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EXPLORING THE PARADOXICAL ROLE AND EXPERIENCE OF FALLBACK IN
DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

by

Valerie Townsend Livesay

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2013

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

Constructive-development and stage development theory, which posits that individuals move through different stages or action logics throughout life, has been the foundation for several models of human transformation. The literature on the leading stage theories indicates that research has focused on exploring stages and their behavioral correlates, but little work has been done on *how* individuals move between stages.

Stage theory has primarily been conceived of as a linear and unidirectional transition from one stage to the next, which encompasses earlier stages, however emerging research has revealed that stage transition may be more fluid and bi-directional than originally thought and may involve fallback to earlier stages in certain circumstances. Further, fallback to an earlier stage of meaning-making may prompt learning that can lead to growth.

The purpose of this study, which used grounded theory methodology, was to examine the phenomenon of fallback through twenty-seven interviews with six key thinkers in the field of adult and leader development: Jennifer Garvey Berger, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Robert Kegan, David McCallum, Chuck Palus, and William Torbert. Several research questions guided this study, with the overall intention of exploring fallback as situated within current developmental theory and learning how these key thinkers understand the fallback phenomenon. This research also examined the role that fallback may play in developmental growth, and how fallback might be studied in the future.

The findings are presented through the key thinkers' own lenses, then through a cross-key-thinker analysis that suggests that fallback can indeed be understood through

the existing theory of stage development. Additional findings indicate that the most important criteria for defining fallback is the absence of options at the more complex level of development that one is capable – be they in thought, feeling, behavior, or meaning-making – and that fallback requires springing forward. This research demonstrates that fallback, under the right conditions has the potential to facilitate developmental growth, and that these conditions for growth to occur are most likely to be met by those in the post-conventional developmental stages. Finally, this exploration reveals the importance of having a theory for understanding fallback to both human and leadership development.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Townsend Wayne Livesay, the mirror through which I see my smallest and biggest Selves, and the person who inspires me most as I stumble my way along my developmental path. And, to my husband, Sonnie Livesay without whose support (in its myriad forms) I would never have begun this program and could never have completed it.

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It is clear to me that though I am the one with the title and the honor, the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the love, sacrifice, authenticity, commitment, and patience of many others. I offer my most sincere gratitude:

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To my son Townsend whose life has spanned the majority of my doctoral program. Townsend endured innumerable nights and weekends without me at home, yet still greeted me with boundless excitement and love upon my return. My son inspires me every day to be a better person.

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To all of those upon whose shoulders I stand...fellow students, faculty, theorists, researchers, human beings – you have my boundless gratitude. This accomplishment is not mine alone...it is ours.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Stage development theory has heretofore conceptualized human development as a forward-moving progression of meaning-making, one which has been likened to steps up a ladder. The theory accounts for the inclusion of all stages of development through which one has already progressed as part of one's overall meaning-making structure. However, stage development theory does not explicitly address the phenomenon of individuals making-meaning, not by choice, from a stage of development that is less complex than the meaning-making capacity that one would expect based on an individual's measured center-of-gravity stage – a phenomenon that has been referred to as *temporary regression* (McCallum, 2008) or *fallback* (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Torbert, 2004; Torbert, Livne-Tarandach, Herdman-Barker, Nicolaides, & McCallum, 2008).

Yet, the phenomenon of fallback in human development seems to be one that is universally experienced. In excluding the occurrence of unchosen earlier meaning-making than that which one is capable, the existing stage development theory denies the full lived experience of human beings. The research described herein explores the phenomenon of fallback in human development through the framework of constructive-development and stage development theories through explorations with six key thinkers in the fields of human development and leadership development. In so doing, this research 1) explicitly acknowledges the presence of fallback, thereby making constructive-development theory more nuanced and accurate and 2) explores the

paradoxically positive role fallback may play in both the lived experience of developmental expression and in developmental theory.

Background

Constructive-development theory has provided the foundation for several models of human development, many of which are based on stage development theory, which posits that individuals move through different developmental stages over the course of their lives (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1997; Torbert, 1991, 1994, 2004, 2010). A review of literature on the leading stage theories concluded that most research has focused on exploring stages and their behavioral correlates, but little work has been done on *how* individuals move between stages (McCauley, Drath, Palus, Connor, & Baker, 2006).

Stage theory has primarily been conceived of as a linear and unidirectional transition from one stage to the next, which encompasses all earlier stages (McCauley et al., 2006). The theory does allow for consciously accessing and choosing to act from a stage through which one has already transitioned. However, limited research has begun to show that developmental movement, while primarily forward-moving, does involve unconscious fallback to earlier developmental stages in certain circumstances, and this fallback to an earlier stage of meaning-making may prompt learning that can lead to developmental growth (McCallum, 2008). A more detailed explanation of the theoretical framework of constructive-development theory and stage development follows in the next section.

Constructive-development theory and human development. Constructive-development theory proposes that context is paramount in the construction of meaning

(McCauley et al., 2006). *Constructive* as defined by Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) means that “humans create a subjective understanding of the world that shapes their experiences as opposed to their directly experiencing an objective ‘real’ world” (p. 650). The individual’s construction of meaning is influenced by both external and internal factors including one’s physical environment, one’s own actions, behaviors, and emotions, and one’s interaction with other individuals. One’s subjective construction of meaning cannot be separated from the environment it is constructed within, nor can one’s human development.

Development is the expansion in people’s abilities to reflect on and understand their personal and interpersonal worlds made possible by increasing differentiation of one’s self from others and integration of the undifferentiated view into a complex and encompassing view (McCauley et al., 2006). As individuals transition from one stage to the next, the way in which they know the world broadens and leads to a qualitative transition in meaning-making and complexity (London & Maurer, 2004).

Through constructive-development, there is a transition from a focus on looking out for one’s self in the earliest stages to interpersonal connections and mutuality in the later stages. As an individual transitions to a more comprehensive stage, the prior stage is included, and one’s capacity to process more complex information and scenarios is enhanced (McCauley et al., 2006). The theory’s focus is on humans developing beyond their current capacity to make meaning of the world.

Several developmental theorists have articulated largely consistent, yet slightly nuanced approaches to the theory with divergence around nomenclature (*stages, orders, action logics*), the number and categories of developmental stages, and ways of

describing the transition between developmental levels. Robert Kegan's (1982) work expands upon the cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget whose research focused largely on development through childhood. Susanne Cook-Greuter's (Cook-Greuter, 2000, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007) and William R. Torbert's (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Torbert, 1976, 1991, 1994, 2004; Torbert et al., 2008) research has primarily focused on the articulation of the post-conventional developmental stages.

Of all of these developmental theorists whose primary focus has been on adult development, only Torbert has conducted empirical research focused on how a leader's developmental stage influences his or her ability to cultivate organizational transformation successfully, and how an organization's stage of development influences its ability to cultivate developmental transformation in its managers (Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005; Torbert, 1991, 2004). Torbert (2004) refers to each stage of development as an *action logic* and defines this term as “an overall strategy that so thoroughly informs our experience that we cannot see it” (p. 66). Throughout this document, *stage* and *action logic* are used interchangeably.

I have selected Torbert's conceptual framework to explain constructive-development theory in greater detail given his research focus on the later stages of development and on the relationship between human development, leader development, and organizational development. This focus is helpful given my particular interest in the connections between human development and leadership development, and the research that indicates that it is at the post-conventional stages of development that individuals are more capable of effectively exercising leadership (Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005; Torbert, 1991, 2004). The primary action logics that order Torbert's theory are detailed next.

Action logics described. Torbert's theory of human development consists of eight primary developmental action logics that are categorized as either *pre-conventional*, *conventional*, or *post-conventional* (Torbert, 2004). The majority of the population operates from a center-of-gravity action logic in the conventional category (Cook-Greuter, 2004). One's center-of-gravity is defined as "the most complex meaning making system, perspective, or mental model [that one has] mastered" (Cook-Greuter, 2004, p. 277). The conventional action logics are those through which individuals tend to progress earlier in life following their development from the pre-conventional *Opportunist*, through pre-pubescence, the teenage years, and adulthood. These conventional or *formal* action logics are identified as *Diplomat*, *Expert*, and *Achiever* and are marked by an acceptance of norms, structures, and relationships as given and impervious to an individual's own influence (Torbert, 2004). Most individuals operating from a conventional developmental level interpret their experience through a lens of taking existing conventions, norms, laws, and institutional structures for granted, rather than recognizing the possibility of acting in ways that can reconstruct such structures.

It is in the later, post-conventional or *post-formal* developmental stages that the simultaneous holding of facts, self-action, and self and other thoughts and feelings can be experienced (Torbert, 1994). The post-conventional action logics include the *Individualist*, *Strategist*, *Alchemist*, and *Ironist*. At these post-conventional action logics, individuals begin to recognize that pre-established structures are experienced differently by different individuals with varying ways of making meaning, and that individuals not only shape the way they see conventions and structures, but can also directly influence these conventions and structures (Torbert, 2004).

The action logics are not predicated on a person's age, and there's no guarantee that even through mature adulthood one will have transitioned through all of the conventional action logics. In fact, very few individuals operate from the post-conventional action logics, making meaning of the world in a way that privileges their ability to influence it. Unlike development through pre-conventional and conventional action logics, which, at least in the case of the earlier action logics, seems to take place fairly automatically, development to the post-conventional action logics requires a conscious effort to do so, facilitated by structures and environments that support this growth (Torbert, 2004; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Understanding the characteristics of the stages of development contributes to an understanding of how fallback can be made sense of within the existing theory. More in-depth descriptions of Torbert's action logics, as well as the constructive-development theories of Kegan and Cook-Greuter can be found in Chapter Two. Also important to framing fallback in developmental theory is understanding how developmental movement occurs. In the next section, I explore what is known in the existing stage development theory about developmental movement between each of these action logics.

Developmental movement. A review of literature on the leading stage theories of human development concluded that most research to-date has focused on exploring stages and their behavioral correlates, but little work has been done on *how* individuals move between stages (McCauley et al., 2006). W.R. Torbert (personal communication, November 2, 2011) explained why this may be: "The field as a whole is young... 'Adult development' as a phrase is probably only 30 or 40 years old at the most." In the theoretical research on developmental movement that has been conducted heretofore,

stage theory has primarily been conceived of as a linear and unidirectional transition from one stage to the next, which encompasses all earlier stages (McCauley et al., 2006).

Certainly, the emerging research on the topic of transitioning from one stage to another is still limited, but research has revealed that stage transition may be more fluid and bi-directional than originally thought (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCauley, et al., 2006).

This fluidity in developmental movement has been captured in one recent empirical study. In this study, conducted during a group relations conference¹, McCallum (2008) identified the occurrence of individuals operating from an action logic earlier than that which is their center-of-gravity action logic according to Cook-Greuter's Integral Sentence Completion Test Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP) developmental measure. The study's findings suggested that all 18 participants, regardless of the highest developmental action logic from which they were most regularly capable of operating, experienced a phenomenon that McCallum (2008) referred to as *temporary regression*. This phenomenon in which one temporarily exhibits behavior that is noticeably different from his/her optimal developmental capacity, or center-of-gravity action logic, while under duress, has also been called *fallback* (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Torbert, 2004; Torbert et al., 2008).

While McCallum's is the only known empirical study in the developmental field that has observed the phenomenon of fallback in individuals, many other developmental

---

¹ Group relations theory provides a lens through which to examine the interaction of individuals, groups and organizations, and their mutual interdependence. Group relations conferences provide a real-time laboratory setting in which participants are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning while studying the influence of unconscious activity on the group-as-a-whole (Getz, 2009; McCallum, 2008).

theorists at least make mention in some form of the possibility of fallback to prior developmental action logics after individuals have moved on to subsequent developmental action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2000; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCallum, 2008; Torbert, 2004; Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008). Studies in the limited literature on fallback go on to suggest that this temporary falling out of step with one's center of gravity meaning-making structure or action logic not only occurs, but also that this fallback, once it is recognized as such, may prompt learning that can support or lead to developmental growth (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCallum, 2008; McCauley, et al., 2006; Torbert, 2004).

