

Navigating the Channel of Life

A Model of Adult Development in Organizations



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Imagine a human life, your life or mine, as a person in a little “sunfish” sailboat, a one-person, one-sail boat with a rudder to keep the boat steady and straight and a tiller at the stern for steering. One skilled sailor can handle this spry little boat. Further imagine a river flowing into a long narrow bay opening out onto the ocean. Childhood is like the river—the current of the river carries the little boat along, sheltered by the banks from very much wind (though, of course, not completely). Human development of a certain amount comes naturally. Of course, we hear of stories of childhood shipwrecks, but normally, with a little bit of skill and luck, the boat makes it down the river and out onto the bay.¹ The bay I am thinking of looks something like the San Francisco Bay, as I spent 11 years in that area during and after college.

But the narrative of this little model changes a great deal when the boat floats out onto the bay, for at this point, life is no longer about “Sail, sail, sail your boat, gently down a stream,” and, as any thoughtful and honest adult will recognize, life is not “but a dream.”

I imagine the task of adult development to be the task of taking that little sunfish up the bay, against the sometimes fierce but always steady headwind of adversity, uncertainty, scarcity, and entropy, and out into the open waters of the ocean. This is nearly a Sisyphean task, as progress must be made *against the wind*. There is no coasting or gentle progress with the tides.

On the other hand, the wind, while providing resistance to direct progress, also provides motive force for the little sailboat. In fact, without wind the little boat would literally be dead in the water. (And without adversity, uncertainty, scarcity or entropy, we would have little impetus to grow and develop.) But, in the hands of an able sailor, this trim little boat can make great progress indeed. So the boatsperson, you or I, puts hand to the tiller, hoists in the sail, and sets off in what is called a “tack”, traversing a course roughly 45° off of straight into the wind.

So we move along, clearly making progress. We feel the wind in our face, but it is not a discouraging drag on our demeanor, but the exhilarating wind of speed, the evidence of progress. At this point in our lives, we tend to over-extrapolate. “At this rate of speed, I’ll be out of the bay and into ocean waters in no time.” It doesn’t help that the myth of rapid progress is reinforced in every

¹ “Loevinger suggests that virtually all adults move successfully through the first three stages. Some then get stuck at the self-protective stage, while others move on to the conformist stage and no further. Most adults, however, reach at least the transition that she calls the self-aware level, and many go beyond this to the conscientious stage or further.” Helen L. Bee, *The Journey of Adulthood* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), p39. In my own reflection on the state of childhood around the world, I am reminded that my theory of adult development, indeed arguably any theory that we have looked at, is probably helpfully descriptive only of Western or economically developed societies. For many children in global poverty, the boat slipping gently down the stream is very far from an accurate picture of their blighted lives. I don’t deal with this darker side of life in this model or paper, though it weighs on me in my ethical choices in life.

bookstore display, every personal interest magazine cover story, nearly every commercial advertisement to come before our eyes. (In other words, just because someone becomes a millionaire before age 30 does not mean that that person is mature, wise, generous, or grounded, as we are reminded daily in the news about professional athletes' misbehavior. No, that person's development has simply become more complex. But in the analogy, he or she still occupies a little sunfish of a sailboat and must find the means to pay attention to sailing it.)

But at some point, inevitably, the trim little boat of our life begins to risk running out of open water. The boat's hull is not deep, but it is still possible to run it aground. The bay is not infinitely wide, and so the first real test of our sailing skill comes when we need to "come around," or to take a different tack. This happens when what was working for us, helping us make headway, no longer is working, and in fact is getting us into trouble. Often, the success we have experienced in this previous tack now works to our disadvantage—we think we should be able to continue making progress without major adjustment. Yet at this point, in order to make progress we must turn straight into the wind and head back, 90° around from the direction we had been going. When this happens, a number of other things happen: 1) we stop making any forward progress, 2) it looks like we are facing the wind head on, 3) our sail flaps, momentarily useless while the boat is coming around, 4) we despair of ever feeling that great feeling of progress again.

All this happens, *indeed must happen*, for progress up the bay toward the ocean to be possible. This turn, however, is a jolt, and feels disorienting, even discouraging. The distant landmark we had fixed in our sights as an indicator of our progress is no longer in our field of vision. If progress had been equated with moving in a Northwesterly direction, then to begin to move in a Northeasterly direction may seem like going squarely the wrong way.

But of course, if we were able to take a bird's eye view of our life's course and its tacks and turns, we would see that this kind of zig-zag progress is, in fact, the only way to navigate the channel of the bay to make it out into open water. But this kind of perspective is rare, and no GPS satellite service exists for help navigating the turns of one's life. So, often we fail to take a new tack until the old one is clearly no longer working, after we have run aground, lost all momentum, and are now confused about how to make progress. This is called a crisis, whether of faith, or of midlife, or of psychological distress due to scheduled or unscheduled life strains.²

In this model, life is a complex interplay between growth (steady progress in the same direction) and development (involving some kind of crisis, insight or discontinuity, leading one to decide to take a different tack). Levinson's theory of seasons of adulthood describes these broad

² Helen L. Bee, *Journey of Adulthood*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000), p50.

seasons as characterized by longer periods of continuity of life structure interspersed between shorter transition stages, at which point discontinuity often interrupts and new life structures emerge.³

Finally, in this picture of life, growth and development, the goal is to reach the ocean, the ultimate in open water, which represents achieving one's life's purpose. It is the accomplishment of the final stage of any theory of adult development—achieving wisdom, self-actualization, the discovery and consummation of one's destiny. We all endeavor to steer our little crafts out into the ocean, but few manage this feat. Most get run aground along the way or lose hope and cease the effort.

Personal Agents of Development

I identify three dichotomies, or axes, providing motive impulse for growth and development, dealing fundamentally with God (or the Ultimate, however conceived), other people, and ourselves:

- **God or Transcendent Reality:** Whether or not there is an actual deity in the picture is, of course, decidedly important to the individual, but I argue that even for the irreligious person these tacks need to be negotiated somehow: faith and hope versus dissatisfaction and disillusionment.
 - *Faith and Hope.* Faith is quite obviously a force that produces growth and development. It can lead people toward ethical behavior, discipline, generosity, sacrificial love. None of these artifacts of maturity are inevitable, of course, by virtue of some intellectual embrace of a religious system. But deep faith can provide the motivation and direction to produce discipline and humility to develop and grow. Appendix 1 contains a model of stages of faith that is a synthesis of several models, taken from Brian McLaren's postmodern apologetic, *Finding Faith*.⁴
 - *Dissatisfaction and Disillusionment.* Without dissatisfaction, it is easy to become complacent and for faith itself to become stagnant. Disillusionment occurs because, in fact, we have been believing an illusion of some kind. (I say this as man who believes deeply—I have sincerely believed many things over the course of my life that I no longer believe, but my faith is deeper and my confidence in God more solid. It is just that I consider that I have had to discard certain illusions along the way.) Disillusionment has a bad reputation in the world of faith. In fact, disillusionment is a sign of growth because *illusions aren't real*. As we discard childish simplifications of the world for models of greater nuance, disillusionment is often the pathway to deeper faith. But it often doesn't feel like it at the time.

³ *Ibid*, p44.

⁴ Brian McLaren, *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*. (Zondervan, 1999), p66-70.

- **Others:** The pathway to relational growth involves holding twin realities in tension: the experience of community, commonality, and affiliation versus “the beloved,” uniqueness and separation.
 - *Community.* Peer pressure is a force for development, whether in the academic life of a graduate student in a lab, the social life of a fraternity pledge, or the competitive experience of the new class of associate consultants in a firm. Loevinger talks about the conformist stage, when group expectations become determinative for individual behavior.⁵[footnote] When I was in 8th grade, I signed up to take a language class because my (academically inclined) friends were doing it, with no prior interest in the language myself. Community can get us to study French, travel out of our comfort zone, or apply ourselves to learning the skills that will help the team. Community, first experienced in a healthy family but then in a peer group, is also the place where the fundamentals of communication and relational health are learned: generosity and hospitality, mutuality and grace. These experiences ideally prepare a young adult for the later decisions that come regarding Ericson’s stages of intimacy and generativity.
 - *The Beloved.* Yet at some point the *many* often must give way to the *one*—a group of friends is traded for a special friend, and a group of housemates is traded for a partner, ideally for life. Obviously, the decision to marry—with all the obligations and privileges that confers—can be a tremendously developmental one. The choice to couple off can feel like a one-way move away from peer friendships and community, but in fact the couple’s relationship is stronger if they can learn to move out of the separation of the oneness of marriage back into a community of friends, in which their oneness is welcome.

