the ground of being” (Victor, Strategist/Alchemist).</p>
<p>9. <b>“Holding things lightly”</b>: one participant (Joshua, Individualist) described how he made a choice to hold his and other peoples’ experiences in such a way that he did not let one perspective prevail over another so that a more full picture could emerge.</p>

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Purpose/Intention (continued)*

<p>10. <b>“I stayed engaged/present”</b>: various participants described how in the midst of heated conflict with other members, they stayed engaged and present without taking flight literally or figuratively (Clare, Achiever; Bridget, Joshua, Individualists; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist).</p>
<p>11. <b>“If you just wait, things will emerge/exercising patience”</b>: one participant (Joshua, Individualist) described how he tried to be patient without acting preemptively to allow situations to sort themselves out.</p>
<p>12. <b>“Spirit of inquiry- asking what does it mean?”</b>: participants in each action logic described their ways of inquiring into the meaning or potential meaning of an interaction. Another expression used was “bringing my curiosity.”</p>
<p>13. <b>“Letting the energy flow through me”</b>; <b>“personalizing/not personalizing”</b>: these two intentions or postures are inter-related and describe the ways that participants in the mid-late Achiever and Individualist action logics described how they allowed negative attacks to flow through (Joann) without attachment or identification. Other participants described trying to not take attacks personally by looking at how this attack was a function of the system (Susan, Jeff, Lisa, Marie, Achievers; Brian, Joshua, Individualist) and not meant for them personally.</p>
<p>14. <b>“Love/unselfish focus on others”</b>; <b>“empathy”</b>: members in each action logic described the ways that made choices to have empathy, love or unselfish regard for others as a way of transforming conflict or of empowering others. In fact, several members described how they actively worked to create holding environments or “lifeboats” (Steve, Expert) for themselves and for others (Joann, Jeff, Achievers; Joshua, Individualist; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist). Victor helped his World Event Group reflect on what kinds of personal needs they had to have met so that they could engage in the group task.</p>
<p>15. <b>“Observing/observer role”</b>: several participants described how they stay engaged by actively observing the situation and by pausing before intervening in a timely way (Steve, Expert; Brian, Joshua, Individualist)</p>
<p>16. <b>“Openness to experience”</b>: related to the willingness to embrace one’s experience, participants described their willingness to be open to experience even in the face of ambiguity, conflict or complexity (Clare, Sandra, Achievers; Victor, Strategist/Alchemist)</p>
<p>17. <b>“Prayer/mindfulness meditation”</b>: several participants described their intention to be prayerful or mindful while in the midst of particularly heated interactions in the small and large group, and of actively inviting God to help guide them or to help transform situations (Joann, Achiever; Joshua, Individualist)</p>
<p>18. <b>“Recalling intention”</b>: one participant (Bill, Individualist), described how he recalled his intention to be there as a way of helping to steady him even as he was feeling “invisible” and “unheard.”</p>

*Adaptive Self-Scaffolds: Purpose/Intention (continued)*

19. <b>“Taking myself seriously”</b> : one young female (Susan, Achiever) who was struggling to find her own voice and to be genuine in the way that she expressed her emotions described how she chose to take the work of the conference and herself seriously even though she saw others dismissing it.
20. <b>“Trust in a mentor”</b> : several of the participants who had mentors on the staff (Jim, Kate, Experts; Anne, Lisa, Clare, Achievers) described how their “trust” or “belief in” or “respect for” their mentors helped them to feel invested in and accountable for their own experience and learning.
21. <b>“Trusting the process”</b> : several participants from across the action logics described their trust either in the conference “institution” or in the process of the conference itself (Jim, Expert; Marie, Achiever)
22. <b>“Safe-care”</b> : one participant (Victor, Alchemist) described in detail the various things he did to insure that his basic needs were met in order that he could fully engage the work of the conference.

D. McCallum, S.J., 2008

When I counted up the number of distinct adaptive self-scaffolds employed by members of each action logic category, I was struck by the way that, given the disproportionately large number of Achievers in the study and the relatively smaller numbers of Individualists and the one Strategist/Alchemist, there was still as high a representation of distinct adaptive self-scaffolds in each of these two later categories as in the earlier action logics. See Table 15.

Table 15. *Incidence of Adaptive Self-Scaffolds for Each Action Logic*

<b>Distinct Adaptive-Self Scaffolds Employed</b>	<b>Expert (3)</b>	<b>Achiever (9)</b>	<b>Individualist (5)</b>	<b>Strategist/Alchemist (1)</b>
Total: 52	20	43	35	28

D. McCallum, S.J., 2008

Not only did the small numbers of participants in the later two action logics manage to employ a relatively large number of the distinct self-scaffolds, but as I identified in

Chapter VI, participants in the Individualist and the Strategist/Alchemist category described more self-scaffolds than external supports when asked what they found helpful for their learning.

## Chapter VIII

## FINDING FIVE

5. Participant Learning: Projection, Valence, and RoleIntroduction

The types of learning that the 18 participants reported as most significant and transformative are related to the experiences of projection and projective identification, the exploration of valence<sup>23</sup> and the potential for participants to choose and take up new formal and informal roles in groups. I differentiate learning experiences that participants describe as transformative and, where possible, indicate whether there has been evidence of learning transfer after the conference. While each of these learning outcomes is described from the first-person perspective, they also have implications for interpersonal and group dynamic levels, which I consider in the next chapter.

Learning: Projective Identification, Valence, and Role

While the study of psychoanalytic processes at the individual/group boundary is the focus of Group Relations Conferences, very little qualitative research (Errichetti, 1992; Fraher, 2004; Gustafson & Cooper, 1985) has been conducted that explores the nature or degree of the learning by conference members. Even as they describe a number of distinct types of learning, the 18 participants in this study reported that the most

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<sup>23</sup> I have offered definition of these dynamics in previous chapters.

significant and transformative<sup>24</sup> learning that they experienced in the conference setting was related to three inter-related dimensions of the individual/group boundary: the experience of projective dynamics, including projective identification/dis-identification; the awareness of personal valences or tendencies to become “loaded with” particular emotions on behalf of the group or to enact certain informal roles in groups; and the reality of informal roles, including the option to transform these roles with intention and practice. Here I define and describe these core features group dynamics in more detail.

### Projection/Projective Identification

Projective process is a psychological term first introduced by Melanie Klein of the Object Relations School of psychoanalytic thought in 1946 (1959). It refers to a complex psychological process in which one person projects a thought, belief, or emotion to a second person. Then, in most common definitions of projective identification, there is another action in which the second person is influenced by the projection and begins to behave as though he or she is in fact actually characterized by the projected thoughts or beliefs (Klein, 1959). This is a process that generally happens outside the awareness of both parties involved. What is projected is most often an intolerable, painful, or dangerous idea or belief about the self that the first person cannot accept (i.e., “I have behaved wrongly” or “I have a sexual feeling towards...”). Or it may be a valued or esteemed idea that again is difficult for the first person to acknowledge. Projective identification, including the phenomenon of scape-goating, is believed to be a very early

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<sup>24</sup> When participants used this expression, none of them mentioned the work of Mezirow (1989, 2000) or other adult learning theorists who use this expression in a technical sense. They do, however, use the expression to distinguish their experiences of learning that feels especially meaningful or deep, relative to learning that they could read in a book or hear in a lecture.

or primitive psychological process and is understood to be one of the more primitive defense mechanisms whereby individuals and groups attempt to protect themselves from perceived threats (Klein, 1959). Yet it is also thought to be the basis out of which more mature psychological processes like empathy and intuition are formed.

### Valence for Emotions and Informal Roles

The term valence, as used in psychology, especially in discussing emotions, means the intrinsic appeal (positive valence) or aversiveness (negative valence) of an event, object, or situation (Lewin, 1935). However, the term is also used to characterize and categorize the ways that individuals have tendencies to take hold and express specific emotions in group settings, such that for instance, one person may have a tendency for expressing anger in groups while another person will tend to hold and express the sadness of the group (Lewin, 1935). Individuals with strong valences for particular emotions may become overwhelmed by them and unable to act in a rational manner (Lewin, 1935).

Related to group dynamics, individuals also may have a tendency or valence for taking up particular informal roles, e.g., there is often a person in groups that will feel an inclination to lead in the absence of formal authority, while another person may have a tendency to play the harmonizer or the devil's advocate (Hayden & Molenkamp, 1994). These informal roles are often taken for granted by individuals in that they are enacted without conscious choice or awareness, but rather from habit or unconscious compulsion. A social role is a set of connected behaviors, rights, and obligations as conceptualized by actors in a social situation, though in the case of Group Relations, roles are conceived of both in terms of the formal and informal roles that members enact in groups and

organizations. In my experience as a member and staff consultant in the GRC setting, the identification of the informal roles that we enact in groups is eye-opening for many people, and this new awareness enhances the freedom to renegotiate or shift unwanted or dysfunctional roles.

### Participant Learning and Transformation

What follows are examples of learning and transformation reported by four participants, one in each of the developmental action logics. I chose each exemplar because of the range and depth of learning that each reported, as well as for the way in which each exemplar represented characteristic traits of the action logic category in which they profiled. In each case of participants' learning with regard to projective processes, valence, and role, there appeared to be a direct relationship between evolving developmental capacity and the kinds of insight, perspective shift, and ensuing behavioral change that they described.

### Expert Learning and Transformation

Kate is a 46-year old white woman who profiled on the SCTi as a late Expert. This indicated that she is on her way to making the transition into the Achiever action logic. This was her first experience of a Group Relations Conference and she had no prior background in the theory or literature of Group Relations. As a sociologist by training and someone whose learning style is more "literary" in that Kate prefers reading peer-reviewed journals or books by acknowledged authorities in a given field, the experiential nature of this conference environment was a discovery in itself.

I think I didn't expect to learn anything about what I learned about [laughs]. I thought I was going to something like management training, really, on some level I don't know what I thought it was going to be like. But since I've never had an experience like this, I never thought this kind of learning was possible. I'm just surprised that one can have such a powerful experience in such a short time (#196).

She described not only how powerful or intense her learning was, but also how much she learned:

Well, I mean, overall, I learned a huge amount at the conference. Just a huge amount. I feel like I'm still learning. You know, I've been back for, I don't know, has it been a week and a half? And I just feel like I continue to learn from what happened there, so I don't want to, you know, I don't want you to think I didn't learn there. I just learned a huge amount (#16).

One of many examples of learning that Kate described as most significant was related to the way she took up her authority in her role at work. This is one of many examples of the ways that the conference learning is transferable to other contexts:

So I learned from what she said, even though she was just another participant, about myself in a role I had kind of taken. And specifically in that case, I realized that I work with a lot of young people who are sort of right out of college, who come to my organization and work for me as research assistants and research coordinators and things like that. And I realized that I'm uncomfortable enough in my role as an authority figure that I actually kind of talk over them, like I don't let them talk sometimes. I'm sort of afraid of what they're going to think or what they're going to say, and that they might have concerns about my being overbearing or being bossy or all those kinds of chauvinistic, negative kinds of authoritarian roles. But I wasn't conscious of it. So because I was so nervous about this, I would talk over them and actually wouldn't let them speak. And I didn't really realize it until this person was called out for that, and then I realized that I do that. So like it was really revelatory to me, and I came back to my organization. Actually the first day I came back, I met with my assistant, and it was like the first really comfortable conversation I've had with her for a long time, and it's completely changed my relationship with her! (#40).

Here, Kate was able to draw on her experience from her workplace to help her to see the possible tendencies that people in authority, including herself, might have to condescend to or boss around younger people (subordinates). She was sensitive to the way in which she saw herself in the role taken by another participant and was able to achieve

perspective with regards to the fact that this role is not one she wants to continue to adopt. This insight into her own behavior was “revelatory” for her and led her to make changes in the way she related to her younger assistant when she returned to work after the conference.

When Kate was asked about the degree of learning measured on the scale I offered, with “one” describing second-hand learning that one could read in a book and “ten” being the kind of experiential learning that changes one’s perspectives and actions, she replied, “I don’t know, a complete ‘ten’” (#48). She continued, “I mean, for me, everything I learned was at a ‘ten’ through this experience. So for me, this is a very bizarre experience. You know, it just, I’m just stunned that I would have learned so much (#50).

In particular, Kate discovered the ways that she takes on a particular kind of role in organizations, that of the “prophet” or voice of morality, a role that others are often unwilling or unable to take on and for which she sometimes suffers. Here, Kate described how, with the help of a consultant in her Role Transformation Event (RTE), she had her “eye-opening” revelation about her freedom to choose her role:

He said, he just said something just really eye-opening to me, which was, you know, he said something—now I’m going to paraphrase really crudely because I don’t speak that language, [laughs] but he basically said, The collectivity is putting you in this role of articulating this position. And they’re electing you into this role. I’m trying my best to say what he said. But you don’t have to accept that role. And you don’t have to be the person who articulates all of these very inflammatory observations to the group. You have a choice about that. And that was just fascinating to me! It was just sort of mind-boggling because this is like a lifelong role. The truth is, I’m born to be a sociologist, this is like all my life, I’m the one who stands up. And he called it the role of the prophet. I’m always the one who stands up. I feel a moral obligation to speak the truth and I always observe as an outsider, and I always see something that isn’t apparent to most people. But I’m also aware of my need to use that data too, because information is power to some extent, and standing up and saying something gives me a certain

authority that I apparently want or crave. [laughs] Which is why I'm sure I went and got a Ph.D., [laughs] so that for sure people would listen to me (#58).

