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## The Distinctive Questions Developmental Action Inquiry Asks

**Abstract** *Developmental Action Inquiry asks three types of questions together in one's actions with others, with the normative aim of improving the timelines and transformational effectiveness of action. The three questions concern the first-person dynamics of one's own awareness, the second-person dynamics of the immediate group with whom one is interacting, and the third-person dynamics of the larger institutions within which one's action is situated. The article outlines the type of theory and practice that supports and reflects such inquiry, and highlights how different such integrated 'research/practice' is from empirical positivism.*

What is unique and uniquely important in Developmental Action Inquiry, by comparison to other action-focused research approaches?

One way of responding to this question is to offer the three questions that have animated this discipline since its inception. To my knowledge, among all the quantitative, qualitative, and action-related social science research approaches, only Developmental Action Inquiry has articulated these three questions together and systematically explored their relationship to one another. The three questions are:

1. *How, in real-time, to divide the researchers own attention by actively turning toward its origin or source, inviting unforeseeable personal transformations of consciousness, while simultaneously going with the (passive) flow of my attention through feelings, actions, and into perceptions of the outside world? This, not lifelong but potentially adult-long-and-increasingly-continual inquiry can generate my own (and your own) first-person research/practice in each moment (Ouspensky, 1949; Trungpa, 1970; Torbert, 1973).*

2. *How to create mini communities of inquiry (three persons or more) in real-time among friends, within one's family, and at work? As we more closely approximate such communities (which we find ourselves doing by treating awareness-deepening*

inquiry as the highest value and the condition for true mutuality, diversity, justice, and empowering effectiveness), our lives become more and more shaped by the loving educational suffering that occurs among peers. This potentially adult-long inquiry can generate *second-person research/practice* between me and others in my company in each moment (Grudin, 1996; Heron, 1996; Reason, 1995; Torbert, 1976).

3. *How to act in an objectively timely manner?* The phrase 'objectively timely manner' is meant to strike the reader as peculiar and implausible. What action (think of Socrates drinking the hemlock, or Marx publishing the Communist Manifesto) strikes all its auditors (immediate and distant [in time or place]) in the same way? Upon reflection, clearly none. Do you agree? If so, what, then, can an 'objectively timely manner' mean?

It means 'listening for the music' (Torbert, 1998) of real-time psycho/social relations among your own first-person voices, the second-person voices of persons with whom you are interacting, and the third-person voices represented in the norms and structures of larger social aggregates. This listening for the patterns of relationships goes on even as your own voice joins in the chaotic/symphonic/transforming song. Sometimes this simultaneous listening (inquiring) and singing (acting) leads to certain predefined results. At other times, it transforms and reframes what is at stake. At other times, you feel out of tune and seek to adjust.

One cannot be precise, for objectively timely action will not merely accomplish certain predefined results, but also heighten inquiry and, therefore, unpredictability. This inquiry occurs in real-time—within the actor and within the other interactors—as well as among third-persons-at-a-distance-in-time-or-space. The inquiry is about the awareness that generates and attributes meaning and effects to action. In Habermas' (1984; Benhabib, 1986) terms, such 'action inquiry' is, alternately or all at once, instrumental (achieves outcomes), practical (improves joint action effectiveness), and emancipatory (improves meaning-making and awareness). One cannot be precise, but if one is *not* achieving all three of these outcomes intermittently, then one is surely not acting in objectively timely ways, ways that improve first, second, and third parties.

Improvement is an ordinal variable. We intuit (perhaps incorrectly on any given occasion) that things are getting better or worse. In the case of objectively timely action, improvement (of awareness, etc.) is best assessed from one's own first-person perspective, from the perspectives of at least two often divergent peers, and from a third-person, organizing-data-meaning-and-action-at-a-distance perspective. Thus, objective timing is objective, not in a pre-relativistic, absolute sense, but in a post-relativistic, inquiring sense.

For example, when I first came to Boston College 20 years ago as graduate dean, my first proposal to my colleagues (about how to recognize excellence in teaching) was roundly squelched in a single meeting. By contrast, my second proposal (about how to reorganize the MBA program to help students increase their action effectiveness as well as their knowledge and strategic awareness) was passed unanimously by the faculty and over the next several years propelled the school from below the top 100 into the top 25 MBA programs in the US). Even this bare-bone, two sentence summary, without any explicit description of my own, first-person feelings about the matter, suggests that I choreographed many distinct actions into a



more objectively timely weave in the case of my second proposal than in the case of my first.

These three unique questions into (1) one's own self-development (2) with others, (3) in the timely service of third parties' futures have inspired Action Inquiry since it was first formulated under the name of Action Science (Torbert, 1976, see quotes below). Interestingly, when Argyris borrowed the term Action Science from me (with attribution: Argyris, 1980), he made no reference to these three questions and proceeded to develop a version of action science theory and practice (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985) with *no* sustained focus at all on cultivating first-person attention or first-, second- and third-person timeliness.

