# Applying Meaning-making Models of Adult Development

To understand and apply Robert Kegan's Meaning-making Model of Adult Development we will examine the cultures and practices of deliberately developmental organizations as we read An Everyone Culture (AEC) and consider how these organizations help adults to grow.



Please write a few notes or sentences about each of the following:

1. Based on our study of Robert Kegan and this reading, what are some things that you have learned and/or appreciated?
2. What are some things that are less clear or that you are wondering about?
3. What is one thing (or some things) related to these readings or our discussions that you might experiment with?

Robert Kegan, a developmental psychologist, has made significant contributions to our understanding of adult development and the concept of "holding environments." He identifies three primary functions of holding environments, which are crucial for supporting psychological and emotional growth. These functions are Confirmation (Holding On), Contradiction (Letting Go), and Continuity (Sticking Around). Here's an explanation of each function:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Function | Explanation | Purpose | Example |
| **Confirmation** | Validates and reinforces existing beliefs, values, and self-concept. | Provides security and a sense of belonging by affirming an individual's current identity and worldview. | Celebrating an individual's accomplishments, values, and contributions in a close-knit family or a supportive workplace. |
| **Contradiction** | Challenges existing beliefs, values, and self-concept.  Encourages exploration of new perspectives and adaptation to change. | Promotes personal and psychological development by expanding understanding and encouraging the letting go of limiting beliefs. | Providing feedback, coaching, or constructive criticism in an environment that values personal growth and learning. |
| **Continuity** | Provides stability, consistency, and predictability.  Maintains essential elements of identity and the environment. | Ensures a sense of security and predictability, creating a foundation for exploration and growth. | Maintaining consistent values, traditions, or routines in a family or workplace, even as individuals explore new ideas and possibilities. |

These three functions of holding environments are interrelated and create a dynamic balance in supporting adult development. Confirmation and Continuity provide stability and a sense of safety, while Contradiction encourages growth and adaptation. The effectiveness of a holding environment often depends on how well it manages these functions to foster the psychological and emotional development of individuals within that environment.

Here are some examples of Robert Kegan's Model adapted from ChatGPT 4.0 (10/25/2023):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Stage | Characteristics | Examples |
| **Socialized Mind** | * Internalizes the values and expectations of others * Seeks to align with and conform to social norms and rules * Influenced by the opinions and feedback of others * Loyal to relationships and groups | * "I always try to do what my parents want me to do. They have sacrificed a lot for me, and I don’t want to disappoint them. They know what is best for me, and I trust their advice." * "I love working in this company. It feels like a family here. Everyone is supportive and friendly. I follow the guidelines and policies that are set by the management. They have a clear vision and mission for the organization, and I want to contribute to it." * "I belong to this church because it teaches me the right way to live and worship God. I want to make my family and others happy.  I follow the teachings and of the church leaders. They are inspired by God, and I respect their authority." |
| **Self-authoring Mind** | * Creates own identity and values, independent of others * Critically examines and evaluates the social environment * Makes choices based on personal goals and standards * Takes responsibility for actions and outcomes * Copes with complexity and ambiguity | * "I have a clear vision of who I am and what I want to achieve in life. I don’t let others dictate my decisions or define my success. I have my own set of principles and criteria that guide me in everything I do." * "I enjoy working in this company because it aligns with my values and purpose. I don’t just follow the rules or the status quo, I challenge them when I see a better way. I am always looking for opportunities to learn and grow, and to contribute to the organization’s mission." * "I belong to this church because it fits with my worldview and how I want to live my life. I don’t blindly accept everything that church leaders say, I question them and pray for my own understanding. I respect the diversity of opinions and perspectives among the members, and I share my own voice." |
| **Self-transforming Mind** | * Transcends own identity and values, and embraces multiple perspectives and paradoxes * Integrates and transforms own and others’ systems of thinking * Generates new possibilities and meanings * Appreciates the limitations and interdependencies of all forms of knowledge * Seeks continual learning and growth | * "I have a fluid sense of who I am and what I want to achieve in life. I don’t cling to any fixed or absolute truths, but rather explore the complexity and diversity of reality. I have my own set of principles and criteria, but I also recognize that they are provisional and contextual. I am open to change and challenge myself and others to grow." * "I enjoy working in this company because it fosters a culture of innovation and collaboration. I don’t just follow or challenge the rules or the status quo, I co-create them with others. I am always looking for opportunities to learn from and with others, and to contribute to the organization’s vision." * "I belong to this church because it nurtures my spiritual journey and connects me with a larger community. I don’t blindly accept or question everything that the church leaders say, I dialogue with God in prayer and seek my own wisdom. I respect the diversity of beliefs and practices among the members and the world broadly, and I celebrate our common humanity." |

## AEC Ch. 1 Discussion Questions

Here is the link to the [padlet application](https://padlet.com/skalskij/kl9m3km2eid36lkk).