Regarding the realization about her tendency to take up this role in groups, Kate acknowledged having some awareness of this, but not to the degree that she had after the conference, especially with the helpful intervention of one of the consultants. This awareness made it possible for Kate to act with greater freedom in her workplace, as she now had the capacity to select a different role.

So it's not like I'm not aware of these things on some level, but I never would have been aware of it on this—it's just much more tangible today. It's hugely tangible. I don't think I ever would have been aware of what he said actually. I never would have thought of a group as sort of pushing me into a position. So I hope I like kind of explained that, but what happened was I came back to work, and almost immediately I made a choice. I'm not going to work for the bully person anymore. I've proposed a new role and I'm moving out of my job next week into a new job within my organization, which is really great. But I came back to work and my soon-to-be-former boss had put on a performance in a public meeting in which she put me down while I was gone. And my first thought was, on my way back to work yesterday morning, was, Ah! I'm going to have to go into her office and say, You know, I hear you put on quite a performance while I was gone! [laughs] I'd really appreciate your not da-da-da. And I thought to myself, You know, I don't have to do that. I don't have to take on this role. Like everyone in the organization recognizes that she's negative and dysfunctional and problematic, but when I put myself in the position of taking on the role as the person who opposes her publicly, in a way it ends up discrediting me. Like I should step out of that and create the vacuum and let somebody else take on that role, like the CEO (#60).

These insights about her role and habits in groups were “momentous.” She went on to describe her insight into another role she plays, that of the “rescuer,” as “really huge.” She gleaned insight into this role through the help of consultation in the context of the Role Transformation Event (RTE).

The other role I learned is about is that I always—this is really huge—is that I put myself in this role as a rescuer, and I see it as a sort of moral position, like a moral philosophical role. As if I should be a sort of social activist at every level of my relationships, like however a micro-level that I should—if I see someone on the subway who's elderly, I should stand up. If I see somebody who needs help, I should help them. But it also manifests itself like in a room with a group of

people. And I would never have even been able to put a name on that because in my field, that's not something that we have a nomenclature for, [laughs] that I'm aware of anyway, in the sociology I do anyway (#70).

This role of the “rescuer” and the ways that it can be counterproductive to try to save people was still difficult for Kate to understand, yet it did raise her self-awareness:

That gave me a completely different perspective on that maybe this rescuing role transgresses a personal boundary for other people. I don't know, I think I'm not really clear on the rescuing thing yet, but I'll never be able to engage in that behavior without being more self-aware. I don't know what I'm going to do with it since I don't really know all the ramifications of that behavior or that role. I just don't fully understand it (#74).

Finally, Kate also explored how she might translate some of these insights into tools for herself and considered where and when she could employ them:

I guess the question for me would be in terms of what to take away from that as kind of a tool, is that given that I'm trying not to rescue other people [laughs] or take on this role of being like the truth-sayer, it would be kind of like drawing the line between when, between the one and the other role. The role where I'm speaking truth to power and perhaps becoming a lightning rod by telling it like I see it...and a role where I can, in a more positive way, open the door for people to talk productively and resolve tensions (#124).

Kate continued that she had to discern “how much of herself” she wanted to extend in these role, “how much of myself I want to put out there, and whether I'm really obligated to do that every time, or whether I could be a little more discerning about that” (#128).

What was striking to me about Kate as a person who profiled as a later Expert was how novel experiential learning was for her as a modality; the extent to which she referred to the consultant's help in offering her perspective on her informal roles as a prophet or rescuer; and the way that she was able to make immediate application of her learning to her work environment. It was also striking to me that she discovered what sounds like a new level of freedom on the basis of the awareness she gained regarding her valences and tendencies with regard to informal roles.

### Summary of Expert Learning

Even though two of the three participants in the Expert category were already aware of projection as a theoretical reality, all three of them came to an experiential appreciation for how unwanted projections can obstruct their competence and participation in groups, so that by exploring the types of informal roles toward which they had a valence, all three developed insight and a deepened capacity to renegotiate unwanted or habitual roles. One of the three reported that she was already utilizing her insights and new capacity in her workplace, demonstrating short-term learning transfer. This participant, who was attending a GRC for the first time, also reported how unexpectedly powerful the experiential learning context was for her. While two of the three participants in the Expert category described their experiences as personally transformative, further study and follow-up would be necessary to determine whether or not their learning could be described as transformative according to Mezirow's description (2000). I do believe that their notion of transformation was consistent with Drago-Severson's (2004a) definition that transformational learning helps adults better manage the complexities of work and life. Next, I turn to the participant learning for the Achiever category.

### Achiever Learning and Transformation

Lisa is a 33 year-old woman, a collegiate athletic coach, and currently pursuing a PhD in Leadership studies. She entered the conference in the role as a consultant-in-training, yet chose to forfeit that role when she was elected to chair the World Event Forum. She brought a considerable amount of theoretical and experiential background

into the conference and drew on this actively throughout the weekend as well as in her meaning-making after the weekend. Her learning was less around coming to awareness of projective processes, valence, and role, but more about how she showed up in role and about the extent to which she was able to explore a greater range of her own affectivity while at the same time working to maintain her authority and composure.

For Lisa, as for all the other Achievers in this study, the experience of vulnerability was challenging, and shedding tears in public was tantamount to a metaphorical suicide:

I had an experience in my small group where I was moved to tears, which is very unusual for me. And I think that's something that I'm working on in terms of the competencies and what I need to work on is the ability to be vulnerable and realize I'm not going to die or get killed or commit suicide if that happens, metaphorically speaking (#31).

This experience, catalyzed by the sharing of a woman who had lost both breasts to cancer, led her to break down sobbing in front of the group, an experience that was not only unfamiliar to her and the people who know her, but which was also intensely uncomfortable. The experience surfaced significant assumptions for Lisa about the roles she takes up, particularly with regard to her own self-image as “the strong one:”

Both of her breasts were removed, but she's still here. And I thought, well, breast cancer and women and I've been thinking about what would it mean for my kids if I end up dying or my partner ends up dying, and then here they are? I mean, my parents are great, but they're not us. It's not the little things that we do, and so I just lost it at that point and just started sobbing. And I usually don't. I mean, I hardly cry in front of my family, and again, I think it's partially because I've sort of accepted this role as sort of the strong one, be strong for other people who want to cry, you know. So I just kind of lost it in that group, and like the consultant pointed out, you didn't die, you're here, and even stronger for it and better for it and lived that experience. So that was really pivotal (#31).

I was struck by Lisa's sense of this being such a pivotal experience, and, indeed, it became a point of departure for extended reflection on the challenge of being a person

within a role. This vulnerability was connected to her learning to balance competing roles—her professional role as a college athletic coach and her role as mother:

Me: So it could have been a whole constellation of different factors that were kind of bringing the tears up.

Lisa: Yeah, I think so. And then also coupled with just the, I don't want to say guilt, but the conflict of being a working mom, and kind of embodying sort of everything that is this challenge for women who want to pursue careers and have definite goals and dreams and ambitions and capabilities to achieve those, but yet also are very tied to being mothers or, you know, so how do you, can you have both? Can you hold both? Does one have to rise while one falls? You know, kind of dealing with that the past year or two, and then having that all surface, you know, that weekend, happening to be the day before was G's birthday, you know, and here I was at the conference and now it's day two, and I'm really just trying to voice that. So I think that was there as well (#41).

Nevertheless, she learns to question the assumptions that she has been operating on. She can show emotions and vulnerability and survive. Lisa continued, "...and then I had to ask myself, Well, why the heck not? I mean, who cares? I mean, you know, there's that need of not wanting to show emotions, that maybe I let my guard down" (#51).

In fact she learned that her vulnerability can help her to appear "more real" and to make space for others, including men, to be vulnerable as well.

Me: And then as you look back on that experience, what is valuable about it to you?

Lisa: I think it allowed—well, two things. I think it allowed my group, some of whom have known me for a while, to kind of see me as real. I think I really project this strong, invulnerable-to-attack, woman, often could be on the verge of sort of this man-hater. [laughs] I mean, like it could go to that extreme, you know. Because I don't allow that soft side or I don't allow those fears or vulnerabilities to come out, and I think to let my group see that was a good, a really good thing. And it ended up, and what I think it did is it allowed one, two of the men to really let their guard down too in the last, in the final, our fifth or sixth and final small group. And so I saw it, I see it now as a way that maybe provided connection, that showed it's okay. I mean, it's on the one hand, I think sometimes I link with males in that I don't cry a lot, I handle stress very well, people can't tell if I'm stressed. Yeah, of course, L's going to be okay. And then when I wasn't, I think it allowed the males to be like, We don't have to be okay either! I mean, shit, if L. can break down, then we all can break down. And they did, and it was very

powerful for all of us. And so I think in that way, it was like, okay, not only did I not get killed, but it allowed for others maybe to experience that same freedom (#53).

Lisa realized that she had taken on an informal role as the “strong one,” and that this role does not allow her to be “soft” to the extent that it may be to the detriment of her personal and professional relationships. It is possible that she has unconsciously suppressed or disowned these more feminine aspects of herself, but she does not communicate that in the interview. In our follow-up member check seven months later, she reported that she is still paying attention to the struggle she has with her self-image of herself as the strong one, yet she also feels as though she has made progress in this since the conference.

As a leader, she understood that the context, aim and ripeness of the group all have to be taken into account when a leader shows this kind of vulnerability.

Me: And as you look at your role as a leader in the future, what will your take-away be?

Lisa: You know, well, it’s interesting because I was thinking about that, and I think it depends on your role. As a coach, you can’t always show vulnerability. I mean, I think you’ve got to sometimes be strong, and there are maybe times in a season where it may benefit the group to admit or show some vulnerability, but for the most part, I think with coaching and being that kind of an authority role, even though you do want to exercise leadership, there’s a continuum. So I think it really depends on the context. I mean, I think in relationships like with maybe colleagues or with peers and with family and things, it’s really enhancing and it does show that we can admit vulnerability and weakness, because it can strengthen and support, and it maybe allows somebody to be that support that didn’t think that they could be supportive, felt that they’re always the victim, and now let them be the one and feel really good to be the shoulder that you stand on or cry on. But on the flip side, I think there are situations where that isn’t served well, and it could be political suicide. So I think again, it comes back to really understanding the role and what the system is ready for (#55).

Here, Lisa noted her learning about how she has to modulate her vulnerability depending on the role that she is undertaking and that the context matters. At the same time, she noted how the freedom to admit vulnerability and weakness is “enhancing” for

relationships; she also suggested that being weak in the wrong place at the wrong time can be fatal. At the same time, she describes feeling freedom, that this was a liberating moment for her:

Yeah! But I think that it was a freedom, you know, it did provide sort of this liberating moment, truly to say, you know, you can break down and it is okay, and maybe in certain places, like in my primary relationship or as my kids get older, you know, don't—you know, we never saw our mom and dad cry! You know? To be able to do that with those relationships and exercise leadership there, and just to-with friends, you know, to now always have to pretend like everything's always okay. I mean, that that's often what I've gotten into sort of the habit of doing, which is kind of a very male thing. I mean, it's a very stereotypical—let me preface it that way— male thing. A lot of my male friends I know struggle with that, and I tease them about that. Oh come on! Admit it! But then I recognize, well, I don't either, and so maybe relationships and certain things could be strengthened if I did (#65).

Lisa's struggle with display of emotional vulnerability is a challenge that she shares with the other eight Achievers in this study, men and women included. I think this is due in part to the way that this particular action logic places considerable emphasis on personal agency, autonomy, competency, and effectiveness (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004) to the possible detriment of a robust personal affectivity and the willingness to be vulnerable in public spaces. In the member check with Lisa seven months after the conference, she continued to reflect on the power of the conference experience and its impact on the way she strives for greater balance of work and life and how she tried to give herself more room to be herself within roles.

### Summary of Achiever Learning

As was the case with the participants in the Expert category, the seven participants in the Achiever action logic who had prior exposure to Group Relations and Leadership theory or previous conference experience noted how the experiential nature of

the learning in the conference deepened their understanding of projective processes by giving them first-hand experience. For the two participants who did not bring prior familiarity with theory or conference experience, the weekend provided both an introduction to basic group dynamics as well as experiential learning around projective processes.

As stated in earlier chapters, while all nine participants in this category described their experiences of receiving projections, none of them described the projections that they were generating themselves. However three of the nine did describe ways that they were able to resist projective identification with unwanted roles or emotions. Six of the nine describing working actively to identify (if not resist) their valences for particular emotions or habitual/unwanted socio-emotional roles. Two of the nine participants in this category, one man and one woman, described significant learning about their capacity to demonstrate emotional vulnerability in public and to recover their authority and capacity to lead. These two same participants also described their ability to block unwanted projections. Finally, while three of the nine participants describe their learning as “transformational” or “transformative,” further study would be necessary to determine whether their experience led them to be more discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally capable of change as defined by transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000).

#### Individualist Learning and Transformation

Bridget, a white, South African minister who profiled as an Individualist brought considerable complexity to the conference experience on the basis of her social identity.

This was her first Group Relations Conference experience, although she had had some prior exposure to Group Relations theory through her seminary formation. Like Kate and Lisa, she also experienced significant learning around her valences and informal roles, while acquiring her newfound capacity to effectively dis-identify with projective dynamics through the use of psychological boundaries.

