

# STAR TREK

## A Developmental Analysis of a Star Trek Episode, 1995

(original version in Fisher and Torbert,  
*Personal and Organizational Transformations*)

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Let us follow along closely as an organizing experience on a small scale evolves developmentally from **Conception** through **Investments, Incorporation, Experiments, Systematic Productivity, Collaborative Inquiry** toward **Foundational Community**.

We say that this is a small-scale organizing experience because there are only two principal players and the action occurs over a very short period of time. But their experience influences other members of the organization and raises profound questions about the relationships between superiors and subordinates, between men and women, and between working and loving. As these two players come closer to establishing a Community of Inquiry between themselves, they generate political friction between themselves and other members of the organization, just as the theory predicts.

The organization of which this man and this woman are members was arguably the most widely and closely observed organization in the world during the early 1990s and still draws new viewers. Like Alcoholics Anonymous, the Jesuits, or the Beatles, this organization does not coerce the wide range of people it influences; rather, they seek its influence and can cease attending whenever they wish. To be more specific, we are speaking of the senior management team of the crew of the Starship Enterprise in the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* television series.

We describe here a particular one-hour episode of the show, in which the principal players are the captain of the Enterprise, Jean Luc Picard, and a new Lieutenant Commander of Stellar Cartography, Nella Daren. Captain Picard is, as many of you readers know, a classic male, executive hero - reserved, inventive, trustworthy, stern. Commander Daren is an initiating, attractive, determined, and possibly insubordinate officer, as we quickly infer upon first meeting her during the initial sequence of the episode.

But before launching into this story of the captain and the commander, and before highlighting the distinctive developmental action-logics of their relationship, let us take a moment to justify why we are presenting this analysis of a fictional story instead of a contemporary business case. One reason is to emphasize that in acting toward the future, each of us is guided by a vision which, however conventional it may be, is also, in all its concrete aspects and in its point of view, fictional.

Points of view are constructions of our imagination, hence fictional (fiction comes from the Latin *fictio*-‘to shape’, *fictus*-‘molded’). *We shape our own points of view* in interaction with the communities to which we belong, though we only begin to become

aware **that** we do so... and **how** we do so... as we evolve beyond the **Achiever / Systematic Productivity** stage of development.

The more we become aware of the fictional aspect of our vision or religious faith, the more we can distinguish its 'essential' features (i.e. its theoretical/arche-typal/eternal features) from its 'accidental' features and from its 'intended' (by us) features. The more we can suffer these differences between the intentional, the archetypal, and the accidental features of our vision, the more we can be flexible enough to allow such accidental features to drop away, as well as alert enough to move among eternal patterns according to our own intention rather than passively and imitatively.

A second reason for this fictional story is to emphasize how fiction communicates truths, for it does so in a much more lifelike way than does social science writing as it is currently usually practiced. Fictional writing or film-making, at its best, asks us to enjoy and be enchanted by the specifics of the artfulness of the story... while simultaneously remembering that it is "just" a story. Remembering that it is just a story helps us to detach ourselves from it and see through it and ourselves to its hidden lessons for us and our lives. Moreover, the fact that the authors of the Star Trek story are almost certain to have been oblivious to adult and organization development theory is some evidence for the fact developmental theory is itself an archetypal kind of story.

Let us see, now, how developmental theory helps us reconstruct the following Star Trek episode.

### **Conception**

The Star Trek episode begins at 3 a.m. with Captain Picard repeatedly being frustrated in his attempts to get both information and tea from the ship's systems. The ship's computer repeatedly tells him, "Stellar Cartography is using all auxiliary power at the present time." He decides to find out what is going on in Stellar Cartography, and walks in on a darkened room where an experiment is in progress.

"In or out! Just close the door!" brusquely hisses the woman we will learn is Commander Daren. But the experiment has already been unbalanced by the interruption and fails. The lights go up, and Commander Daren turns on the intruder, only to be brought up short as she recognizes that it is the captain. She apologizes for her brusqueness and says she hadn't expected anyone at this time of night. Captain Picard advises her to learn to "expect the unexpected" on board the Enterprise - Alchemist-like advice indeed.

When he says that he was prevented from getting his Earl Grey tea, she responds in a rather motherly way, "No wonder you can't sleep if you're drinking caffeine. Try some of my special blend." His restrained facial expression as he tastes the tea tells us that he does not like this blend; but he asks what experiment she has been doing. She begins talking in some detail about her attempt to model the birth of a star system... And we fade into a commercial break.