Developmental movement may occur when a situation presents challenges that conflict with the way a person is accustomed to making sense of the world (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCauley, et al., 2006). This jarring dissonance also describes what happens when a person experiences fallback. One must often fall back in the face of challenge to what is familiar, in order to recognize that this familiar way of making meaning no longer supports the individual's experience of the world.

Statement of the Problem

While these initial musings in the literature are helpful, a clear and universal definition of fallback has yet to be developed. The identification of fallback as an aspect of human development, and quite possibly an aspect that has paradoxically positive consequences for developmental growth, has largely been an ancillary bi-product of research focused on other topics, not the specific focus of study itself. Consequently, there is a need to conduct research intended to elucidate the phenomenon of fallback and its potential for transforming the developmental growth of individuals. Constructing an

understanding of how the fallback phenomenon fits in the existing theory of human development is an important initial step.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of fallback from the perspective of six key thinkers in the field of human development and leadership development, each representing a nuanced approach to constructive-development theory's inner workings. Through interviews with the key thinkers in the field, I examined in some cases complimentary, in others contradicting theoretical conceptions. My goal was to develop a theory of fallback that will add further explanatory power and accuracy to the existing theory of stage development while also uncovering the potential of fallback as an aid in the developmental transformation of individuals. I also probed for a more deeply articulated and informed approach to conducting empirical research on fallback in the future.

This research was designed to understand how the fallback phenomenon might be explained within the existing constructive-development theory as well as through other theories by which the key thinkers have been influenced, to understand the space where theory and the lived experience of fallback meet, how the experience of fallback when recognized as such might paradoxically lead to developmental growth, and how to deepen our understanding of the fallback phenomenon through future research. I employed a qualitative research design using grounded theory as elaborated on by Charmaz (2006) and Bryant (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) to answer the following research questions:

1. How do we more deeply understand the fallback phenomenon as situated within current developmental theory?
2. How do key thinkers in the field of adult development and leader development understand the fallback phenomenon within their own theoretical frame?
3. What role may fallback play in developmental growth?
4. How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?
5. How might the fallback phenomenon be researched with participants in the future?

In the next section, I detail the significance of this research.

Significance of the Study

The broader implications of this research are apparent in the following four claims.

First, while each individual's meaning-making structure and experience of fallback is unique within the wider framework of his/her center-of-gravity action logic, the phenomenon of fallback appears to exist all along the developmental spectrum.

Cultivating a greater understanding of fallback, and understanding that fallback is an inevitable aspect of human development, no matter one's developmental action logic, can help make the process—often marked by risk and ambiguity (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCallum, 2008)—less frightening.

Second, identifying one's primary fallback action logics and the circumstances which prompt the occurrence of fallback, allows greater presence and awareness in the moment, enabling an individual to respond more effectively, and for fallback to be experienced as an opportunity for learning (Torbert, 2004). This learning may be a

primary agent in developing the aptitude for more complex ways of making meaning of the world, and may actually prompt human beings to transform to more complex developmental action logics.

Third, structured interventions have shown promising results in the developmental movement of an individual through post-conventional developmental stages (McCauley et al., 2006). This research may inform the design of programs that can provide scaffolding and/or interventions that lead to quicker in-the-moment awareness of fallback, leading to the capacity to regain one's ability to make meaning at a more complex level, and offering the potential for learning to occur.

Finally, this research provides a contribution to the larger theory of human development—specifically stage development theory—and leader development. Developmental movement to and through post-formal developmental action logics is largely unexplored. Yet, the ongoing study of developmental action logics, leadership capacity, and the developmental movement that connects the two is integral to preparing leaders who are able to address the increasing complexities of present and future communities of practice.

Definitions and Related Concepts

Throughout this dissertation, there are several key terms that will be used. Below, operationalized definitions are provided.

Action inquiry – the practice of simultaneously paying attention to a given situation, accomplishing prioritized tasks, and revising actions and tasks as necessary (Torbert, 2004).

Action logic – an overall strategy that so thoroughly informs our

experience that we cannot see it (Torbert, 2004).

Center-of-gravity (or “*central tendency*”) – the most complex meaning-making system, perspective, or mental model one has mastered (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007).

Domain – 1) The *multiple intelligences* of an individual including visual-spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, logical-mathematical (Howard Gardner, 1993, as cited in Fischer & Rose, 1998); 2) the “external-perspective term *field*” (Commons, Trudeau, Stein, Richards, & Krause, 1998, p. 252).

Highest sustained demonstrated score – the developmental capacity that is measured on Kegan’s Subject-Object Interview (Berger, 2010, p. 255).

Order of development – how one thinks and how one constructs reality (intangibles including feeling, thinking, and relating). Each order represents a different *subject/object* relationship: what is subject in one order becomes object in the next order (Bugenhagen, 2006).

Object – separate from who one is (Kegan, 1982).

Stage – the developmental structure, lens, perspective through which one understands and approaches one’s world.

State – those aspects of consciousness that are temporal, passing, experiential, and phenomenal.

Subject – part of who one is (Kegan, 1982).

Territories of experience – the realms of awareness, thought, action, and effect (Torbert, 1994; Torbert et al., 2008).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the current literature explores the history of constructive-development theory in human development, with particular attention to stage development theory, the process of developmental movement, and fallback in human development. The frameworks of developmental theorists Robert Kegan, William R. Torbert, and Susanne Cook-Greuter are described in detail and provide the conceptual models against which the relationship between human development and leader development is explored.

The questions that guided this initial inquiry into the published literature include: What are the origins of constructive-development theory? What is known about the phenomenon of fallback in human development? What are the critiques to the existing constructive-development and stage development theories? What is the role of human development in the exercise of leadership? It is to the subject of human development and constructive-development theory, specifically, that I now turn.

Constructive-Development Theory and Human Development

Constructive-development theory proposes that context is paramount in the construction of meaning (McCauley et al., 2006). *Constructive* as defined by Kuhnert and Lewis means that “humans create a subjective understanding of the world that shapes their experiences as opposed to their directly experiencing an objective ‘real’ world” (1987, p. 650). *Development* is the expansion in people’s abilities to reflect on and understand their personal and interpersonal worlds made possible by increasing differentiation of one’s self from others and integration of the undifferentiated view into a

complex and encompassing view (McCauley et al., 2006). The theory's focus is on humans developing beyond their current capacity to make meaning of the world.

Abstracted from the fields of biology (adaptation), psychology (ego), and philosophy (truth), the framework asserts both that the human experience is constructed within one's environment, and that the environment is constructed by one's experience (Kegan, 1982). "Constructive-developmental psychology reconceives the whole question of the relationship between the individual and the social by reminding us that the distinction is not absolute, that development is intrinsically about the continual settling and resettling of this very distinction" (Kegan, 1982, p. 115).

Constructive-development theory has provided the foundation for several models of human development, many that are based on stage development theory, which posits that individuals move through different developmental *stages* over the course of their lives (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1997; McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert, 1991, 1994, 2004, 2010). As individuals transition from one stage to the next, the way in which they know the world broadens and leads to a qualitative evolution in meaning-making and complexity (London & Maurer, 2004; McCauley et al., 2006). Through stage development, there is a transition from personal goals in the earliest stages to interpersonal connections in the later stages. As an individual moves to a more comprehensive stage, the prior stage is included, and the capacity to process more complex information and scenarios is enhanced (McCauley et al., 2006).

Several developmental theorists have articulated similar, yet slightly nuanced approaches to the theory with divergence around nomenclature (*orders*, *action logics*,

levels, stages) and ways of describing the transition between developmental stages. In this literature review, I focus primarily on the conceptual frameworks of developmental theorists Robert Kegan, William R. Torbert, and Susanne Cook-Greuter with particular emphasis on their post-conventional levels of development. I selected these developmental theorists, because they are three of the foremost, present-day thought leaders in constructive-development and stage development theories, and those who have most influenced my own thinking about human development and the phenomenon of fallback.

Kegan's Orders of Development

Robert Kegan's developmental framework outlines five *orders* through which individuals have the possibility to transform throughout their lives (see Table 1). The following assumptions apply to Kegan's orders: the orders refer to how one thinks and how one constructs reality (intangibles including feeling, thinking, and relating). One's approach to a situation is dependent upon one's developmental order and the complexity of the situation. Each order represents a different *subject/object* relationship: what is subject in one order becomes object in the next order (Bugenhagen, 2006).

Table 1

Summary of Kegan's Constructive-Development Subject-Object Transition

Order	Subject	Object
1: Impulsive	Impulses, perceptions	Reflexes (sensing, moving)
2: Imperial	Needs, interests, wishes	Impulses, perceptions
3: Interpersonal	The interpersonal, mutuality	Needs, interests, wishes
4: Institutional	Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology	The interpersonal, mutuality
5: Interindividual	Interindividuality, interpenetrability of self systems	Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology

Note. Adapted from Kegan, R. (1982). *The evolving self: problem and process in human development*. p. 86. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Subject, object, and the Subject-Object Interview. In 1988, Kegan created the Subject-Object Interview (SOI) to measure an individual's complexity of the mind or one's "characteristic ways of understanding the world and organizing [one's] experience" (Berger, 2010, p. 249). During an SOI, which generally lasts between sixty and ninety minutes, the interviewer asks questions to uncover the structure of a person's meaning-making rather than the content. The interview is audio recorded and transcribed, and a trained scorer assesses what is subject and what is object for the interviewee and thereby measures the individual's "highest sustained demonstrated score" (Berger, 2010, p. 255) or developmental order.

A thorough explanation of the subject/object relationship is integral to understanding Kegan's developmental theory. An individual's capacity to differentiate what is subject (part of who one is) and what is object (separate from who one is) sets the tone for how the individual views a situation and the motivations that act upon that individual in any scenario. What is subject does not exist outside of us (London & Maurer, 2004). It is an integrated aspect of one's self (Kegan, 1982). It *is* one's subjectivity. As what is subject moves over to what is object in the process of developmental movement, it becomes distinct, different, capable of being reflected upon object-ively. In other words, in the developmental transition between orders, one is able to separate and make meaning from what was once so closely held as part of oneself, which now becomes an externalized object.

Subject/object relations is a study of one's motion in the world (Kegan, 1982). As individuals transition from one order to the next through this movement of subject to object, the way in which they know the world broadens and leads to a qualitative transition in meaning-making and complexity. This is so, because the transition from one order to the next is inclusive of and more complex than previous orders, resulting in an individual's personality evolving qualitatively over time. This qualitative shift in meaning-making structure is marked by periods of stability and change (London & Maurer, 2004; McCauley et al., 2006), and according to Kegan, is the very process of "defending, surrendering, and reconstructing a center" (1982, p. 82). The process of developmental transition through the orders will be more thoroughly explored in the coming pages. First, I detail the characteristics of Kegan's developmental orders.

Five orders of development. Kegan's first order, *Impulsive*, is predominantly occupied by young children. Order one individuals are unable to understand a reality in which anything exists outside of their interaction with it. The "egocentrically embedded" (Kegan, 1982, p. 118) individual is ruled by one's own impulses and perceptions. If an object appears to be different, it must be as a result of the object changing, not that the way one perceives that object has changed.