When asked what her primary learning was, Bridget described how she discovered that she has choices about the roles that she can and will play in groups, and that she experienced a transformation of her life-long tendency for being overly responsible and taking inappropriate blame. She described how this new freedom involved maintaining psychological boundaries she compared to strong stomach muscles:

I guess what I learned is that I have choices about the roles that I will play and can play, and the responsibility that I will or won't take on in a situation. And that's transformative for me because accepting responsibility or being over-responsible and not knowing my choices in that matter had been devastating in my life. And it has to do for me with inner muscle or inner resilience around—it's not putting up a wall, but it's putting up a kind of barrier, you know, when someone pulls the stomach muscles and says, Hit me! But because they've prepared their muscles, it's not going to have the same effect. So it's not like I'm going to block it all out, but I don't need to receive certain things. And I've had some practice in doing it that was positive, for me anyway (#163).

Bridget's use of metaphors like the "inner muscle" and "inner resilience" are helpful for describing the psychological boundary that is necessary for her to selectively block or receive projections depending on whether they are wanted or unwanted. Her positive experience in the conference, especially in her interaction with Jim (Expert) and in the large group was "transformative" because it broke a pattern that had had "devastating" consequences in her life.

I was struck by Bridget's use of words such as "revelation" and "enlightening" related to her learning experience about not taking up the blame, as they convey the way

this experiential learning opportunity in the conference provided conditions where she found deep insight as well as the space to experiment with new behaviors, which she stated here:

That was tremendously enlightening. And I mean, I know at some level that we all experience things differently and so on, and yet that moment was just key for me. Not sure how much I did it thereafter, but at that moment, that was, that was a pivotal moment for me. And then the rest of the conference really, for me anyway, flowed out of that revelation and that realization in every other group (#25).

She also described her learning in terms of "liberation", for example, with the effect of that learning being "elation:"

I think it was mostly a sense of liberation. And elation. That it was a role that I take, that I'm susceptible to take, but I don't have to, right? So I can choose to resist the role, to be resilient against that, either projection or reception or whatever it is that I'm—it's like these thoughts hit and just lodge and I can go, Whoa, stop, no, no, no thanks! [laughs] Anyway, so that was freeing, it was wonderful (#33).

Further, it was fascinating that her learning paralleled that of Jim, who was in the same World Event group. While Bridget was learning to objectify and differentiate herself from projections and expectations, he was working through his anger at her rejection of his need at that moment:

I watched him crumble and he just kind of fell apart. And so then, his lips started to quiver and he was really upset. Anyway, so I think what I did to him was that I tried to acknowledge that struggle, but also to—I tried to differentiate from him and connect with him at the same time, and he didn't take it well. In fact, it was almost like when I did that, he needed to kill me (#37).

Not only did she manage to set up a psychological boundary to defend herself from his hostility, Bridget was also able to resist her valence for caretaking:

But I felt really tremendously good because my tendency would be to mother him and to look after him and to take care of his feelings. So for me to go, No, actually, this is your thing, this is my thing, and I'm not going to join in, was difficult, but less difficult by this point. And so I felt exhilarated. He felt terrible and he kept telling me how terrible he felt and how terrible I was to have made

him feel this way, and if I would just share in his anxiety, he would immediately feel better. [laughs] And I said, I'm absolutely sure that's true, but I'm still not going to do it [laughs] (#39)!

As was described in the finding on self-scaffolds, Bridget discovered her ability to be completely engaged and present without being drawn into Jim's personal distress. She did so, not because she was being insensitive, but because she allowed her own learning about psychological boundaries to take precedent over her life-long habit of compulsively mothering others.

Bridget prioritized her own learning and transformation again in the large study event by resisting the roles the group was trying to impose on her. Even though she described being aware of the need to be sensitive to the group's need, she chose to give priority to her own experiential learning in the moment:

Anyway, so at first, I felt tremendous pressure, but I just resisted the pressure, and I stayed totally engaged. I listened to what everyone was saying. I turned to look at them, I participated as much as I could—but without speaking or taking on a role. And I have to say it was one of the most elating experiences [laughs] of my life. I was so elated. And so, you know, I'm a little torn between the—so was this about my journey and my stuff, or was I supposed to be more sensitive to the needs of the group? But I really was, This is about me and this is what I'm learning, and so this is what I'm going to do (#45).

As a result, she experienced “elation” and sense of possibility as she recognized a new freedom to either take up roles or not, depending on her own priorities and discernment:

Whatever was altered from that choice, I felt pretty, I felt pretty brilliant, excellent, wonderful! Yay! [laughs] So you know, this whole thing then just started to play out in every single situation I was in, that I could choose to take on a role, I could choose not to take on a role, and I did choose at times to take on the mothering role, the sort of drawing people in role. I was the one who—the consultant in my small group noticed that I was the one person everyone in the group allowed to ask questions that drew in people that weren't speaking and to ask questions that the group was avoiding (#47).

Her learning experience, which she described as so significant and transformative, involved her emancipation from habits of mind/heart rooted in her childhood—in particular, a tendency to take up a caretaking role and for being overly responsible.

The other four participants in the Individualist action logic each reported significant learning, although from my perspective, the most powerful insight and transformation happened for Bill. He reported learning of a transformative nature that entailed a fundamental shift at the tacit level of perception and a change in his patterns of action that followed. This shift involved two aspects: recognition of the projections he received as a middle-aged white man and the way in which he had been sublimating the death of his daughter through transferences in his relationships and professional work with young people. Bill said:

And I realized how profoundly that experience affected me—not just my stance in the conference, but also in my professional work and in my relationship with especially young women, but also some young men in my life. My daughter’s friends and—I have one other son and five step-kids—and I understood that there was that kind of a connection. And it didn’t all make sense until the conference. So that was real important. And I sort of knew going in just in general that when I say hard things to people—because I’m a family therapist—when I say hard things to people, which I think is for their benefit, they’re not always going to be appreciative and grateful because they’re painful things. And that my job is to do it anyway, and to find my own source of nourishment elsewhere. So that, that was really underscored by the conference (#12).

Bill described how, in the context of his small group, he discovered how profoundly his daughter’s death had been affecting him at the subconscious level and the degree to which it was leading him to seek having his needs met by surrogates for his daughter.

### Summary of Individualist Learning

As was the case for the two earlier action logics, the two participants with no prior Group Relations theory or conference experience described both informational and

experiential learning around projective processes, while the other three who brought prior theoretical background or had attended other conferences described how their understanding of projective processes was deepened by their participation in the weekend. Four of the five participants in the Individualist category described being able to identify and renegotiate their valence for particular socio-emotional roles, yet unlike the participants in the Achiever category, only one of the five described learning with regards to his emotional vulnerability in his role. The participant who profiled toward the late-middle of the Individualist category (according to her SCTi score) described learning how to modulate psychological boundaries in order to both permit and block projections. Four of the five Individualists described aspects of their learning in terms of “transformation,” yet, as in the case of the previous two action logics, further study would be necessary to determine whether their learning revised pre-existing epistemic schemas (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000).

#### Strategist/Alchemist Learning and Transformation

While the learning for the Experts, the Achievers, and the Individualists is more easily categorized in terms of projection, valence, and role, when it came to the one participant profiled as a Strategist/Alchemist in this study, Victor’s learning was still grounded in these categories, but reached a level of nuance that was not present in the other action logics. Where the three Experts in the study learned through their experience that these dynamics of projection really are at work in groups and organizations, where several of the Achievers learned that they can begin to exercise choices about how they make use of this awareness, and four of the Individualists reported the capacity to

generate psychological boundaries to defend themselves from unwanted projections, the one Strategist/Alchemist in the study actively attempted to “re-own” the emotions that he had tended to suppress out of fear and anxiety. He learned to do this by surfacing his “big assumptions” (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) about feeling and expressing anger, and by choosing opportunities to experiment with channeling the anger of the group.

While Bridget, an Individualist, also described questioning assumptions in the small group setting, Victor actually brought a personal learning agenda into the conference, whereby he used the method described in Kegan and Lahey’s book (2001) to explore and dismantle the tacit assumptions influencing his own behavior. Victor stated, “So the big assumptions are the things that are sort of maintained in that equilibrium, and so they can look like, and my number one looked just like this: If people don’t like me, I will die [laughs]” (#27). He continued, “This is the big assumption, sort of number one. Kind of like, I have to play nice, right? At all times. So I can’t have that, right?” (#28). He is reported the ways that his idealized self-image as a peaceful, loving person was actually stunting his development and interfering with authentic relationships. Further, he described how questioning this big assumption allowed him to be liberated and expanded his perspective:

And that was freakin’ liberating. It happened in my role where I was acting as an agent of rage on behalf of the group. And I did it, I was drawn to that role, in retrospect, what I see as a valence to anger, expression of it, sort of [laughs] this is, this is wonderful. Sort of like the part that I disowned, I want to jump on it and carry it for somebody else, right? ‘Cause it’s really mine. So this is a perspective-expanding experience (#39).

Here, Victor described the way his valence for anger drew him to express the rage in the group, which allowed him to take back the anger that he had disowned. The experience

not only led him to experience an expanded perspective, that he can express anger and still find acceptance in groups, it also helped him to reconnect with a source of energy. He continued to describe the extent to which this experiment of channeling the group's rage had "revitalized" him and helped him to see that he can have rage without it taking over, and that he will not be ostracized for expressing himself this way:

I feel revitalized. I absolutely feel revitalized. It's as if my authentic being was being blocked, and that's been removed. And also I would say that I dis-identified with that rage. It's like I'm not rage, you know, I can have it. It can come through me, it can be expressed. And then another sort of shattering the big assumption is, is this can happen and I won't [laughs] be shunned (#43).

Like Bridget, Victor described how in the small group setting he was able to maintain his conscious self-possession and capacity to be engaged and dispassionate at the same time. He said, "And so I just came right back up and established a boundary. And you know what happened? The group moved on (#103). The result, as for Bridget, was a kind of elation he felt in this new-found freedom, "hell, yes, it was great. It was testing the big assumption! I have to make everybody happy or I will die. So you know, I felt more alive. I felt like I had more degrees of freedom, more choice (#103). While I offered the 10 point scale for him to measure how transforming this learning was for him, he jokingly shares:

Me, I'd put it on eleven. Eleven on the guitar here! [serious] Makes joke referring to movie This Is Spinal Tap. It was an eight, it was definitely the type of thing that's more transformational. I will lose that, I'll fall back on that, but you know, the metaphor that comes to my mind is like, it's sort of like two steps forward, one step back, you know, or like climbing up and you're climbing and you're making progress and you slide down, but over time, the progress adds up, right? And so definitely, qualitatively transformation (#107).

To summarize then, the learning that Victor reported was related to his "big assumptions" that if he were to tap into and express anger, that the anger would consume him and that he would be ostracized, but his conscious experiment in the group setting helped him to

revise his perspective, which he described as “qualitatively transformative.” In a follow-up conversation with Victor eight months later, he reported that the learning had continued to be valuable in a transformative way, though he experienced a period of depression after the conference. He shared, “Yes, I fell into kind of funk. I think it was partially a function of the artificiality of the conference structure... and the reclamation of the energy/loss of the idealized self. I’ve really worked to integrate that... and I feel more real” (member check, 1/28/08).

#### Summary of Strategist/Alchemist Learning

As was the case for other participants from earlier action logics who brought theoretical backgrounds or had attended other GRCs, the one participant in this category reported how the experiential nature of this conference both deepened his understanding of the theory of group dynamics and projective processes and broadened his recognition that at times there was a gap between his knowledge and what he actually did in practice. While participants in the earlier action logics report learning about and in many cases renegotiating their valences for particular emotions (such as anger or sadness) and socio-emotional roles, the one participant in this category described bringing in a learning agenda, namely, to test the prevailing assumptions that had been guiding his behavior. While participants in the four earlier action logics described both having an awareness of receiving and giving projections and being able to exercise psychological boundaries, the one participant in this category reported these characteristics as well as an additional one; he reported being able to identify and to reintegrate his disowned feelings of anger. As a result, he also used language like “liberation” and “transformation:” yet again, further

study would be necessary to determine whether or not there had indeed been a lasting perspective shift at the level of epistemic schemas.

### Summary of Participant Learning and Transformation

The types of learning that the 18 participants reported as most significant and transformative were related to the experiences of projection and projective identification, the exploration of valence, and the potential for participants to choose and take up new formal and informal roles in groups. I differentiated learning experiences that participants described as transformative, and, where possible, I indicated whether there was evidence of learning transfer after the conference. While each of these learning outcomes has been described from the first-person perspective, they also have implications for interpersonal and group dynamic levels, which I consider in the next chapter.

## Chapter IX

### IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

As I write this final chapter in mid-March 2008, all three of the remaining candidates in the current U.S. presidential election have drawn attention to two issues in particular: leadership and change. At the heart of the debate is the question of experience and its role in helping prepare these candidates to deal with crises, conflict, and the unknown, as well as to change the way that politics are conducted in this country. The focus on candidate's prior experience seems to assume either that all experience is beneficial and an asset, or perhaps that if this is not the case, that one can at least learn from one's missteps and errors so as not to repeat the same mistakes again. However, history's chronicle of human behavior suggests otherwise. History suggests that some experience can mis-educate us and lead to the formation of biases, prejudices, and bad habits. History also shows that we often repeat the same mistakes again and again without learning vital lessons. Perhaps if the human person was an entirely rational being, things might be otherwise. However the human person is comprised of reasons and passions, intention and will, such that knowing the good is no guarantee of doing the good.