Argyris also offered only an *ideal* notion of professional, second-person 'communities of inquiry within communities of social practice', rather than any developmental articulation of how, step by step, through increasing voluntariness, mutuality, and discipline of inquiry, a community can transform toward a community of inquiry. According to developmental theory, neither a traditional community nor a modern corporation can transform directly into a community of inquiry. Instead, a traditional, exclusive community (the sociologists' 'Gemeinschaft'; the Incorporation stage in Table 1 below) can evolve through an Experiments stage to a typical corporate, hierarchical form (the sociologists' 'Gesellschaft'; the Systematic Productivity stage in Table 1). From there, an organization can transform toward the more inclusive, present- and future-oriented constitutional form (Rawls, 1972; Torbert, 1991; the Collaborative Inquiry stage in Table 1). Note that most organization development of the past generation attempts to achieve the informal aspects of Collaborative Inquiry without transforming the political status of the employee into citizenship (with rare exceptions such as the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain). Real-time, citizenship-based communities of practice can in turn be inspired from within by mini-communities of inquiry (the Foundational Community stage in Table 1), like the US Supreme Court, Alcoholics Anonymous, the Quakers, lifetime Buddhist practitioners, etc. (Fisher and Torbert, 1995).

While Argyris was redefining Action Science I had come to feel that the term sounded too much like already-knowing how to act and interpret action and not enough like continual, existential, relational searching for how to act and interpret and envision action. The latter phrase comes far closer to describing what I found my adult life becoming, by virtue of my (sometimes meandering) commitment to questions like the three above. So I renamed the research/practice in which I have been engaged for the past 36 years at first Action Inquiry, in deliberate contrast to Action Science, and later Developmental Action Inquiry, in contrast to the closely related Cooperative Ecological Inquiry paradigm named, and well-illustrated by, the work of John Heron (1996), Peter Reason (1995), and most recently Hilary Bradbury (1998) (see Table 1).

Here is the original formulation of the four primary axioms of Action Science according to Torbert (1976)—axioms that currently root Developmental Action Inquiry into the wider cosmos:

1. An initial axiom of action science ... hold(s) that a person must undergo a to-him [sic] unimaginable scale of self-development before he becomes capable of relationally valid action. This self-development includes not only disciplining and freeing emotions and behaviour—the personal elements often neglected by contemporary education—but also

**Table 1** Analogies among personal, organizational, and social scientific (increasingly voluntary) developmental paths

Personal development	Organizational development	Social scientific development
<i>I. Birth–Impulsive</i> (0–6yrs) (multiple, distinctive impulses gradually resolve into characteristic approach [e.g. many fantasies into a particular dream for a new organization])	<i>I. Conception</i>	<i>I. Anarchism</i> (Feyerabend, 1975)
<i>II. Opportunist</i> (7–12?) (dominant task: gain power [e.g. bike riding skill] to have desired effect on outside world)	<i>II. Investments</i>	<i>II. Behaviorism</i>
<i>III. Diplomat</i> (12–?) (looking-glass self: understanding others' culture/expectations and melding own actions to succeed in their [e.g. market] terms)	<i>III. Incorporation</i>	<i>III. Gestalt Sociologism</i>
<i>IV. Technician</i> (16–?) (intellectual mastery of outside-self systems such that actions = experiments that confirm or disconfirm hypotheses and lead toward valid certainty)	<i>IV. Experiments</i>	<i>IV. Empirical Positivism</i>
<i>V. Achiever</i> (25?) (pragmatic triangulation among plan/theory, operation/implementation, and outcome/evaluation in incompletely pre-defined environment*)	<i>V. Systematic Productivity</i>	<i>V. Multi-method Eclecticism</i>
(* first logic-in-action that [more or less] reliably accepts and adjusts to single-loop feedback)		
<i>VI. Strategist</i> (35?) (self-conscious mission/philosophy, sense of timing/historicity, invitation to conversation among multiple voices and to reframing of boundaries**)	<i>VI. Collaborative Inquiry</i>	<i>VI. Postmodern Interpretivism</i>
(** first logic-in-action that in principle accepts, and adjusts to, double-loop feedback)		
<i>VII. Magician/Witch/Clown</i> (45?) (life/science = a mind/matter, love/death/transformation praxis among others, cultivating interplay and reattunement among inquiry, friendship, work, and earth/material goods***)	<i>VII. Foundational Community of Inquiry</i>	<i>VII. Cooperative Ecological Inquiry</i>
(***) first logic-in-action that regularly cultivates double- and triple-loop awareness)		
<i>VIII. Ironist</i> (55?)	<i>VIII. Liberating Disciplines</i>	<i>VIII. Developmental Action Inquiry</i>
(full acceptance of multi-paradigmatic nature of human consciousness/reality, including distances/alienations among paradigms)		

**Source** Drawn from Torbert (1987, 1999); Fisher and Torbert (1995).

disciplining and freeing oneself for higher thought—thought capable of tracing the patterns of intuition, feeling and behaviour as they actually occur. Only such thought remains open to the mystery-revelation of each moment, open to one's own and the environment's implications. (p. 167)

Most adults broadly assume that they and the real world are generally shaped as they imagine and that their view of the self-world cosmos will not transform again. One undertakes Developmental Action Inquiry only as one increasingly intuits that an unimaginable scale of self-development lies in front of one. The aim is, by dividing one's attention, to treat each moment—not least the moment of death—as an

opportunity for inquiry about the relation between original purpose, theoretical language, action-in-my-surround, and empirical reverberations. Insofar as Developmental Action Inquiry concerns the conduct of such first-person research/practice by each of us, it can be generalized no more than one person at a time over each of our lifetimes.