- **Self:** Any model of development must take into account the individual’s coming to terms with his or her own sense of self, through both the discovery of giftedness and success as well as learning to appropriately deal with limitations and failure.
 - *Success.* The upward climb of achievement through the disciplined honing of skills and development of giftedness, with the success that that so often brings, is a powerful motive force for adult development. The carrot of being recognized in your job, with attendant bonuses and promotions, can often (though not always) produce the fortitude and impulse to conquer addiction and squash distraction.
 - *Failure.* And yet, everything that goes up must come down, and human nature will out. So at some point, our failures catch up with us. This is not like the announcement we hear when we board a plane, “In the unlikely event of a water landing...” While that tragic event is

⁵ Bee, *op.cit*, p39.

statistically remote, our failures and limitations catching up to us is inevitable. And thus begins another tack in our journey, if we choose to accept it by accepting them: the pathway to growth involves humility, laying down our defenses, being able to say to ourselves, “I may never grow up to be a rock star,” and being able to say to our detractors, “It’s even worse than you think!” John Maxwell turned his attention to the role of failure in the development of leaders in his recent *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success*. “The difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure. Nothing else has the same kind of impact on people’s ability to achieve and to accomplish whatever their minds and hearts desire.”⁶

Each of these pairs describe points on an axis from open-ended and abundant to closed-ended and narrow: faith is open-ended, an upward look, while disillusionment is a shrinking and narrowing. Community and affiliation is open-ended—the more the merrier. The choice of a single “beloved” is not open-ended; in fact, it is a closing off of options: “Forsaking all others, till we are parted by death.” And development of skills and talents seems like a hopeful, open-ended process, securing success all the way along. But embracing limitations and facing failure is, well, so limiting. Each of these upward paths is matched by a downward move. Or back in my model, the left-ward tacks of faith, community, and success are correlated with rightward tacks of disillusionment, separation, and failure. But progress is not made unless both tacks are used in a back and forth fashion.

These three axes or pairs of agents interact, in my model, in the following way: as a young adult pulls into the bay from the mouth of the river, this young woman takes a leftward tack (just for simplicity’s sake) toward the more open-ended of each of these three axes: she tacks toward faith, community, and success. But at some point, she runs aground, and the combination of things she used before no longer works. Perhaps she is disillusioned because her pastor, from whom she had received her childhood faith, had an affair with the church organist. Or she hears from her friend from home that she is sleeping with her boyfriend and wondering why that could be so wrong. She then begins to tack back across the bay toward the other side—this new strategy, disillusionment in this case, begins to force her to ask questions of her faith she has never bothered to ask. While this is a painful process for her mother to watch (if she’s even allowed to see it) it is actually part of the growth process for this young woman.

The danger for the young woman is that she could now easily run aground on the opposite side of the bay. Disillusionment is deceptively toxic—it can provoke growth in faith, but it can also derail it. So in my model, there are dangerous shoals on either side of the channel of the bay, upon

⁶ John Maxwell, *Failing Forward* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p2, emphasis his.

which the little boat of our lives may easily run aground and be damaged if we aren't careful to come about at the proper time. Table 1 describes the crises associated with each tack of the boat of life, assuming that the boat is not brought around out of the way of danger in a timely fashion.

Table 1. Navigational Crises in Adult Life	
Tack	Dangerous shoals if we go too far:
1a) Faith and hope	Stagnant and/or immature faith
1b) Dissatisfaction and disillusionment	Cynicism and despair
2a) Community and affiliation	Inability to forge depth; fear of intimacy and/or commitment
2b) The Beloved and separation	Stifling and clingy relationship; co-dependency, isolation
3a) Development of giftedness and success	"I am what I do"; a fear of failure and death; rejection of suffering, inability to come to terms with loss and grief; meaninglessness and shallowness
3b) Embracing limitations and facing failure	Poor self-image and self-pity; purposelessness.

Faith is a developmental pathway, but if taken too far, without a corrective tack, it can lead to stagnation and immaturity. Disillusionment is also a developmental pathway, but if taken too far, it can lead to cynicism and despair. Community is a tool for development, but if made an absolute value, can lead to an inability to embrace intimacy and commitment. Marriage is also a pathway for development, but can lead to a stifling, stultifying and retrograde relationship (or series of similar failed relationships), if not tempered with a tack back toward community and affiliation. Development of giftedness is clearly a pathway toward growth and development, both professional and personal, but if not tempered with a realistic appraisal of one's own limitations and failures, it can lead to an inordinate fear of failure, or of being found out as a failure. And finally, embracing limitations and facing failure can also yield developmental fruit, but if the reverse tack of gift development and experiencing some recognizable success is not taken, then the person will wallow in self-pity and may come to feel like life has no real purpose. Figure 1 illustrates this model graphically.

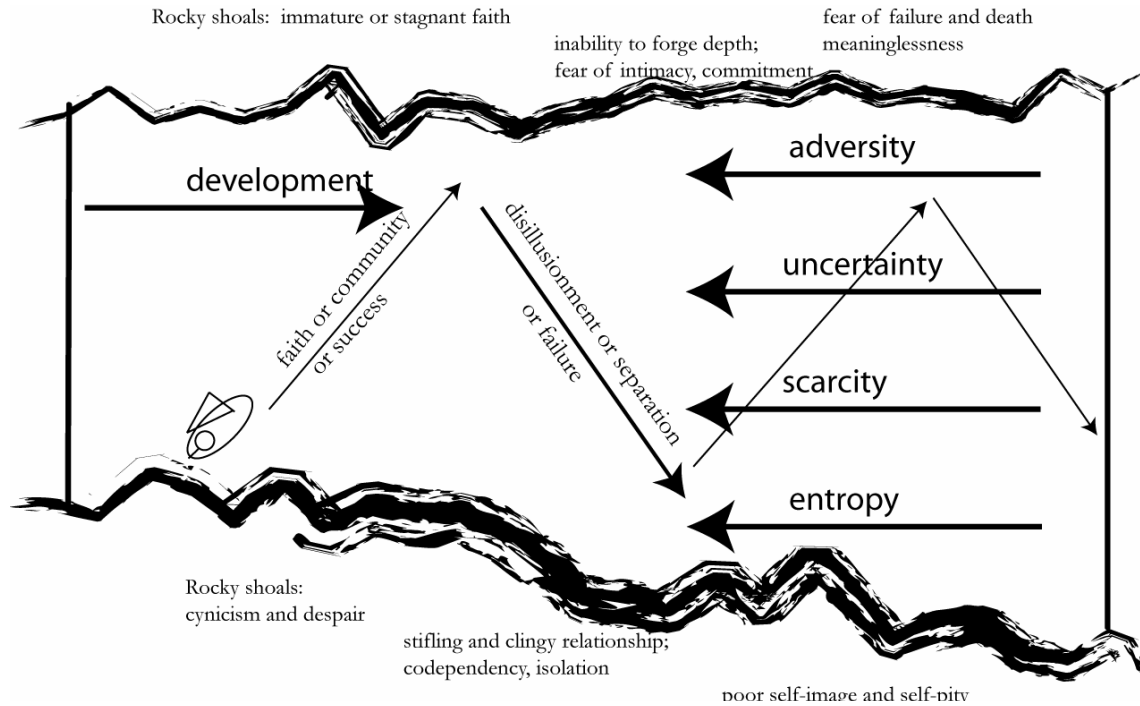


Figure 1. Navigational Model for Adult Development

For further illustration of the model, let me expand with more examples of lives run aground on the rocky shoals:

- *A “cocooning” process that never ends.* The intimate relationship or even the family never comes out of its relational home base enough to develop friendships, community and support. Relational growth is stifled—ultimately the central relationship may be doomed either to stagnation or worse. In the community in which I live, some people have big houses, housing lots of stuff, but the children spend their days on their computer or other electronic games, material needs sated but starved for relationship.
- *Single women on IVCF staff.* The community value is so high, and the other open-ended tasks (faith, skills and success) run so long, that at a certain age these women look around them and realize they haven’t paid enough attention to the desire they feel to be married one day. With their weekends scheduled for ministry, not romance, they just simply aren’t available to someone who might even be interested. At some point, they begin to face the fact that they may have unwittingly chosen a celibate life. This can then cause a larger crisis of faith and disillusionment.

- *The successful narcissist.* This person has never faced his or her own failure or limitations, and has an abiding sense of personal power and importance. While experiencing success in some areas of life, the narcissist is in a larger sense a failure, having run aground on the shores of insecurity and fear of failure.

“Notwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence, the narcissist depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his ‘grandiose self’ reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power, and charisma. For the narcissist, the world is a mirror.”⁷

This model synthesizes the stages models (in a sequential process) with the non-stage crises model: crises are defined as a time when what was working for us no longer does—we need to take a different tack. In Levinson this is reflected in the transition stages: early adult, age 30, mid-life, late adult transitions. Perhaps it would be fair to acknowledge that a single tack may not generate a crisis, but the conflation of two or more tacks (turns necessitated by the approach of dangerous shoals) would likely measure as a crisis: a failure in marriage could produce alienation and a move toward community, disillusionment in faith prompting a turn to God, and coming to terms with limitations and failures. Of course, the crisis could instead produce stagnation, a grounding of the boat in the shallows.

I think the model of life in a boat, navigable but also subject to the vicissitudes of wind and weather, is a pretty accurate description of how life goes. M. Scott Peck says it this way:

“Life is difficult.