In the second, *Imperial* order, one has a "theory of impulse" which is ordered by one's own needs, wishes, or interests (Kegan, 1982, p. 104). The Imperial individual can now experience the ambivalence of two impulses at once, and can distinguish between one's perception of an object changing, and the actual physical properties of an object having changed. In the second order, one is developing a sense of who I am (Kegan, 1982), able to identify one's own immediate needs and perceptions, but unable to appreciate the influence that one's own personal goals and agendas have on one's thoughts and feelings. Further, although the individual recognizes the existence of others' feelings, empathy is not possible at this stage. The second order individual identifies others as barriers to, or facilitators of, one getting what one wants. Children, teens, and some adults reside in this order (Bugenhagen, 2006).

Kegan's third order, *Interpersonal*, is marked by a "fused commingling" of relationships (Kegan, 1982, p. 105). The Interpersonal individual is oriented to nurturance, affiliation, and organization of self according to the expectations of others. Once an individual has developed and transitioned to this order, one is able to recognize that one possesses a personal agenda and goals, but is unable to appreciate and reflect upon the influence that interpersonal connections have on one's agenda and goals. While

capable of distinguishing one's own from others' beliefs, the third order individual feels responsible for others' feelings (London & Maurer, 2004).

During emergence from the Interpersonal order, "the me-I-have-been starts to look more like the expectations of *other* people, often one's parents..." (Kegan, 1982, p. 205). The Interpersonal individual does not handle anger well, as it requires recognition of one's self as separate from another, a possibility that the individual has heretofore in this order not been able to consider. Therefore, as one begins to emerge from the third order, in lieu of anger, feelings of disloyalty and selfishness are common. In the Interpersonal balance, one *is* one's relationships, and without the responsibility of mutuality, one fears that one may cease to exist (Kegan, 1982).

It would follow, then, that as one transitions from the Interpersonal to the fourth order *Institutional*, one often experiences intense feelings of loss and loneliness.

...[It] phenomenologically amounts to, first, the relativizing of what was taken for ultimate, a loss of the greatest proportion; and second, a period of not-knowing, of delicate balance between what can feel, on the one hand, like being devoured in the boundarilessness of the old construction, and the selfishness, loneliness, or coldness of being without 'the interpersonal' on the other. (Kegan, 1982, pp. 196-197)

The tools to handle this discord are present when an individual fully inhabits the Institutional order. In this balance one begins to possess "a sense of self outside of connections to others" (London & Maurer, 2004, p. 234), which is gained through affiliation with societal and ideological institutions. In the Institutional balance, one sees one's self as a self-governing and principled institution, yet possesses little insight into the limitations of this self as a system. A fourth order individual possesses an internalized value system, which intertwines with one's externalized commitment to

relationship with others. Relationships exist, but they are relegated to their role in support of the self-system (Kegan, 1982).

The Institutional balance is ordered by perfectionism, certainty, self-esteem, successful self-maintenance and control, and independent accomplishment.

Dissatisfaction with goal achievement, achievement which was at one time the ultimate goal in the Institutional order, marks emergence from this order. There begins to be a self-conscious to be reflected on, and this is often experienced as a threat to self and a loss of agency characterized by “self-anger, self-shame, [and] fears about boundary loss” (Kegan, 1982, p. 223).

It is only when one reaches the fifth, or *Interindividual* order that one is able to cease monitoring the self as a system regulated by its affiliation to institutions and ideologies. One may hold concurrently an appreciation and questioning of one’s own value system, and a desire to personally transform and to connect at an integral level with others. The Interindividual person assumes responsibility for one’s own transformation, seeking out feedback in a quest for authenticity. Contrastingly, in the Institutional balance, a critique of self would have been devastating. “Certainty” is the domain of the Institutional order, while “tentativeness” is the hallmark of the Interindividual (Kegan, 1982, p. 247). According to Kegan, individuals who operate in the fifth order are rare, and this order is not attainable before mid-life (as cited in London & Maurer, 2004).

In order five, one is able to understand the limits of one’s own system of principles, and is also capable of understanding the nuances of diverse opinions. The self is seen as “value-originating, system-generating, [and] history-making” (Kegan, 1982, p. 104). Once in the Interindividual balance, performance is no longer “ultimate” (Kegan,

1982, p. 105) and community is found beyond the affiliated organization. The Interindividual conceives community as one that all people, by virtue of their humanity, have membership to. In the fifth order, one is able to both maintain one's own distinct identity and recognize the distinct identity of others while also establishing a form of self- and other-honoring intimacy and mutuality that is possible in none of the earlier, formal developmental orders (Kegan, 1982). The fifth order is Kegan's first and only post-formal developmental stage, and it is to the explanation of this classification of developmental orders that I now turn.

Kegan's first four, or *formal*, developmental orders reveal a focus on intellect, thought, and reasoning. The meaning-making structures of the formal orders are guided by a "dualistic... overarching ideology" (Kegan, 1982, pp. 229-230) in which sharp distinctions are drawn. Each formal order is marked by a tendency toward either over-integration or over-differentiation, and the transition between the stages is a see-saw motion between the two extremes.

Contrastingly, at the *post-formal* Interindividual order, while form, structure, order and balance can be appreciated, they cease to be the ultimate context by which one defines the world (Kegan, 1982). In the post-formal order, the primary feature of reality is motion, process, and change—the movement *through* rather than *within* an environment. Systems are viewed in a larger context with a focus on the tension between them. The post-formal individual appreciates contradiction and recognizes the limitations of intellectual solutions to moral problems.

In the Interindividual order, one recognizes one's own connectedness with one's community and the world at large (Kegan, 1982). To be sure, in the transition from

formal to post-formal operations, there is a qualitatively different way of *being* in the world; a way of knowing that we are all connected. No matter our developmental order, we are a perfect merging of opposites (over-integrated and over-differentiated), as individuals, and together with the rest of humanity (Kegan, 1982).

Kegan's conceptions of formal and post-formal developmental orders form one of the early and most enduring frameworks for stage development theory. His developmental framework is built upon the work of Jean Piaget, whose research focused on the development of children within the formal stages of development. Kegan's orders of development are based in constructive-development theory and explore the meaning individuals make.

In contrast, William R. Torbert's and Susanne Cook-Greuter's theory of stage development is constructed on the logic that informs individuals' *actions* as they navigate life, and is influenced by the ego development theory of Jane Loevinger (1997). Torbert's and Cook-Greuter's developmental action logics are the subject of the next section.

Torbert's and Cook-Greuter's Developmental Action Logics

Torbert, Cook-Greuter, and the Leadership Development Profile. Torbert sought a method for measuring the developmental capacity of the students in his MBA program when he became Dean of the Graduate School of Business at Boston College in the 1990s (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008). He found Loevinger's assessment of ego development, the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) (Walsh, 1998), to be both psychometrically valid and demanding in determining how a person makes sense of and acts in the world (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008; Cook-Greuter &

Soulen, 2007). He contracted with Cook-Greuter, a trained WUSCT scorer to assess the developmental stage of the students, thus beginning a collaboration that would span the next twenty years (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008).

Torbert and Cook-Greuter collaborated extensively in the creation of the Leadership Development Framework and the associated developmental assessment, the Leadership Development Profile (LDP) which formed the basis for their theories and developmental measures. Torbert developed the Leadership Development Framework through a combination of synthesis of existing theory and his own original research. Cook-Greuter expanded and refined Loevinger's developmental measure to include more rigorous appraisal and definitions of the post-formal stages of development and incorporate a focus on individuals in organizations (Cook-Greuter, 2004; McCauley et. al, 2006), replacing Loevinger's gender-focused sentence stems with work-related stems focused on teams, time, and power (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008).

In the LDP, Loevinger's "stage" was replaced by "action logic" in an effort to reflect the dynamic, multiple dimensions of a person's experience, including reasoning and behavior (Torbert, 2004; Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008). Many of the names of the stages/action logics were changed, as well, in order to reduce the judgment Torbert felt was implied in Loevinger's stage names and descriptions and to make them more descriptive, active, and better suited for feedback in organizational settings. For example, the "Conformist" stage was renamed "Diplomat," and the "Self-aware" stage became the "Expert" action logic (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008, p. 48). Instead of referring to stages along the developmental continuum as lower and higher as had Loevinger, Torbert

and Cook-Greuter referred to them as earlier and later action logics (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008).

The Leadership Development Profile assesses the action logic which functions as an individual's dominant way of making meaning (Rooke & Torbert, 2005) or an individual's center-of-gravity action logic (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008). The LDP, touted for the nuanced approach it provides to evaluating those at post-formal developmental action logics (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007), consists of the beginning stems of 36 sentences which participants are asked to complete. Participant responses allow trained evaluators to construct images of how participants frame their own actions and their world. Over the past 25 years, the LDP has been administered to thousands of professionals, primarily between the ages of 25 and 55.

Torbert and Cook-Greuter eventually branched off to pursue their own particular interests in developmental theory. Cook-Greuter refined the original LDP into her own developmental measure, the Integral Sentence Completion Test Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP), and now uses integral theorist Ken Wilber's (2000) all-quadrant (AQAL) framework in her research and practice. Torbert continued to focus his theory and research on the post-conventional stages of adult development and the implications of development for leadership and organizational success. The Global Leadership Profile (GLP) is the latest version of Torbert's developmental leadership measure.

In an effort to maintain simplicity in the midst of an already complex theory, and given the similarities of Cook-Greuter's and Torbert's theoretical underpinnings, the following descriptions of Cook-Greuter's and Torbert's developmental action logics focus primarily on Torbert's framework.

Developmental action logics. Torbert's theory of human development consists of eight primary developmental action logics, which are defined as an overall strategy that so thoroughly informs our experience that we cannot see it (Torbert, 2004). These are categorized as either pre-conventional, conventional, or post-conventional (Torbert, 2004). The Opportunist falls in the pre-conventional category, because it makes its appearance prior to the influence of conventions on the developing individual. Most individuals who make meaning from the Opportunist action logic are between the ages of six and twelve, though some adults can also be found at this stage (Torbert, 2004). The Opportunist's focus is on mastering external reality, which may include exploiting other human beings to suit one's own needs (Torbert, 2004; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011). The Opportunist exercises power unilaterally, and this exercise is often marked by manipulation with little regard for the long-term repercussions of one's actions, particularly on relationships (Torbert 1991, 2004). Opportunists often see themselves as victims, and consequently, avoid taking responsibility for their actions and instead place blame on others (Torbert, 2004; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Conventional action logics. The conventional action logics are those through which individuals progress earlier in life through pre-pubescence, the teenage years, and adulthood following development from the pre-conventional Opportunist. The conventional action logics are identified as Diplomat, Expert, and Achiever and are marked by an acceptance of norms, structures, and relationships as given and impervious to an individual's influence (Torbert, 2004). The majority of the population operates from a center-of-gravity action logic in the conventional category (Cook-Greuter, 2004).

The Diplomat, having emerged from the Opportunist's self-focus, recognizes that others have their own point of view and conforms behavior to suit the expectations and preferences of others (Torbert, 2004; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 11, 2011). Those at the Diplomat action logic realize they can control the external world through their own behavior and through the coordination of viewpoints, but are unable to hold separately the conflicting needs of self and other, and often have trouble making decisions on their own. Diplomats often perceive themselves as victims, and receiving negative feedback becomes translated as a loss of status (Torbert, 1991, 2004). Diplomats' aversion to feedback serves to reinforce this action logic when held during adulthood, though most individuals transition through the Diplomat action logic during their early teen years (Torbert, 2004).

From the Diplomat emerges the Expert action logic, which is able to prioritize claims by others within one's own cognitive system. This action logic's focus is on cognitive awareness and display of the "intellectual symbols of excellence and consistency" (Torbert, 1991, p. 45). The Expert values expertise, though often only in one's own chosen field (McCauley et al., 2006), and rarely seeks or appreciates feedback unless it comes from "acknowledged masters of the craft" (Torbert, 2004, p. 80). The Expert seeks to stand out from others, is competitive, and is critical of self based on one's own standards of perfection (Torbert, 2004).