2. A second axiom of action science . . . stress[es] the importance of finding friends willing to take roles (of challenge, support, and complementarity) for the sake of mutual development. Personal development is bound to be one-sided and incomplete without a circle of friends willing to act as enemies. (p. 169)

Not everyone will call their form of search Developmental Action Inquiry. Nor will all who concoct their own idiosyncratic understandings and exercises in the name of Developmental Action Inquiry in fact continue to draw closer to our own breath, heartbeat, and best practice, unless . . . Unless we befriend at least a few others who are pursuing their search in their own way as well as in a mini-community of inquiry under construction among us through our efforts to interweave our passions, dispassions and compassions productively, justly and lovingly. Insofar as Developmental Action Research concerns the conduct of such second-person research/practice by families, organizations and friendship circles, it can only partially and gradually generalize itself through the practices of such mini-communities.

3. A third axiom of action science: that the earliest personal steps on the path towards action science unavoidably have immediate and strong social consequences, even though the person accepts that he or she is not at a point to take valid social action and is therefore not focusing on changing others. (p. 172)

. . . a fourth axiom of action science: that objective timing is of the essence to relationally valid action. . . The kinds of personal leadership and organizational structure that will be effective vary according to the developmental age of the interaction, institutions, and persons in question . . . (p. 173)

The first of these two axioms expresses the same observation as the more recently fashionable chaos theory formulation that chaotic patterns over time are highly sensitive to seemingly trivial initial movements. The second of these two axioms raises the question, *as* each of us seeks to act in a timely manner, what kind of knowledge about one's own, one's colleagues', and one's organizations' developmental age is valid and a reliable bridge to effective action? A preliminary response that eliminates virtually all social scientific knowledge to date is that only such knowledge can possibly be valid and reliable as can be held in the midst of an ongoing inquiry in the present. Such active knowing will encourage: (a) an awareness of the present through a dividing of the action inquirer's attention; and (b) a public, second-person testing of one's attributions as one acts—not of one's *hypotheses* formulated prior to the action, but rather of one's *paratheses* that emerge during the action (see Raelin, Preface to this issue). If one is speaking, acting, policy-making, or writing (as I am now) for third-persons, without the opportunity for direct public testing, then one wishes to craft the performance or product so that it addresses multiple developmental perspectives and potentially provokes its auditors to engage in their own first- and second-person research/practice. So do first-person, second-person, and third-person research/practice potentially interweave.

What kind of social science theory can support this kind of real-time inquiry rather

than distracting one from it, or narrowing it into yet another form of one-upsmanship? My conclusion (which raises more questions) is that the theory must be *holistic, analogical, and self-transcending*:

- The theory must remind me (the person playing lightly with the theory) of the *analogies* among larger *wholes* (how my comment now relates to the conversation as a whole, to my and your overall perspectives during this era of our lifetimes, to our lifetimes as wholes, and to the lifetimes of other interacting persons and systems at a distance and often only implicit for me).
- The theory must do this in such a way that my appreciation for their present interplay increases and in such a way that I search beyond the explicit. Thus, the theory guides me beyond the answer it provides, beyond mere thought itself, *self-transcending* into an attention that includes the creative implications of this moment. The theory guides me (or any inquirer in action) beyond the explicit and timebound, and beyond the archetypal and timeless, to the unique act that I body forth, seeking to express this moment's *kairos*, helping this moment become a meaningful meeting among past, present, and future.

The simplest mental reminder of *self-transcending analogies among wholes* is the analogical, qualitative meaning of the single digit numbers (Torbert, 1993, Lecture V). The following few words very rapidly and abstractly introduce this notion, dealing briefly with the numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Specific attention exercises are necessary to make these ideas vividly meaningful, but even the brief abstract comments point to a profoundly different way of understanding mathematics and science than has been practiced during the past five centuries of modern science:

*Zero* refers to the unknown origin or source (*Nous, Noumenal*) of all else I believe and do—the point of no dimensions—into which I may inquire, only if I can divide my

*One* attention (or any other *Nominal* category in which I am trapped) in

*Two* (entering the realm of the *Ordinal*—first, second, etc.), turning—imploring—part of the attention toward the origin (the Russian Orthodox continual Prayer of the heart in the midst of outer activity is one way).

Through the first-person struggle between the passive outflowing attention and the active turning toward the origin (or the second-person struggle between me and my wife, or ...), I may experience yet another Other, a third ...

*Three*—a reconciling force that sometimes appears in a timely fashion in an *interval* in real situations at critical moments, generating creative synthesis.

Remembering the numbers 0, 1, 2, and 3 can remind me, not only of quantitative counting, and not only of qualitatively different types of numbering (nominal, ordinal, interval), but also of first-person awareness-transforming exercises I may try right now (how to turn my attention? how to experience the origin?, etc.). Of course, at the outset of first-person research/practice, we do not begin with any clear reason why it is important to exercise in this way, nor any clear sense of how; so our exercise soon ceases or enters the realm of the merely imaginary; unless we find one or more communities of inquiry with longtime masters and mistresses of traditional liberating disciplines (Torbert, 1997) who repeatedly intervene at appropriate intervals in questionable ways—be they Vajrajana Buddhists (Trungpa, 1970), Quaker Friends

(Nielsen, 1996), Postmodern Platonic Jewish gay philosophers (Kaplan, 1996), or students of students of Gurdjieff (Pentland, 1997).