This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”⁸

Peck goes on to state, “Discipline is the basic set of tools we require to solve life’s problems. Without discipline we can solve nothing. With only some discipline we can solve only some problems. With total discipline we can solve all problems.”⁹ It perhaps seems a little simplistic to equate all of life to a problem set assignment; indeed life is not fair and some things that happen to us (say the early death of a beloved son) can not be neatly summed up as a “problem.” The developmental theories talk about stresses and crises in life and the developmental potential (for good or ill) in these events. While it may be possible to weather a tragedy like the death of a child, it seems simplistic to talk about it as a

⁷ Kets de Vries, *Leaders, Fools and Impostors*, (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1993), p21: epigraph from Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (Norton, 1979).

⁸ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p15.

⁹ *Ibid*, p16.

problem needing to be solved. It is more like a storm needing to be survived. It is survivable, but not without impact. It may even produce growth and development, but surely not gladly chosen. Yet Peck's insight, the seminal insight of his bestseller, *The Road Less Traveled*, is crucial for anyone attempting to understand adult development in general or their own developmental path in particular.

Organizational Agents of Influence

In this model I also define three organizational agents of influence affecting human growth and development. These three agents are like the personal agents, in that they represent contrasting values held in tension. In the model, the boat is an individual's life. The developmental organization doesn't take different tacks at different times, but it creates an environment whereby the individual employees of the organization are encouraged and empowered to take the appropriate tacks at appropriate times—therefore both values, or their organizational manifestations, need to be held in tension.

Ultimately, the organizational culture is the place where the developmental organization will be established. Certain supervisors or co-workers can have deep impact in the lives of people around them. "Effective managers manage themselves and the people they work with so that both the organization and the people profit from their presence."¹⁰ However, unless developmental management is coherent with the organizational culture, that impact will be anomalous and short-lived.

- **Transcendent Purpose:** The company has a stated mission or purpose statement that is coherently applied and validated throughout the organization. This generates employee loyalty and a willingness to offer loyal critique, which the organization embraces because of its higher commitment to its purpose. This agent correlates to the first of the three personal agents: literally it is having an organization you can believe in.
 - *Open-ended value: Integrity.* The integrity of an organization is, in part, the coherence between what it says is important and what, by measure of its practices, it actually demonstrates to be of importance. A company lacking such integrity produces cynics out of even the most naïve and hopeful of new employees. Without a credible claim to the loyalty and heart-felt commitment of its employees, a company will tend toward a policy-rich management of its employees' baser motivations, churning out rule after rule to try to get employees to do what they would only do with a shared, internalized motivational framework. On the other hand, a company with demonstrated integrated commitment to its worthy transcendent purpose will find its employees full of faith in its leadership and able to summon up supernatural effort

¹⁰ Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager* (New York: William Morrow, 1982), p15.

toward the fulfillment of its destiny, enriching the company's employees *and* other stakeholders.

- *Closed-ended value: loyal critique and rigorous self-evaluation.* The company one can believe in must not be above critique, but must actively seek out loyal evaluative feedback from its employees, as well as being willing to listen to others in its ecology (shareholders, customers, regulatory agencies, NGOs). Supervisors seek out feedback from subordinates regarding their own and their unit's performance, and there is no tendency to shoot the messenger of bad tidings.

- **Relational Health:** The organization neither undermines self-initiative through enforced conformity nor isolates people through competition and jealousy. Stephen Covey tells the story of the manager who wanted to encourage teamwork in his organization but motivated aggressive sales through a competitive race for one of his managers to win a trip to Bermuda. Pointing out the inconsistency of message, Covey summarizes, "One manager's success meant failure for the other managers." Covey's public victory disciplines serve the relational dimension of the organizational agents of development: Think Win/Win; Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood; and Synergize.¹¹ This provides the organizational support for the second axis of personal agents of development, that of relationship with others.
 - *Open-ended value: Teamwork.* A team is a group of people who must work together to accomplish a common purpose. Often people are grouped into "teams" when they either 1) have no need to work together, or 2) have no common purpose. But a developmental organization doesn't simply have Thursday evening volleyball or off-site creative brainstorming sessions, but gives people real experiences where their perspectives are valued and their contributions are recognized as critical to the overall success of the project. This is the enactment of Covey's sixth habit, Synergize. This will require honest communication about process breakdowns, and reconciliation and forgiveness (even perhaps using that word!) between colleagues and teammates.
 - *Closed-ended value: Submission and servanthood.* Not all team experiences involve ready consensus and every team member's full self-actualization through a harmonious synergy of creative talent and impulses. "We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms..."¹²

¹¹ Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the Character Ethic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

¹² *Ibid*, p239.

Servanthood in a team setting begins with what Covey calls “empathic listening,” where the goal isn’t to win the argument but to deeply understand others on the team. Submission continues when, at the end of the brainstorming session, decisions get made and not everyone gets their way. In a developmental organization, teammates don’t leave the room uncommitted to the decisions that went contrary to their preferences. Rather, they submit to the team’s agreed-upon process and serve the purposes of the team. With relational health as an organizational culture asset, tendencies toward passive aggression or resistance from below can be addressed quickly, either bringing the effected employee back into alignment or, if necessary, removing that person from the team. In the developmental organization, an employee readily acknowledges the many benefits he or she receives from participation on the team, so it is possible to guide this employee back to productive ways of relating to the team because the employee is so motivated to remain.

- **Authentic Competence:** The firm expects from its employees excellence and supports it. Yet the firm also demands and models authentic facing up to weakness and respects it when this happens. This is the institutional support for the third axis, that of the self. The organization provides arenas and opportunities for employees to grow and develop, while expecting that people will make mistakes and own up to them. In *Bringing Out the Best in People*, Alan Loy McGinnis writes his management rules for helping others excel: “Rule 3: Establish High Standards for Excellence.” “Rule 4: Create an Environment where failure is not fatal.”¹³
 - *Open-ended value: Excellence and Initiative.* In a competitive culture, with high costs of failure, an organization can motivate deceit, cover-ups, overstatements of success and a disregard for the hard facts of failure. This is fatal to an organization let alone its developmental culture. (Hence the notorious and massively costly corporate-finance scandals of the past few years.) Even well-meaning and basically honest employees will not develop in such an environment; in fact they probably won’t have the political skills to survive in the organization. But when an organization values excellence, trains for it, expects it, but doesn’t penalize failure arbitrarily (knowing that failure brings a certain amount of unavoidable, intrinsic disincentive), then people can develop and be seen to be developing (i.e., growing in some professional way in which they obviously hadn’t already achieved excellence).
 - *Closed-ended value: Humility.* Every capable young employee, well along on his or her first long “skill and success” tack, will eventually come to the end of that first wonderful ride. If that person, faced with a personal or professional disappointment, can look up and into the

¹³ Alan Loy McGinnis, *Bringing Out the Best in People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), p56, p71.

organization and see people who themselves have failed, have learned from it, and can tell the story without being trite or dismissive (i.e., tell it vulnerably yet without maudlin self-pity), then that young and capable employee might very well embrace his or her own “limitation and failure” tack with confidence that, in the end, fundamental life lessons are ripe for the picking. With models of humility (people who are truly models and yet who are remarkably humble), and an organization that doesn’t shy away from honoring them, the developing young employee will be better able to navigate his or her own craft away from the rocky shore of the fear of failure and the self-deception and duplicity that that fear fosters.

Each of these organizational values maps elegantly onto the appropriate personal agent value from the previous list. Organizational *integrity* correlates to *faith*, while *openness to critique* correlates to *disillusionment and dissatisfaction*. An organization that has both integrity and is not brittle in the face of critique can actually foster an environment where one’s faith development is no threat to organizational participation, and vice versa. (In other words, it would be easy to imagine an organization in which a lack of integrity produced cynicism that made personal integrity, let alone faith, more difficult for the employee, while at the same time made organizational critique costly to the employee. This would not be a developmental context or a hopeful place to remain for the employee.) Likewise, *teamwork* correlates to *community* and each mutually supports the characteristics needed to thrive and grow—organizational forms of teamwork develop skills that can deepen personal experiences of community, and vice versa. *Submission and servanthood* correlate to the unique relationship with *the Beloved*—as the choice will need to be made, repeatedly and unendingly, to submit one’s own preferences and wishes for the sake of one’s beloved. And, quite obviously, *excellence and initiative* and *humility* correspond with *success* and *failure*, and the fostering of the one in organizational life will lead to an achievement and an acceptance of the other in personal life, and vice versa.

Let us consider a few examples of organizational agents of development working properly or breaking down.