Given the complex composition of the human person, I was amazed when I first encountered a form of leadership education that takes irrationality and fear of change for granted, and that factors in the whole unconscious fantasy life that people in organizations and institutions enact every day as they project their hopes and fears on authority figures, collude with dysfunctional dramas, and unknowingly surrender their

unique voice for the sake of safe conformity to social norms. My experiences of the Tavistock-style Group Relations Conferences I have attended over the years have opened my eyes to subtle dimensions of leadership and the challenges of personal and social change that I might never have learned in any other way. In particular, I have learned about the often surprising ways that forms of diversity (racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, ideological, religious, etc.) can complexify, enrichen, and also challenge life in social groups and organizations. At the same time, taking into account all the powerful ways that different forms of diversity affect people in groups, I found one form of diversity was not being considered, and that perhaps this one mattered more than all the rest.

In this final chapter, I present an overview and discussion of the five findings that emerged through this research study into the implications of developmental diversity for Group Relations Conference learning. I begin with a review of the biases and expectations that I brought into the study, as well as an overview of the experience and learning that I discovered through the analysis and interpretation of the GRC participants' descriptions. I present summaries of the five findings and integrate conclusions with reference to the specific research question(s) that eventually led to the particular finding, the implications that I see in these conclusions for theory and practice, the limitations of my study, and recommendations for future research. I conclude with a reflection on the value that I found personally in the experience of conducting this study.

### Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of my research was to understand the experience and learning of 18 participants in a Group Relation conference, focusing on the psychosocial supports and

challenges in this setting. I explored how the participants' way of making meaning of their experience was related to their assessed stage of maturational development. While the Group Relations Conference design tends to assume the developmental competencies of adults who have an interiorized locus of authority,<sup>25</sup> it is actually statistically unlikely that all conference members operate at this stage of maturity.<sup>26</sup> As a result, I believed that understanding the developmentally diverse ways that people experience the holding environment in the conference setting could facilitate the creation of conferences that better attend to the diverse needs of participants and could, therefore, further their capacity for learning and leading, not only in the context of the conference, but in their own organizations and institutions. The following were my three research questions. As mentioned, each conclusion I make includes reference to the specific research question(s) to which it responds.

### My Research Questions

- 1a) How do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand their experience and their learning in the context of a Group Relations Conference?
- 1b) In particular, how do 18 developmentally diverse participants describe and understand the internal supports and challenges available to them in the Group Relations Conference?
- 2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience and their assessed ways of making meaning?

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<sup>25</sup> Specifically, I am referencing the developmental competencies described by Kegan (1994) as self-authoring, or by Cook-Greuter (2003) and Torbert (2003) as the Achiever action logic.

<sup>26</sup> According to inferential statistics taken in 1994, only 19% of the adult population in the U.S. was in this self-authoring stage of development (Kegan, 1994).

### My Expectations Realized and Challenged

Prior to the discussion of my findings, I return to some of the assumptions and expectations I had as I entered into this study. My research questions inquired into the experience of the holding environment, that is, the kinds of supports and challenges that constitute the conditions for the members' learning and growth during the conference. I entered the study with a bias that the expectations for conference learning and much of Group Relations theory is predicated on the members' capacity for self-authorization, for personal responsibility, and for an inner locus of control. I suspected that participants who were not yet in the Achiever action logic would not find sufficient supports to help them manage the difficulties and challenges of the conference, and that perhaps those in the earlier action logics would not experience the same depth of learning as those in the later action logics.

While I did not have access to the experience of those conference members who profiled at the Diplomat action logic, the three participants who profiled at the Expert did describe significant, if not transformational learning. When using the term "transformation," participants described how their experiences led them to insights that helped change their perspectives and, in many cases, affected their behaviors in such a way that they were able to handle complex challenges more capably. Further, when asked whether there were anything that they would add or take away from the way the conference was conducted, these three reported that they would not change the conference design to include more supports than they experienced. Furthermore, in their interviews, every person in this study reported that the external holding environment

provided by the conference was “good enough” for learning. Before undertaking this study, I also had a bias that there would be some differentiation in the ways that participants experienced and described the various supports available to them in the conference setting. For example, I thought that there might be less frequent mention of external social supports as people moved through the later action logics, assuming that they would have more and more personal, internal resources from which to draw. However, in the reports of participants across all the action logics, the presence and influence of social supports was valued—if not highly valued—whether those supports were other members, consultants, family, etc. At the same time, the proportion of external to internal supports did vary across action logics, and those participants in the Individualist action logic and the one in transition between the Strategist and the Alchemist reported as many or more internal supports as they did external supports.

One support that I did not necessarily anticipate was the way that some participants who had relationships with members on staff as students, colleagues, or mentees described how important it was for them to experience the regard, affection, and support of these figures. I consider this a special kind of social support in that the presence of these mentors seemed to help people take even greater risks for the sake of their learning.

While I was slightly surprised by the way that social supports were valued across the spectrum of the action logics, I was less surprised that there was a fairly uniform reporting by participants in every action logic that the small group generally was more supportive than the experience of larger groups, that everyone reported how helpful the Role Transformation Event was for their learning, and that the remainder of the

aim/role/task was considered valuable as a way of helping participants orient to their experience of ambiguity or confusion.

While I anticipated that participants would likely describe a variety of self-supports, and that the sophistication of these supports might evolve from one developmental action logic to the next, I did not anticipate the number and variety of these “adaptive self-scaffolds,” nor the way in which these self-scaffolds could assist participants in a mindful and effective engagement of the challenges they were facing in the moment. Finally, I also did not anticipate the ways in which all 18 participants would report experiences of regression or coping behaviors, which became key findings. What follows is a presentation of those key findings, the conclusions that come from them, and implications I see for theory, practice, and research.

#### Claim One: Regression under Adversity, or “Fall-Back”

In this study, every one of the 18 participants, no matter what their developmental action logic, described experiences of “fall-back”—periods of time when the participant reacted to the challenges posed by the conference environment by regressing to ways of thinking and behaving that were more consistent with earlier developmental action logics (Cook Greuter, 2003, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004), as well as in ways that were maladaptive or seemingly counter-productive to the situation at hand. I define “fall-back” in the following terms: fall-back is a temporary regression of undetermined duration that is catalyzed by experiences of anxiety and distress such that individuals behave with a logic of action (Torbert, 2003) that is markedly less complex and adaptive than their

potential suggests is possible. At the same time, more than half the participants reported how these experiences of fallback were key to their learning and growth.

A second dimension of the finding is that while each participant reported some form of temporary regression, the ways in which participants caught themselves or made sense of the regression differed depending on their individual action logic. Participants sometimes described this experience of catching themselves in terms of noticing they were not being genuine, were acting out of character, or were feeling like they had temporarily forgotten their training, tools, and theoretical resources. Those participants in the Expert and Achiever action logics reported having insight into their temporary regressions after they had occurred, while several of the Individualists described having awareness of the fall-back as it was occurring, and the one Strategist/Alchemist reported having acute, moment-to-moment awareness of regressive feelings and behaviors as they were emerging and unfolding.

A third dimension of the finding was that the variety of fall-back behaviors decreased in the two later action logics. Finally, the fourth dimension of the finding reinforces the theoretical premise that while the participants' developmental action logic might indicate a meaning-making center of gravity (Cook-Greuter, 2006), it was influenced significantly by context and contingency, such that participants regressed several stages before arresting their fall and recovering. Based on these four dimensions of the finding related to the participants' experiences of fall-back, I make the following claim:

In response to research questions 1a, 1b, and 2 into the participants' experience of the GRC and the relationship between their experiences and their developmental action

logics, I conclude that with regard to fall-backs, a participant's developmental maturity as assessed by the SCTi may indicate one's meaning-making center of gravity, but it does not preclude temporary regression into ways of sense-making and/or acting consistent with earlier action logics. There was evidence that the later one's action logic—especially in the post-conventional stages represented in the study—the more there seemed to be a capacity for awareness of these regressions in the moment and an enhanced facility in recovering more quickly and effectively from the fall-back.

### Implications of Claim One

As I approach the implications of each of the conclusions, there is potential value for several areas of theory and practice in each of the claims, including adult development theory, adult learning theory, Group Relations theory, and conference design, as well as organizational and leadership development and coaching.

To begin with, regressive behavior in adults receives little attention in the literature of adult development and learning, as most research and literature focuses on the positive dimensions of adaptation, development, and learning (Hoare, 2006). Adult developmental research has tended to emphasize, for instance, how development can advance well-being and optimal aging (Baltes, 1990; Bornstein, 2003; Rowe, 1998). By contrast, the field of clinical psychology focuses on negative or maladaptive behavior and uses the interpretive frame of pathology as the primary means of understanding developmental regression (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Rather than dividing attention to optimal and regressive patterns of behavior in this manner, it would be more helpful, in my opinion, if there were less bifurcation of research and theory such that theorists and

practitioners in the field of adult development could include attention both to patterns of optimal functioning and to patterns of temporary regressive behavior which occurs when adults of any age or stage of maturity are under situational duress. I recommend this inclusion as a means of offering alternatives to unhelpful labeling of behavior as pathological when in fact context and conditions exert considerable influence on human behavior.

While there is growing theoretical interest and attention given to the post-conventional stages of adult development (Cook-Greuter, 1999, 2003, 2006; Nicolaidis, 2008; Torbert, 2003, 2004; Wilber, 2007) and to the practical conditions for promoting healthy development among professionals (Drago Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994), there is relatively little consideration given to the amount of fluctuation and fluidity of developmental capacity relative to the conditions and contingencies available to people at any given moment in particular domains (Hoare, 2006). A failure to attend to this fluctuation and to the contingent nature of developmental capacity can in itself lead to a mistaken conception of developmental stages as more stable or resilient across contexts than was found to be the case in this study. I recommend that adult developmental theorists, researchers, and practitioners pay more attention to the dynamic relationship between developmental capacity and varying environmental conditions/contingencies in order that optimum benefit can be achieved not only in the GRC setting, but in other formal and informal learning environments as well (e.g., workplace learning, Human Resource training, experiential leadership development programs that use action research, etc.).

With regard to the theory of developmental action logics and the use of this theory in leader and management education, the issue of regression under duress is well documented (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Boyatzis, 2005; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Quinn, 2004; Torbert, 2004). Torbert (2004) already notes the importance of being aware of patterns of regression “to which we retreat when under duress” (p. 68). He suggests that, in addition to the primary action logic or center of gravity (Cook-Greuter, 2006) of meaning-making indicated by the SCTi profile, there may be a habitual fall-back action logic that people can identify through careful attention to specific patterns of behavior. Boyatzis & McKee (2005) also point out the consequences of cycles of behavioral regression for leaders and suggest practices to help leaders live with greater balance, mindfulness, and compassion for themselves and for others. This first conclusion from my study reinforces these contributions in the existing literature.

For those who use developmental assessments in professional coaching, such explicit attention to patterns of fall-back can be helpful for two reasons. First, attention to patterns of behavioral regression can raise leaders’ and managers’ awareness of trigger events that instigate fall-back. Second, such attention can also promote reflection and the development of practices to help people who deal with stressful and adverse conditions in personal and professional environments to hold steady (Heifetz 1994, 2002) and to resist regression. In this sense, it is helpful if professionals who support the adult development of others frame experiences of regression as opportunities for growth, for the mending of unhealthy patterns, and for ongoing personal evolution. I recommend the development of assessments that help leaders and managers track these patterns of regression so that they can attend to them more constructively with the support of professional coaches.

In the context of Group Relations theory and the design and implementation of conferences, the importance of reflection on regression in individuals and groups is already a central feature (Rice, 1965). However, during the conference events that are designed to assist members to make sense of, integrate, and then live from their newfound insights about their behaviors, I recommend that consultants make the notion of regression or fall-back more explicit in their interventions, and that they help members identify these patterns for their own self-examination and learning in the reflection and application groups within the conference. Further, I recommend introducing a component into the role and application events<sup>27</sup> whereby members could be encouraged to utilize practices that might help them catch themselves in fall-back or build adaptive self-scaffolds to support themselves when under adverse conditions.

Finally, in the field of organizational development and change leadership, this claim regarding fallback behaviors is especially important in understanding how to support organizational members through change initiatives. Large scale initiatives that require the adoption of new technologies, knowledge, and skills have a tendency to lose momentum and even to fail when personnel and leadership begin to feel their uncertainty and incompetence in the early phases of transition (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) describes this phenomenon as the implementation dip, though it is also known as the “neutral zone” of transition (Bridges, 1993, p. 34). During this crucial phase of change efforts, the experience of uncertainty, incompetence, and loss of the familiar catalyzes sufficient levels of individual and systemic distress that the change efforts themselves are often abandoned (Fullan, 2001).

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<sup>27</sup> The reflection and application event in my study was called the Role Transformation Event.