In these opening scenes, we are shown several versions of the Conception stage of organizing:

- 1) a new officer learning a new (to her) organization's culture;
- 2) the not-particularly-propitious beginning of a relationship between Captain and Commander;

- 3) the beginning of a study of the beginning of star systems; and
- 4) the vision of the interplay of opposites captured in the phrase “expect the unexpected.”

In showing this episode to several audiences, we have found that a number of viewers believe that Commander Daren has gotten off to a very bad start in her relationship to her boss, in snapping at him to begin with, in ‘matron’izing him next, and third in boring him with her intellectual excitement about her research. Others, however, suggest that her overall ‘enterprise’ may seem admirable to the captain. Either outcome seems plausible. Our allegiance to developmental theory suggests to us that the captain’s developmental perspective will determine the actual outcome. Will he react negatively to the “insubordinate” aspects of her behavior, or positively to the independent, motivated, peer-like aspects of her behavior?

### **Investments**

After the commercial break, we first see the second in command, Will Reiker, refusing Commander Daren’s request for use of auxiliary power the next day. She attempts to continue the discussion, but he ends it with “No! That is all, Commander Daren.”

Next, we see Captain Picard at dinner in his quarters with his old friend, the ship’s doctor, Beverly Crusher. He asks whether she has met the new crew members, then mentions that he has met Commander Daren. Beverly signals her approval of the new lieutenant commander, whom she has also met briefly, by calling her “Forthright,” accompanied by clenching her fist and lower arm in a small and amusingly androgynous gesture of strength. This is all the support Picard needs to become more voluble than usual and to begin to bore Beverly with a mathematical description of the birth of star systems.

But they are late for a concert which features Data, the ‘android,’ playing the violin, and Nella Daren at the piano. A music lover himself, Captain Picard is clearly bewitched by her playing, to the approving smile of the observant ‘witch’ sitting behind him - ship’s Counselor (and empath), Deena Troy.

During the after-party, the captain and Commander Daren talk, the captain complimenting her on her playing by commenting on a particular choice of notes and emphases, in a way that shows he is a connoisseur, and by saying he hadn’t known she could play the piano. “On the Enterprise,” she replies, mimicking his earlier comment, “you’ll come to expect the unexpected!”

With the second commercial break, we recognize that we have witnessed the Investments stage of this story. Commander Daren shows her investment in her research project by championing it to Commander Reiker. Other women senior managers - Dr. Crusher and Counselor Troy - show their investment in Commander Daren as a competent, creative, forthright addition to the leadership group. Captain Picard shows his budding investment in Commander Daren by his vulnerability to her sophisticated ‘charms’ - her mathematical theory and her musical practice. And she in effect invites him, in a somewhat competitive way, toward a vision of a peer relationship when she one-ups him for having one-upped her earlier.

The audiences who have viewed this segment with us have added two further impressions. First, some viewers see Commander Daren’s gesture of one-upping the captain as dangerous for her, or as hostile and inflammatory. They themselves seem to be becoming increasingly invested, as they watch the show with these discussion breaks, in a negative interpretation of her actions and her attitude toward an authority figure. This is their fiction about the fiction. Similarly but conversely, we have found ourselves becoming increasingly committed to a positive interpretation of her interesting brew of gumption, competence, and artistry, which is our fiction about this fiction.

A number of women viewers of this segment have expressed delight at:

- 1) the images of feminine solidarity (the generosity and lack of competitiveness in Dr. Crusher's and Counselor Troy's responses to Commander Daren);
- 2) the feminine practice of artistic power (the aforementioned gestures, along with Daren's piano playing); and
- 3) the artistic subtlety with which the show conveys these artistic subtleties (Dr. Crusher's small but highly evocative arm gesture; Counselor Troy's faint background smile [which it turns out many of the men in the audience did not see because they were concentrating exclusively on Picard in the foreground {no soft, action inquiry focus there!}]).

### **Incorporation**

The third segment of the Star Trek episode begins with Commander Reiker again refusing a request by Commander Daren. He clearly feels she is acting too pushy, just as a proportion of the show's audience does.

This interpretation seems about to be confirmed when Captain Picard hears the door buzzer to his private quarters, and it is Commander Daren who enters. Perhaps, we imagine, she is about to "go over Reiker's head." Picard puts down the small 'Ressican' flute which he taught himself to play during a twenty-five minute lifetime on that planet (which regular viewers know from another episode).

