

# How can the Adult Development theories help us better choose and develop leaders for a sustainable future?

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# How can the Adult Development theories help us better choose and develop leaders for a sustainable future?

The title seems to assume things around adult development (AD):

1. AD theories describe how our ability for e.g. complex thinking, perspective taking and the way we identify *can develop* throughout life
2. Persons with more developed abilities are *better suited* to address complex challenges, e.g. sustainability issues
3. This development can be *measured*
4. The development can be *supported*

# Do people *really* transform and go through developmental stages?

## Adult development hard stage theories:

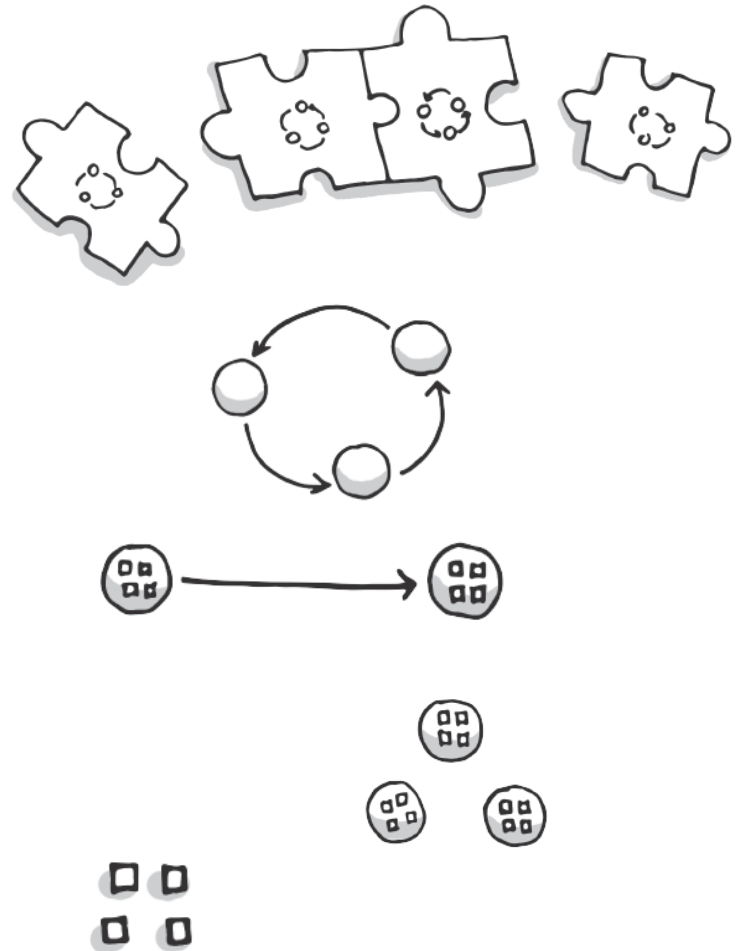
1. The Model of Hierarchical Complexity (Commons et al)
2. Ego Development Theory (Loevinger, Cook-Greuter, Torbert et al)
3. Subject Object Theory (Kegan)

# The Model of Hierarchical Complexity

## 17 orders of hierarchical complexity

### Orders 9-13:

- 13. Metasystematic: systems compared or coordinated
- 12. Systematic: several abstract variables of formal chains create a system/context/ideology
- 11. Formal: linear thinking based on empirical or logical reasoning, cause-effect
- 10. Abstract: generalisations and stereotypes
- 9. Concrete: referring to single facts/events/places and use of simple logic



# Do people transform and develop in stages according MHC?

## What MHC says:

- Yes! Thinking develops in stages
- Formal theory – orders (stages) are analytically defined
- Measured by well-structured tasks or text analysis
- Individuals perform at different stages depending on e.g.
  - Domain and context
  - Support
- Development is typically supported by training and education

## What MHC does not say:

- Anything about the person – identity, meaning, emotions, worldview
- That the individual *is* at a certain stage



# Ego development theory

Inductive, empirically based theory

Holistic: complex thinking, perspective taking, meaning making, how experiences are organised