It is possible that by understanding the extent to which context and contingency affect the developmental capacity and performance of individuals (and teams), change leaders and organizational development consultants can tailor supports to assist personnel in managing their anxieties through change efforts. First and foremost, Fullan (2001) suggests that it is helpful for leaders and organizational members to anticipate the implementation dip from the beginning of a change process. According to Heifetz (2002), who also writes of the way in which change processes or “adaptive work” (p. 141), generate heat, resistance, and danger for those in authority, it is essential for leaders to practice self-regulating methods (such as the ones described in this study as adaptive self-scaffolds) for helping themselves “hold steady” under duress. Then it may be helpful for leaders and consultants to help organizational members to reflect on their experiences of uncertainty and incompetence in such a way as to frame regression or fallback as a natural by-product of change, and as a potentially valuable resource for learning. Further, it may be helpful for leaders, consultants, and coaches to encourage organizational members in the practice of adaptive self-scaffolds that can help them hold steady with awareness, patience, intention, and purpose even during the most challenging phases of such processes.

#### Limitations of Claim One and Recommendations for Research

As is the issue with all five findings, the claims that I make are based on a single case study with 18 participants, with uneven populations in each developmental action logic category. As volunteers may have a greater willingness to take risks for the sake of their learning, there may be limits to our ability to claim that other conference members

in the same action logic categories would have the same experiences. As a result, I recommend repeating this study or aspects of it to determine to what extent these findings can be generalized to other conference members and other GRCs. In particular, I would recommend a sampling process that would provide more even distribution of participants in each developmental action logic, including people who profile in the Diplomat as well as explicitly in the Strategist and Alchemist categories. I recommend this inclusion as a way of exploring the adequacy of the holding environment for members on the earlier end of adult development (Diplomat) and in order to better understand the capacity and competency of members in the later phases, specifically the Strategist and Alchemist action logics. This same recommendation applies to each of the five conclusions presented in this chapter.

In addition to the limits of the research based on the population and sampling in this case study, I also acknowledge that there are limits to the particular hermeneutic lens I employed as part of my conceptual framework. No single theory, including the modified ego or self-development theory of developmental action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2003, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004) used in this study, can be sufficiently integrative or comprehensive of all dimensions of human functioning. In order to gain a more robust insight into the unique experiences reported by each participant, I recommend repeating this kind of study using two theoretical frameworks of adult development (e.g., that of Kegan and of Cook-Greuter) and including for instance, a personality inventory such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or a test for emotional intelligence.

With regard to the claims I am making about fall-back behaviors, originally my interview protocol did not include questions or specific probes designed to explore

regressive behaviors. While I did pursue these experiences with questions that I formulated extemporaneously, I may not have been able to expose the full range or depth of the regressions that participants reported. Furthermore, self-reports often call for special procedures such as triangulation (Maxwell, 2005, Yin, 2003) to help compensate for the ways people regulate the description of their experiences (McDonald, 1977). Gathering accurate and rich self-reports of regressive behavior may be even more difficult and require additional modes of data collection. I recommend that further research explore means of gathering data on participant regression in the conference setting that include methods of triangulation and other measures to support and augment the quality of the self-reports.

Next, I turn to a conclusion related to that of the fall-backs, the relationship between the participants' use of coping mechanisms and their learning.

### Claim Two: Use of Coping Behaviors as Missed Opportunities for Learning and Leading

In this study, many participants explicitly or implicitly described ways that they resorted to various coping mechanisms in response to their experience of the challenges<sup>28</sup> they encountered in the GRC setting. While coping behaviors are generally understood to be neutral or even healthy features of adults' capacities to deal with life challenges (Baltes, 1990), some coping mechanisms can be counter-productive relative to the roles and tasks that adults perform in groups and organizations. In this study, I define these coping mechanisms as behaviors that are primarily self-protective and that helped

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<sup>28</sup> The distinct challenges were identified in Chapter Six and fall into three general categories: experiences that were ambiguous, complex, and conflictual.

participants manage their anxiety more than they assisted in leading or learning in the moment.

These behaviors fell roughly into two categories. Behaviors such as safety-seeking, skepticism, and disassociation are self-protective mechanisms that participants used as a means of “staying in their comfort zone” and keeping their distress in a tolerable range. Behaviors such as pushing one’s agenda, problem-solving, and control-taking, among others, are more active means of engaging the conference challenges from what Heifetz (1994, 2002) calls a technical, rather than an adaptive, stance, where people resort to formulaic or habitual responses to challenges without transforming the situation. None of the 18 participants reported learning or acting in a way that influenced others constructively while simultaneously they were resorting to either category of coping behavior. Several participants reported catching themselves in their coping behavior and making adjustments so that they could reengage the GRC from a more advantageous learning stance.

A second dimension of this finding was that there a greater incidence of coping behavior in the participants who profiled in the Expert and Achiever categories than for those who profiled in the later two action logics. While this may not be surprising, as 12 of the 18 participants were profiled in the earlier two action logics, the six participants in the later two action logics reported more in-the-moment awareness of when they were or were not actively engaging the challenges they encountered in this conference. A third dimension of this finding was that while most participants tended to associate their experiences of fall-back with their learning and even transformation, several

participants<sup>29</sup> described their experiences of resorting to their comfort zone as “missed opportunities” for discovery and learning. As a result of these three dimensions of the finding related to coping behaviors, I make the following claim:

In response to research questions 1a, 1b, and 2 into the participants’ experience of the conference and the relationship between the meaning they made of their experiences and their developmental action logics, I conclude that the participants who described resorting to coping behaviors did not report simultaneous learning or effective leadership until moving beyond their comfort zone and actively re-engaging the challenges of the conference. Further, there was more incidence of coping behavior among participants in the Expert and Achiever action logics than for participants in the later two action logic categories included in this study.

### Implications of Claim Two

Regarding Group Relations theory, conference design, and implementation, while regressive behavior receives explicit consultation and intervention, conference directors and consultants may not pay as much attention to the subtle ways in which members manage their anxieties by resorting to coping behaviors. Bion’s (1962) description of the basic assumption behaviors implicitly includes coping behaviors wherein individuals and groups retreat from the challenges of uncertainty, interpersonal or inter-group conflict, or overwhelming experiences of complexity through various forms of avoidance. At the same time, without explicit attention to the specific ways self-protective behaviors can interfere with learning and leading, conference members might leave the experience unaware of the negative or unintended effects of their coping mechanisms. In fact, when

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<sup>29</sup> Anne, Achiever; Sandra, Achiever; Joshua, Individualist

participants manage to stay in their comfort zone throughout the entire conference, they might even feel as though they had completed a challenging experience successfully when indeed their experience might have been limited by their having opted (consciously or unconsciously) to remain in their comfort zones.

I recommend that those who offer training and formation for Group Relations consultants through the Tavistock Institute and the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems pay more attention to coping behaviors and educational interventions to bring the counter-productive or unintended consequences of these self-protective behaviors to members' attention.

In the literature of leadership and management, there is already some attention to ways that self-protective stances by people in positions of authority can lead to counter-productive or even destructive results for organizations (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Boyatzis, 2005; Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Quinn, 2004; Torbert, 2004). This particular finding reinforces the way that this concept has been dealt with in the literature, and yet I also believe that the counter-productive consequences of coping behavior merits more attention by this field. Similarly, I recommend to adult educators and practitioners who engage in leadership development and coaching to help students and clients pay attention to the counter-productive effects of coping behaviors for leading and learning in the workplace. Even if such behaviors are the best a person can manage under adverse conditions, at least from the perspective of coaching and personal development, I believe the identification of patterns of coping behaviors can benefit people's self-awareness and personal and professional growth.

### Limitations of Claim Two and Recommendations for Research

In addition to the general limitations that were mentioned following the first claim, as was the case with the issue of fall-back behavior, I did not design this research study with the specific intention of exploring a phenomenon as subtle and difficult to identify as peoples' use of coping behaviors to manage their anxieties. If a study was designed to explore participants coping behaviors more specifically, it could strengthen, refine, or challenge my claim that coping behaviors tended to interfere with learning and leading in the moment. I recommend that research be conducted to explore this subtle but critical matter and its implications for learning and leading both in and out of the GRC setting. Further, because of the evanescent way in which some coping behaviors manifest in reaction to emergent anxieties and then dissipate (Schlossberg et al., 1995), it may be helpful to develop data collection methods that help to capture participants' experiences during the conference, or within a short time span afterwards.

The following claim relates to the finding on the sufficiency of the GRC as a holding environment.

### Claim Three: A Holding Environment “Good Enough” for Learning

All 18 of the participants reported that the combination of external supports and challenges constituting their conference experience were sufficient for their learning, such that all 18 reported on the way they drew insight, perspective, and understanding out of their participation in the weekend. Even participants in the earliest of the four action logics represented—the Expert category—described finding sufficient support. While

most participants described similar aspects of the conference as supports, there were also reports of some distinctions in the ways that participants from one action logic to another construed and relied upon these external factors. Also, it was noticeable to me that the six participants in the post-conventional action logics—the five Individualists and one Strategist/Alchemist—relied on an increased number of self-generated supports, relative to the external ones available to them. I will deal with this in the fourth claim.

Regarding the participants' reports of what they experienced as challenging, three main categories of challenges were apparent: challenges associated with ambiguity, complexity, and conflict. While there were many similarities in the ways that participants in each of the four action logics described their experiences of these three key challenges, there were several challenges that the participants experienced differently from one developmental stage to the next. These particular challenges included the different ways in which participants in each action logic experienced and made sense of projective processes, found and used their voice, and exhibited varying degrees of tolerance for demonstrating their own emotional vulnerability in public. On the basis of these components of this third finding, I make the following claim.

In response to research questions 1a, 1b, and 2 regarding the participants' descriptions of their experience in the Group Relations Conference and the relationship between their learning and the developmental action logic in which each participant was profiled, I conclude that the environmental supports and challenges that constituted the holding environment in this conference were sufficient for participants' learning in the four action logic categories represented in my study. There was evidence that the ways that participants in each action logic category described slightly different ways of relying

on the supports available to them, although all the participants expressed value for social supports, and some made particular mention of relationships with staff members or consultants whom they regarded as trusted mentors or teachers. With regard to their experiences of challenges, among the three key areas reported (ambiguity, complexity, and conflict), participants across the four action logic categories varied the most in the way that they managed projective processes, the exercise of personal voice, and their emotional vulnerability.

### Implications of Claim Three

With regard to the implications of this conclusion for the fields of adult development and adult learning, this finding helps to confirm and extend existing theory on the importance of the holding environment and its role in facilitating both learning and growth. In particular, the ways in which participants differed in their descriptions of their experiences of particular supports and challenges according to the developmental capacities in each action logic category strengthens and extends Drago-Severson's (2004a, 2004b) claim that socializing and self-authoring knowers, that is, people that make meaning from these phases of adult development, have distinct needs when it comes to the particular supports and challenges that they find helpful for learning (e.g. the extent to which they can work with feedback, need clear and concrete expectations of outcomes, or varying ratios of social supports). The finding extends Drago-Severson's claim by also including the supports and challenges preferred by post-conventional, self-transforming and self-transcending (Nicolaidis, 2008) knowers. Further, this claim about the holding environment extends Drago-Severson's emphasis on the importance of

including both tailored challenges and sufficient supports as conditions for the promotion of transformational<sup>30</sup> adult learning.

At the same time, one implication of this claim for adult educators and any professionals who are in a role to facilitate and promote adult learning and change stems from the degree to which the participants reported conference challenges as essential to their learning. It is my opinion that in a culture saturated with therapeutic idioms drawn from popular psychology, the role of intense personal, relational, and organizational challenges is underplayed in favor of more soft, supportive approach to education and learning. In fact, coming into this study, I was of the mind that the holding environment might not have been sufficient for supporting the learning of members as the earlier end of adult development. However, what I learned is how essential it is that the participants were moved outside of their comfort zones for the sake of experiential learning around deep structures of personality, and psychosocial dynamics. Adult educators, including those involved in counseling and pastoral ministry, need to exercise caution and at times restraint in attempting to relieve, let alone rescue, adults from the pain of their experiences, at least if learning is the intention.

With regard to the importance of this claim about the holding environment for leadership educators and practitioners of organizational development and change management, I am operating on the assumption that the GRC creates a temporary organizational setting that has at least limited transfer value for other organizations. On the basis of this assumption, this third claim reinforces and extends the work of Heifetz (1994, 2002) and Kahn (2001, 2005), both of whom suggest that adequate holding

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<sup>30</sup> According to Drago-Severson (2004a), transformational learning assists adults in being able to better manage the complexities of their work and lives (p. xxii).

environments are essential for effective organizational health, resiliency, and adaptation. However, few theorists (with the exception of Torbert [2003, 2004]) draw explicit attention to the ways a leader might gauge the developmental needs of organizational members. In fact, the literature of organizational development and change management generally ignores the reality of developmental diversity amongst organizational members and the implication of that diversity in creating healthy and adaptive work environments. As mentioned in the implications for the first finding's claim, I recommend that theorists and educators in this field begin to pay attention to this developmental diversity as means of more effectively understanding and supporting organizational health as well as dealing with the complexities of change management.

The implication of this claim regarding the sufficiency of the holding environment in this particular GRC is closely related to the limits I describe in the following section. As stated in Chapter IV, I conducted this research in the context of a GRC sponsored by the Leadership Institute in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego (USD). According to the conference brochure, the intention behind this event was to create an atmosphere of inquiry wherein members and staff could explore their lived experience of this temporary organization in order to promote self-learning and transformation. According to my findings, which I address again in the fifth claim, the conference intention was fulfilled for these 18 participants.