Torbert's final conventional action logic, the Achiever, works to incorporate the meaning-making tools from the three prior action logics – Opportunist, Diplomat and Expert – but with a different end goal. Rather than trying to personally advance, to maintain organizational norms, or to find the answer solely in one's chosen field, the

Achiever attempts to influence the entire system's effectiveness through coordination of the external, behavioral, and strategic. However, the Achiever will not dare to do so through innovation, instead focusing on implementing a current strategy in an effort to influence (Torbert, 1991).

The Achiever's main focus is goal achievement within the existing system through involvement with new and different projects. Success is measured by outcome, not process (McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert, 2004; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011), though the Achiever values mutuality over hierarchy (Torbert, 2004). Unlike the Expert, the Achiever welcomes feedback, and looks for opportunities to improve, but is only able to internalize this feedback if it fits within one's self-chosen cognitive and ethical framework (Torbert, 2004).

Most individuals operating from a conventional developmental action logic interpret their experience through a lens of being influenced by the world they interact within; rather than influencing the world and their experience of it through their own intentional interactions. It is in the later, *post-conventional* developmental stages that the simultaneous holding of facts, self-action, and self and other thoughts and feelings can be experienced (Torbert, 1994).

As individuals advance through the post-conventional developmental stages, they begin to link theory, principles, and practice through awareness, thought, action and effect (McCauley et al., 2006). This interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effect, or the *territories of experience* (Torbert, 1994; Torbert et al., 2008), are integral concepts in Torbert's work, particularly within his post-conventional action logics. Each of the

post-conventional action logics will be described in detail in the coming pages, but I first describe Torbert's four territories of experience.

Territories of Experience. Torbert, et al. (2008) described the four territories of experience to which all individuals have access. The first territory of experience is the outside world, or the facts and stimuli that are external. One's own behavior marks the second territory. The third territory encompasses an individual's thoughts and behaviors and those of others, which guide our actions. The fourth and ultimate territory is known as transcognitive awareness, or the ability to be aware of all of the territories at once (Torbert et al., 2008).

While individuals are able to explore each of these territories separately, their capacity to make meaning with more than one territory at a time is influenced by their stage of human development. For example, the Opportunist only has access to the experience of the outside world. Yet, the Diplomat can make sense of one's own experience through reflection on the outside world and one's own behavior, and is able to regulate the former to influence the latter. The Expert is able to access both the prior two territories and one's own thoughts and behaviors in a quest for perfection and efficiency (Torbert, 2004). While not noted explicitly in Torbert's description of stages and territories of experience, I would argue that the Achiever, according to the characteristics of this action logic, has access to the first two territories as well as the full spectrum of territory three which includes not only one's own thoughts and behaviors, as accessed by the Expert, but also the thoughts and behaviors of others. It is in the later, post-conventional developmental stages that territory four – the simultaneous holding of facts, self-action, and self and other thoughts and feelings – can be experienced (Torbert, 1994).

The post-conventional developmental action logics have been the focus of Torbert's most recent work on human development and developmental movement and are described in greater detail next (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Merron, Fisher, & Torbert, 1987; Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005; Torbert, 1991, 1994; Torbert et al., 2008).

Post-conventional action logics. The post-conventional action logics include the *Individualist*, *Strategist*, *Alchemist*, and *Ironist*. At these post-conventional action logics, individuals begin to recognize that reality is not pre-established, that it is experienced differently by each individual according to one's unique way of making meaning, and that individuals not only shape the way they see reality, but can also influence the structures and conventions that contribute to one's reality (Torbert, 2004).

Also referred to as *inter-independent* (McCauley et al., 2006), the four post-conventional developmental action logics are characterized by an individual understanding of one's power to determine who he or she is and who he or she is becoming. Inter-independent individuals appreciate the usefulness of conflict and display a willingness to question and revise their own goals and principles. Individuals in the post-conventional action logics are more aware of incongruities in self (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008). Mutuality is the goal, and negotiation is used to discover commonalities.

Postconventionals are more likely to (a) reframe presenting problems and constraints; (b) recognize diverse frames or action-logics and to deliberately seek to create shared vision; (c) use a collaborative inquiry process in implementing solutions; and, (d) spot incongruities among their own territories of experience, such as between what they advocate and what they actually do. (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008, p. 51)

The *Individualist* is Torbert's first post-conventional action logic, and is the first of the developmental action logics at which moment-to-moment awareness is beginning

to be experienced (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011). The Individualist is aware of conflicting emotions which often result from being "...in part engaged in a journey that reevaluates all prior life experiences and action logics" (Torbert, 2004, p. 102). The Individualist's newfound ability to deconstruct the assumed frames which regulated meaning-making in the conventional action logics, combined with one's barely burgeoning ability to apply post-relativistic principles in one's current making of meaning can result in an inability to make decisions.

The *Individualist* is a bridge between two worlds. One is the preconstituted, relatively stable and hierarchical understanding we grow into as children, as we learn how to function as members of a preconstituted culture. The other is the emergent, relatively fluid and mutual understandings that highlight the power of responsible adults to lead their children, their subordinates, and their peers in transforming change. (Torbert, 2004, p. 102)

The Individualist seeks out different perspectives, and assigns less judgment to these and to those who hold them than did the Achiever. Awareness of one's own shadow side – those aspects of self which humans seek to deny and often project onto others – comes to the surface for the first time (Torbert, 2004).

The *Strategist* is Torbert's second post-conventional developmental action logic, and the first stage at which a person has momentary access to a comprehension of self and environment as mutually intertwined (Torbert, 1994). Strategists appreciate that each person views the world from a unique frame (as do Individualists) (Rooke & Torbert, 1998; Torbert, 2004), yet they are also able to honor the evolving nature of individuals (Torbert, 2004). The Strategist is capable of creating a shared vision across different action logics, while also being open to having one's own perspective changed (Torbert, 2004), allowing Strategists to serve as effective agents of change (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Governed by principles that they choose themselves, not rules assigned by others,

Strategists value finding the best solution over imposing their own (Torbert, 1994), and are willing to expose and discuss personal and organizational constraints and shortcomings in order to transform them (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Authenticity is a hallmark of the Strategist action logic. Strategists are both goal- and process-oriented (Rooke & Torbert, 1998), motivated to work towards organizational and even global change (Rooke & Torbert, 2005), and are committed to the ongoing development of both self and others (Torbert, 2004).

Strategists are intrigued by their simultaneous need to be recognized as individuals while also being in-relationship with others (Rooke & Torbert, 1998; Torbert, 1994). Precisely because Strategists are so effective at leading, often in transformational ways, their perspective can paradoxically become over-powering, blocking the creation of shared understanding and solutions that initially led to the Strategist's success. Strategists may become enamored with their own theory, forgetting that the contributions of many led to the theory's creation, and that each moment and situation presents new opportunities for evaluation, interpretation, and theory-development (Torbert, 1991).

In the third post-conventional developmental action logic known as the *Alchemist* (also referred to as *Magician* and *Clown*), persons consistently operate from all four territories of experience at once, allowing others' perspectives to be held in equal regard to their own, recognizing the interconnected roles of self, others, and organization and the influence generated by each on the other (Torbert, 1994). The self-aware Alchemist is able to observe one's inner process concurrently alongside the ongoing transaction process with the outer world and other people (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 11, 2011). More awareness leads to more noticing of incongruities (Torbert &

Herdman-Barker, 2008), and the Alchemist, recognizing that there is a constant shift in developmental state, seeks to influence one's own action logic in the moment (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Alchemists are capable of holding multiple and conflicting perspectives in time and space, and recognize important moments as they occur (Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005). The Alchemist's principles are self-created and inform their purpose and action (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Flexibility in their ability to reinvent themselves and their organizations differentiates Alchemists from Strategists (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Further, unlike Strategists, Alchemists can claim their own shadow side, resist projecting it on others, and instead, use their charisma to support the development of others (Torbert, 1994).

Similarly, *Ironists*, those at the fourth post-conventional developmental action logic, are able and inspired to use themselves and their mastery of the four territories of experience as instruments to advance the learning and development of others and the growth of the system as a whole. Often, Ironists take up their roles in a manner that is contrary to their natural inclinations, which allows them access to a different kind of experience. This foreign perspective allows the Ironist to come into contact with a different way of knowing and understanding, which expands the possibility of mutuality. Further, Ironists, in taking up their roles in this way, become aware of characteristics of the system that may otherwise have gone unnoticed (Torbert, 1994).

At these two final action logics, Alchemist and Ironist, transformation of self and organization comes easily as does a consistent presence in the fourth territory of experience. Torbert points out the rarity of this level of development, noting in one of his

earlier studies of managers the absence of a single participant operating from either the Alchemist or Ironist action logics (Torbert, 1991). In fact, the very names given these latest stage action logics are a nod to their elusive existence (Torbert, 1991).

Table 2 (below and also in Appendix A) provides a brief description of Torbert's main action logics (listed sequentially from earliest to latest), and the corresponding percentage of the population by which they are represented based on empirical studies conducted using developmental assessment instruments (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007).

The action logics are not predicated on a person's age, and there's no guarantee that even through mature adulthood one will have transitioned through all of the conventional action logics. Very few individuals operate from the post-conventional action logics, making meaning of the world in a way that privileges their ability to influence it. Unlike development through pre-conventional and conventional action logics, which, at least in the case of the earlier action logics, seems to take place fairly automatically, development to the post-conventional action logics requires a conscious effort to do so, facilitated by structures and environments that support this development (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2, 2011).

Table 2

Brief overview of each of Torbert's eight main action logics

Action logic (the primary stage or level from which one makes meaning of their world)	Main focus (of an individual's interaction with the world)	Percentage of adult population (n=4,510)
1 - Opportunist – needs rule impulses	Own immediate needs, opportunities, self-protection	4.3
2 - Diplomat – norms rule needs	Socially expected behavior, approval	11.3
3 - Expert – craft logic rules norms	Expertise, procedure and efficiency	36.5
4 - Achiever – system effectiveness rules craft logic	Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals, success within system	29.7
5 - Individualist – relativism rules single system logic	Self in relationship to system; interaction with system	11.3
6 - Strategist – most valuable principles rule relativism	Linking theory and principles with practice, dynamic systems interactions	4.9
7 - Alchemist (Magician/Clown) – deep processes and intersystemic evolution rule principles	Interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effects; transforming self and others	2.0
8 – Ironist – intersystemic development rules process (Torbert, 1994)	Generating ambiguity (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008); transforming others through own role transformation (Torbert, 1994)	?

Note. Adapted from Cook-Greuter, S. R. (2004). Making the case for a developmental perspective. [Technical paper]. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 36(7), p. 279; and Cook-Greuter, S. R., & Soulen, J. (2007). The Developmental Perspective in Integral Counseling. *Counseling & Values*, 51(3), p. 188.

The strength of Torbert's theory of stage development and action logics is that it has evolved over the years. However, this evolution, specifically of action logics, may leave the Torbert enthusiast a little perplexed. There are numerous changes in the action logic nomenclature throughout Torbert's publications, and in some cases, the outright

omission of certain action logics altogether. Even following a chronological path does not provide a complete picture of the action logic evolution. Finally, the Ironist action logic has not been proven to exist, leaving one to wonder if it is merely a myth.

Torbert's developmental action logics, particularly those in the conventional category, bear close resemblance to Kegan's developmental orders, yet are classified differently within the conventional/formal, post-conventional/post-formal realm. They can be viewed comparatively in Table 3.

A review of literature on the leading stage theories concluded that most research has focused on exploring stages and their behavioral correlates, but little work has been undertaken to reveal *how* individuals move between stages (McCauley et al., 2006). It is to the process of developmental movement that I turn next.