- Often an apparent conflict emerges between employee development and concern for the bottom line: employee development is more costly in the short term, and perhaps developed employees will no longer be satisfied in the positions in which they have served. This can, of course, serve the larger organization, but individual managers may need to find replacements as people develop skills that create dissatisfaction in their current positions. But in organizations where, despite lofty mission statements, the most important value is quarterly income (i.e., short-term profit), the long-term development of staff is simply not seen as profitable. This line of thinking was debunked in a recent Harvard Business Review article:

“Managers are always claiming, ‘People are our most important asset.’ But deep down, they can’t shake the feeling that employees are costs. Big costs. And they treat them that way. Quarterly earnings off? Cut the perks, rein in training, and downsize. This strategy may increase earnings in the short term, but it’s myopic. Recent studies suggest that layoffs actually destroy shareholder value. And our research shows that treating employees like the assets they are—by investing in development—boosts returns over the long term.”¹⁴

In an organization with more deeply held transcendent goals, employee development is consistent with these goals, and it becomes normative, with a payoff for employees and for shareholders alike.

- In Hal Rosenbluth’s iconoclastic *The Customer Comes Second*, he tells the story of his travel agency in which employees, not customers, were his top priority. Employees were required to attend “mandatory” training sessions, but there was no need for an enforcement mechanism, because these were highly popular. His company grew to have one of the highest customer satisfaction ratings in the industry, not, as he says, by putting the customer first, but by emphasizing the importance of an excellent and developing workforce. “Only when people know what it feels like to be first in someone else’s eyes can they sincerely share that feeling with others. We’re not saying choose your people over your customers. We’re saying focus on your people *because* of your customers. That way everybody wins.”¹⁵
- When stated higher goals and unstated operational priorities do not align, the organization develops a dysfunctional system that makes truth, organizational or personal, an endangered species. Ironically, this is the more powerful when the organization has a lofty mission, as is the case with non-profit organizations in general and Christian ministries in particular.

“The organization becomes the addictive substance for its employees when the employees become hooked on the promise of the mission and choose not to look at how the system is really operating. The organization becomes an addictive substance when its actions are excused because it has a lofty mission. We have found an inverse correlation between the loftiness of the mission and the congruence between stated and unstated goals. When this lack of congruence exists, it is more probable that the organization will enter in to a rigid denial system with concomitant grandiosity.”¹⁶

One of the most painful organizational experiences of my life in IVCF has to do with precisely such an addiction, which was destructive in the lives of a several dozen employees with whom I had supervisory oversight. I didn’t quickly see the destructive nature, though I too was caught in its web of deception, perpetrated over several years by a direct supervisee of my own.

¹⁴ Laurie Bassi and Daniel McMurrer, “Human Capital: How’s Your Return on People?” *Harvard Business Review*, March 2004, p18.

¹⁵ Hal Rosenbluth, *The Customer Comes Second*, (New York: William Morrow, 1992), p25.

¹⁶ Anne Wilson Schaefer and Diane Fassel, *The Addictive Organization*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), p123.

- Many books have been written on the organizational value and practice of teamwork. In one of the recent best, a simple fable exploring team life, Patrick Lencioni writes of the five dysfunctions of a team: 1) absence of trust, leading to invulnerability; 2) fear of conflict, leading to artificial harmony; 3) lack of commitment, leading to ambiguity; 4) avoidance of accountability, leading to low standards; and 5) inattention to results, leading to a focus on status and ego.¹⁷ The first two of these are addressed by the open-ended value of teamwork in my model, while the next two (commitment and accountability) are addressed by the alternate values of submission and servanthood. One of the most egregious ways these dysfunctions manifest is when a team supposedly comes to consensus but the team members fail to live by it because, essentially, they personally disagreed with the decision. Another way is that team members fail to press for consensus because none of them can commit to an alternative that they personally don't favor. An organization in which employees operate with the discipline of functioning teams, including a willingness to submit to the choice of colleagues and peers, will likely perform well in the marketplace as well as contribute to a developmental outcome for individual employees.
- In their book detailing the results of in-depth interviews by the Gallup organization of over 80,000 managers in over 400 companies, Buckingham and Coffman talk about the “revolutionary” insight from their study of “the world’s greatest managers”.

“Conventional wisdom encourages you to think [that] anyone can be anything they want to be if they just try hard enough. Indeed, as a manager it is your duty to direct those changes. Devise rules and policies to control your employees’ unruly inclinations. Teach them skills and competencies to fill in the traits they lack... Great managers reject this out of hand. They remember ... that each individual is true to his unique nature. They recognize that each person is motivated differently, that each person has his own way of thinking and his own style of relating to others.... But they don’t bemoan these differences and try to grind them down. Instead they *capitalize* on them. They try to help each person become *more* and *more* of who he already is.”¹⁸

Developmental managers focus on the positive, on the areas of strength and giftedness, encouraging supervisees to grow and develop excellence in those areas, rather than simply focusing on weaknesses and grinding away at the need to improve in areas that may never become strengths.

- Finally, in another recent blockbuster, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins speaks of a “Level 5 Leader” who seems to break the mold of the larger-than-life CEO who by dint of ego and aggressive forcefulness is able to get their companies to perform well. Collins studied companies that

¹⁷ Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p188-190.

¹⁸ Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman, *First, Break all the Rules* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), p56-57. Ironically, this is the same insight that forms the foundation of other bestsellers that long pre-date the Gallup organization results, for example *The One Minute Manager* (1982) and *Bringing Out the Best in People* (1985): managers should “Help people reach their full potential [by] catching them doing something right”[Blanchard].

experienced an inflection point in their upward trajectory in the market, making the transition from “good to great”. One of the central ingredients in such a transformation was having a “level 5 leader” at the helm.

“Level 5 Executive: Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will... Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious—but *their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves.*”¹⁹

Stages of Development

At this point I will address the question of stages of development in a human life. I have already outlined three different stages in my simple model: childhood, characterized by a gentle drift down a benign stream; most of adulthood, characterized by the need to actively navigate the wind, water, and shoreline out of the bay toward the ocean; and finally culmination, self-actualization or wisdom, conceived of as the (relatively rare) emergence of the boat out into the open waters of a fulfilled life.

However, it must be obvious to the reader that the second stage is the one that captivates my interest for the purposes of this paper and my current position with IVCF. I take the position, consonant with the perspective of the instructors of the class, that Erickson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development is largely accurate. I am not at all trying to displace that theory or its rich and relevant insights. I am, however, trying to build a pragmatic model that might yield implications for self-knowledge and guidance of others in this process. I have identified, in Table 2 below, these broad navigational challenges with the most advanced of Erickson’s stages: Erickson’s industry and identity stages (IV and V) map to the success/failure growth in understanding of the self; intimacy and generativity stages (VI and VII) map to the relational components of community and intimacy; and wisdom stage (VIII) maps to the issue of faith and hope. These, of course, do not perfectly line up. Indeed, I think some of each navigational challenge (God, Others, Myself) can be found at each stage throughout Erickson’s model.

One implication of these broad identifications would be to extend the model to a timeline and a staged sense of chronological priority. Erickson’s model, therefore, would imply that the navigational challenges would roughly follow this pattern: Myself (stages IV and V), then Others (stages VI and

¹⁹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (NY: HarperCollins, 2001), p20-21. The first four levels, in Collin’s framework, are “*Level 1: Highly Capable Individual*: Makes productive contributions through talent, knowledge, skills, and good work habits. *Level 2: Contributing Team Member*: Contributes individual capabilities to the achievement of group objectives and works effectively with others in a group setting. *Level 3: Competent Manager*: Organizes people and resources toward the effective and efficient pursuit of predetermined objectives. *Level 4: Effective Leader*: Catalyzes commitment to and vigorous pursuit of a clear and compelling vision, stimulating higher performance standards.”

VII), then God (stage VIII). Yet I do not see this in my experience, either in my own life or in the lives of students and staff with whom I have worked. Rather, I'd like to make a few observations, based on my reflection on the interviews taken as well as my own experience.

View of	God	Others	Myself
Tack to the left: open-ended	Faith and hope	Community, commonality, abundance and affiliation	Gift development and success
Tack to the right: closed-ended	Dissatisfaction and disillusionment	Belovedness and chosenness; uniqueness and separation	Limitations, failure and suffering
The dangerous left bank	Stagnant and/or immature faith	Inability to forge depth; fear of intimacy	“I am what I do”; fear of failure (death); rejection of suffering; meaninglessness, shallowness
The dangerous right bank	Cynicism and despair	Stifling and clingy relationship; co-dependency, isolation.	Poor self-image, self-pity. Purposelessness
Vector	Soul	Emotions	Will
Theological virtue	Faith	Love	Hope
Erikson’s stages	Wisdom	Intimacy, generativity	Industry, identity
Organizational Values	Transcendent Purpose	Relational Health	Authentic Competence
Open-ended values	Integrity	Teamwork	Excellence and Initiative
Closed-ended values	Loyal critique and self-evaluation	Servanthood and submission	Humility
Organizational leadership disciplines	Listening skills, empowerment	Conflict management & reconciliation	Skills training and talent management

1. Instead of sequential stages, or discrete enumerable crises, this model views *six distinct tacks*, as detailed earlier in Table 1, none of which need trigger a crisis, though any or all of which may provoke crises that result in major life structure change. As well, any of these successful and stable tacks may be altered by a crisis of scheduled or unscheduled life events such as marriage, becoming a parent, a job change or geographic move, or any stressful unchosen life change such as death of a family member, divorce or job loss. The power of this model, then, is its flexibility. I don't have any theoretical or experiential basis to give more structure to these six tacks than that I have already given, other than what follows. For example, I don't theorize that these tacks proceed in a person's life in some normative order—indeed I suspect that each person's life course back and forth across the bay is more like a fingerprint than an Olympics downhill slalom course: unique for

everyone. But while providing flexibility, this model still offers some guidance to the one who recognizes that they need to make, or are already in the process of making, a disruptive course change, a tack back to the other side of the bay: 1) Don't panic—that change that you view as a detour away from your life's progress was inevitable. If it didn't happen now it would need to happen soon. Welcome it (thank God for it), and learn what you need to learn in the midst of it. You will soon see that indeed this new tack involves making progress as well. 2) Don't give up or be tempted to regain what was lost by turning back. Eventually, this tack will end, but if you end it prematurely, you will find yourself back on this tack again soon anyway. 3) Give yourself to navigating this tack as well as you are able. Find a new horizon point, a point newly in the distance on which you can focus your energies, toward which you can steer your craft.