We can use (or can we?) the number *Four* to help us, both in our own first-person exercise and in seeing analogies among the first-, second-, and third-person scales of Developmental Action Inquiry. Usually, when we wake up momentarily to our actual existential condition, we realize we've been immersed in a single territory of experience (e.g. a dream, an action, or an impression of the outside world—what the poet Blake called single vision and Newton's sleep). The moment of awakening, as we can verify from our own experience (Torbert, 1991, ch. 13), involves an apperception of at least two territories of experience, and this, in turn, can become an opportunity to cultivate a taste for Blake's fourfold vision of the interplay among four territories of experience. The

*Four*—territories (archetypal, analogical wholes) can be named in a variety of ways; from a first-person point of view, they can be named: (1) the outside world; (2) one's own behavior as sensed by oneself; (3) one's thought/feeling; (4) one's transconceptual awareness that can register one or more of the other territories as well as its own changing nature.

Through seeking contact in the present with each of these four territories of experience, and all at once, we can test whether they exist (Torbert, 1973); we can test what we mean by being awake; and we can test whether we are acting in harmony with our espoused purposes and strategies (are we doing what we say, and saying what we mean?). Figure 1 suggests in the most skeletal outline how we will see organizational and interpersonal processes through a fourfold awareness (see Fisher and Torbert, 1995; Torbert, 1997 for further discussion and illustration).

In this representation, the four territories are shown in reverse order from the first listing above; thus 'Visioning', etc. properly occurs through the medium of transconceptual awareness, and Assessing, Inquiring, and Effecting/Sensing involve reaching into the outside world.

It is an unusual trick for any of us to distribute and circulate our attention so as to be in contact with all four territories at once (indeed, in thought and action in durational time they occur either fragmentarily or sequentially—e.g. from Visioning to Strategizing to Performing to Assessing, and then recursively). An even trickier thing is to be aware of transformations across the four territories as these occur—say, from some vague (or spuriously specific) intuition of one's transpersonal mission, through some implicit or explicit strategic logic, into verbal or non-verbal practice, and then into effects on others—and to diagnose and correct significant unintended

**Figure 1** Analogous terms for the four territories of experience

<b>Organizing</b>	<b>Interpersonal speaking and listening</b>	<b>Personal awareness</b>
I. Visioning	Framing	Intending/Attending
II. Strategizing	Advocating	Thinking/Feeling
III. Performing	Illustrating	Acting/Embodying
IV. Assessing	Inquiring	Effecting/Sensing

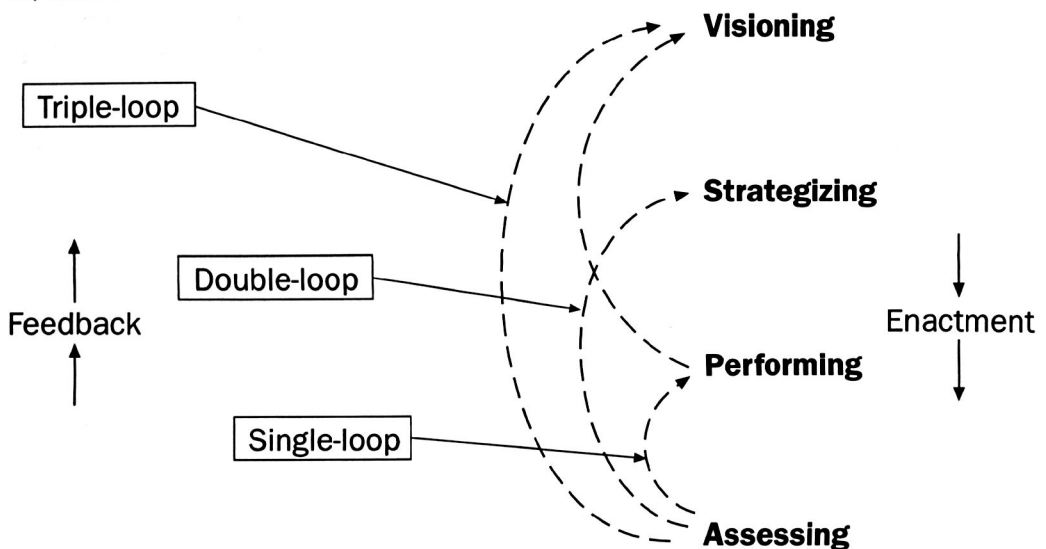
incongruities (Torbert, 1989). Likewise, it is difficult and unusual for a group, organization or society to be aware of these transformations as it functions. So difficult is this, and so at odds with our conventional modern views of social science, of political power, and of personal conduct, that few today recognize or take up this challenge, even though it is implicit in the calls for learning organizations (Senge, 1990) and knowledge-creating companies (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Put differently, the person, the organization, or the institution must become capable of generating and responding to:

1. not only first order, single-loop feedback—e.g. changing specific behavioral practices to achieve desired outcomes, thus achieving greater congruity between two territories of experience; but also
2. second order, double-loop feedback—e.g. changing one's way of strategizing and, thus, the way one defines and measures practices and results, thus achieving greater congruity across three territories of experience; and
3. third order, triple-loop feedback—e.g. changing the very quality of one's present awareness, of one's actual visioning (Deutsch, 1966; Bateson, 1972; Hawkins, 1991; Bartunek and Moch, 1994; Torbert, 1994b; Nielsen, 1996) to include all four territories of experience, thus increasing the likelihood of achieving congruity across all four.