Table 3

Comparison of Kegan's and Torbert's Developmental Categories

Kegan's Developmental Orders			Torbert's Developmental Action Logics	
Formal	Impulsive			
Formal	Imperial	←→	Pre-conventional	Opportunist
Formal	Interpersonal	←→	Conventional	Diplomat
Formal	Institutional	←→	Conventional	Expert
		↘		
			Conventional	Achiever
Post-formal	Interindividual	↘	Post-conventional	Individualist
			Post-conventional	Strategist
			Post-conventional	Alchemist
			Post-conventional	Ironist

Developmental Movement

The tenets of stage development theory indicate that developmental movement is a linear and unidirectional transition from one stage to the next sequential stage, each stage increasing in complexity. As each stage is transitioned through, the stages through which one has already traversed are encompassed and are capable of being reflected on from the later order meaning-making structure (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCauley et al., 2006). While those at later developmental stages can understand individuals at earlier stages, the reverse is not true (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007).

Developmental growth happens when one turns away from the self that is known, because that self is no longer functional in avoiding displeasure (Kegan, 1982). In other words, developmental movement is precipitated when one's current meaning-making is no longer sufficient to construct the increasing complexity of one's environment (McCauley et al., 2006). Kegan notes,

Every balance's irritability is simultaneously testimony to its capacity to grow and its propensity to preserve itself. Every new balance represents a capacity to listen to what before one could only hear irritably, and the capacity to hear irritably what before one could not hear at all. (1982, p. 105)

In the process of development, one is "defending, surrendering, and reconstructing a center" (p. 82), as one emerges from embeddedness in one stage, thereby making object what was before subject (Kegan, 1982). Kegan describes the process as one of "recoverable loss" (1982, p. 129). What we separate from in one developmental stage, we find anew in the next (Kegan, 1982). Once one achieves a higher action logic, the needs characteristic of the earlier action logics have a different pull, and one's response to these needs will be different (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 11, 2011).

Developmental movement occurs when a person experiences *existential awareness*, or is present in multiple territories of experience (Torbert, 1994). Existential awareness can be defined as *positive*, *negative*, or *reconciling* (Torbert, 1994). Positive awareness results when individuals are aware that their intentions at all levels are in alignment, for example, "saying what one means and doing what one says" (Torbert, 1994, p. 184). Negative awareness occurs when there is a disconnection across territories (Torbert, 1994), when behavior hasn't yet caught up to thought and feeling (Kegan, 1982; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, October 14, 2011). Kegan, describes this as

“meeting up with experience in the world that cannot be made sense of according to my present way of organizing reality” (1982, pp. 169-170). Reconciling moments take place during a “crisis of meaning” (Kegan, 1982, p. 240), when what worked or made sense before does no longer, the contemplation of which leads to a more inclusive understanding of multiple territories (McCauley et al., 2006; Torbert, 1994).

Developmental movement can be triggered through both challenges (Kegan, 1982; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; W.R. Torbert, personal communication, October 14, 2011) and opportunities, including personal changes, external events and changes in environment, and planned and structured developmental interventions (Rooke & Torbert, 2005; McCauley et al., 2006; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007). Personal changes such as becoming a parent, developing new relationships, and seeking out spiritual practice and forms of self-expression provide the opportunity to examine existing patterns and assumptions and to experiment with new ways of acting (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). External events, such as a promotion, or changes to a business environment or tasks can prompt development of different skills, and the necessity to view situations from a different perspective. Structured interventions have shown promising results in the developmental movement of an individual through post-formal developmental stages (McCauley et al., 2006). In fact, Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007) claim that the complex world requires individuals to develop to post-conventional action logics.

While many organizational management and leadership programs focus on development through goal achievement, developmental movement through action logics or orders is qualitatively different. Torbert notes that it entails making vulnerable current ways of knowing, allowing space for the unknown to enter, and re-evaluating the very

structures of reality as they are currently viewed (Torbert, 1991). Kegan describes developmental transition as “the motion of life” (1982, p. 123), which entails “loss and recovery, separation and attachment, anxiety and play, depression and transformation, [and] disintegration and coherence” (1982, p. 44). Even when individuals are dissatisfied with their current worldview, experiencing the discomforting ambiguity of a different way of understanding creates frustrations that may prevent change (Torbert, 1991).

Similarly, Torbert points out that developmental movement between action logics at the post-conventional level is qualitatively different from that of earlier action logics. The post-conventional action logic individual is no longer looking to transform self within an organization, but now seeks communities of collaborative inquiry through which to transform society (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). While individuals operating from conventional action logics seek mentors, post-conventional action-logic individuals seek the development of existing relationships to challenge their assumptions, their practices, and their purpose. A person’s attraction to those at the next highest action logic is often an indication of an individual’s readiness to transform to the next action logic (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007) similarly point to self-reflection, action, inquiry, dialogue, and surrounding oneself with those further along the developmental spectrum as prompts for human development.

While the stage development theorists highlighted to this point focus on sequentially-forward movement along the stair-steps of development as measured by assessment of one’s espoused behavior, feeling, thinking, and overall meaning-making, other theorists provide a critical lens to this approach. In the next section, two critiques of stage development theory are offered.

Critiques of Stage Development Theory

Stage development theory posits that development takes place through sequential, forward movement of one's entire meaning-making system through stages of increasing complexity. However, some theorists claim that stage development theory is far too simplistic to represent the true complexity of human development.

Dynamic Skills Framework. Fischer and Rose (1998) argue that the stair-step ladder approach of stage development is a gross oversimplification of what happens during development. Instead, they posit that cognitive capacity develops separately across different *domains* and *levels* (Fischer & Rose, 1998). They reference the concept of domains as used in Howard Gardner's (1993, as cited in Fischer & Rose, 1998) framework of *multiple intelligences* (e.g., visual-spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, logical-mathematical). They define developmental level as "each round of the growth cycle" (Fischer & Rose, 1998, p. 56), and note that one's optimal level of development is the most complex skill or understanding one can produce. However, Fischer and Rose posit that one's optimal level of development is generally only produced in highly supportive environments, which they suggest are rare in everyday life. They claim that lower level functioning takes place in most normal and frequently present environments, therefore individuals need to learn how to operate effectively in the normal environments that do not support optimal developmental functioning (Fischer & Rose, 1998).

Based on research in cognitive neuroscience, Fischer and Rose suggest that there is a relationship between the development of the brain, specifically the cerebral cortex, and thinking and learning (1998). Their research indicates that there are multiple growth

cycles of both the brain and mind that occur in humans between zero and 30 years of age (Fischer & Rose, 1998). According to Fischer and Rose's "dynamic skills framework" (1998, p. 56), development is flexible, and variable, and marked by complexity and chaos similar to that found in mathematical theory. Fischer and Rose claim that individuals experience different levels of developmental growth independently but in parallel along different domains (1998). There is no sudden transformation in development. Development takes time, though optimal skills do show sudden spurts.

Fischer and Rose posit that the repetition of growth cycles throughout the first three decades of one's life provides a new capacity for learning and thinking that may have been missed in earlier cycles (1998). They suggest that the repeated cycles of growth explain the human capacity for plasticity of earlier psychological and neurological trauma, particularly when later cycles take place in a more supportive environment (Fischer & Rose, 1998). This has interesting implications not only for one's later capacity to develop generally in those domains which were not fully developed earlier, but specifically for how one may grow through earlier periods of trauma that may have caused stunting of development in certain domains. While this seems great news for the capacity of individuals to develop to the age of 30, Fischer and Rose do not indicate how development takes place once the occurrence of these multiple cycles has ceased.

General Model of Hierarchical Complexity. While Fischer and Rose (2008) through their Dynamic Skills Framework argue that stage theory is too simplistic to describe the chaotic nature of development that occurs at different levels which vary across different domains, the General Model of Hierarchical Complexity (GMHC)

(Commons et al., 1998) offers a different critique of stage development theory.

Commons et al. critique stage development theory's focus on behavior-focused linkages to developmental sequence as empirical evidence of stages, claiming to have proven stage development theory through the analytic lens of their GMHC (Commons et al., 1998).

The authors (Commons et al., 1998) acknowledge the existence of developmental stages, posit that stages are inclusive of the lower stages through which they have transformed, and contrary to Fischer and Rose, claim that developmental stages are constant across *domains* (which Commons et al. define as the "external-perspective term *field*" p. 252). However, Commons et al. takes issue with stage development theory's use of behavioral "evidence" to identify one's stage of development. In this article, "stage" is based on the hierarchical complexity of a task and one's performance based on that task (Commons et al., 1998). The authors explain,

With tasks as the fundamental elements to be measured, task analysis and the sequential ordering of tasks are alone sufficient to form a "stage" sequence. From the order of hierarchical complexity of tasks, then, it is possible to derive an analytic measure of stage. (Commons et al., 1998, p. 241)

The GMHC claims to provide an objective measure of an individual's developmental stage by determining if the subject successfully completes *this* task that has been associated with *this* level of complexity. The GMHC measures only from the outside in based on performance, not one's subjective experience, capacity, or competence (Commons et al., 1998).

Further, the authors (Commons et al., 1998) criticize the seemingly abrupt occurrence of a new stage and sudden disappearance of a former stage as indicated by current stage development measures. They identify challenges with the Subject-Object

Interview specifically, noting that no task has been identified in the assessment of the stage. Instead, the task is inferred by the researcher (Commons et al., 1998).

The authors seem to argue that in the absence of a formally defined task that an individual must complete, it is difficult to measure if the individual has met the task requirements of that stage. In contrast to the stage theories developed by Kegan, Cook-Greuter, and Torbert, the GMHC framework of stage development privileges action over meaning-making and the way one shows up rather than the capacity one has to do so.

While the prevailing literature on stage development theory, including that of Commons et al. (1998), posits that development through the stages is largely forward, other theorists such as Fischer and Rose (2008) indicate that development is much more chaotic and random. Even within the traditional Kegan, Torbert, Cook-Greuter camp of stage development some developmental theorists allude to the possibility of developmental movement that is more fluid and bi-directional. What is currently accounted for in the literature on fallback in human development is detailed next.

Fallback in Human Development

As noted before, one of the tenets of constructive-development theory is that development unfolds through a specific sequence with each next stage transcending and incorporating the previous stage. McCauley et al. in their review of the literature on constructive-development theory specifically note, “In general, people do not regress; once an order of development has been constructed, the previous order loses its organizing function, but remains as a perspective that can now be reflected upon (2006, p. 636).” Similarly, Cook-Greuter and Soulen write, “Once a stage has been traversed, it remains a part of the individual’s response repertoire, even when more complex, later

stages are adopted (2007, p. 184). Additionally, Torbert (2004) points out that as individuals progress to later action logics, they have more tools available to make choices about which action logic to use given a specific circumstance. It seems clear that one has the ability to *choose* to use an earlier action logic than one's highest measured action logic. However, one empirical study set in the midst of a group relations conference found that an *involuntary* acting from an earlier stage is also possible.

McCallum's Fallback Finding. In his 2008 dissertation research, McCallum found that all 18 of his participants, regardless of their center-of-gravity action logic (as measured through Cook-Greuter's SCTi-MAP) experienced "temporary regression" or "fall-back." McCallum defined fallback as "...a temporary regression of undetermined duration that is catalyzed by experiences of anxiety and distress such that individuals behave with a logic of action that is markedly less complex and adaptive than their developmental capacity suggests is possible" (2008, p. 135). He claimed, "...with regard to fall-back, a participant's developmental maturity as assessed by the SCTi[-MAP] may indicate one's meaning-making center of gravity, but it does not preclude temporary regression into a way of sense-making and/or acting consistent with earlier action logics" (McCallum, 2008, p. 255).

McCallum suggested that individuals' developmental capacity is significantly influenced by context (2008). He identified anxiety, distress, and confrontation as catalysts for fallback. His participants' experiences of fallback included disorientation, confusion, rage, excessive self-criticism, aggression, accommodation, conflict-aversion, and reversion to childhood patterns.