She asks him to play it for her, but he is shy and refuses. Undaunted, she asks if she may try it, and he politely agrees. As she (cooly?) begins attempting the fingering, he fumblingly tries to explain to her and then takes back the flute to show her... and is soon playing.

Now, she becomes a proud-teacher-acting-like-peer, congratulating him on his playing. Her praise draws from him an innocently joyful grin such as his regular viewers have never before seen or imagined possible. It is as if he were looking into the sun, having a 'close encounter of the third kind.'

Then, producing a futuristic, roll-up piano from her purse, she proceeds to lead them in improvising on the French children's song, "Frere Jacques, frere Jacques; dormez vous? dormez vous?" Picard whistles, glowing and gleaming, until the picture fades for the next commercial break.

The segment we are now discussing can be interpreted as an Incorporation stage segment in the simple sense that it is the first time that Captain Picard and Commander Daren actually do something together - they play music.

A second sense in which this third stage of the story represents its Incorporation is that, just as the third point defines the plane of a portrait, so this third point or stage in the story defines its overall archetypal character for us. Here we have a promising subordinate, a woman of genius, who is 'outside the box' for her immediate, bureaucratic organizational superior (Commander Reiker), but is simultaneously attracting the attention of his superior (Captain Picard). Put simply, we have here a budding, subconscious work/love triangle. In more complex terms, this triangle can be interpreted as an archetypal triangular tension in spiritual development between following the rules (i.e. obeying Reiker) and engaging directly, through one's own initiative, with the source of power (represented by the musical interplay between herself and Picard).

Such, ever, is the story of spiritual development, especially as retold in the Gnostic, Sufi, and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions. In the Gnostic version, for example, humans host and nurture an embryonic spark of light (the feminine subordinate). This spark of light grows through contact – not with the religions dedicated to the Yahweh-type “enforcer” gods of this sector of the universe who are believed, in the Gnostic version, to be keeping us enslaved in relative darkness (the Commander Reikers!) – but rather with their superiors (the Captain Picards of the celestial hierarchy).

In terms of the developmental archetypes, Commander Reiker can be seen as a typical Achievement Oriented COO, trying to get the job done and not play favorites. Captain Picard represents an Ironist CEO, accustomed to wearing an objective, impartial, and impenetrable mask of command, but able to doff it when he comes face to face with, and is properly challenged in a playful manner by, a true peer such as a Strategist-and-at-least-aspiring-Witch/Alchemist, as Commander Daren apparently feels herself to be with anyone, whether Reiker-like or Picard-like.

Again, part of the audience responds to Commander Daren’s leaderly and supportive comments about Captain Picard’s flute playing as ‘matron’izing. They are more than ever irritated by her and speak of her as competitive and scheming. The fact that she has not actually asked Picard to override Reiker strikes these viewers as evidence of the subtlety of her manipulateness. We see how easy it is to find reinforcement for our own story as we move deeper into a particular event.

### **Experiments**

In the next episode we find Commander Daren leading the way up ladders, with Captain Picard following, to an obscure intersection of tubes in the bowels of the ship. When they reach her chosen spot, she asks him if he knows where they are. He answers with the technical coordinates of the intersection, but she says, “No, we are at the most acoustically perfect spot on this ship.” They then take turns playing some extremely resonant and passionate music, his coming from his Ressian lifetime. She is truly moved. Her husky, passionate voice emerges and breaks as she tells him, “That’s beautiful. I’ve never heard you play with such feeling.”

Meanwhile, other crew members hear ghostly sounds of unusual music faintly reaching their ears; but when they begin to investigate, they can no longer hear anything. When the camera returns to Picard and Daren, they are engaged in a long embrace and kiss. This is definitely way outside the box for the entire series. Captain Picard in love?! What can this portend? Time for another commercial break.

This scene has many Experiments stage qualities. The twosome is experimenting with music making and love making. In ‘getting involved’ with one another, they are exploring beyond the conventional wisdom about how superiors and subordinates ought to relate in professional settings. And she, not he, is clearly taking the lead.

Some viewers immediately conclude that this experimenting is unwise in principle, for all the conventional reasons. Others are delighted by the “cracks” in Captain Picard’s loner facade and take the relativistic perspective that “anything goes” in love and war. But the developmentally oriented viewer sees the timing of these moves as critical and as propitious, given the developmental ‘moment’ of the relationship. Such a viewer also realizes that the couple is moving at a rapid developmental pace and is “asking for trouble” - that is, asking for the even more difficult balancing acts that each successive developmental action-logic mandates.