In response to the particular supports and challenges that participants described and their implications for GRCs, I recommend that conference designers, directors, and consultant staff pay attention to the following points:

- Given that the reflection and application event known in this conference as the Role Transformation Event was described as a key support in every participant's description of their experience, I recommend that consultants receive education and formation on how they might make this dimension of the conference even more effective as a means of supporting participant learning.
- In particular, given the three key areas of challenges that participants described—ambiguity, complexity, and conflict—I recommend that consultants pay more attention to the ways that participants understand and make sense of their experience of these three sources of challenge.
- As the 18 participants varied according to 1) their action logic in their capacity to manage projective processes, 2) the issues around the exercise of their personal voice in groups, and 3) the challenges of emotional vulnerability, I recommend that conference designers, directors, and consultant staffs consider the developmental learning curves associated with each of these challenges in order to gauge more effectively the kind of support members need in engaging these challenges constructively.
- Finally, as one element of the holding environment (according to Kegan [1982]) is the way that it provides a source of continuity over time, I recommend that GRC designers consider ways of providing forms of post-conference follow-up to promote continued reflection on and reinforcement of the conference experience and learning transfer to members' organizations, including coaching, online resources, and literature that describes practices to support continued growth.

The following are limitations with regard to this third finding and recommendations for research that could respond to these limits.

#### Limitations of Claim Three and Recommendations for Research

As described in Chapter IV, Dr. Theresa Monroe, the director of this institute, emphasizes the importance of creating robust conditions for learning and for promoting individual and group transformation within the GRC setting by paying attention to differences in developmental capacity in the membership. This emphasis is manifest in the way she models consultation to the conference membership, in the way that she conducts training for consultants, and in the way that she and the people she recruits design and direct conferences at USD. While this claim with regards to the sufficiency of the holding environment in this particular setting supports perception of the effectiveness of USD's conferences, further study is required to determine whether GRCs in other settings are also sufficient in terms of providing sufficient holding environments for similar participant learning.

Furthermore, in this study, the three participants in the Expert action logic were experienced professionals between the ages of 38 and 53, and two of them had prior GRC experience as well as consultant training. As a result, there is no way to generalize that all the members who might have profited in the Expert action logic felt the same sense of adequacy with regards to the holding environment for their learning. Moreover, as there were no Diplomats included in this study, I cannot comment about any experience such a person might have in a GRC. I suspect that participants in the Diplomat action logic might report more intense struggles with the challenges of the conference, and so I

recommend that this study be repeated with a broader compliment of participants, including a number from the Diplomat action logic, in order to obtain a more informed opinion on the adequacy of the GRC as a holding environment.

The concept of the holding environment is just one theoretical construct used for understanding the relationships between environmental conditions and the experience and learning of organizational members. While leadership educators (Drago Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Heifetz, 1994, 2002) and organizational development experts (Kahn, 2001, 2005) use the concept of the holding environment in this manner, another theoretical construct for understanding this relationship and for promoting organizational sustainability through learning and change is the notion of the liberating structure described by Torbert (2004). The liberating structure is way of designing an organization that takes developmental diversity into account, by generating tailored supports and challenges for each of the action logics that are intended to promote constant action learning (Torbert, 2004). I recommend that this study be repeated using an alternative construct such as the liberating structure in order to determine whether this model may be more adequate for addressing the experiential learning orientation of the GRC.

Next, I present the fourth finding regarding the participants' uses of adaptive self-scaffolds and the claims I am making based on their usage of them.

#### Claim Four: Adaptive Self-Scaffolds That Support Learning and Leading

Guided by research question 1b, which explored the participants' use of internal supports, I found that participants relied on a variety of behaviors to support themselves

in effectively meeting the challenges they faced during the conference. Using an emic code from one of the 18 participants, I call these internal supports “adaptive self-scaffolds.” I define these adaptive self-scaffolds in terms of the 52 cognitive/affective behaviors that participants described using to modulate their stress and anxiety in order that they could simultaneously engage the challenges they were facing in the moment with intention and purpose. These cognitive and affective behaviors were dynamic and often extemporaneous responses to the context and contingencies that participants were engaging, and through these behaviors, the participants demonstrated capacity for reflection in action. This capacity for conscious and purposeful engagement and reflection in action at times led to a constructive transformation of situations and conflicts.

Four general categories of adaptive self-scaffolds emerged through my analysis and interpretation of the 18 participants’ descriptions: 1) personal power/capacity, which were attributes of the individual developmental capacities or conferred traits; 2) self-awareness and/or experience, which were qualities and characteristics associated with awareness and learning; 3) cognitive behaviors, which were habits of cognition and affect that helped participants both differentiate themselves from others and take perspective on situations; and 3) purpose and/or intention, which were various ways that participants elected to be in relationship with themselves, with others, and with the process or situation in which they were involved. A complete list of these 52 self-scaffolds, their descriptions, and their incidence/frequency across each category is included in Chapter VII.

The number of adaptive self-scaffolds and the ways that participants described using them varied from one action logic to the next, although, as I explain, careful analysis is needed to verify that these variations are indeed contingent upon developmental capacity. I found that not only did the small numbers of participants in the later two action logics manage to employ a relatively large number of the distinct self-scaffolds, but as I identified in Chapter VI, participants in the Individualist and the Strategist/Alchemist categories describe more self-scaffolds than external supports than those in the other logics when asked what they found helpful for their learning.

In response to research question 1b regarding the participants' experiences of internal supports, and on the basis of the findings described above, I conclude that the 18 participants in this study used a wide variety of internal supports that I call adaptive self-scaffolds as a way of engaging the challenges they faced in the conference in a manner that was characterized by being both conscious and purposeful. These adaptive self-scaffolds contributed to the participants' abilities to learn and to lead in the moment. Further, I found that examining the data from one developmental action logic to the next, there was variation in the number of adaptive self-scaffolds and the ways that they were employed.

#### Implications of Claim Four

My claim regarding adaptive self-scaffolds has implications for a number of fields and disciplines with regards to adult learning and development, leadership education, and Group Relations in terms of both practice and theory.

First, as described in Chapter II, most attention given to the holding environment emphasizes the external elements of support and challenge, such that while theorists and practitioners have begun to suggest tailoring supports and challenge to meet specific developmental capacities and needs (Daloz, 1986; Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b; Kegan, 1982, 1994), little explicit attention outside the of literature on resiliency (O'Connell Higgins, 1994) has been given to the internal resources that people generate in meeting gaps in the external holding environment. While attention has been given by adult developmental theorists and researchers to the adaptive capacities that promote continued growth (Csikszentmihalyi, 1994; Pirttila-Backman & Kajanne, 2001), as well as the role of positive attitudes, self-understanding, and acceptance as internal resources (Staudinger, 2001), study that helps translate these capacities into practices may be helpful to adult learners in a variety of settings of work and life. I recommend that adult developmental theorists and researchers explore further the range of adaptive self-scaffolds that people employ, and specifically the relationship between these scaffolds and developmental capacity.

In terms of the literature on leadership and management, a variety of prominent experts such as Boyatzis (2005), Heifetz (2002), Quinn (2004), Senge (1990), and Torbert (2004) point to the importance of personal, internal resources; for example a leader's intention, self-awareness, mindfulness, other-centeredness, and grasp of and attention to the larger system. Each of these experts also recommends practices for leaders to help cultivate these mental and affective behaviors as a means of enhancing their effectiveness. However, of the experts mentioned, only Torbert (2003, 2004) draws attention to the relationship between these leadership competencies and developmental

capacity. My claim about the value of adaptive self-scaffolds reinforces and helps illustrate the work of these experts by providing insight into the variety of these behaviors and the distinct ways that they are exercised by individuals at a variety of stages of adult development. I recommend that leadership and management experts continue to devote resources to understanding these adaptive competencies, the extent to which they are contingent on developmental capacity, and how various practices might assist in building them up.

With regard to Group Relations theory and the practice of GRC, a central intention of the experiential learning in the conferences is to build the leadership capacity of the members who attend. While the principle focus of that capacity-building is to help demonstrate the reality of covert phenomena in groups such as basic assumption behaviors (Bion, 1962), projective processes (Klein, 1959), and the variety of implications of dependence, independence, and interdependence in systems (McCullom & Gillette, 1990), some conference designers also pay attention to individual leadership capacity-building for systemic change (Monroe & Irvine, 2007). For those interested in this type of capacity building, I recommend that they continue to explore the variety of adaptive self-scaffolds that they might introduce to conference members as skills to learn and practice within the conference setting and beyond.

#### Limitations of Claim Four and Recommendations for Research

This study was designed to determine what, if any, internal self-supports participants might describe during their conference experience. As a result, I have provided a descriptive presentation of these adaptive self-scaffolds, explore their

incidence across the action logics, and draw specific inference about the relationship between these adaptive competencies and developmental capacity. However, in order to better understand the range and depth of these adaptive self-scaffolds, their role in learning in action, and their potential transformative impact on situations, as well as the relationship between these competencies and developmental capacity, I recommend further research including in-depth factor analysis of the distinct competencies themselves.

#### Claim Five: Participant Learning: Projection, Valence, and Role

The types of learning that the eighteen participants report as most significant and transformational were related to the experiences of projection and projective identification, the exploration of valence for particular socio-emotional roles in groups, and participants' ability to choose and take up new formal and informal roles. In some cases participants described "transformative" or "transformational" learning. While I do not maintain that their learning satisfies the specific criteria determined by Mezirow (1990, 2000), they clearly match the definition of transformational learning provided by Drago-Severson (2004a,b), in that their learning assisted them in better managing the complexities they faced in the conference. Regarding the participants' learning around projective processes, I identified a clear pattern of evolving capacity to identify, negotiate, and re-integrate projections according to participants' developmental action logic. This pattern indicated that the later the developmental action logic, the more capacity the participants described in being able to understand and manage these

processes with skillfulness and intention. Based on this fifth finding, I make the following claim.

In response to research questions 1a and 2 regarding the 18 participants' experience and learning in the GRC, and the relationship between the description of their learning and their developmental action logics, I conclude that the learning these participants found most significant related to the dynamics of projective processes, their valences to take on specific socio-emotional roles in groups, and their capacity to renegotiate those roles. Further, I conclude that on the basis of a clear pattern of evolving capacity with regard to the participant's ability to understand and manage projective processes, that there is a relationship between developmental capacity and the ability to understand and manage projective processes. Specifically, I conclude that the later the developmental action logic, the greater the capacity to understand and manage these processes.

#### Implications of Claim Five

This final claim has implications for Group Relations theory and practice. At present, there is no attention given in theory or practice to the way that understanding and negotiating projective processes may be linked to developmental capacity, let alone that there may be a learning curve that demands incremental experiential learning that helps people build from informational learning of projective processes to experiential and transformational learning about ways of effectively identifying, negotiating, and re-integrating projections. While I recommend that further study follow up and either verify, modify, or challenge this conclusion, I recommend that conference designers, directors,

and consultants explore the implications of this connection between developmental capacity and competency around projective processes.

Further, while the exploration of covert processes in groups and systems is at the core of Group Relations theory and the intention of GRC, I recommend that practitioners associated with the design, direction, and consultation of conferences place more explicit attention on the relationship between the learning that occurs around projection, valence, and role and their implications for the field of leadership.

#### Limitations of Claim Five and Recommendations for Research

In terms of adult development theory, the link between evolving cognitive and affective capacity and competency or skill development is well established (Hoare, 2006; Kegan, 1994; McCauley et al, 2006; Torbert, 2003, 2004). However, to my knowledge, there is no study that explores the relationship between developmental capacity and competence in identifying and negotiating projective processes. Since I did not conduct a study that explored this relationship in itself, I recommend that follow-up research with a larger sample and perhaps across multiple cases could reinforce, modify, or challenge this conclusion.

In this section to follow, I share my final reflections on what I learned through this research and how it may be valuable to my own practice.

## Epilogue

I attended my first Group Relations Conference in July 2002 and the experience was extraordinary. I had never experienced anything quite like it and it was to be a seminal event in my life. I recall being the first to speak in the opening plenary and thinking, rather ridiculously, that I was going somehow to emerge as the real leader of the conference. By the end, I was sitting in the closing session with my head down, holding the hand of the African-American woman sitting next to me, a woman with whom I had clashed in my small group, sobbing like a baby, repenting my ignorance, my arrogance, and my white privilege, hoping that I would come away from the conference having been changed, even recreated by my experience. I was upset because I felt like I had somehow failed in an important task by letting some over eager, ambitious part of myself take over in competition for attention and power. At the same time, however, I also felt that there was hope for me, and that though I may have just been broken by the experience, I had been broken open.

The learning around my own privilege as a white man and an ordained priest, and about the variety of traits that people projected on me, both positive and negative, was overwhelming. That learning would never have been so profound unless I had, in my own way, fallen back into defensive patterns and regressions that did not represent my best self. The conference provided a crucible of sorts, revealing my own fault lines and hypocrisy so that in knowing them, I could be more conscious and conscientious in the way that I related to these privileges and exercised my authority in various roles. Having conducted this research, and particularly in light of my interactions with the 18

participants in this study and many colleagues along the way, I know that I am clearly not alone in having had a profound learning experience at a Group Relations Conference and that it is an excellent setting for this kind of leadership learning to take place.