McCallum noted that participants also experienced temporary depression caused by rejection, disappointment, marginalization, hostility, criticism, loneliness, and loss of agency (2008). McCallum found that those in later action logics experienced less diversity in the action logics they fell back to than did those at earlier action logics.

The participants caught themselves in fallback by noticing their own inauthenticity, that they were acting out of character, and that they had forgotten their normal tools. Perhaps not surprisingly based on what we know about the differing developmental characteristics of various stages, the participants in McCallum's study noticed and recovered from fallback at different paces and in different ways. The Experts needed time to notice their regression and self-correct. Likewise, those measured as Achievers in McCallum's study were only able to see fallback and learn from it after the fact. However, those measured as Strategist or Alchemist were aware of their "shadow" (McCallum, 1998, p. 144) even as they were experiencing it. McCallum found that though it may seem that those at later stages fell back less frequently, given their faster noticing of falling back the later stage individuals were able to recover from it more quickly. McCallum noted that though the time to notice their fallback differed, participants at all action logics had the capacity to take responsibility for their role and took comfort in this accountability. In McCallum's research, fallback had the capacity to lead to learning (2008).

In contrast to fallback, McCallum identified the use of "coping mechanisms" by his participants. He defined coping mechanisms as "...behaviors that are largely self-protective and that helped participants manage their anxiety more than they assisted in leading or learning in the moment" (2008, p. 153). He identified many of the same

behaviors exhibited by those in fallback as those employed through coping mechanisms, however he noted that coping led to “missed opportunities” that actually prohibited learning as long as they trumped re-engagement and awareness (McCallum, 2008, p. 152).

McCallum pointed to the importance of his finding of fallback in individuals noting that it helps raise awareness of situations that trigger fallback, suggesting that awareness will help individuals develop the capacity to self-support through periods of duress and resist regression. He recommended: paying closer attention to the dynamic relationship between developmental capacity and context and conditions; interventions that make fallback more explicit in the moment for the learning of self and others; data gathering on regression that includes more than just self-report; and specifically, the creation of developmental assessments that help track patterns of regression.

Fallback in constructive-development literature. While McCallum’s is the first and only empirical study to my knowledge that identifies fallback in human development, there has been faint mention of the phenomenon (if not by name) by the stage development theorists dating back to Kegan’s *The Evolving Self* (1982). Kegan notes, “Human being is the composing of meaning, including, of course, the occasional inability to compose meaning, which we often experience as the loss of our own composure (p. 11).” In fact, the see-saw motion back-and-forth between the stage one is aspiring to, and that which one is leaving behind in the process of developmental transition is well-documented (Kegan, 1982). Kegan describes the process as one of “loss and recovery, separation and attachment, anxiety and play, depression and transformation, disintegration and coherence” (1982, p. 44). However, fallback outside its occurrence in developmental transition is not something Kegan has acknowledged in

his writing. Instead, he has posited that one may revisit old issues but does so at a whole new level of complexity with the full use of the tools one has from one's highest developmental capacity (Kegan, 1982).

In contrast, both Torbert and Cook-Greuter have acknowledged fallback in their writing. Torbert wrote,

In addition to our primary action-logic, we each tend to have one particular secondary or fallback action-logic to which we retreat when we are under duress—when we feel insecure, ill, angry, or exhausted or when visiting our parents in our childhood home. This fallback position is well worth knowing and remembering at the moment of action in order to avert ineffectiveness and bad feeling. (2004, p. 68)

Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007) also identify regression in human development that is caused by life circumstances, environment, stress, or illness. They write, “Under pressure and rapid change conditions, people often resort to behavior patterns from earlier stages (p. 185).” However, in contrast to McCallum's (2008) claim that those at later action logics fall back as frequently as those at earlier action logics, Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007) suggest that those at later action logics have a greater ability to hold steady in the face of ambiguity and pressure and to not fallback.

Following McCallum's research, and perhaps based on it, the fluidity of developmental movement has been more widely acknowledged in the literature. In a conference paper presented during a session at the 2008 Integral Theory in Action Conference, Torbert et al. state,

While development is often understood as a process of moving from one stable action-logic to the next more open action-logic that transcends and includes the earlier action-logics, recent research indicates that development is actually a more fluid phenomenon, with more likelihood of falling back to earlier action-logics in action than has previously been imagined. Although theoretically the postconventional action-logics give persons or teams increasing capacity to influence their environment, in fact it appears that developmental capacity seems

to fluctuate to some degree based on the context in which a person is situated and on the contingencies that they are facing in the moment. (p.21)

Certainly, the emerging research on the topic of transitioning from one stage to another is still limited, but recent research has revealed that stage transition may be more fluid and bi-directional than originally thought (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCauley, et al., 2006). Further, the learning that may be generated as a result of fallback could have potential for prompting developmental growth and may have broader implications for individuals in organizations (McCallum, 2008). One of the prevailing themes of a review of literature on constructive development is how current stages of development predict leadership behavior (McCauley et al., 2006). It is to this relationship between human development and leader development that I now turn.

The Relationship between Human Development and Leader Development

Organizations as systems face the same challenges as any other system (community, family, marriage), and must ask the question “to which is it more committed – the present evolutionary state of its constituents, or the bigger picture of the person as the process of evolution itself?” (Kegan, 1982, p. 248). Workplaces that face this decision and choose commitment to the present evolutionary state often lose the valuable human capital that strives for ongoing development. This development and striving for such is the best source of information and resources for the organization’s continued growth and for the leadership that is integral for success and change in the world today (Kegan, 1982). Human development cannot be divorced from leader development if leadership at its highest aspirations is to be exercised.

According to the characteristics of the stages or orders of development, one’s capacity to understand, empathize with, and aid in the growth of others is directly tied to

one's own human development. One's developmental stage has an impact on one's own motivations and the methods one uses to motivate others through one's understanding of and ability to relate to another's developmental stage. Analyzing Kegan's developmental orders through the lens of leadership will make this relationship explicit.

Kegan's developmental orders through the lens of leadership. As the reader may recall, Kegan's second or Imperial order, where one sees that one's own way is the best, and perhaps even the only way, defines a relationship to others that revolves around the leader getting what s/he wants. As long as the leader is able to offer the follower something the follower wants or needs, the relationship will remain functional. When this need satisfaction breaks down, the leader is unable to access other leadership tools, as s/he is incapable of comprehending motivations and communicating a vision other than her/his own.

Once individuals develop and transition to the third, Interpersonal, order, they are able to recognize that they possess a personal agenda and goals, but are unable to appreciate and reflect upon the influence of interpersonal connections. That which is subject to an individual, the thing that the individual cannot see – in this case, interpersonal connections – inhibits one's development. In other words, in the Interpersonal order, while one may understand that s/he is acting to accomplish one's own goals, s/he does not realize that s/he is equally motivated by interpersonal connections. However, these interests play a role as s/he attempts to exercise leadership through emphasis on the shared values of the leader and follower and a concurrent striving to actualize the needs of both parties.

Interpersonal individuals are often team players with a shared professional identity. While they are able to internalize diverse perspectives, they have not yet achieved a sense of self-ownership. Instead, they are willing to sacrifice their individual and the organization's goals and growth for the appeasement of others (London & Maurer, 2004). Interpersonal individuals, through their ability to recognize the perspectives of others, may exercise interpersonal influence only as long as the continuum of diversity between their and others' perspectives is not vast. In this order, too much dissent has the capacity to result in leaders giving up their attempt at leadership in favor of harmony with others. Leadership can be painful for both leader and follower, and is often lonely.

Self-ownership and self-motivation are the hallmarks of the fourth order, Institutional balance. Perhaps because fourth order individuals are autonomous and self-driven, they find difficult "motivating others around a vision, working with those who are not self-empowering, being honest and sensitive, and working collaboratively. They are self-empowered but not yet able to think of themselves objectively" (London & Maurer, 2004, pp. 234-235). Personal goal achievement and perfection are the focus for the Institutional individual, and one's embeddedness in one's own autonomy is a weakness (Kegan, 1982), particularly when it comes to the exercise of leadership.

Individuals in the fifth, Interdependent, order operate from an integral perspective, and therefore are adept at finding common ground and mediating conflicts (Kegan, 1982). The Interindividual balance recognizes the integration of the many narratives that contribute to a system through the shared construction of reality. Similarly, in the exercise of leadership, the collective ownership of advancing the system and its

individuals resides in the group itself and results from the sense made by the group of its divergent perspectives (Ospina & Sorenson, 2006).

As I have alluded through the exploration of Kegan's orders of development through a lens of leadership, at the later stages of human development, one has evolved the capacity to distinguish subject from object and therefore has the capacity to understand the motivations of those at the same and earlier development levels. This understanding of others' frames of meaning-making allows leaders to customize their approach to the potential follower using language and motivations that both can understand. Yet, this conclusion is based on mere speculation, since in the reviewed literature, I was unable to locate any empirical research conducted by Kegan linking human development to leader development. In fact, in another review of literature (McCauley et al., 2006) in which both Kegan and Torbert were included, it is noted that only Torbert empirically explored how developmental movement changes the way individuals approach leadership and management (Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005; Torbert, 1991). A review of the empirical studies that have examined the relationship between human development and leadership is the subject of the next section.

Torbert's empirical studies of the relationship between human development and leadership. Torbert's empirical studies of the relationship between human development and leadership were primarily conducted prior to the evolution of the LDP into what is now the Global Leadership Profile. In a meta-analysis of the quarter century of LDP results, developmental action logic was positively correlated with leadership capacity. Action logic predicted levels of organizational and individual performance. Those measured at the post-conventional action logics (Individualists, Strategists and

Alchemists), demonstrated consistent capacity to lead organizational transformations (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

In a study of ophthalmologists of differing developmental action logics, the business practices of participants measured at the Strategist action logic far outperformed the practices of participants measured at two conventional stages: Achiever and *Technician* (now referred to as Expert) (Torbert, 1991). Gross annual business revenue of the medical practices run by Strategists was three times greater than that of participants at the conventional stages (Torbert, 1991).

In this study, qualitative responses to interview questions revealed a distinct difference in the manner in which the ophthalmologists at the three action logics (Expert, Achiever, and Strategist) made meaning of their broader environment. The Strategist ophthalmologists' worldview incorporated a focus on technical expertise and relationships which was similarly noted by individuals at the two conventional action logics, but also included a capacity to identify market niches and form strategic business partnerships. This finding lends support to the assertion that individuals at the Strategist action logic, given their business results, are often promoted (Torbert, 1991). However, this hypothesis does prompt a question along the chicken and egg line. Are Strategists promoted to leadership positions because of their capacity to navigate complex organizational environments, or do complex organizational environments prompt the development of Strategist capacities (Torbert, 1991)?

Another study conducted by Torbert explored the relationship between ten CEOs and the success of their respective organizations. Five CEOs were measured at the Strategist action-logic and five at pre-Strategist action logics. The organizations of all

five Strategist CEOs transformed positively, while only two of the five organizations led by pre-Strategist CEOs transformed positively. Two of the other three pre-Strategist CEO-led organizations did not transform positively, and one regressed. In all ten cases, researchers at the Strategist or Alchemist action logic served as consultants to each CEO.

These findings indicate that leaders' developmental action logic and that of their closest advisors accounts for 59% of the variance in the positive transformation of their organizations ($\rho=.651$, one-tailed $p<.01$) (Torbert, 2010). Further, CEOs at the Strategist action logic specifically have a strong likelihood of influencing positive transformation in their organizations (Rooke & Torbert, 1998).