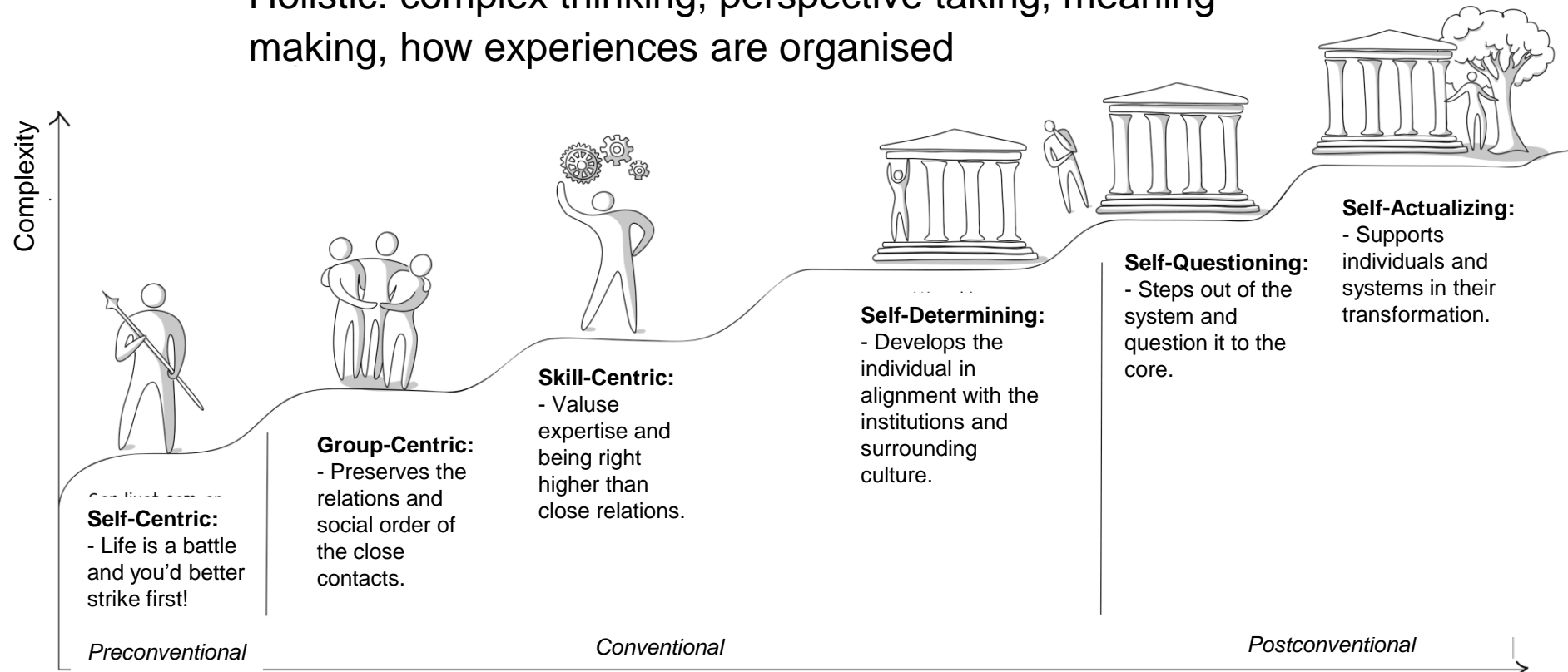


Illustration: Mette Koverberg

Time

# Do people transform and develop in stages according Ego Development theory?

## What EDT says:

- Inductive and empirically based theory
- Measured by sentence completion tests: WUSCT (LDP, MAP) – for research purposes (> 10 000)
- Although a simplification, yes you are operating from a stage of ego development or meaning making
- Higher stages, increased abilities for perspective taking and complex thinking and *should* thus be better suited for complex challenges