As I reflect on how I have been moved and influenced by my experience working with these 18 participants and the process of witnessing, analyzing, and interpreting what they shared with me, there are three dimensions of the research that I found to be most significant: 1) the inspiring degree to which regression (or fall-back) can lead to learning and even to what many participants identified as “transformation”; 2) the fact that people employ a breathtaking array of behaviors to support themselves in order that they can learn and lead in extraordinary (and potentially stressful) situations; and 3) the tremendous value to be found for personal growth and organizational growth by combining adult developmental models and experiential learning conferences such as the one I studied in this research.

During the 18 interviews I conducted in the two weeks that followed the conference in July 2007, I was impressed by the ways that person after person opened up to me about sometimes messy, embarrassing, and often very raw moments in the conference when the angels of their better natures were nowhere to be found. At particularly challenging moments, the participants gave in to anxieties, to their need for self-protection, and sometimes to crippling self-criticism. Even more so, I was moved by fact that these same experiences became the raw material for the participants’ insights into dimensions of group life that they never understood before, and in some cases, never knew existed. Their insights into the projective processes in groups and organizations, while seeing their own tendencies to take up particular and not always helpful or healthy

socio-emotional roles in groups, provided these 18 participants with a heightened awareness that they often described as liberating and transformative. I felt as though I was given the gift of witnessing that transformation unfolding in these participants' consciousnesses, and in some cases, in the ways in which that transformation was making a difference in their relationships and work lives after the conference was over. Sometimes, with the right conditions in place, breakdowns can lead to breakthroughs, as the saying goes.

While I have long been fascinated by the ways that some people manage to hold steady in the face of crises and lead with principle and purpose, despite the uncertainties and complexities they face, I was still impressed with the amazing number of ways that the participants described supporting themselves through the challenges of the conference. Perhaps the reason these adaptive self-scaffolds impressed me so much is that I have come to appreciate how much depends on a person's abilities to be fully present in heated—and often—chaotic moments within a group or organization. And in addition to being fully present, it is critical that leaders learn to act with awareness, intention, and care for the good of the whole. What I witnessed in these 18 participants was an evolving capacity to do just this, and what I realize now is that these self-scaffolds can be taught to others.

Finally, with regard to the importance of both the maps of growth, the descriptions of maturation provided by adult development theory, and of the value of the Group Relations Conferences for learning about the covert dimensions of group and organizational life, I came away from this study with renewed appreciation and new insight into the power of these two theories. In the wake of this research, I am more

convinced than ever that these theories of the ways we grow and make meaning as well as these unique spaces for experiential learning, are vital tools for understanding the complexities of life—both personally and within a group—and for fostering wise and effective leadership in society today. The theories of adult development provide lenses for seeing and appreciating individuals as they are and how they can be encouraged to be, as well as for understanding the supports and challenges necessary for helping them along the way. The Group Relations Conference provides a unique experiential learning environment where one can explore and come to grasp, if only for fleeting moments, the complexity, chaos, and beauty of living systems in action.

As an educator committed to helping generate conditions for the benefit of peoples' individual and collective well-being, I know that these two resources, both valuable in their own right, are filled with even greater potential when combined and explored together. Developmental diversity is a reality in every social enterprise, and without the combination of adult development theories and theories of social systems such as Group Relations theory, this diversity and all its implications for learning and growth might be missed. Furthermore, developmental diversity has implications beyond learning and growth. The variety of ways in which we perceive the world and make meaning depend on our developmental frame of reference. This influences every significant dimension of our human experience, particularly the way we engage, understand, and respond to the pressing organizational and social challenges of our times.

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## Appendix A

## LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Group Relations Conference Research

Dear prospective participant,

This invitation to be a participant in a research study is being extended to you because you have registered for the Group Relations Conference scheduled for July 13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> at USD. I am doctoral student in the Adult Learning and Leadership program at Teachers College, Columbia University and I am conducting this study for my dissertation, which will explore the relationship between participant's ways of making meaning, and their experience of the Group Relations Conference setting.

The study will entail the following: a 45 minute sentence completion form (completed at least 40 days prior to the conference); (*optional*) taking very brief journal entries about your experience at various points during the conference; a 90 minute interview within two weeks after the conference; and a 3-5 page post-conference reflection paper. All of this information would remain confidential, and would be disposed of or returned to you after the pilot study is completed. Upon request, I will make the results of the sentence completion available to you after I have completed the first phase of my data analysis.

What benefit might there be in being involved with such a study? People who have participated in studies like this report that it has enriched their learning after the experience, and provided insight into the research process. If you would be willing to be part of my study, I will also express my appreciation for your time and energy with a small gift.

If you are still interested, please make your interest clear to Ms. Beth Yemma at the Leadership Institute, USD. She will have an informed consent for you to sign. I will be present at the conference in the role of observer, and while participants may know who I am, I want to remain blind to their identity until after the conference is over. My intention in doing so is to help relieve participants of any anxiety about my presence. At the end of the conference, I would ask that if you are one of the volunteers, that you contact me so that we can confirm the schedule for our interview ([dcm2108@columbia.edu](mailto:dcm2108@columbia.edu)).

If you sign up for this study, Ms. Beth Yemma will communicate any relevant information to you. Thank you so much for your consideration!

Gratefully,

David McCallum

## Appendix B

### RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prospective Research Subject: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

#### The Researcher

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This pilot study is being conducted by the researcher, David McCallum, a doctoral candidate in the Adult Learning and Leadership Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. One important note: David will be present at the large group events of the conference as an observer, but in order not to distract you in your participation at the conference itself, he will not know who you are until after the conference is over. It would be helpful if you could introduce yourself to him after the final conference event has ended so that you can confirm the time and place of your interview. For the purposes of maintaining your confidentiality through the study, please direct your inquiries to Ms. Beth Yemma, the assistant director of the Leadership Institute, USD. She can be reached at (619) 460-7790; [byemma@sandiego.edu](mailto:byemma@sandiego.edu)

#### Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the pilot study is to explore the experience of participants at a Group Relations Conference. In particular, the study will explore how people with different styles of making meaning describe and understand their experience of the conference, including any learning that may take place.

The research questions guiding my study:

- 1a) How do 15-18 participants describe and understand their experience and their learning in the context of a Group Relations Conference?
- 1b) In particular, how do these 15- 18 participants describe and understand the internal and external supports and challenges available to them in the Group Relations Conference?
- 2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience and their assessed ways of making meaning?

#### Procedures

The study will include observation of the large group proceedings of the conference by the researcher, a 45 minute sentence completion form that will be used to help ascertain

the participants meaning making style, one ninety minute interview following the conference, (optional) brief journals kept by the participants during the conference experience, and a three to five page reflection paper describing your experience/learning.

To be more specific, you will be asked to:

- (optional) If it is your custom or habit to keep a journal, I will invite you to keep very brief journal notes during the conference. These notes, perhaps best kept after each event so as not to be a distraction, might include some description of your experience of the previous conference event, questions that arise for you about how you are making sense of your experience, and perhaps what resources you find yourself drawing upon to support your learning.
- Complete a brief electronic sentence completion form by at least 35 days before the conference is schedule to begin (45 minutes).
- Meet with the researcher after the conference at a mutually convenient time for a 90-minute interview. This interview will take place within seven to fourteen days of the conference.
- Write a three to five page reflection paper considering questions such as:
  - What aspects of the conference were most challenging for you?
  - What aspects of the conference felt most supportive to your learning?

### Risks

I do not anticipate any significant risks involved in this study, though I will work to minimize any potential discomfort you may feel, for instance, emotional vulnerability, as a result of your conference experience or the meaning that you are making of it.

### Rights

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and should you refuse to participate at any point, there will not be any penalty whatsoever. You also have a right to privacy. Your real name will not be used in any writing or presentations I do about this study. You have the right to access all audio recordings, transcripts, and to review, and potentially, withhold interview material (or portions of interviews).

### Possible Benefits

Group Relations Conference experiences are often described as potentially rich learning events that require thoughtful reflection and consideration after the fact. It is possible that through participation in this study, you will find the experience beneficial for enriching your learning from this event. Also, upon request, I will make the results of your sentence completion form available to you with explanation that you may find helpful. There will not be any financial remuneration for your participation, but you will receive a small gift from the researcher as token of his appreciation. The study is intended to benefit the researcher in his dissertation research.

### Confidentiality of Records

For your privacy, I will make up a different name for you in my writing, and your identifying characteristics will be disguised. No one but the researcher and his colleagues will have access to the information (sentence completion forms, digital recordings of interviews, transcriptions of interviews, journal notes). The only other person who will know of your participation in this study is Ms Beth Yemma, but she will not have access to any of the data generated by that participation.

Further, the interview will take place at a safe space designated by the participant, and the recording of the interview and the transcript will be kept in a safe place until after the study is completed, when that information will be destroyed or returned to you.

### Authorization

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information (phone # and email): \_\_\_\_\_

It is ok for the interview to be audio recorded Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

## OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Event: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Context

Supports

Challenges

Comment

## Appendix D

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Research Questions

1a) How do 15-18 participants describe and understand their experience and their learning in the context of a Group Relations Conference?

1b) In particular, how do 15-18 participants describe and understand the internal and external developmental supports and challenges available to them in this setting and the relationship between these supports and challenges and their learning?

2) What are the relationships (if any) between the participants' self-reports of their experience in this setting and their assessed ways of making meaning?

Interview

Welcome:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you know I am exploring the variety of ways that people make sense and potentially learn from their experience of participating in a Group Relations Conference.

I will limit my comments during the interview because I really want to hear what you have to tell me. However, if at any point you want more information or clarification on any point, please do not hesitate to ask.

With your permission, I will digitally record this interview. The purpose of the recording is two-fold: first, so that I can accurately capture what you share; and second, so that I do not have to write extensive notes, which will allow me to fully listen to what you are telling me. I may jot some notes down here and there just simply as reminders to myself. The recording will remain confidential. Only fellow researchers and myself will have access to the tape. After the interview is over, I will have the tape transcribed and will forward it to you so that you can review it for accuracy.

As I continue to go further with the interviews and analyze the data, with your permission, I would like to contact you for clarification and /or to ask additional questions that may arise in later interviews.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you have any need for clarification on anything that has been said?

If you have any questions at any time please ask me.

Interview:

### Warm Ups

How was your travel getting here?

Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable?

When you first got the invitation to participate in this study, what came to your mind?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Intention of Interview

I just wanted to remind you that the purpose of this study is to explore the variety of ways that people make sense of and learn from their participation in the Group Relation Conference.

### Interview Questions

1. Before the conference, were you consciously aware of any growing edges that you wanted to explore in the conference?

Did you have any intentions or expectations about what the conference might be like?

How would you describe any assumptions you brought into the conference about the ways that you are when in groups?

2. What stands out for you as you reflect on your experience of the conference?

Can you say more? What thoughts and feelings come to mind? What stands out for you? An event? A personal interaction? Something at the group level?

What, if any, questions did your experience of the conference raise for you? How, if at all, have these questions led you to any insights?

3) What did you find most challenging about the conference?

What happened? What was it about that experience that was most challenging? Have you experienced anything like this before? What thoughts and feelings did this challenge provoke in you? What questions, if any, did this challenge raise for you? Did this experience challenge any assumptions that you have about X,Y,Z? How did you respond?

What if anything was challenging about your experience of the structure of the conference? The group dynamics? The staff's consultations? Your own personal limits?

4) Generally speaking, in your daily life, what do you find most helpful for supporting your learning and growth?

How, if at all, did you experience support for your learning in the conference setting? What aspects of the conference would you describe as supportive? What if anything was supportive about your experience of the structure of the conference? The group dynamics? The staff's consultations? Your own personal abilities? How so?

What, if anything, did you experience as unsupportive for your learning? Can you tell me more about this? How might you have wanted to be supported differently?

What are some of the ways you support yourself when facing such situations? If you experienced an absence of a felt sense of support in the conference, how did you deal with this?

If you were someone else, a peer or a colleague, witnessing you in action at the conference, how would you describe yourself?

5) As you reflect on your conference experience, what sorts of things would you say you learned?

How, if at all, are you different after your experience of the conference? If you did experience a change, how do you account for the way this change took place?

What, if any, perspectives did you bring into the conference? How, if at all, were these perspectives affected by your experience? What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about other participants? What did you learn about groups?

What did you learn regarding the theme of the conference?

How were you surprised in any way during the conference? What, if anything was most rewarding or valuable about your experience?

Conclusion:

I want to thank you for your generosity of time, for your insights, for your openness.  
Before we end...

Is there anything I have not asked you that I should?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

How was this experience for you? What was your experience of having me in the large group environment as an observer? Is there anything that would have been more helpful for your experience as a participant in this study?

## Appendix E

## TEXT FROM BROCHURE FOR USD JULY CONFERENCE

## LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

ONE World ONE Spirit:

Encountering Leadership, Freedom, Authority and  
Accountability in Organizational Systems

A 3-day Group Relations Conference

University of San Diego

Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice

Fri, July 13, 2007 9:00 am – 9:30 pm

Sat, July 14, 2007 9:00 am – 9:30 pm

Sun, July 15, 2007 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Co-sponsored by the

National Alliance of Professional Psychology Providers in Association with GREX, West Coast Center for the Study of Group Relations; Steinhardt School of Education, New York University; Teachers College, Columbia University.