2. I theorize that the open-ended tack of each pair of axes, in most cases, needs to be taken first, for successful navigation of life's challenges.
 - For example, people will have a better, healthier relational history if they develop in the area of community before they try to negotiate the potentially treacherous path of intimacy. Ideally, an emerging adult has his or her experience of a healthy family dynamic on which to build further experiences of community. (And biologically, the experience of the community of the family precedes the experience of coupling.) However, in IVCF ministry to college students, we often find that students' home experiences are far from ideal. IVCF staff often must encourage students to postpone their natural tendency to want to pursue their "beloved" for the sake of building or rebuilding healthy relational patterns and resources through community. These resources are necessary for success negotiating the more intricate challenge of intimacy.
 - Likewise, I believe it is necessary to experience success before failure. As one of my senior staff interviewees said, "For the sake of growth, failure cannot be beat. But without success, people cannot keep going."²⁰ Admittedly failure offers great developmental opportunities. Yet failure without tacks and turns back into success can easily rob one of the belief in one's own ability to navigate into the headwinds of adulthood, and can cause the individual to become discouraged to the point of abandonment of the little craft—suicide, dropout, or escape. As an example, one of the costs of aggressive affirmative action is that it places some students who are not prepared for success into academic environments that will not easily afford them what they need to keep at it. The result—predictably enough—is a much higher dropout rate among such students.

²⁰ Actually, this was the comment that, together with my reflection on several other interview narratives that supported the observation, sparked the seminal insight of this paper. Hence it is worth noting more completely: Jason Jensen, Director of the Pacific Region, said this after reflecting on his own experience and that of some of his younger staff.

- Finally, I believe that a move toward faith is natural and developmental for people starting out in life. If parents encourage children, they naturally find a comfortable faith and the hope that that faith affords. Eventually, this “childlike” faith will be challenged, repeatedly, but that first initial move toward faith makes the other efforts of development possible. I have observed that many children of deeply believing parents who have become young adults rejecting faith have struggled to make progress in relational and vocational areas of their lives as well. At some point, they veered from the early faith of their families and didn’t easily negotiate that first disillusionment. This seems to have inhibited development in other areas of their lives. A recent study noted in the Washington Post puts it this way:

“Late last year, a commission convened by Dartmouth Medical School, among others, studied years of research on kids, including brain-imaging studies, and concluded that young people who are religious are better off in significant ways than their secular peers. They are less likely than nonbelievers to smoke and drink and more likely to eat well; less likely to commit crimes and more likely to wear seat belts; less likely to be depressed and more likely to be satisfied with their families and school. ‘Religion has a unique net effect on adolescents above and beyond factors like race, parental education and family income,’ says Brad Wilcox, a University of Virginia sociologist and panel member. Poor children who are religious will do better than poor children who are not religious, he adds—and in some cases better than nonreligious middle-class children.”²¹

While the focus of this study is on adult development, it seems clear that a legacy of faith and not cynicism coming out of the teen years is going to provide a much stronger foundation for development in all areas of life. The surprising part of this study is the extent to which faith swamps other factors such as socioeconomic background as a predictor of success in life.

3. As an employee in a ministry organization such as IVCF, it can be very threatening to deal with a tack in one’s faith, coming up against some disillusionment or disappointment that makes it difficult to feel that one is a leader, a model, an appropriate representative of a life of faith. I mentioned the tendency, when sailing one’s little craft, to measure progress by approach to some distant landmark on the shore. That landmark might be a person, idealized in the mind of the individual staffworker, by whose mental simplification this landmark person is conceived of in unapproachable terms. Of course, the little boat will eventually need to tack back across the bay, moving away from this ideal. Yet, unless the staff person is able to recognize that this model was deficient in some way (and therefore did not represent an ultimate goal), growth and development for the staff person can feel like a repudiation of the values and ideals previously embraced, resulting in confusion and shame.

²¹ Laura Sessions Stepp, “An Inspired Strategy: Is Religion a Tonic for Kids? You Better Believe It, Say Teens and Scholars” *Washington Post*, Sunday, March 21, 2004; Page D01

4. Resources in one area (theological, relational or personal) can engender successful turns in another: faith and community can make failure more instructive and less likely to derail. The inverse is postulated as a corollary: failure to successfully navigate the turn and new tack in one area can rob resources from other areas and make a major life crisis more likely.

Challenges for InterVarsity

At this point I consider that I have amply satisfied the requirements of the assignment of this paper, and I turn to further analysis of the research I undertook to fulfill my personal objective in this class. I was able to interview eight men²² at roughly the same stage of life and leadership development in the organization: all of them now serve as either regional directors or national field directors in IVCF. I sent out via email a set of four questions and asked them to consider these questions and let me interview them over the phone. Here were the four questions:

- 1) Can you give me a brief timeline of your job assignments, starting with coming on staff?
- 2) Can you talk about a time when you had to make a decision about whether or not to stay in IVCF? Was there a crisis? An alternate opportunity? How might it have gone differently? What went right? What went wrong?
- 3) Can you talk about a time when you were asked to take an opportunity in the organization that you eventually said “no” to, or when you were offered a promotion or challenge to which you initially said “no”?
- 4) Were there one or two people in your IVCF staff career that you could identify as being peers of theirs at an earlier stage of their career, but who left the organization? How do you understand your peer’s decision? Was there something IVCF did or didn’t do that made it harder for them to stay?

I ended up with about ten pages of notes with many direct quotes from these interviews. In my analysis, I mostly looked at the answers to questions 2 and 3. The answers to these questions, and my reflections on them, directly contributed to the insights I have brought together with this little “navigational model” of adult development, and hence I am grateful for the interviewees and their willingness to tell me their stories, at some length. I would like to do further research in a number of directions, but one would be to consider all the names in question 4 and contact as many as possible, for further interviews on the answers to these questions. Still, I felt that the answers people gave me were probably indicative, if not conclusive, of some trends in that direction as well. Table 3 summarizes some of the common factors in the narrative interviews, listing in decreasing order the number of people about whom each line of commentary reflects their description of their history and process. I left out factors that didn’t show up more than once.

²² I decided to interview men in part because my sample size was limited by my time availability. It would be instructive to do a similar study with senior women in the movement: there are fewer, but certainly enough to do a study and draw a few conclusions. But with an admittedly tiny sample size of eight, I wanted to aggregate the data as much as possible. I suppose it was not irrelevant to my considerations, however, that I am innately curious about the developmental process of men in IVCF.

Table 3. Common factors in the narrative interviews

6	very helpful supervisor or mentor kept him in the game
6	sense of calling key to keeping in
5	considered leaving for another ministry opportunity
5	never turned down a promotion opportunity that came up
4	major geographic move as a developmental opportunity
3	crisis on team challenged sense of calling
	Took a job promotion and then backed away with sense of
2	failure
2	considered leaving because of financial considerations
2	didn't seriously consider leaving
2	saw own developmental opportunity and hence decided to stay

Of the eight men, all senior leaders and all but one older than me, only two of them never seriously considered leaving IVCF. Of the others, five of the six considered leaving for another specific ministry opportunity that presented itself, though not necessarily as a firm job offer. Two of the six considered leaving for financial reasons, while 3 of them considered it because crisis and conflict on the team that they led caused them to question their own sense of calling to this work.

All of them said that one or both of the following were crucial to keeping them in ministry with IVCF: 1) a very helpful supervisor or mentor who encouraged them to stay in the game, and 2) their own deep sense of calling kept them more able to stay when external circumstances were far less than ideal. Only two of them said that they saw their own developmental opportunities before them and hence were able to decide to stay.