### **Systematic Productivity or Collaborative Inquiry?**

For, let us not forget, in the midst of the magic of this love making, who the real boss is! As the next scene opens, Picard and Daren are taking the ship’s elevator along with other crew members. She says in an informal and friendly voice “I’ll be finished with my survey at 11 hundred hours.” To which he

responds in his flattest, most formal voice, “Very good, Commander” and steps off the lift without looking her way as the door opens. Is this appropriate etiquette in public, so as not to show favoritism, or is it a betrayal of their budding friendship?

Are we back in the Systematic Productivity mode, with its impersonal, hierarchical ranks, the mode that almost always appears dominant in any large organization when observed over short interactions? Or is there a way to evolve beyond this mode without altogether destroying its code and its discipline?

We next see Captain Picard himself struggling with these questions, with the help of Counselor Troy. “Relations with co-workers can be fraught with consequences,” Picard pontificates, having difficulty even naming the situation for which he is seeking her counsel.

“So can cutting yourself off from your own feelings,” she counters pointedly.

“I’m afraid of compromising my objectivity,” says he.

“Are you asking my permission to conduct a friendship with Nella Daren?” asks she, in an amused but unthreatening tone.

Now he lightens a little for the first time: “And if I were asking your permission, would you grant it?”

She pauses and smiles, “Yes.”

This is, of course, not the end, but at best the beginning, of a Collaborative Inquiry that must engage not only the couple itself, but the other significant stakeholders in this couple’s destiny if it is to be negotiated successfully. At minimum, these stakeholders include the senior management team that operates - in bureaucratic, military, Systematic Productivity terms - between the captain and the lieutenant commander. Counselor Troy has signed up for Collaborative Inquiry. Will anyone else? Will Will Reiker?

As this segment continues, we see Picard reentering the Stellar Cartography laboratory (recapitulating the beginning of their relationship) to apologize to Commander Daren. “Nella?”

“Can I help you, sir” she answers flatly, again mimicking a recent gesture of his.

But he continues, and we soon find them back in his cabin and him with tears in his eyes as he tells her how much his Ressian life and music mean to him and how precious it is for him to find someone with whom to so actively share it. So, now they are launched into their own private Collaborative Inquiry.

But what of their relations to the rest of the senior management team - Commander Reiker, in particular - not to mention that large part of their audience that may feel extraordinarily uncomfortable with, and even censorious of, their conduct? After all, they appear to be collapsing the distinctions that order modern life, between work and love, between the rational and the emotional, between the professional and the personal.

The following scene addresses this question. Commander Reiker has asked for a few moments of the captain’s time. He is uncomfortable with Commander Daren’s assertive conduct on behalf of her department’s interests. Picard sees his worst fears already coming true - fears about personality conflicts growing out of the perception of illegitimately interwoven personal and professional relationships. But he does not simply defend himself, nor does he conclude that he ought to discontinue the relationship.

“Do you feel that her requests are inconsistent with the proper performance of her duty as chief of Stellar Cartography?” he asks. Reiker pauses, and to his immense credit, fairly computes his answer: “No, sir.”

“Then let her do her job, and you do yours,” replies Picard, “I’ve always had the greatest confidence in your judgment.” With this response, he catches both the highest Systematic Productivity wisdom relevant to the situation, and then, with his fulsome compliment, includes Reiker in the Collaborative Inquiry now underway.

But Daren herself is assailed by doubts when she rehears the story about Reiker, along with the moral that Picard draws from it that they must conduct themselves with great care in public. “I don’t like to have to second-guess others,” she says, in an Achievement Oriented, none-of-that-process-stuff mode, “It can take my mind off what I am trying to do.” “No, don’t let it do that,” responds Picard, “just add in the possible effects that you may have as you think and act.” Thus does Picard recommend Alchemist-like simultaneous awareness of intentions, thoughts, actions, and effects to Daren.

So goes Collaborative Inquiry - two steps forward, one step back; slide to the side and twirl about. Are we acting more deliberately or more spontaneously? What logic are we enacting? Where is the source of our spontaneity?