Using the organizational terms for the four territories of experience, single-, double-, and triple-loop learning can be conceptually visualized as in Figure 2 below. So difficult is the interweaving of single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback across the first-, second-, and third-person scales that it requires multiple, gradual transformations of a person's or organization's worldview and pattern of enactment before the person, organization, or science becomes truly committed in practice to continual

**Figure 2** Enactment and single-, double-, and triple-loop learning across the four territories of experience





quality improvement; to becoming a learning organization; or to becoming a real-time community of inquiry (Fisher and Torbert, 1995). According to third-person developmental research, only a minority of adults (approximately 30%) currently evolve to the Achiever stage (see Table 1), where they achieve the capacity to digest single-loop feedback regularly and respond to it effectively. A much smaller minority (less than 10%) currently evolve to the next stage—Strategist—where they achieve the capacity to occasionally digest and respond to double-loop feedback. And only a tiny minority (less than 1%) of adults currently develop a taste for continually offering and receiving timely, transforming triple-loop feedback at the Magician/Witch/Clown stage (Alexander and Langer, 1990; Miller and Crook-Greuter, 1994; Fisher and Torbert, 1995, ch. 11).

### Developmental Theory, Seen From the Perspective of Action Inquiry

Let us review the bidding together to this point, and then try to count to *Eight* together. The early pages of this article point to the radically different spirituality, politics, ontology, epistemology, theory, and method of inquiry that Developmental Action Inquiry involves by contrast to other contemporary quantitative, qualitative, and action research paradigms. In the past several paragraphs, the reader has for the first time heard some concepts that relate directly to issues of work, management, and social science as we have heretofore known these (concepts such as feedback, learning organization, visioning and strategizing, and advocating and inquiring). The foregoing paragraph introduces the personal scale of developmental theory and points, through the analogical use of the term feedback, to the way in which each action logic (e.g. relatively reliable responsiveness to single-loop feedback at the Achiever stage) is lodged within a wider systems structure initially taken as fixed.

The distinctive feature of developmental theory (by comparison, say, to the Myers-Briggs Jungian typology) is that it shows (Kegan, 1982) how each such fixed structure of assumptions to which a person may be subject can become object for a newly evolving subject who evolves through exercising a more voluntary, more intense, more mutual action logic (e.g. how the goal-orientation of the Achiever can evolve to the more mutual occasional vulnerability and responsiveness to double-loop, structure-changing feedback at the Strategist stage). At each later stage or action-logic, the person becomes able to make one more significant distinction among primary aspects of reality and to balance the new relationships.

Let us see how we as humans can become capable of counting to *Eight*. The (*One*) undifferentiated Impulsive child comes to divide *self* clearly from *outside world* (*Two*) at the Opportunist stage, seeking control of outcomes (see Table 1). Next, usually in the pre-teen and early teen years, the youth evolves to the Diplomat perspective which further differentiates (1) *social/emotional expectations/norms* from (2) *one's own behaviour* from (3) *outside world* (*Three*), seeking to coordinate one's own behaviour and social norms for good results. At the Technician stage, the person ceases to be entirely subject to social norms and evolves an independent *thought-logic* which provides guidance amidst conflicting *norms, behaviours, and outside events* (*Four*). At the Achiever stage, the independent thought-logic ceases to be regulative and becomes a variable of a *subject* who coordinates *thought, norms, action, and outcomes*

(*Five*), but without regular questioning of frames. At the Strategist stage, the subject itself divides in two (now making *Six*). There is an implicate, observing, reflective, creative, frame-recognizing, future-oriented subject and an explicate, acting, habitual subject constrained by her or his own past experience. In Magician/Witch/Clown moments (*Seven*), three alchemical movements (active, passive, reconciling) interact in the four territories of experience. Then, a new octave begins with the generative Ironist who births and guides the developmental octave of children, adult volunteers, or new organizations (*Eight*).

Organizations do not today generally help individual adults develop capacities beyond Stage V. This is because the organizations themselves rarely develop the capacity for digesting and responding to double- and triple-loop feedback. General inspection of the organizational field, along with years of research and consulting (Torbert, 1976, 1987, 1991; Fisher and Torbert, 1995)—as well as the fact that most organizational theories do not mention anything like the later organizational development stages (*Seven* and *Eight*—*Six* is much espoused, rarely practiced long)—all support the inference that organizations are about as unlikely as persons to digest and respond to double- and triple-loop feedback. There is no quantitatively-validated third-person measure for developmental theory as applied to organizations; Rooke and Torbert (1998), to be discussed briefly below, comes closest to date.

It is important to highlight that this developmental octave is meant to be analogically applicable, not just to psycho/social/scientific phenomena, but to phenomena of all kinds—such as the musical octave, the colour spectrum, and to the nature of number itself, as is touched upon above (Bennett, 1983; McClain, 1978; Theon, 1979). Again, in Developmental Action Inquiry *analogical* theorizing about wholes and their relations of nesting, struggling, and cooperating (not *deductive* theorizing from axioms about variables, nor *inductive* reasoning) is taken as primary because this kind of thinking can be ridden beyond itself in each moment of thinking toward a wider awareness of the four territories of experience—both toward the phenomenal world and toward the noumenal working of our own attention. Moreover, as already mentioned, judgments about whether a given strategy or action is harmonious with, or discrepant from, a given purpose also require analogical thinking.