## What EDT does not say:

- *How* transformation between stages takes place

# Do people transform and develop in stages according the Subject Object Theory?

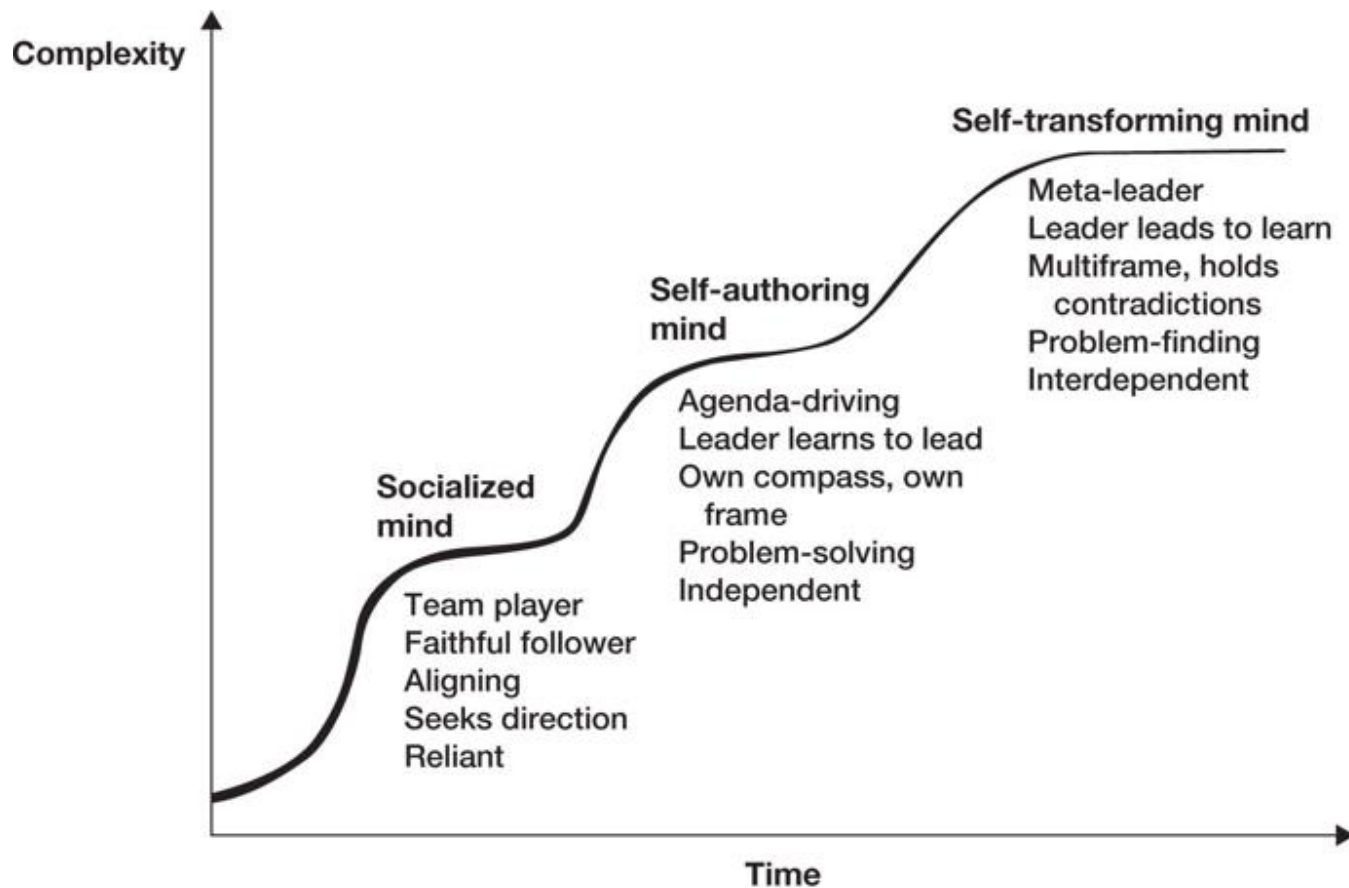


Illustration from *Immunity to change* (Kegan & Lahey, 2009)

# Do people transform and develop in stages according the Subject Object Theory?

## What SOT says:

- More theoretically based theory
- Measured using Subject Object Interview (> 300)
- Although a simplification, yes you are operating from a certain order of consciousness (stage)
- Transformation occurs when we step out of embeddedness and our meaning making frames
- Transformations can be supported with e.g. the Immunity to change process

## What SOT does not say:

- It does not define what appropriate responses to leadership and complex challenges are (neither do MHC and EDT)