### **Foundational Community**

After the next commercial interruption, we near the climax of the episode. On the planet below them, there is a firestorm approaching the outpost they are trying to evacuate. Commander Daren is now sitting with the senior team, brainstorming a solution. She makes a tentative suggestion for how to create a firewall that Geordie, the Chief Engineer, is quickly able to technologize. Picard accepts the strategy and turns to Reiker for the implementation plan. Reiker assigns everyone, with Daren assigned to the on-planet away-team.

Now it is Picard’s turn to strain against the Systematic Productivity logic of the situation, fearing for Daren’s safety. He asks Commander Daren to remain after the meeting, but she quickly asserts that the assignment is justified and parts.

In fact, as we were beginning to expect, based on our use of the developmental lens, the transition from the Strategic-Systems Oriented/ Collaborative Inquiry logic to the Alchemist/ Foundational Community logic dictates that the relationship must die and be reborn, in both actual and mythical terms. The firestorm rages out of control, despite the firewall. Most of the persons on the planet surface are successfully evacuated, but when Reiker beams back up, he is forced to report to the captain that the last two groups of crew members, including Commander Daren, appear lost to the fire.

We see a stunned and infinitely heavy Captain Picard in his quarters, walking with meditative dignity and sitting, having shut, with finality, the box that contains his Ressian flute. We can feel the irretrievable loss that this fine man feels - this man who had never hoped for such a love, but had then seemed to find it, only to lose it.

The intercom sounds, announcing that a few more survivors are beaming on board. Picard rises, knowing that he must not hope, yet, unable not to, already preparing himself for further disappointment. The crew members who arrive do not include Commander Daren. Again crushed, he turns away with unbearable dignity. Then, as he turns, a final twosome arrives: Daren holding a more seriously injured subordinate.

We next see her speaking to him in his ‘ready room,’ grieving for the crew members lost. Each shares how s/he felt during the crisis, and Picard says that he can never again give a command that risks her life. A wonderful sentiment, but one that, in its conventional dichotomization of work and love, misses an essential element of the Community of Inquiry they have just been enacting. Put differently, instead of describing how vulnerable he feels about her and what a dilemma that creates for him as her superior

officer, Picard tells her how he will act to reduce his and her vulnerability, without inquiring into her view. Thus, he is espousing making her safe and he is enacting making himself safe.

But in creating a Community of Inquiry there is no safe haven. A Community of Inquiry is a cross-gendered, cross-generational, cross-cultural community through which we wager our lives on behalf of integrating work, love, and frame-challenging inquiry. Nor is creating a Community of Inquiry a one-time wager, such as the wager that Captain Picard, Commander Reiker, and Commander Daren have just survived. It is an ongoing wager, inspired by an increasing appreciation of the ongoing interplay between light and shadow, foreground and background, life and death. In transforming to the Alchemist/ Foundational Community stage, we cease clutching fearfully at life and security and give our lives freely instead.

In any event, the entire relationship between Picard and Daren immediately deflates after he makes his heartfelt, but conventionally protective statement. The captain and the commander bicker politely and painfully about whose career will defer to whose (he suggesting hers, she suggesting his). Then she says that she will seek reassignment, and he concludes lamely that that doesn't mean they can't see each other again, does it?

Thus, as this episode of Star Trek ends, it appears once again that their relationship has died. Through the evolution of their relationship, we have glimpsed the fictional Foundational Community to which we and they can aspire. But the fuller realization of such a community lies, still, in our future. Will they be reunited in the future? Not on a Star Trek television episode, for the series as a whole has now come to an end.

Is the limp ending of this episode dictated by the pre-defined Systematic Productivity boundary of creating a one-hour show? To answer "Yes" gives too little credit to the creativity of the show's writers who usually offer more satisfying endings and have more than once offered us two-hour sequences. If that is not the answer, is the limp ending dictated by the developmental limits of the show's writers? To this way of asking the question, the answer is more plausibly "Yes." As creative and Strategist-like as the plots, the character development, and even the varied frames or genres (comic, action, mystery, horror, etc.) of the Star Trek series have been, it does seem as though they ultimately fall short, again and again, as this particular episode does, of fully evoking the "indomitable vulnerability" of the Alchemist/ Foundational Community action-logic. For example, no episode that we have ever seen (or heard of from other aficionados) either reveals or confronts the political realities of the Federation itself. Occasional hints are offered that not all is well in the upper echelons of the military/ scientific/ governmental complex of the Federation, but this potential story-line is never pursued...