Some of the implications of these data and the rest of the interviews:

- For better or worse, most people are weak at identifying their own developmental opportunities, especially the negative or closed ended tacks of disillusionment and failure. It is easier to be discouraged by the frustrating state of things in the present rather than to perform an out-of-body maneuver and identify that the tacks you have taken have enabled you to make progress toward your goal, or to identify that the next tack is not in fact a detour, but an opportunity for development unhelpfully disguised.²³
- Hence the role of a key supervisor or mentor. The words “supervisor” and “overseer” literally mean the same thing: someone who is able to *see over*, to get a vantage point from a height and is able to plot out a safe and fruitful developmental pathway. This is perhaps *the key role* for a supervisor, to be thinking about the next developmental tack ahead for the supervisee. One

²³ Jim Collins, in *Good to Great*, called the ability to do this the “Stockdale paradox”, named after Jim Stockdale, imprisoned as a POW by the Vietnamese for eight years. Stockdale survived his ordeal, as he says, because he never lost faith that he would indeed do so, and indeed knew at the time that the ordeal would turn out to be a character defining experience for himself. He saw the end from deep in the middle. Collin’s summarizes the Stockdale Paradox as “Retain faith that you will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties, *and at the same time* confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.” (p86)

interviewee said it this way, “I’ve gone further than I thought I would. Even when I got a first RD SIMA match²⁴, I didn’t see myself going that far. The organization has pushed me ahead when I might have been reluctant. My sabbatical year wasn’t something I sought—my supervisor paved the way for me to do it.” Specifically on the notion of a sabbatical, I think supervisors should be held accountable to helping their supervisees take productive sabbaticals. I have met so many senior staff in IVCF who have not had a sabbatical in 20-25 years, but I am quite sure they never turned one down when credibly offered by their thoughtful supervisors.

- I am pretty sure that failure is not as highly valued or sought in the organization as my model would indicate it should be. Several interviewees spoke of their own sense of failure in a prior job, but it wasn’t clear to them that that failure was a key part of the telling of the narrative that, at least so far, would have to be viewed as a success story. For some of our most capable people, perhaps we need to build into their ministry and leadership experience indelible failures. We could provide a safety net so that they don’t break anything, but so they are offered the chance to learn from their limitations—perhaps even to learn finally what their limitations are. Two people remarked that they were probably made AD too early, and they both said that they took the jobs because of their own ambition. At the same time, I cannot help but sit back and hear how that short-term experience of failure was a key developmental fulcrum for their early years in ministry.
- On the same theme of failure, it seems that our staff failures should travel with us like merit badges, rather than like a scarlet letter. One of the interviewees spoke of the tendency for failure not to be quickly forgotten, “With 25 years in the organization, you can be put in a box. The institutional memory is long.” I am not sure if the institutional memory being long is the problem, but at least in this case his previous failure had branded him as a particular type of leader, almost as if he couldn’t be expected to have developed over 25 years in the movement, at least by those who know him the best.
- Just as I don’t think we as an organization fully appreciate failure, I don’t think we give enough value for excellence. Because IVCF was founded by Pietists for whom the chief virtue was humility, I think this has been an organizational weakness from day one. We have always been better at encouraging faithful, beleaguered remnants than coming alongside of flashy, powerful speakers and teachers. There is room in the movement for the wide range of pretty good, but the three-standard-deviations-above-the-mean excellence is sometimes hard to take. One of the interviewees told of a peer who left the movement, having succeeded in extraordinary ways, in part

²⁴ The SIMA (System for Identifying Motivated Abilities) acts as a consultative guide to hiring practice within IVCF. A SIMA match tells the person making the decision whether or not the individual being considered is a good match for the position. These matches, while not determinative, are significantly probative in the hiring and approval process for any job higher than entry level.

because he was being increasingly micromanaged, even while he was increasingly successful. Eventually, a regional director job opened up, and he was invited to apply, but without any sense of being actively recruited for the job. This was the final straw, and the person left. One of the interviewees said it this way, “There have always been times that I have been unclear whether IVCF really values what I bring, that it appreciates my kind of personality and directness.”

- In at least one important way, IVCF is doing something right that it didn’t use to get right. Until just a few years ago, no formal training for the AD role existed. The New Area Director Orientation involves gathering the same group of new ADs three times over the course of their first year—a successful example of cohort training in IVCF. Regarding his entry into the AD job, one interviewee said, “The organization failed me... Looking back, I was in over my head. My responsibilities were greater than my skills. Up to that point, I was not used to asking people for help. I didn’t realize I was in trouble.”

I believe I have stumbled upon a model that has much to recommend itself, both as a reconceptualization of familiar insights from the discipline of adult development, as well as a new paradigm that offers fresh clarity and perspective. As IVCF staff and staff supervisors, we work with young adults who are beginning to orient themselves to the nature of the complexity of the developmental tasks they face. We have much to offer them, and IVCF has a long established reputation as a developmental organization, whether one’s involvement in it is as student or employee. Yet current consensus in the movement has emerged that we must do more than we have done, and that at least some of that technology for adult development remains outside of our organizational grasp. I suggest that further consideration of these themes will provide another piece of the larger puzzle.

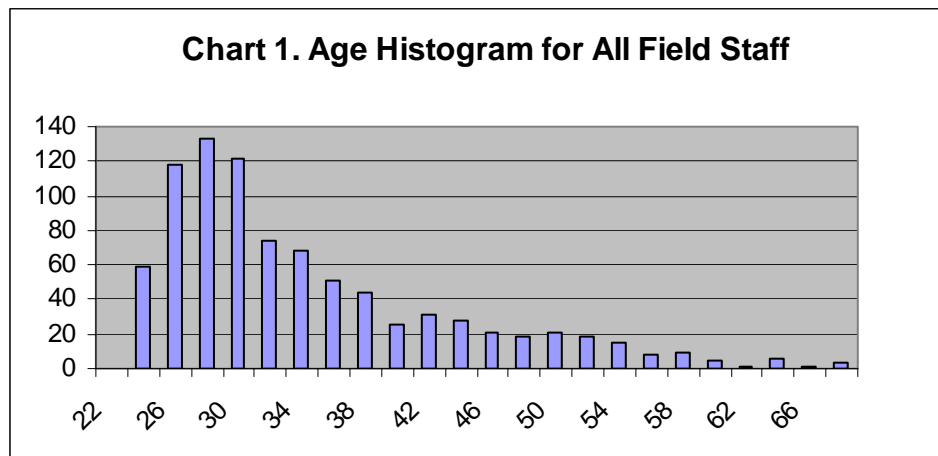
Questions for Further Study

1. I assume that what I have outlined here is a first draft of a model. I need help to tighten up the contrasts and comparisons in Tables 1 and 2, and to extend these comparisons in helpful ways. I also would be grateful for any pushback regarding weaknesses or lack of parallel structure in the model.
2. I also am not very familiar with the literature of adult development (other than the course readings—mostly secondary sources). I would be grateful for any pointers to primary sources that could either extend and bolster my thinking or demonstrate its flaws and vulnerabilities.
3. I am sure there are many more implications of the model than I have spelled out here, though not for lack of spending time thinking about it. (In fact, it has been difficult the last few days to think about much of anything else.)

4. I would love any help and suggestions regarding a methodology that will test the model, for example interview questions and/or a questionnaire design.
5. I include in this study, in Appendix 1, work I have done with the termination and employment data from IVCF. The preliminary results confirm the value of this line of inquiry, at least, but not any specific aspect of the model. I hope to do more analysis of these data, as well as further narrative interview work with those who have left IVCF employment in a later stage in their career and development.

Appendix 1. Quantitative Analysis of the IVCF Workforce

Nearly 50% of the employees of IVCF are age 30 or younger, and 76% are under age 38. (See Chart 1.) While it seems clear that the workforce is aging, it is doing so slowly, and because of the rate of hiring the developmental issues of those in their 20s and 30s will predominate the concerns of managers, most of whom are themselves in their 30s and 40s. I have had a number of conversations with staff supervisors in the last few years about the less developed work ethic of recent hires compared to the “good ole days” when we ourselves were campus staff. These younger staff members seem motivated by different developmental challenges, often having to do with getting settled, pursuing romance and establishing a family earlier than in the recent past (and probably more typical of the broader historical trend).



The staff team has grown substantially in the last ten years, growing from __ field employees to ____ today. As the “baby staff boom” works its way through the fellowship, one challenge will be to recognize and honor the expertise and experience of a growing number of older staff. Specialist roles, such as International student ministry or Graduate Student and Faculty ministry or missions training specialists, will become an increasingly important place where staff can continue to develop their gifts and skills without needing to enter management. Yet there remains some resistance in some places to a migration of staff into these types of roles.

Chart 2 represents the distribution of ages at hiring date for the current field workforce, as of early March, 2004. Over 84% of staff are hired in their 20s, while less than 5% are hired after age 40. Of course, this has probably always been true. (Table 4 reconstructs some of these data—I don’t have the data on all those who were hired in previous decades, only those who remain on staff today. But the numbers aren’t vastly different than what would be expected. They do show a slight trend toward hiring younger employees.) So as an organization, we need to become very adept at helping staff navigate the early turns in the channel: dealing with that first experience of failure as an adult, moving from community to intimacy and back to community, and experiencing disillusionment in the context of an organization all about faith.