1. Brene Brown is quoted at the beginning of Ch. 1, “Vulnerability is at the core of shame and fear and our struggle for worthiness, but it appears it is also the birthplace of joy, of creativity, of belonging, of love.”  Brown’s TED talk and books about vulnerability have been immensely popular, and perhaps most people are inspired by her work to take risks to be less guarded and fearful. Are you inspired by this Brene Brown zeitgeist?  Do you have concerns about this? Can you discover clues about yourself in your own feelings about vulnerability?  What might this suggest about how you perceive others?  Do you think that you are more inclined to perceive “toxic” individuals (do they stand out to you more than others?)?  What about people who pray upon the vulnerable self-disclosures of others?
2. What do you think about the prospect of considering your failures and limitations as openly as it happens in these DDOs?  How do you imagine you would feel in such a setting? The authors assert that there are individuals within these DDOs that are exploring personal thoughts and feelings openly as they work.  What do your perceptions and feelings about this suggest about you?  In both openness and hesitation about this, there are clues to our gifts.
3. The authors suggest that if you are alarmed by the prospect of becoming vulnerable (i.e., which causes your sympathetic nervous system to activate), you might be inclined to put down the book (i.e. to flee) or to fight against these ideas. They suggest that this is a kind of automatic response in which you are not considering these thoughts.  They encourage you to keep track of such automatic reactions, to become more self-aware.  Did you notice any such responses during this chapter?  What might this tell you about yourself?  One aim for psychology might be to decrease automaticity by increasing self-awareness.
4. Consider Ray Dalio's statement "Pain plus reflection equals progress" What are the potential benefits of such self-reflection?  It seems like reflection involves the process of distancing oneself from one’s experience… perhaps making that subject become more object.  In what ways have you been able to engage in processes that enable such reflection?
5. What evidence is there that the world is more Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) now than ever before in its history?  Is there evidence that the world has always been VUCA? How might such a focus on psychological development be valuable if the world is indeed more VUCA? Consider that there are scales that measure intolerance of ambiguity and intolerance of uncertainty and this seems to be one the aims of an undergraduate education for a psychology major according to the APA.
6. These DDOs, or the authors, assume that it requires more energy to be inauthentic than to be authentic.  For example, Next Jump’s Greg Kunkel says on p. 15, “it takes twice as much energy to fake and hide who you really are than it does to just be that  , to just be yourself.”  Do you think that inauthenticity takes more energy than authenticity?  In what ways is inauthenticity easier?  In what ways is it harder?
7. In what ways has your experience at BYU-Idaho so far been like a DDO? What would it look like if your educational experience was structured more like a DDO?  What would be different if you focused more on your own growth and development?  What would you do differently in your education here if you focused almost entirely on your own growth and development in ways that are like these DDOs?  What would you do differently?
8. The Church can offer us opportunities for “working on our backhands” teaching, ministering, and administering. Have you taken advantage of these opportunities?  How can you make the most of these opportunities?  As you are likely to work with and manage some individuals that do not have such Church opportunities for growth, how do you think that you can help create an environment that enables psychological growth and development?

## AEC Ch. 2 Discussion Questions

Here is the link to the [padlet application](https://padlet.com/skalskij/iqxfe5mlmz84wt8f).