# How can the theories of Adult Development help us better choose and develop leaders for a sustainable future?

What Adult development theories claim:	MHC	EDT	SOT
1. AD theories describe how our ability for e.g. complex thinking, perspective taking and the way we identify <i>can develop</i> throughout life	Yes!	Yes!	Yes!
2. Persons with more developed abilities are <i>better suited</i> to address complex challenges, e.g. sustainability issues	Should be	Seems so	Should be
3. This development can be <i>measured</i>	Yes!	Yes...	Yes...
4. The development can be <i>supported</i>	Yes...	Well...	To some degree

# Conclusions

## What AD theories say:

- It's meaningful to describe personal development in terms of stages
- People *are not* at a stage but rather operate from different levels of complexity or meaning making
- Development is an organic process that takes time

## What AD theories does not say:

- That higher stage is better – for what?
- That persons at higher stages have a positive impact on the world
- That everyone *can* or *should* develop
- That much about collective development

# Further reading

*Grown-up but not done growing:  
Adult development – stages of complexity  
and meaning* (only in Swedish)

On EDT: Pfaffenberger, Marko & Combs  
– The postconventional personality  
Pfaffenberger – Optimal adult  
development: an inquiry into the  
dynamics of growth

On SOT: Kegan – In over our heads,  
Kegan & Lahey – Immunity to change

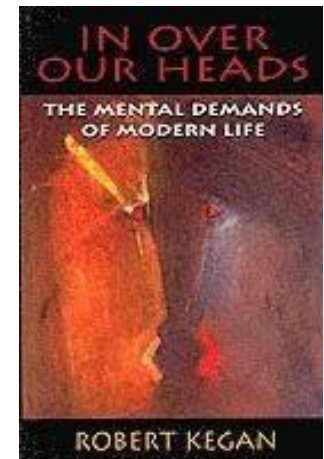
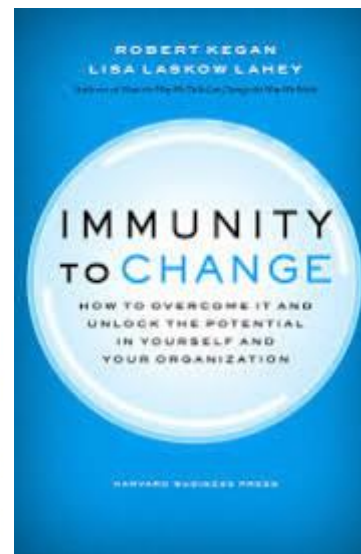
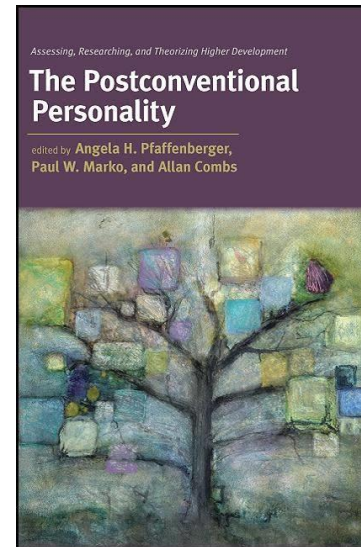
On MHC: Commons et al – Special issue  
in World Futures

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## OPTIMAL ADULT DEVELOPMENT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE DYNAMICS OF GROWTH



ANGELA H. PFAFFENBERGER is a licensed acupuncturist and psychotherapist who maintains a private practice in Fort Collins, Colorado. She has been involved in Buddhist meditation for 20 years and is interested in health psychology and positive adult development. She received her M.A. in psychology from Saybrook Graduate School, where she currently works toward her Ph.D. For her dissertation research, she will interview self-actualizers and arrive at a grounded theory of how and why individuals move toward higher stages of development. She is a member of Division 32 and takes an interest in the intersection of critical theory and humanistic psychology.



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## INTRODUCTION TO THE MODEL OF HIERARCHICAL COMPLEXITY AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO POSTFORMAL ACTION

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The Model of Hierarchical Complexity is introduced in terms of its main concepts, background, and applications. As a general, quantitative behavioral developmental theory, the Model enables examination of universal patterns of evolution and development. Behavioral tasks are definable and their organization of information in increasingly greater hierarchical, or vertical, complexity is measurable. Fifteen