This emphasis on holistic, analogical, self-transcending thinking in real time is no doubt a key difficulty that obstructs more social science colleagues from taking an interest in Developmental Action Inquiry, even though such thinking is open to debate and empirical testing. For, first of all, analogical thinking is out of fashion in science and often considered sloppy and primitive. Second, American Academy of Management thought (unlike large areas of education, political philosophy, and psychology in the US and unlike European, Asian, Latin American, and African scholarship [when it is not merely an American derivative]) is peculiarly alienated from, and hostile to, the incomparably elegant and richly contested tradition of developmental theory, research, and practice. This tradition not only reaches back from Kegan (1994) through Piaget and Hegel to Plato and to Socrates' dialogues amid everyday life, but also through the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of eight stages of life, through tai chi to Taoism, etc. (Alexander and Langer, 1990; Wilber, 1995). Today, developmental theory (usually as formulated by Piaget or Kohlberg) is often dismissed as individualistic or hierarchical, when in fact, in the formulation



offered here, each later stage permits a practice that is more ecological (in both social and natural terms), more relational and mutual (in both political and spiritual terms), and more open to the unknown than earlier stages. Moreover, the analogy among personal, organizational, and epistemological logics-in-action highlights how critical any given organizational and cultural surround—and the action-logic of each political act—is in either encouraging or discouraging transformation by participants towards first-, second-, and third-person research/practice that generates single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback. Also, ironically, the sharper analogical awareness inherent in later action-logics sees the actual fragmented and chaotic swirl of action-logics from moment-to-moment within and around oneself, dissolving any pre-relativistic sense of individualism and hierarchy.

The significance of cultivating a double- and triple-loop action inquiry capacity in oneself, organizations, and social science is that, theoretically, only leaders and other organizational participants, consultants, or scholars with such capacities can reliably help organizations to transform toward such capacities and trace such transformation. In today's world the capacity to self-transform—while more closely aligning mission, strategy, performance, and outcomes—is arguably the key competence for continuing success in turbulent environments—whether we speak of businesses in the market, of approaches to social science at universities, or of our own personal, lifelong inquiries with our closest friends.

### **Data about, and Practice of, Developmental Action Inquiry**

Recent studies provide some empirical confirmation for these theoretical propositions. Bushe and Gibbs (1990) found that eleven internal consultants measured at the Strategist stage in the Washington University Sentence Completion Form were perceived as more competent by other organizational members, and as playing more of a change management role, than fifty-three other consultants who scored at earlier stages of development. Torbert and Fisher (1992) and Rooke (1997) describe self-reflective activities in mini-communities of inquiry that managers or any other adult volunteers can engage in to support development from Achiever to Strategist, along with statistical results supporting the developmental efficacy of those activities.

Rooke and Torbert (1998) found that, in ten organizations observed over an average of 4.2 years, the five CEOs measured at the Strategist stage of development supported 15 progressive organizational transformations, with dramatic increases in business indicators of success, while the five CEOs measured at pre-Strategist stages supported a total of 0 progressive transformations and several instances of serious deterioration in business indicators. The developmental changes were measured independently by three trained raters who achieved a level of reliability beyond 0.9.

But let us look beyond third-person data to two much closer illustrations of practice guided by the Developmental Action Inquiry approach. First, how might a Developmental Action Inquiry consultant respond to the case, in Joe Raelin's Preface to this issue, of the Manufacturing Manager who visits the team that is supposed to be developing innovative procedures?

A Developmental Action Inquiry consultant or participant might first note the simple *Threefold* dynamics among active, passive, and reconciling in the short

exchange between the Team Leader and the Senior Manufacturing Manager. The Team Leader begins by representing the first, active force—the vision of a new way of working. The Senior Manager's first move is as second, passive, object-ing force. Then both of them continue in second-force mode, objecting to one another. More first force initiative and more third force reconciling are needed in the situation. Intervention by the consultant and/or the team members is needed. There has as yet been no true meeting—no alchemical transformation involving the three forces.

Looking more specifically, the Developmental Action Inquiry perspective shows the Team Leader oscillating between Strategist-stage rhetoric about empowerment and using the team for live quality improvement, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Diplomat-stage withdrawal from conflict with the Senior Manager, instead of improving the quality of the exchange on the spot. The Senior Manager primarily exhibits Technician-stage characteristics in his categorical claim that the proposal won't work, in his emphasis on a precise plan to cut . . . costs, and in his lack of action initiative to improve the present interchange. His espoused commitment to working with things as they change has an Achiever-stage quality about it, but in practice he is not doing so (yet) in this situation.

The Developmental Action Inquiry consultant has a wide array of possible interventions, depending on many elements of his/her contextual and implicit knowledge about the developmental timing of the company, the team, and the project. Each effective intervention will be conducted as a form of inquiry as well as a form of influence. For example, if there is a long-term vacuum of legitimate, transformational authority in the company, the consultant may take a rather parental role, saying:

Ending the meeting now is just going to crystallize the bad feeling here. If either of you lets it end now, you are guilty of poor quality improvement leadership. While you each consider how you can take a more constructive initiative, we need to hear from the team members. [*Turning to the team members*] Are you strongly committed to the design you've come up with? Do you see it meeting the Senior Managers goals? If not, can it be redesigned without violating its spirit?

As this particular intervention illustrates, the Developmental Action Inquiry approach does not only encourage processing and reflection and empowerment of others, but is also willing to blend powerful action moves with feedback, as participants in ongoing action situations inevitably must.