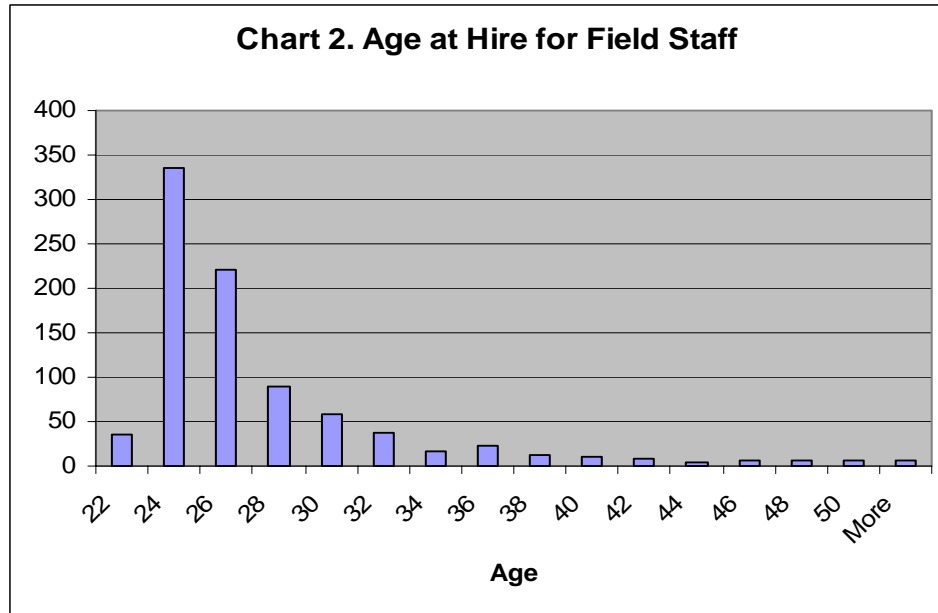


Table 4. Hiring Age over Time

Hired in	Ave Hire Age	Med Hire Age	count
1960s	27.0	26.8	4
1970s	25.9	24.9	25
1980s	27.5	25.5	97
1990s	26.7	24.7	341
2000s	26.2	24.2	413

I know as a manager I rarely hired people who I thought would only serve on staff for a year or two. There were exceptions—hiring an intern while he or she is in seminary, when you know that long-term staff was not a likely option. But most staff are hired with an expectation that they will serve three to five years, at least after their intern year is successfully completed. (And most hope it will be.) With the trend toward hiring younger staff comes a slight but noticeable correlation: the younger the staff, the shorter the likely term of employment (with a 15% correlation—not strong enough to make it an accurate predictor of individual staff, but enough to make a difference when a class of 100 new staff are being hired every year). I have myself been a big fan of hiring younger staff, ideally after a volunteer year or two right out of college. Indeed, this may be the best strategy in terms of quantity of staff recruits. But our hopes for staff hires will, more often than we'd like to expect, be reduced by their short tenure of employment.

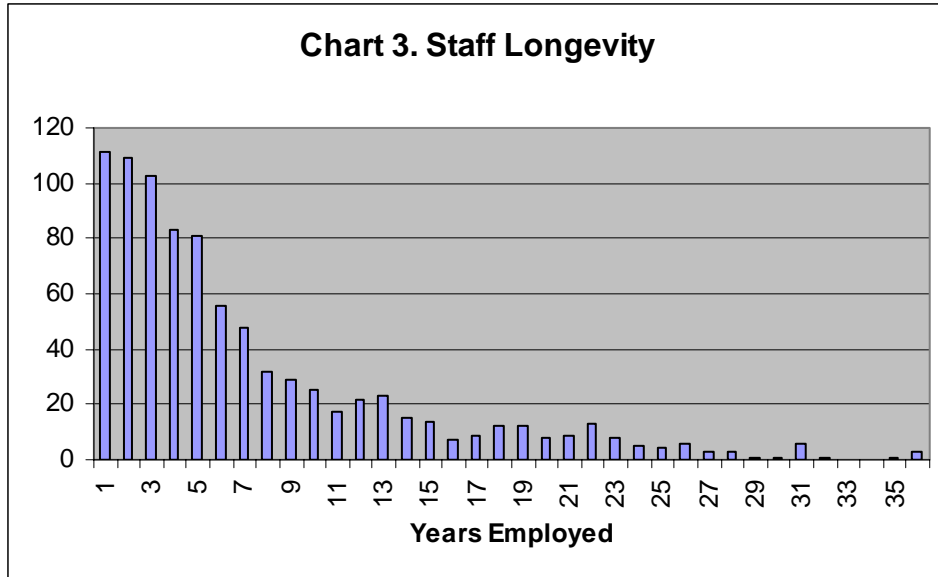


Chart 3 depicts staff longevity for those who are currently employed by IVCF. Over 55% of staff have served for less than 5 years, and 70% for less than 8 years. I have served on staff for 20 years, making me senior to all but 7% of the IVCF workforce. One of the easily forgotten products of our ministry is the swelling number of former IVCF staff. These folks leave the organization having received much training and many developmental opportunities, yielding for them personal, professional and spiritual growth. Yet nearly half of them leave disappointed and frustrated because the ministry that they intended did not come to completion, since most of them were hired with hopes of four years at least but 48% of those terminated in the last three years were employed for less than 3 years, including the 15% who terminated with less than one year of staff employment, and another 17% with between 1 and 2 years of employment. When you consider the high cost of raising funds initially, this trend is not only a HR/staff morale problem, it is a public relations (PR) catastrophe waiting to happen. We need to figure out how we can hire more able staff, those more likely to stay with us for four years or more.

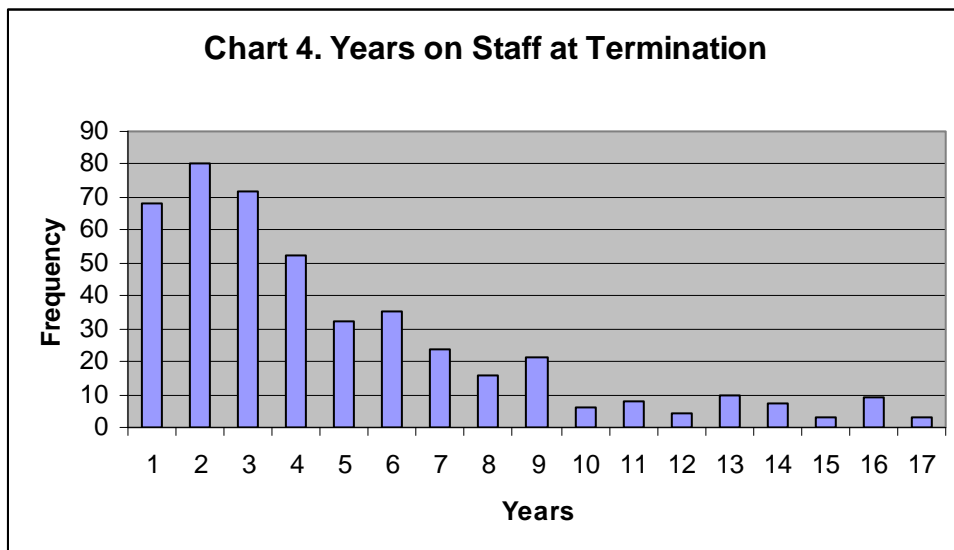


Chart 4 shows the distribution of years on staff at the point of termination, for all field staff leaving since July 1, 2001. (All the termination data begin at that date, because of a new HR database installed at that time. Older data is more difficult to recover.) Of the people who have left field staff employment with IVCF in the last three years, nearly 48% of them left within three years. Most of these would have joined the organization expecting to stay on staff at least four or five years, as that is a typical expectation for a new campus staff. In a direct gender comparison, the median years on staff for men leaving staff during this time was 3.3 years, while for women the figure was 3.1 years. (The averages were 5.4 and 4.3 respectively, skewed a little more for men because of the larger number of men staying on staff longer.)

Table 5. Reasons for Leaving Employment, By Gender

Reason for leaving employment	Men	Women	Total	% of total
Employment-Christian Ministry	50	19	69	15.0%
Employment-Secular Organization	67	53	120	26.1%
Family Responsibilities	0	16	16	3.5%
Lack of Funds	11	14	25	5.4%
Other-see notes ²⁵	33	68	101	22.0%
Personal Reasons	1	15	16	3.5%
Return to School	34	45	79	17.2%
Unsatisfactory performance	2	1	3	0.7%
Miscellaneous	12	19	31	6.7%
Total	210	250	460	100.0%

Table 5 shows reasons for leaving employment, compared by gender. Note that “Family responsibilities” essentially means, *motherhood*. Further note that far more men than women leave employment with IVCF to enter another Christian ministry vocation, regrettably so but not surprisingly. These data, with the differentials by gender statistically significant in several areas, have much to recommend further analysis and study. (Note that one reason given, “lack of funds” is essentially equally likely for women as for men, and a fairly small percentage of the total. However, I suspect that funding was a significant issue for as many as one half or more of all people leaving employment with IVCF.)