The five CEOs who measured at the Strategist action-logic on the LDP were associated with organizations that positively transformed as measured by organizational growth and profitability, customer and employee satisfaction, reputational measures, archival data, and "thick descriptions." The authors suggest that Strategist action-logic CEOs whose exercise of leadership is marked by mutual (not unilateral) power, and who are self-reflective practitioners who inquire about and adjust their own actions to increase effectiveness and encourage the same in others, are more effective at positively transforming the organizations they lead (Torbert, 2010).

Two of the five CEOs who measured at conventional action logics (one Expert and one Achiever), and whose consultant measured at the Alchemist post-conventional action logic were associated with organizations that also experienced positive transformation. In these two instances, the CEO either treated the Strategist consultant/researcher as a close confidant or shared leadership influence with the senior management team and consultant. The researchers do not hypothesize about whether

there was developmental movement of these CEOs, and did not note if developmental action logic was assessed at the end of the study period in addition to at its beginning. The inclusion of this data could have important implications for the understanding of how close interaction with individuals at later developmental action logics might influence the developmental movement of individuals at earlier action logics.

Two more of the organizations led by conventional action logic CEOs (Achiever) with Strategist-measured consultants did not transform at all. And, the organization led by a Diplomat-measured CEO paired with an Alchemist consultant actually regressed on the organizational action logic continuum. In these three cases of organizations that did not transform positively even with consultant interventions, the pre-Strategist CEOs distanced themselves from the post-conventional consultants/researchers and their broader leadership team (Rooke & Torbert, 1998).

The authors suggest that the lack of positive organizational transformation in these organizations may have been the result of consultants' interventions that were not well-matched to the CEOs' action logics. Specifically, the interventions utilized may have caused too much risk and anxiety for the earlier stage CEOs, while the same intervention with the Strategist CEOs would have a positive effect coming from an individual with a similar frame for viewing the world (Rooke & Torbert, 1998). This is an interesting suggestion given that those at post-conventional action logics should be able to more effectively provide feedback in a way that can be understood, even by those at earlier action logics according to Cook-Greuter and Soulen (2007).

The measurement of organizational action logic held strong inter-rater reliability (1.0 reliability on if organizations transformed, and .9 reliability in agreement on the

number of transformations in each organization). However, the researchers do not reference any inter-rater reliability testing on the exact assessment of starting and ending organizational action logics. For instance, the raters may have agreed that there were three levels of positive organizational transformation, but it is not noted if they agreed on which organizational action logic the organizations were measured at in the beginning and to which they transformed.

The lack of a common definition of both “organizational transformation” and “leadership” is a shortcoming of Torbert’s research connecting developmental stage to organizational transformation and leadership. Without an equally well-validated and descriptive instrument for measuring both organizational transformation and leadership, together and separately, the relationship between developmental stages and these two concepts is unable to be linked without critique.

Despite the limitations of these particular studies, research suggests that human development is critical to leader development (Getz, 2009; Martynowych, 2006; Merron et al., 1987; Rooke & Torbert, 1998, 2005; Spence, 2005; Torbert, 1991, 1994). It is clear that those at earlier stages of development are only able to approach leadership from certain perspectives given that they have access to only the meaning-making perspectives that they themselves have transitioned through (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007). Those at later stages are privy to a broad repertoire of leadership approaches, which include those at both the higher and lower ends of the leader/follower exchange spectrum by virtue of themselves having transitioned through a greater number of stages of meaning-making, which are inclusive of the earlier stages (Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007). Therefore, in

order to develop a leader, one must first focus on how to support the development of the human.

An understanding of what prompts human development at the post-conventional action logics is integral to the development of leaders who operate from a framework in which diverse perspectives are sought and explored for their ability to transform mental models, existing structures and practices are examined against principles, transforming power originates not from an individual but from the collective awareness of the group, personal development is linked to development and understanding of communities of practice, and mutuality is the goal. As organizations confront increasingly complex challenges, it is important to understand developmental movement, what catalyzes it, and how it can be channeled in the development of leadership capacity. Action inquiry as a tool for prompting developmental movement through post-formal developmental stages is explored next.

Action inquiry as a structure to support developmental growth. *Action inquiry* is the practice of simultaneously paying attention to a given situation, accomplishing prioritized tasks, and revising actions and tasks as necessary. Torbert developed the practice of action inquiry as a tool to catalyze developmental movement (McCauley et al., 2006). In fact, action inquiry and Vedic/Transcendental Meditation are the only two educational interventions that have empirically been shown to facilitate developmental transformation beyond formal operations (Torbert, 1994).

Formal educational settings that offer lengthened exposure (one to two years) or that are intense and repeated were identified as effective settings for action inquiry prompting developmental movement (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). These settings, which are

designed to encourage in-the-moment awareness and to produce dissonance in order to allow participants both reason and opportunity to challenge their current meaning-making frames (Rooke & Torbert, 2005), include Bath University's two-year master's degree program, the University of San Diego's leadership program's group relations courses, and Boston College's master's of business administration (MBA) program.

The concurrent responsibilities of action inquiry are described as first-person, second-person, and third-person practice (Chandler & Torbert, 2003). In first-person practice, the individual is part of and an active contributor to the situation, able to determine what is most helpful in advancing the work of self and others. In second-person practice, an understanding of the environment is gained through seeking out others' views and sharing one's own perspective on the identification of patterns, perceptions, influence, and growth. Third-person practice takes place through attention to both one's own actions and external information that contributes to an understanding of the situation. In the practice of action inquiry, while actively working in real time on a project with others, one is challenged to access all levels of experience – the situation, one's own behaviors, and how self and others' thoughts and behaviors influence action. First-, second-, and third-person practice provides the transcognitive awareness that is present in the fourth territory of experience (Chandler & Torbert, 2003).

Torbert has identified similarities between action logics of individuals and those of organizations (Rooke & Torbert, 1998), and the post-conventional organizational settings may provide the kinds of structures that have been shown to facilitate developmental growth in individuals (W.R. Torbert, personal communication, November 2 & 11, 2011). The Strategist individual's organizational counterpart is referred to as

collaborative inquiry. Its characteristics include open discussions to reveal differences, directly addressing potential conflicts, and a commitment to collectively creating the strategies and structures of the organization rather than accepting those that currently exist (Rooke & Torbert, 1998).

These characteristics are similar to those of the group relations theory-in-practice courses at the University of San Diego in which the class is used as a laboratory to explore issues of authority, leadership, and organizational change. Participants are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning while studying the influence of unconscious activity on the group-as-a-whole (Getz, 2009; McCallum, 2008). The unconventional pedagogical approach used provides an environment for exploration of self in relation to others and to the embedded contexts of systems. In this environment, discomfort and ambiguity are ever-present and are intended to be made explicit, thereby providing a rich environment in which to practice developmental interventions and conduct research focused on human development's links to leader development.

A five-year longitudinal self-study of a University of San Diego faculty member's experience in teaching leadership to undergraduate students offers scaffolding to the concept of action inquiry (Getz, 2009). Five group relations, case-in-point, experiential learning courses provided a setting in which to engage learners, both students and faculty, in the three levels of analysis: introspection; interactions with others, group or any sub-system within the whole; and the larger organization (Getz, 2009). The learners were charged with practicing action inquiry as a disciplined way of becoming aware of what's happening in the moment and taking action based on this knowledge in keeping with the group's purpose.

While action inquiry was used as a tool to teach leadership to the students rather than to teach the students about leadership, the professor/researcher discovered a broader use for action inquiry in the development of self. Specific benefits of action research noted by the researcher include improved ability to make thoughtful decisions, assistance for those aspiring to leadership to gain confidence, and increased capacity to “hold steady” through conflict (Getz, 2009). Personal reflection as a necessary tool for development was also identified in this study (Getz, 2009).

Respect for the individual, organizational effectiveness, and an encouragement of innovation characterize *liberating disciplines*, the Ironist’s organizational counterpart. These environments provide supports that are accessible to all members at each stage of development and encourage developmental transformation (Torbert, 1987). Liberating disciplines are marked by an open structure in which all participants can exercise leadership, a commitment to correcting inconsistencies, and an ongoing cycle of action and inquiry (Rooke & Torbert, 1998), which closely matches Boston College’s master’s in business administration program design.

The Wallace E. Carroll School of Management at Boston College designed its MBA program to include specific elements encouraging post-formal development through action inquiry (Torbert, 1994). The program highlighted each participant’s potential for critical thought, and did not require adherence to one theory. On the job training in giving, receiving, and responding to feedback was provided to participants on all four levels of experience. Additionally, feedback was encouraged as close to the experience as possible. Findings indicate that those measured at later action logics sought out opportunities for developmental growth. For example, students who

volunteered to explore the action inquiry approach through consulting roles and ongoing practice experienced development to later action logics (Torbert, 1994).

In action inquiry, researchers are participants and participants are researchers. If empirical research instruments are used, they are developed with or agreed upon by the participants (Torbert, 1994). The goal is to create communities of inquiry to address issues of concern and in pursuit of the development of individuals in communities of social practice (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Torbert, 1994). In action inquiry, as in the post-formal developmental action logics, the purpose is to become aware of incongruities that exist, simultaneously observe the four territories of experience, and bring authenticity to the practice in a quest for integrity, mutuality, and transforming power (Chandler & Torbert, 2003).

Torbert's work with its efforts to explore the connections between human development, developmental movement, and leadership capacity, has wide-scale implications for both theory and practice. A theoretical understanding of how humans make meaning and how their meaning-making structures inform their ability to practice leadership, not only as individuals, but also in concert with society, should be a key component of leadership studies. The practical value of this knowledge lies in the potential for research to uncover the catalysts for developmental movement. Action inquiry, with its focus on communities of practice, timely action and reflection, and transformation of all participants is key in providing an actionable, real-world tool for developing individuals to their highest selves in pursuit of leadership, organizational, and societal transformation.

These examples illustrate how the relationship between human development and leadership development has been explored to-date, and how research might be undertaken in the future. Additionally, fascinating research is currently being undertaken to understand how the structure of the brain may influence the structure of the mind, and the implications of this connection to the exercise of leadership. In the next section, one particular strand of brain/mind/leadership research is described.

Connecting the structure of the brain with structure of the mind and implications for leadership. Research in the developmental field is turning more frequently to an exploration of the linkages between the physical organ of the brain and the mind (Fischer & Rose, 1998; Rock & Schwartz, 2007; Rock, 2008). Emerging research focuses on the integration of psychology (the study of the human mind and behavior, which forms the basis for constructive-development theory) and neuroscience (the study of the anatomy and physiology of the brain) (Rock & Schwartz, 2007).

According to research in the field of social neuroscience, much of social behavior is driven by the organizing principle of reducing threat and maximizing reward. Several domains of social experience draw on the same brain networks as those used in survival situations (Rock, 2008). David Rock (2008) in his SCARF Model has identified five domains of human experience that motivate threat and reward responses in the brain: (a) Status – how one is perceived by others, (b) Certainty – ability to predict the future, (c) Autonomy – sense of control and of having choices, (d) Relatedness – sense of safety with others, and (e) Fairness – “perception of fair exchanges between people” (p. 1).

These social triggers are first processed through the amygdala, part of the limbic system in the brain. The amygdala plays a role in categorizing stimuli to the brain as

“approach” (good) or “avoid” (bad) stimuli (Rock & Schwartz, 2007). In a reflexive reaction, the limbic system and amygdala respond before conscious processing is able to occur. Threat (avoid stimuli) perceived as such by the amygdala results in reduced functioning of the prefrontal cortex where the cognitive mind is housed and where linear conscious processing takes place. Under threat, the basal ganglia, the part of the brain located near the core “where neural circuits of long-standing habit are formed and held” (Rock & Schwartz 2007, p.11), are activated. As a result, the brain adopts less nuanced responses, retreating to what’s safe and “shrinking from opportunities, as they are perceived to be more dangerous” (Rock, 2008, p. 3).