Next, I offer a second up-close illustration—this one of the interweaving of single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback and transformation. The illustration comes from my personal journal of a conversation at my home when Peter Reason arrived from Ireland for the 1997 Academy of Management meeting in Boston, where the symposium that led to this issue was offered. My brief version of Peter's more textured stories illustrates his interweaving, both in leisure and at work, of a political Participatory Action Research approach, with his own, second-person Cooperative Inquiry approach, and the kind of first-person here-and-now awareness of Developmental Action Inquiry. These stories also illustrate a light-heartedness and a light touch that are cultivated by the humility of repeatedly observing one's own incongruities during the course of the meditative practice of living one's life. I invite readers to hypothesize at what points in the following stories single-, double-, or triple-loop feedback and awareness may be operating:

8/8/97

Peter Reason arrives at my home in Boston lithe and copper, having rowed ashore from his sailboat off the west coast of Ireland this morning, in order to fly here for the 1997 Academy of Management meetings.

In addition to presenting his OD&C Division Invited Address 'Revisioning Inquiry for Action: A Participatory View', Peter is currently engaged in a number of concurrent and overlapping inquiry practices. One is his two-year Cooperative Inquiry with a group of longtime professional colleague/friends into what exquisite performance may entail, not just in the arts or in one's vocation, but also in the interstices of daily life.

Several of Peter's Cooperative Inquiry colleagues were with him on this sailing expedition. He regales us, using exquisite gestures, tones and facial expressions, with the inner challenges he repeatedly experienced as—first, his dinghy was knocked off the sailboat by a swell—next, one friend's cellphone, that Peter had rather objected in principle to having on board, got them the help they needed—then, a day later, when they were caught in a foggy dead calm and Peter tried to start up the sailboat motor, it failed to catch for the first time ever. Fit to burst, but aware of being exquisitely eyed by a Gestalt therapist, a Chan. master, and an organizational consultant, Peter confessed that he felt like throwing a tantrum and bursting into tears. Everyone laughed heartily and that moment passed into the next, without leaving a trace.

A few weeks before that, Peter was in Colombia for the Worldwide Congress on Participatory Action Research, which drew—in addition to the 1,700 participants—Presidential videos from Brazil and political pleas on behalf of PAR researchers murdered only two weeks before and on behalf of the right to a natural death in Colombia (where one-quarter of the population dies violently). As the conference continued, Peter became increasingly concerned with its non-participative, non-collaborative, white-males-at-the-podium quality . . . to the point where he mounted the dais and expressed just what the nature of his concern was. In the midst of his intervention, he realized he had no idea what do next, and then, almost simultaneously, that he needed to pee and it was lunch time. He finished with these points and walked off toward the bathroom. He was halfway along the aisle when the English-to-Spanish simultaneous translation ended and the whole crowd burst into laughter and dissolved toward lunch.

In the hallway, Peter asked an African woman if she would chair the next session (when he was to be one of eight [male] reporters on key issues that had emerged), and then went out shopping. Upon his return, he found the African woman starting the next session, surrounded by sisters from Asia, Europe, and Latin America who brought written notes from the floor. First, key questions were volunteered and rapidly rank ordered by vote of the whole body. The rest followed naturally.

Who knows how many incongruities are suffered and how many instances of single-, double-, and triple-loop feedback and of exquisite performance are exhibited in these cases? Who can imagine by what disciplines to cultivate such attending, thinking, feeling, acting, and effectuating?

So long as social science approaches do not develop theory, methods, data, and reporting vehicles that open toward triple-loop, self-transforming action inquiry, practitioners will do well to question the value of social science for their activities.

### **Comparing Developmental Action Inquiry to Empirical Positivism, Action Learning, Action Science and Cooperative Inquiry**

Just how far is social science currently from opening toward first-, second-, and third-person triple-loop action inquiry? Argyris (1971, 1980) made powerful and cogent

arguments beginning a quarter of a century ago about just how far. Empirical Positivist science is an institution/paradigm primarily dedicated to digesting single-loop feedback, after the act, from third-person studies in order to make universalizable (not timely) conclusions with valid certainty, all under conditions of hierarchical control by researchers of subjects and of dissociation between research and action. According to the developmental octave of social scientific paradigms, Empirical Positivism requires four transformations before it addresses the full field of Developmental Action Inquiry. At the US Academy of Management, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods through a Multi-method Eclecticism is currently in fashion, and Postmodern Interpretivists have been visible and vocal during the 1990s.

I interpret the practice of Action Learning and Action Research as pedagogical and research reactions to Positivism that switch the focus from impersonal research for the sake of valid, general theory to personal learning for the sake of more effective local practice (see Table 1 in the Preface for comparison of characteristics of Developmental Action Inquiry with characteristics of Action Learning and Action Research). Like Positivism, Action Learning often focuses on single-loop learning (e.g. new skills) in second-person research/practice contexts (classes or workshops); when individuals then try these new skills in their own work settings, this often represents first-person, double-loop learning because taking the risk of intentionally experimenting with new behavior on the job may be a radical shift in approach. Depending on the specific setting and researchers, such work contains a mixture of Multi-method Eclectic, Postmodern Interpretivist, and Cooperative Ecological Inquiry qualities.