²⁵ This “other, see notes” indication is from the check box on the termination form. Since the notes section wasn’t included in the data that I received for study, I cannot actually see notes. Any significant study of these termination data would need to include a by-hand accounting of these notes. I would expect that significant features of the contours of our departing staff cadre are wrapped up in these notes, awaiting further exploration and analysis.



Chart 5, the last gender comparison in this small study, shows the differential in retention rate between men and women. After about year 8, the two graphs are almost identical, but between years 2 and 7 women drop out of the workforce much more rapidly than men do, to the point that after 4 years, nearly 55% of women have dropped off of staff, while it takes another 32 months of employment for the same percentage of men to have dropped off staff (6 year, 8 months). Some of this retention loss is biological (as noted from the Table 5, but yet that reason was assigned to only a small fraction of women leaving staff), but we could look harder at the causes of higher attrition in women staff.

Table 6. Regional Comparisons of Retiring Staff and Current Staff teams, by years on staff

Region	Ave Yrs retiring staff	Med Yrs retiring staff	Retiring since 7/1/01	Ave Yrs Current Staff	Med Yrs Current Staff	Hires Since 7/1/99	Staff Count	Retiring/hires	retiring/total staff	Young hires/total staff
Blue Ridge	4.8	3.8	30	5.7	3.5	54	65	56%	46%	83%
Central	4.0	3.9	23	7.1	5.6	17	25	135%	92%	68%
GLE	7.2	5.1	16	7.1	4.8	36	61	44%	26%	59%
GLW	5.5	3.7	35	7.1	4.5	83	147	42%	24%	56%
MidAtlantic	6.8	5.0	19	8.4	5.1	30	61	63%	31%	49%
New England	5.8	3.9	39	6.6	4.1	43	53	91%	74%	81%
New York/NJ	5.6	1.9	22	6.3	4.3	34	47	65%	47%	72%
North Central	3.1	2.2	11	8.3	5.5	18	25	61%	44%	72%
NorthWest	5.2	3.7	13	6.7	4.3	27	39	48%	33%	69%
Pacific	7.0	6.0	18	7.4	5.5	33	64	55%	28%	52%
Red River	7.1	5.7	21	4.4	3.5	27	33	78%	64%	82%
Rocky Mountains	4.0	4.6	15	5.7	3.5	26	44	58%	34%	59%
Southeast	5.4	4.7	18	5.8	3.4	42	58	43%	31%	72%
Southern California	5.9	5.2	39	5.8	4.4	71	102	55%	38%	70%
All Regions	4.8	3.2	319	6.9	4.5	541	824	59%	39%	66%
(not including the Grad/Faculty Regions)										

I include Table 6 in this study because I made these comparisons and the results were interesting to me. It is beyond the intended scope of this study to do much more with these data other than to make a few observations:

1. The regions that have seen the departure of the most staff, as a percentage of their hiring or current staff teams, Central Region and New England, are also the two regions that have gone without a regional director the longest, nearly four and nearly three years, respectively. This is just one more way to measure the cost of slow leadership transitions at the top of the field organization.
2. The regions in the country vary considerably regarding staff longevity, staff team stability, and average tenure of departing staff. It would be worth considering factors that contribute to these differences and address regional weakness in this area by transregional analysis and reflection.

If you are still reading, thanks for slogging your way through all this.

Rich Lamb, April 2, 2004

Appendix 2. Stages of Faith

Summarized from *Finding Faith: A Self-Discovery Guide for Your Spiritual Quest*, by Brian D. McLaren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

Stage	1: Simplicity	2: Complexity	3: Perplexity	4: Humility
Focus	Right or Wrong? Being right, belonging to the right group	Effective or ineffective? Accomplishing, learning, technique, winning.	Honest or dishonest? Authentic or inauthentic? Understanding, seeing through appearances and illusions to reality.	Wise or unwise? Fulfilling potential. Making the most of life.
Motive	Pleasing authority figures, being an “insider.”	Reaching goals; be effective.	Being honest, authentic.	Making the best of opportunities. Serve, contribute, make a difference.
Beliefs	All truth is known or knowable. There are easy answers to every question. The right authority figures know the answers.	Almost anything is doable. Different people have different methods, beliefs, approaches—the key is finding the best ones.	All is questionable. Nothing is really certain, except uncertainty. Everything is relative.	There are a few basic absolute or universal truths, many relative matters, and much mystery. There are enough basics to live by.
Perception	<i>Dualistic</i> , in terms of right v. wrong, good v. bad.	<i>Pragmatic</i> —looking for the useful, practical.	<i>Relativistic</i> .	<i>Integrated</i> , synthesizing the dualism, pragmatism, and relativism of earlier stages.
Mottoes	You’re either for us or against us; it’s all or nothing.	There’s more than one way to do things—find whatever works best for you.	Everyone’s opinion is equally valid and equally questionable. Who knows who really is right?	I’ll focus on a few grand essentials. In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity.
Authorities	<i>Godlike</i> . God’s representatives, with divine right. They help you know.	<i>Coaches</i> . They help you grow.	<i>Demonic</i> . They’re dishonest controllers, trying to impose easy answers on complex realities.	They’re people like you and me—imperfect, doing their best, sometimes admirable and dependable, sometimes untrustworthy and despicable, sometimes sincerely misguided.
Like/Dislike	We like bold, clear, assertive, confident people who know the answers. We dislike tentative, qualifying, timid or unsure people who say, “I don’t know.”	We like people who give clear instructions and let us know what they expect of us. We like people who motivate us and make us feel like doing things. We dislike people who are too dogmatic (stage 1) or mystical (stage 3).	We like other questioners, free spirits, and non-conformists. We dislike people in stages 1 and 2.	We like people who combine thoughtfulness with accomplishment.
Life is:	A war.	A complex game. You have to learn the rules.	A joke or a mystery or a search.	A mixture; what you make it; what it is.

Strategy	Learn the answers. Learn what to think. Learn to identify and avoid “the enemy.”	Learn the technique. Play the game. Find what people want and give it to them.	Ask hard questions. Be ruthlessly honest.	Learn all the answers and techniques you can (Stages 1 and 2), ask all the questions you can (stage 3), and try to fulfill your potential, admitting how little you really know.
Strengths	Highly committed, willing to sacrifice and suffer for the cause.	Enthusiasm, idealism, action.	Depth, honesty, often humor or artistic sensitivity.	May exhibit strengths of earlier stages, plus stability, endurance, wisdom, and humility.
Weaknesses	Also willing to kill or inflict suffering for the cause. Arrogant. Simplistic. Combative. Judgmental. Intolerant. Incapable of distinguishing major from minor issues, since every issue is part of the system that has embraced all or nothing.	Superficial, naïve.	Cynical, uncommitted, withdrawn, depressed, or elitist.	May display weaknesses of earlier stages.
Identity	I find my identity in my leader or group.	I find my identity in a cause or achievement.	I find my identity in solitude or a small circle of similarly alienated friends.	I find my identity in my relationship to the whole, or to God.
Relationships	Dependent or codependent.	Increasingly independent.	Counter-dependent.	Interdependent.
God is:	The Ultimate Authority Figure and./or ultimate friend.	The Ultimate Guide or Coach.	Either a mythic authority figure I’ve outgrown, an opiate of the masses, or a mystery I’m seeking.	Knowable in part, yet mysterious; present, yet transcendent; just, yet merciful. (Able to hold dynamic tensions about God.)
Transition:	As Stage 1 people encounter diversity in their ranks, or are <i>disillusioned</i> because of fallen leaders or internal squabbles in the group from which they derive their identity, or are unsettled by the multiplicity of viewpoints, they tend to swing from a desire for internal knowledge and certainty to a desire for external accomplishment and success, thus moving on to Stage 2. The world isn’t simple anymore, so the task changes—to make life work in this complex environment.	Three problems push people out of stage 2. First, the prevalence of Stage 1 people always claiming to have all the answers prohibits Stage 2 people from escaping questions about truth. Second, the failure of “foolproof” techniques and projects leaves them <i>disillusioned</i> and perplexed—prime characteristics of Stage 3. Third, Stage 2 people survive by fragmenting complex and apparently contradictory religious truth into categories (scientific, religious, social, etc). Eventually, a desire for unity and integration causes them to be dissatisfied with their fragmented approach.	One of the key struggles in perplexity is the battle between arrogance (“Those simpletons in stages 1 and 2 don’t see how shallow and primitive they are!”) and humility. And there is much in this stage to humble a person. Notably, one has to get on with life, and life requires one to make commitments, and commitments grow out of values and beliefs, so one is not left with the option of staying in limbo. One has to make choices. One can’t blindly accept a group’s or authority figure’s agenda anymore, but one has to take responsibility for living life and proceed—chastened and more realistic, often <i>disillusioned</i> and less idealistic—in short, humbled.	That this is the last stage in our schema doesn’t suggest that one lives happily ever after! At this stage of integration, one now faces all the weaknesses of the previous stages. Whenever one enters a new context (a new career, a new religion, a new social network), he or she may well recapitulate the stages repeatedly. After all, humility, like maturity, is obviously not a destination, but rather a journey in itself.