## AN OPPORTUNITY TO

- \* Experience and learn about the challenges of leadership.
- \* Create conditions supportive of authentic conversation with family members, co-workers, suppliers, business partners, etc.
- \* Become more aware of your own assumptions about power, authority, responsibility, role, and the way things are ‘supposed’ to be done.
- \* Experiment with deeper awareness and ways of knowing.
- \* Work ‘in-the-moment’ and continue to think clearly even when facts are unclear and circumstances are changing.

## CHANGE

Most serious problems that we face in life, whether personal or political, arise because some fundamental aspect of our world changes. On some level we know that truly solving them will require “letting go” of familiar ways of seeing, interpreting, and acting that we have come to rely on because they served us so well in the past. Many of these “habits of mind and heart” are implicit and unconscious, so we are not even aware of them until the security and predictability they once provided is threatened. If we try to cling to the old patterns, we often end up blaming others—especially those in authority—for the pain we feel. Deep change is possible only if we are able to look at ourselves in the clearest possible mirror, hold the tension that will likely arise, and try to enlarge our awareness of the illusions about ourselves and the world that have brought us to this point

of crisis. Since culture is a human creation, whose deformations begin not “out there” but in our inner lives, we can transform organizations and societies only as our inner souls are transformed.

## AWARENESS

Unconsciously we often superimpose assumptions and opinions formed by past experience onto the present. As a result we mostly see and hear only what we expected, and discover little that is new. Conversations during business meetings and among family members, for example, often play out as repetitive patterns of interaction between different (but familiar) points of view. Accessing a deeper level of awareness by suspending habitual patterns and changing the quality of our attention from looking for something to co-creating experience can almost instantly transform such exchanges. New patterns of perceiving, relating, connecting, knowing and discovering begin to emerge. Actions happen more spontaneously; and decisions are usually more compassionate because they are based on more than our own perspective. And, they frequently turn out to be shockingly more effective than those that emerge from more methodical planning processes!

## LEADERSHIP

Not only does expanded awareness enrich our effectiveness, but it is also associated with greater spirit, energy, health, intimacy, patience, perseverance, creativity and innovation (Scharmer, et al., 2000). In this context, we can think of leadership as an activity that promotes “life-enhancing” awareness in group members, which in turn enables them to creatively address new types of challenges and make the needed changes that will ultimately improve the quality of life.

Leaders, therefore, must be able to spot and speak to old “mental models”—habitual patterns of thinking, speaking and acting that often sabotage a group’s effort to find what it is seeking. This requires creating (or allowing) the kind of social space that encourages individuals to “switch channels” and access their own deepest source(s) of knowing. This can take time, however, and group members sometimes become impatient. Uncomfortable with holding the tension, they want to “get on with it,” and thereby attempt to resolve things prematurely before new possibilities have had a chance to open up. While quick decisions may appear to be straightforward and efficient, they often alienate certain factions of the group who leave determined to conduct a long-term guerilla war to undermine the decision. Those who would exercise leadership, therefore, must learn to cultivate an instinct for holding steady -- remaining aware, clear-headed and attuned to purpose—when tension or frustration tempts the group to fall back on the “same old way” of doing things, even though circumstances have changed.

## DESIGNED FOR

Thoughtful people who want to make a significant contribution to their organization, profession, or society and who understand that genuine change usually involves deep learning—paying attention, letting go of old expectations, and making new choices.

- \* Managers and executives in private, public or non-profit organizations
- \* Organizational Consultants
- \* Educators
- \* Clergy
- \* Mental health professionals
- \* Graduate students in management, public administration, education, public health, and the social sciences, who wish to improve their understanding and practice of leadership and authority.

## LEARN TO

- \* Manage rapidly evolving events without a prescribed plan.
- \* Fully engage by developing a curious and exploratory attitude.
- \* Resist the gravitational pull of conventional culture to “fix” situations and “save” others.
- \* Ask difficult questions that invite others to consider the subtext of conversations—to explore what is not being said, but is nevertheless present—while simultaneously managing the anxiety this process can trigger in us and in others.
- \* Cultivate habits of listening and speaking that model alternative ways of dealing with uncertainty, tension and conflict.
- \* Take “risks of love” by holding tension in a more undefended, heart-opening way

## LEARNING ON THE EDGE

Every facet of this conference is experiential and is purposely designed to promote dynamic interchange and shared learning among a group of diverse peers. The program doesn't teach answers to specific problems. Rather, it provides a social ‘laboratory’ for exploring the dynamics of power, leadership, authority, change and transformation as they actually arise and unfold during the conference. Participants are exposed to a method of ‘reflection-in-action’ that utilizes both the intellect and emotions and can reveal profound truths, such as:

- \* Many of our (re)actions are driven by beliefs and patterns of thinking that lie beyond our immediate level of awareness.
- \* We have become so accustomed to ‘doing something/anything’ to fix problems that we lack the flexibility to simply let something ‘be’ until we can understand it better.
- \* Authentic problem solving begins with being prepared to examine our own lived experience.
- \* Control is the problem, not the solution.

This way of learning may require giving up what we think we know—allowing ourselves to experience uncertainty—in order to make space for new thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. Benefiting from it requires a willingness to surface and examine elements of personal identity and history that influence the ways we think about leadership, relate to authority, manage boundaries, respond to criticism, and handle conflict.

## ATTENDANCE

The Conference-as-a-whole is designed to be a single integrated educational experience. Individuals who know in advance that they are unable to attend all sessions are discouraged from applying. Attendance at all events, including pre-and-post conference meetings, is required for the award of graduate or continuing education credit. An orientation designed to provide more conceptual background for the Conference will be held the previous week (TBA) from 6pm – 9pm. All members of the Conference are welcome to attend if they wish; students taking the conference for graduate credit must attend this session. To receive graduate credit, students must also attend a debriefing session after the conference (TBA) from 6pm – 9pm.

### Special Note:

The conference is an educational endeavor and does not provide psychotherapy or sensitivity training. Although the experiential learning available in this conference can be stimulating and enriching, it can be emotionally demanding as well. Thus, potential applicants who are ill or experiencing significant personal difficulties should forego participating in this conference and, perhaps, plan on attending one at a future date.

## CREDIT

The University of San Diego awards 3 credits for graduate students enrolled in this conference. Students taking the conference for credit are required to attend separate orientation and debriefing sessions and to complete readings and written assignments. For required and recommended readings, consult the Syllabus for EDLD 551 or EDLD 585. In addition to completing the online registration form at <http://leadership.sandiego.edu>, students seeking USD graduate credit must follow formal registration procedures specified by the University to enroll in either EDLD 551: Human Relations for Leaders, or EDLD 585: Leadership for Change.

The conference is approved by the American Psychological Association to award 21 continuing education credits to psychologists through our co-sponsor, The National Alliance of Professional Psychology Providers (NAPPP). Other professions for which CE's have been granted include social work, and marriage and family therapists, but we do encourage you to check with your licensure provider about your eligibility to accumulate the said credit. NAPPP maintains responsibility for the content of the program. Continuing Education is awarded for those professionals who attend all sessions of the conference. A daily sign-in and sign-out is required along with a brief post-conference evaluation. Please check with Beth Yemma ([leadership@SanDiego.edu](mailto:leadership@SanDiego.edu)), in advance of the conference if you seek CE's. For further information, or to reserve a space

for the conference, you may register at <http://leadership.sandiego.edu>. If you have questions, please contact Beth Yemma in the Leadership Institute at (619) 260-7790 or e-mail [leadership@SanDiego.edu](mailto:leadership@SanDiego.edu).

## REGISTRATION

Registration will begin in late March. Early registration is strongly encouraged due to limited space for this popular workshop. ALL PARTICIPANTS, regardless of whether you are taking the conference for graduate credit or on a non-credit basis, need to complete the Conference Registration Form at <http://leadership.sandiego.edu>.

## RESEARCH

Conference events include a few research activities that facilitate participants' reflection on their perceptions of leadership and on the conference itself. These activities are done anonymously and reports of the research refer only to groups, not to individuals. The research activities are planned to enrich the conference experience for everyone. However, your participation is completely voluntary, and your decision whether or not to take part in the research will not affect your treatment as a conference member or student in any way.

Registration to begin in late March.

Registration Deadline: Wednesday, July 11 at Noon.

## Appendix F

## THE SCTI SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST

(Please note: formatting is different for electronic form)

Professional Sentence  
Completion Form SCTi-MAP

© scg web 2006

Dr. Susanne Cook-Greuter

Assessment and Coaching  
for Personal and Professional  
Excellence and Well-Being

The Leadership Maturity Framework (LMF) refines and expands Loevinger's Ego Development Theory. The LMF integrates Bill Torbert's model of Personal and Organizational Transformation with Susanne Cook-Greuter's ongoing research in Adult Development and the assessment of personal maturity and transformational leadership capacity.

Certified scorers analyze your responses to this form in multiple ways. They then create your unique Leadership Development Profile. The SCTi-MAP identifies your center of gravity or action logic within The Leadership Maturity Framework. This is the level from which you habitually make sense of your experience and the world. The profile points to your unique strengths and vulnerabilities, your likely fallback positions as well as your areas of greatest challenge and potential for growth and personal transformation.

The SCTi-MAP is the most highly validated and reliable of existing, developmental assessments.

Unlike other measures, the SCTi-MAP makes powerful and subtle distinctions at the high-end of the developmental spiral.

#### Directions for completion

\* The following three pages contain thirty-six sentence beginnings of various kinds. Please just finish each sentence. There are no right or wrong answers.

\* Allow yourself at most forty-five minutes of private time to finish the form at one sitting.

\* After each response, use the tab key or cursor to move to the next form field.

\* This document will be treated with the highest confidentiality. Please respond spontaneously and honestly.

\* Make sure that your contact information is completed on this page and that your initials and date of completion (but not your name) are entered on all other pages.

\* Please save the form and your responses on your system. When finished, return a copy of your test as an email attachment to:

MAP@Cook-Greuter.com

Your details for return of the profile packet

Name

Position

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone

Cell

Email

First language

Please provide the following data for ongoing research and development of this instrument. Thank you.

Your gender Your age Education (highest degree)

Your Initials                  Date

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Raising a family                 |
| 2 | When I'm criticized              |
| 3 | Change is                        |
| 4 | A man's job                      |
| 5 | Being with other people          |
| 6 | The thing I like about myself is |

- 7 My mother and I
- 8 What gets me into trouble is
- 9 Education
- 10 When people are helpless
- 11 Women are lucky because
- 12 A good boss
- 13 A girl has a right to
- 14 The past
- 15 When they talked about sex, I
- 16 I feel sorry
- 17 When they avoided me
- 18 Rules are
- 19 Crime and delinquency could be halted if
- 20 Men are lucky because
- 21 I just can't stand people who
- 22 At times s/he worried about "S/he" should be read as "she" by women, "he" by men
- 23 I am
- 24 If I had more money
- 25 My main problem is
- 26 When I get mad
- 27 People who step out of line at work
- 28 A husband has a right to

- 29 If my mother
- 30 If I were in charge
- 31 My father
- 32 If I can't get what I want
- 33 When I am nervous
- 34 For a woman a career is
- 35 My conscience bothers me if
- 36 Sometimes s/he wished that S/he" should be read as "she" by women, "he" by men

## Appendix G

## SCTI MAP SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST CONTINUED

The instrument<sup>31</sup>

The current professional LDP/SCTi has 36 sentence stems printed on two and a half pages. It has minimal instructions: “I would like you to fill out this sentence completion form. You see that these are incomplete sentences. Please complete each sentence in the space provided to the best of your ability.” The recommended time allotment is between 30 and 45 minutes.

The LDP/SCTi is currently administered in several forms:

- 1) The best practice for rigorous research is to administer the test in a group setting which guarantees that the time limit is respected and that no other people are involved in producing the completions,
- 2) However, given Internet technology, individual clients often use an electronic form. It can be downloaded, filled in by using the tab key and writing responses in the given space. Finally, the test can be emailed back as an attachment. A benefit for research of this method of data gathering is that the data is already in computer readable form and does not need to be transcribed. The disadvantage is that the researcher has no control over whether the participant follows the instructions or not.
- 3) The SCTi is also occasionally given orally or by phone in research with populations who are unable to use either of the two other formats or because they are illiterate or infirm.

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<sup>31</sup> The description of the LDP/SCTi is taken from the scoring manual by Susann Cook-Greuter (2006)

- 4) The LDP/SCTi is unisex. It has manuals for all items. Sometimes, two separate but identical forms are administered except for the pronouns he or she are used depending on whether the test taker is male or female. The unisex form can split in half for pre-post test purposes.

#### Scoring manuals

Original manuals were based on protocols of about 1200 women, half used for the construction phase, half used for refinement and development of the measuring tool. The current manual is based on thousands more and updated to reflect current sentiments and conventional beliefs. The high-end stages and criteria are based on an additional sample of 4500 protocols. Occasionally, Dr. Cook Greuter adds new stems, although the development of manuals for new stems is extremely difficult and time consuming.

#### Special forms and instructions

The form developed by Torbert and Cook Greuter in 1984 was geared toward adults working in organizations, and they now recommend the 36 item form in all professional contexts for statistical reasons. With simpler instructions, post conventional subjects often respond from a conventional, functional point of view, not from their most complex level of understanding or making meaning. Therefore, slightly modified instructions are helpful in some contexts: "Finish these sentences to the best of your understanding or to the best of you ability." This is meant to signal to individuals to go beyond merely cursory or functional replies.