1. Defining growth in order to think about how we perceive growth can be helpful as students of psychology; this is especially true as we move towards helping professions.   Take a moment to consider how you think of growth.  Write down and try to articulate some of your own personal ideas and assumptions.  Revisit how Erik Erikson conceptualizes a healthy personality; hint, he draws from Jahoda’s 1950 definition.   Next, according to Kegan and Lahey, what are some of the outcomes as psychological evolution occurs from one level of complexity to another?  (see page 60).  Can you relate to Erikson’s definition of a healthy personality and/or Kegan and Lahey’s descriptions about what psychological evolution involves?
2. Kegan and Lahey suggest that there are several characteristics for mental complexity.  What are they? (see figures 2-2 and 2-3 as well as page 60-61)
   1. Paraphrase each of these qualities in your own words.  There are at least seven qualities.
   2. Evaluate each and think critically about them; which assertions seem more valid?  Which assertions seem less valid?
3. Examine the three adult “plateaus” in Figure 2-4 and Table 2-1 (page 62-63).  Revisit the descriptions of these three mindsets as they pertain to information flow (p. 63-71).  Considering the metaphor of traveling in a car to a destination, what is the predominant way that you send information;for you is it more about being included, driving, or remaking the map and destination?  Discuss each of these plateaus and try your best to understand them.
4. What do you think about Ray Dalio’s approach to the business he manages?  What does he say about open mindedness?  What are your thoughts about his approach?  Consider how this relates to Martin Buber’s ideas.  Do you have any concerns about Ray Dalio’s approach?  If you have concerns, examine your own concerns in terms of what they are about and how they emerge for you.  What might your own concerns reveal about your own preferences, style, and meaning-making?
5. What percentage of adults are at each level of complexity?  Be sure that you understand the differences between the socialized, self-authoring, and self-transforming minds; what percentage of adults have not yet reached the self-authoring mind?  What are the implications of these percentages?  In other words, what can you make of this information?
6. What is a DDO?  What are some things that DDOs do to incubate and facilitate development?  Do these practices, processes, and aims focus on any particular developmental level?  Discuss some examples of things that some DDOs do to facilitate development.  How might you apply some of these principles to your calling, family, job, or elsewhere?
7. In a mechanical world, it is important to minimize disturbances to optimize efficiency and production, and today, many organizations seem focused on such a goal.  Yet, Kegan and Lahey make a different claim about disturbance in the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world. What do they say about such disturbances?  How do DDOs approach such disturbances?  Is all the effort to keep distracting alarms to a minimum, look good, stay safe, and avoid vulnerability is worth it? Is it more efficient to do so? Do you think that there are hidden costs and limitations?

## AEC Ch. 3 Discussion Questions

(No padlet this time)

This book is about organizations but describes principles that are relevant to the organization of other institutions in our lives like our church communities and our families.  I reflected on Clay Christensen’s How Will You Measure Your Life, in which he encourages treating family life like a job.  What job does spouse, child, etc. need me to do the most?  He also describes the importance of intentionally creating the kind of culture you desire for businesses and families.  Please think about this question from Clay Christensen, “What job does my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ need me to do the most?”

1. Chapter 3 describes how DDOs can be understood in terms of their developmental aspirations (edge), practices (groove), and sense of community (home).  Review and discuss the section Edge: Development Aspiration Oriented to the Growing Edge. Review each of the four aspects for this section and summarize them in your own words: 1. Adults Can Grow, 2.Weakness Is a Potential Asset; Error Is an Opportunity, 3.Run on Developmental Principles, and 4.The Bottom Line Is All One Thing
2. Chapter 3 describes how DDOs can be understood in terms of their developmental aspirations (edge), practices (groove), and sense of community (home).  Review and discuss the section The Groove: Developmental Practices and Tools. Review each of the four aspects for this section and summarize them in your own words:5.Destabilization Can Be Constructive, 6.  Mind the Gaps, 7.Set the Time Scale for Growth, Not Closure, 8.The Interior Life Is Part of What Is Manageable
3. Chapter 3 describes how DDOs can be understood in terms of their developmental aspirations (edge), practices (groove), and sense of community (home).  Review and discuss the section Home: Developmental Communities to Provoke and Hold Vulnerability. Review each of the four aspects for this section and summarize them in your own words: 9.Rank Does Not Have Its Usual Privileges, 10.Everyone Does People Development, 11.Everyone Needs a Crew, 12.Everyone Builds the Culture,
4. Consider the organizational constitution of the specific church or community group that you are most familiar with.  In order to understand what Kegan and Lahey mean by edge, groove, and home, describe the developmental aspirations (edge), the practices (groove), and the sense of community (home) in this church or community.  [It will be useful to keep this church or community group in mind and continue to reflect on this organization’s qualities as you study the rest of this book.]  Considering the examples of the DDOs discussed in this chapter and book, what is this particular “organization” doing well?  Is it evidenced in their edge, groove, or home?  How could this church or community group be improved in these areas?
5. Consider the organizational constitution of your family of origin and/or your developing family.  In order to understand what Kegan and Lahey mean by edge, groove, and home, describe the developmental aspirations (edge), the practices (groove), and the sense of community (home) of your family of origin and/or your developing family.  [It will be useful to keep this ward or community group in mind and continue to reflect on this organization’s qualities as you study the rest of this book.] Considering the examples of the DDOs discussed in this chapter and book, what is this particular family “organization” doing well?  Is it evidenced in their edge, groove, or home?  How could this family be improved in these areas?
6. How might you help shape the culture of growth and development for yourself and those you love in your church community and your family?  Here, “Leadership is crucial” and Kegan and Lahey describe how DDO leaders need to be focused on 1) practical success, 2) creating conditions for growth and development, and 3) their own active participation and growth (near the end of the chapter).  Please consider and discuss each of these qualities.  Where do you tend to focus?  With which of these are your stronger/weaker?