Argyris' version of Action Science (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985) is intended to encourage double-loop learning among second-persons in real time, as well as third-person data and theory after the act. This is a significant step toward Developmental Action Inquiry. But Argyris (personal communication) is ambivalent about the relevance of first-person, emotional research. He argues broadly against developmental theory (on the grounds that its practitioners make stage attributions without public testing with respondents—an argument that doesn't hold in the case of Developmental Action Inquiry where such attributions are tested directly with respondents and where participants often diagnose themselves in ongoing dialogue in mini-communities of inquiry). Also, as mentioned earlier, Argyris does not explore the notions of triple-loop awareness or timeliness. Moreover, his tight control of theoretical domain of discourse and his bivariate models (Model I and Model II) themselves contribute to win-lose dynamics. Consequently, his work has some elements of Cooperative Ecological Inquiry mixed with Multi-method Eclecticism and a Positivistic tendency toward inductive-deductive theories of relationships among variables and of what constitutes universalizable generalizations. Although his work is also interpretivist in nature (it examines persons' espoused theories and theories-in-use), it is emphatically *not* Postmodern Interpretivist because Argyris' is the only normative interpretive system visible.

Peter Reason's and John Heron's Cooperative Inquiry (Reason, 1994, 1995; Heron, 1996) works with a full sense of first- and second-person research/practice, creating mini-communities of inquiry in their practice (such as the Reason inquiry with colleagues into exquisite performance described above) and describing more complete and more profound guidelines for creating such communities of inquiry

**Table 2** Seven ways Developmental Action Inquiry is distinctive from other action methods

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1. DAI seeks to blend and align first-person, subjective inquiry; second-person, intersubjective inquiry; and third-person, objective inquiry.
  2. DAI seeks incongruities and improved harmony among four territories of experience—intuitive vision, rational strategy, artistic performance, and concrete outcomes.
  3. DAI operates at the personal, group, organizational, social, and ecological scales.
  4. DAI seeks to blend single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop feedback and learning in ongoing, real-time settings.
  5. DAI asks not only about the analytic validity of theory, data, and written reports, but also and equally about their transformational action efficacy.
  6. To engage in DAI involves the following steps (each of which becomes clarified, revised, re-committed-to, or abandoned with each further step):
    - (a) affirming the Vision of a lifetime of self-transforming action and inquiry in association with friends of similar commitment and with the help of liberating spiritual/performance disciplines that exercise one's attention to encounter and span the four territories of experience from moment-to-moment;
    - (b) developing and testing in one's own practice an analogical theory of the timing of processes (such as developmental theory applied to number, music, colour, personal and organizational development, etc.);
    - (c) developing a kind of performance artistry in movement, tone, and speech that is simultaneously vigilant and spontaneous, and that blends one's own idiosyncratic passion with archetypal-observational dispassion and with timely compassion;
    - (d) developing dialogical and empirical measurement methods for assessing success in the object-ing world.
  7. In numerical and quantitative terms, engaging in DAI requires:
    - (a) first, foremost, and always, the effort to experience the noumenal—*0* (the origin, chaos, the source, the undifferentiated aesthetic continuum);
    - (b) second, the effort to make (and to constantly re-make) a *nominal distinction* (e.g. dividing the attention among the four territories of experience, in order to recount them and test for a primitive, intuitive, analogical sense of alignment or incongruity);
    - (c) third, the effort to make *analogical ordinal distinctions* (e.g. among developmental notes, so that one can act strategically in time); and
    - (d) fourth, *interval* level distinctions that can be of use in assessing outcomes.
- 

than anyone else has. They also develop a notion of interactions among four types of knowledge very similar to (and interestingly different from) the action inquiry notion of four territories of experience. They name their four: Experiential, Presentational, Propositional, and Practical knowledge—a way of distinguishing that highlights the spectrum between implicit and explicit knowing and is thus particularly helpful for supporting development to the Strategist and Magician logics-in-action. This is a giant step toward Developmental Action Inquiry and constitutes the fullest realization of the Cooperative Ecological Inquiry paradigm of which I am aware. But Reason and Heron have attended less to third-person research/practice, either in the sense of influencing whole organizations or in the sense of developing tightly linked, quantitatively rigorous empirical tests of theory—a challenge that

Developmental Action Inquiry does choose to address and seeks to interweave with the encouragement of first- and second-person research/practice. Bradbury (1998) is the first to name her work on the Swedish Natural Step Cooperative Ecological Inquiry, and she explores the links between creating micro-communities of inquiry and macro-societal-global change.

Developmental Action Inquiry deals with all the Action Science and Cooperative Inquiry concerns and owes much to Argyris, Reason and Heron for their ways of conceptualizing and enacting their forms of research/practice. At the same time, it attempts to interweave first-, second-, and third-person research/practice in ways that open ordinary, everyday settings to such research/practice, while simultaneously recognizing the long, paradoxical, ironic, multiply-transformational, developmental journey required before one can expect widespread personal, organizational, or public commitment to such notions.

Action Learning, Action Research, Action Science, and Cooperative Inquiry all proceed through alternations between action and reflection. This seems to be a useful way to begin cultivating persons' capacity for reflection related to their own actions. By contrast, Developmental Action Inquiry understands all human action as a blending of action and reflection, the ultimate challenge at all levels of organizing being to develop a clearer awareness of how they *actually* blend and how they *optimally* blend in this time and place, so that one can intervene now.

By way of summary and conclusion, Table 2 highlights the distinctive characteristics of Developmental Action Inquiry.

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