## AEC Ch. 4 Discussion Questions

You are preparing for and about to blast off into a workplace culture, and you are going to be part of many work settings over the course of your life. Some research suggests that millennials are likely to have three different careers and eight different positions of employment over the course of their lives. How will you contribute to your culture?

1. What are some of the practices that you find interesting? What are the micro, meso, and macro practices at Bridgewater, Next Jump, and Decurion? Do you see common principles that undergird these practices? If so, what are some common principles or themes that emerge across these practices? What are some these that all of these DDOs seem to be doing? How might we apply these principles towards psychological development?
2. What are some practices that help you move your thinking and behavior from subject to object? How might you invite others to engage in similar practices? How did Decurion make the growth of everyone a shared, public, and intentional activity. How do you feel about public feedback? Consider how public feedback like the Baseball Card (ratings and evaluations like Ratemyprofessor, etc.) are here to stay.
3. One of the five qualities of practicing in a DDO is “Language is a practice, and it creates new tools for a new paradigm.” Consider how language expands and shapes meaning. Discuss a time when a word or phrase made you think about something in a new way that helped you to grow and develop. Consider and discuss some of the language or themes that you have seen in other communities like families and then consider some that you might use in your own communities and family.
4. People rarely feel well-held vulnerability in life and especially at work.  On page 3, the authors discuss a "safe and demanding culture where everyone comes out of hiding."  Where have you felt a safe and demanding culture in your life? Discuss a time when that was the case. What was that like for you? Consider Diana Baumrind's parenting styles and the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness (please look that up on the internet) and consider how this relates to Kegan's notions of confirmation and contradiction and continuity (see table below)
5. As we discussed in class one’s “holding environment” also known as the “culture of embeddness” provides the three primary functions of Holding On (Confirmation), Letting Go (Contradiction), Sticking Around (Continuity). This can be observed in our families and work settings, etc. Review and discuss each of these three primary functions. You might want to examine two jpeg images in Canvas titled Kegan Stages 1, Kegan Stages 2 images and review pages 152-154 in the book. The two images have each stage and describe the way in which each stage tends to engage each function. Next consider ways that your current holding environment (aka culture of embeddedness) is Holding On (Confirmation), Letting Go (Contradiction), Sticking Around (Continuity)? Continuity is the hardest to understand; I want you to focus on the first two

## **Chapter 3: A Conceptual Tour of the DDO: Edge, Home, and Groove**

**1. Edge – Stretching Toward Growth**  
 What does *“Edge”* mean in a DDO? Identify and explain at least **two concrete edge practices** described in the text. How do these practices push individuals or teams outside their comfort zones?

*Reflection: How might the idea of “edge” relate to being spiritually refined by fire (1 Peter 1:7) or to personal growth through trials?*

**2. Home – Creating Psychological Safety**  
 What does *“Home”* refer to in a DDO? Identify and explain **at least two practices** that help create a “Home” environment. Why is this sense of safety essential for developmental growth?

*Reflection: How might the principles of Home connect with gospel ideas like bearing one another’s burdens (Mosiah 18:8–9) or building a Zion-like community?*

**3. Groove – Building Growth into Routines**  
 What does *“Groove”* mean in the context of a DDO? Identify **at least two examples** of groove practices mentioned (note: Chapter 4 includes several). How do these routines help turn growth into a daily habit?

*Reflection: How does this idea of incremental development relate to “line upon line, precept upon precept” (2 Nephi 28:30)?*

## **Chapter 4: In the Groove: Practices and Practicing to Create an Everyone Culture**

**4. Accountability and Transparency – Normalizing Mistakes**  
 The book describes the use of “issues logs” and similar practices for owning and learning from mistakes. Describe **at least two other examples** of accountability and transparency that are highlighted in DDOs? How do these practices foster a culture of learning instead of fear?

*Application: What might this look like in a school or work setting you’re familiar with?*

**5. Overcoming Fear of Judgment – Rethinking Failure**  
 Why do people fear judgment when making mistakes?  List and describe **at least two DDO practices** that help reduce this fear?

*Reflection: How might the Atonement of Jesus Christ reframe our understanding of failure, forgiveness, and growth? What role does humility play?*

**6. Aligning Personal and Organizational Growth**  
 DDOs aim to align employee development with the organizational mission. What does this look like in practice (**use at least two examples** from the text)?

*Reflection: How could this principle apply to balancing your spiritual growth with academic or professional goals? How might BYU-Idaho help support both?*

**7. Barriers to Building a DDO Culture**  
 According to the authors, what are some major obstacles to implementing a developmental culture? (Look for **at least two examples** of real resistance or challenges faced.) What strategies—either from the book or your own experience—might help overcome these barriers?

*Reflection: Are there any gospel principles that might support this kind of culture shift?*

## 

## **SKIP CH. 5**

## AEC Ch. 6 Discussion Questions

### Immunity to Change & Making Subject Become Object

The Greek word “atia,” which is translated as cause, is best understood as what “bears responsibility.” We are embedded in (i.e., subject to) what is causing us and eventually come to take responsibility (i.e., to make object) for our prior subjectivity.  Taking responsibility for one's subjectivity seems to be one of the crowning hallmark of adulthood (and self-authoring). Taking responsibility emerges in relation to others in roles. Jean Paul-Stare and others play with the word responsibility, which also implies a kind of response-ability, an increasing ability to respond in different ways, to utilize our agency in increasingly beneficial ways. In order to do so, we gradually uncover (to make object) what we are subject to, and the Immunity to Change activity discussed in Ch. 6 can help:

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An Everyone Culture- Ch. 6 Uncovering Your Biggest Blindspot takes the reader through Kegan's "Immunity to Change" work. Download this [Immunity Map Worksheet.pdf](https://extension.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2021/03/ext_immunity_map_0.pdf) and complete this form based on a goal you select. Ch. 6 describes this process with examples of how one might complete this exercise. It is due before we cover this material in class- so please try to work on this, but if you have trouble with it we will go over it in class and you can submit it 1 day late without penalty.

This is one of the hard questions you need to consider as you complete this assignment: Consider the behaviors that you are engaged in to accomplish a goal that is important to you. What would you worry about if you were doing the OPPOSITE of the behaviors that work against your goal? This is your worry box (be honest about exploring your concerns and fears here). It takes real honesty to explore your own competing commitments and worries.

The concept of an "Immunity to Change Map" is a tool that helps people identify:

1. Improvement Goals: What you genuinely want to change or improve in your life or work.
2. Behaviors: Observable actions that keep you from reaching those goals.
3. Hidden Commitments: Underlying values or beliefs that are at odds with the change you want to make.
4. Big Assumptions: Deeply held assumptions that you take as truth and that influence your behavior.

### Immunity to Change Map Example:

1. **Improvement Goal**: "I want to be more receptive to feedback."
2. **Behaviors**: "I get defensive when receiving criticism", "I avoid situations where I might be evaluated."
3. **Hidden Commitments**: "I am committed to always appearing competent," "I am committed to avoiding humiliation."
4. **Big Assumptions**: "If I show vulnerability, people will think less of me," "Making a mistake means I'm not competent."

This map can then serve as a worksheet for individuals or teams to work through their 'immunities', identify contradictions between their goals and their hidden commitments, and experiment with changing their big assumptions.

In the context of psychology, understanding the "Immunity to Change" process can be immensely helpful in cognitive behavioral therapy, organizational psychology, and personal development. It provides a structured way to understand the cognitive dissonance that often arises when people attempt to change.

Read this online at <https://books.byui.edu/Adult_development/week_3AX>