The basal ganglia can function exceedingly well without conscious thought in any routine activity. In contrast, working memory fatigues easily and can hold only a limited amount of information “on line” at any one time. Therefore, any activity conducted repetitively (to the point of becoming a habit) will tend to get pushed down to the basal ganglia, the habit-center part of the brain. This frees up the processing resources of the prefrontal cortex. (Rock & Schwartz, 2007, p.11)

Understanding the interaction between the brain and the cognitive mind has significant implications for a more nuanced understanding of how individuals are able to make meaning and the circumstances in which their most complex meaning-making may be beyond their physiological reach. It would seem that one’s well-established meaning-making becomes engrained in the habitually-oriented basal ganglia. In general, but particularly under threat situations (such as those related to status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness), when the necessary energy for the prefrontal cortex where the conscious mind resides is redirected to the amygdala, the basal ganglia, or that which is well known, steps in. This may be the physiological explanation for what happens in fallback when one unconsciously makes meaning from a less complex stage of development than one would otherwise be capable.

Rock and Schwartz identify specific recommendations for leaders in organizations, noting that threats to the five SCARF areas reduce capacity to collaborate and persuade, limit empathy and feelings of connectedness, and cause individuals to become emotional, to act more impulsively and to resist change (2007; 2008). Rock posits that the value of knowing the social drivers that motivate threat is that one is able to avoid them in self and avoid generating them in others. He also points to the importance of naming and reframing these triggers and the impact they may have (Rock, 2008). He emphasizes focusing on the positive, thereby allowing individuals to create their own mental models of what the positive vision looks like, and to create their own solutions.

Rock and Schwartz suggest that awareness is critical to successfully changing the structure of the brain (2007), and note that “people’s expectations have a significant impact on what they perceive” (p.11). Regular focus and attention on a particular thing engrains patterns in the brain around that thing and new neuropathways can be formed. Rock and Schwartz also point to the importance of increased attention in moments of insight.

The findings suggest that at a moment of insight, a complex set of new connections is being created. These connections have the potential to enhance our mental resources and overcome the brain’s resistance to change. But to achieve this result, in the brain’s limited working memory, we need to make a deliberate effort to hardwire an insight by paying it repeated attention. (2007, p. 15)

Many of Rock’s and Schwartz’s recommendations including those related to the power of naming and positive focus; the importance of knowing, accepting and reducing, when possible, the circumstances that trigger threat responses in the brain; and holding steady during moments of insight have relevance to the phenomenon of fallback in

development. First, the science of the interaction between the brain and the mind suggests that mental maps play a central role in human experience. This emphasizes the importance of not only naming fallback, but also exploring the positive role it may play in development. Second, by naming fallback and identifying its triggers, one is able to attempt to avoid them in self and create circumstances and environments in which they may be avoided by others. Yet, also accepting the inevitability of the fallback and recognizing that it has the capacity to be in the service of learning allows the creation of safe spaces in organizations and on teams for people to be vulnerable and bring their full self. The experience of fallback may prompt moments of insight. Rock's SCARF model emphasizes the importance of staying present in these moments of learning rather than withdrawing from the situation and allowing the established patterns of the basal ganglia to take over.

The relationship between the structure of the brain and the mind and the subsequent implications for the exercise of leadership provides a different lens through which to view human development and leadership. Future research specifically focused on the linkage between human development and leadership should attempt to address limitations that exist in this field of study, which are next described.

Limitations of research on human development and its relationship to leadership. The ongoing study of post-conventional developmental action logics, leadership capacity, and the developmental movement that connects the two is integral to preparing leaders who are able to address the increasing complexities of present and future communities of practice. However, research in this subject area is challenging. Assessing developmental action logic is time-consuming, the instruments expensive, and

the data complex, requiring manageable, and therefore, small samples (McCauley, et al., 2006). Given the somewhat nascent explorations of the connections between the fields of human development and leader development, research designs have also been limited. Existing research in this area has largely focused on a limited range of developmental levels, and primarily those at the conventional action logics from which the majority of the population makes meaning (McCauley et al., 2006), yet not those at which individuals have been shown to have the highest capacity to exercise leadership.

Further, the majority of studies on development, leadership, and developmental movement specifically, have been of brief duration. Torbert's hypothesis that individuals can develop through action logics and that this development supports leadership has been supported in a handful of research projects (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). However, developmental movement takes time. Only three examples from the research exist of individuals transforming twice in less than four years (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Longitudinal studies should be the focus of future research in this area to allow for a comprehensive understanding of how individuals develop over time and how this movement influences their leadership capacity.

Another limitation of this area of research is its lack of generalizability (Chandler & Torbert, 2003). Action logics are distinguished by consistent characteristics, however the essence of the action logic of individuals is their distinctiveness based on each individual's unique worldview. This worldview is constructed through one's particular interaction with and influence upon one's environment, and conversely, one's environment's interaction with and influence upon the individual (Kegan, 1982; Cook-

Greuter & Soulen, 2007). One's unique experience of the world cannot be oversimplified by application to the masses.

In the next chapter, I describe the methodological approach I undertook in exploring one particular aspect of one's experience of the world, an aspect that has heretofore largely been neglected – the phenomenon of fallback and its role in human and leadership development.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of fallback through interviews with six key thinkers in the field of developmental theory, each representing a nuanced approach to the theory's inner workings. Five research questions guided this study:

1. How do we more deeply understand the fallback phenomenon as situated within current developmental theory?
2. How do key thinkers in the field of adult development and leader development understand the fallback phenomenon within their own theoretical frame?
3. What role may fallback play in developmental growth?
4. How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?
5. How might the fallback phenomenon be researched with participants in the future?

I employed a qualitative research design using grounded theory methodology. This approach to research methodology is detailed in the next section.

Research Design: Grounded Theory Method

The grounded theory method is based on the claim that “theory emerges from the data” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 32). Analysis is conducted throughout the research process, thereby allowing the analysis of the data to inform the data collection process. The method advocates looking anew at concepts and categories through an ongoing process of “coding for actions and theory construction, successive comparative analyses,

inductive-abductive logic, memo-writing, theoretical sampling, and theoretical integration” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 51).

The grounded theory method was perfect for the research I undertook: collecting data, allowing the theory to emerge by understanding each key thinker’s perspective of the fallback phenomenon, noting the similarities and differences between key thinkers, all in order to better elucidate the phenomenon of fallback. Charmaz wrote, “through comparing other scholars’ evidence and ideas with your grounded theory, you may show where and how their ideas illuminate your theoretical categories and how your theory extends, transcends, or challenges dominant ideas in your field” (2006, p. 165). More detail about how the grounded theory method was utilized in data collection and analysis is included in the sections that follow.

Research Participants

Identification and selection. I conducted a series of interviews with six “key thinkers” in the field of adult development and leader development. For the purposes of this study, a *key thinker* is defined as one who has done extensive thinking around models of developmental theory that one or several of the originators of the theory created. Another distinguishing factor for key thinker classification was that they have also integrated these models into their own research and application in the adult development and leadership development fields. As a result, they were able to draw upon the experience of individuals positioned all along the developmental continuum through their own extensive empirical research and practice in the field. In addition, the key thinkers had access to their own experiences as humans who have themselves traversed the developmental spectrum.

The basic tenets of stage development theory are a common thread that all of the selected key thinkers share. These essential principles posit that individuals move sequentially through stages of development throughout their lives; that individuals have access to the meaning-making structures of the stages through which they have already developed; and that there is a qualitative difference in the way in which individuals make meaning between the conventional stages of development and the post-conventional stages.

However, each key thinker represented a slightly nuanced approach to stage development theory. To this end, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) among the key thinkers within stage development theory was employed in an effort to represent and subsequently analyze patterns and anomalies that emerged as a result of their differing points of view. In this case, this meant choosing key thinkers whose primary conceptual frameworks diverge in the nomenclature and narrative used to describe the theory, stages, and/or the process of developmental transition, and whose research may be primarily focused on varying stages along the developmental spectrum. The use of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) enabled me to access a diversity of thought, experience, and perspective on developmental movement between the stages.

Snowball sampling, a strategy that uses others to identify potential participants who meet a certain criteria (Glesne, 2006)—in this case, classification as a key thinker following the definition outlined above—was utilized. William R. Torbert, with whom I had an existing relationship, agreed to both participate as one of the key thinkers and to facilitate identification of and introduction to the additional participants. I also utilized my own network of faculty and colleagues in the field of leadership and human

development to identify and recruit potential key thinkers. Torbert sent an introductory email to Chuck Palus, Robert Kegan, and Jennifer Garvey Berger to which I followed up directly by email with an invitation to participate. I invited Susanne Cook-Greuter to participate directly, with no prior introduction. Theresa Monroe, one of my committee members, mentioned my research in a phone call with David McCallum, prompting him to offer his participation via Facebook message. Ah, the evolving technology of research participant recruitment.

Through these resources and outreach, I was able to secure all three of the living originators of constructive-development theory as participants: Robert Kegan, William R. Torbert, and Susanne Cook-Greuter. In addition, David McCallum, Jennifer Garvey Berger, and Chuck Palus represent the next generation of scholar-practitioners in the fields of human and leadership development through not only their own research, but their extensive integration of Kegan's, Torbert's, and Cook-Greuter's frameworks in their practice outside of academia. In the next section, I provide additional background on the key thinkers and identify the conceptual and relational ties that connect them.

Meet the key thinkers.

Susanne Cook-Greuter, Ed.D. Susanne Cook-Greuter is an independent scholar who coaches individuals in personal and professional resilience, self-acceptance, and consults to various organizations and projects in researching and applying developmental thinking. Cook-Greuter earned her doctorate from Harvard University where she worked closely with Robert Kegan. Her thesis, *Postautonomous Ego Development* (1999), is recognized as a landmark study in the characteristics and assessment of highly developed and influential individuals and leaders. Cook-Greuter and Torbert collaborated for years

on the development of the Leadership Development Profile (LDP), an instrument that assesses the core human process of making meaning, before Cook-Greuter later independently developed the Integral Sentence Completion Test Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP). She is an internationally known authority on adult development.

Jennifer Garvey Berger, Ed.D. Jennifer Garvey Berger earned her doctorate from Harvard University where Robert Kegan served as her dissertation chair. She's a trained interviewer and scorer for Kegan's developmental assessment instrument, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI), and has adapted this research instrument into her own Growth Edge Interview which she uses in her consultation practice to help her clients identify the growing edge in their human and leadership development. Before launching her own consulting organization, Berger was an associate professor at George Mason University in Virginia, and continues to teach and offer workshops at academic institutions including the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Georgetown University, the University of Sydney, and Oxford Brookes University. Berger is the author of *Changing on the Job: Developing Leaders for a Complex World* (2012) as well as numerous articles and books on leadership, coaching, adult development, and individual and organizational change.

Robert Kegan, Ph.D. Robert Kegan earned his doctorate from Harvard University and is a psychologist who teaches, researches, writes, and consults about adult development, adult learning, and professional development. His work explores the possibility and necessity of ongoing psychological transformation in adulthood; the fit between adult capacities and the hidden demands of modern life; and the evolution of consciousness in adulthood and its implications for supporting adult learning,

professional development, and adult education. In addition to his faculty appointment at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Kegan serves as educational chair of the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education; as co-director of a joint program with the Harvard Medical School to bring principles of adult learning to the reform of medical education; and as co-director of the Change Leadership Group, a program for the training of change leadership coaches for school and district leaders. In collaboration with Lisa Lahey (change management consultant, author, and Harvard Graduate School of Education faculty member), Kegan conducted the original research on the development of adult mindsets and later discovered the hidden mechanism which prevents people from making the changes that are most important to them. He developed the Subject-Object Interview, an instrument that is aimed at understanding and assessing the developmental complexity of an individual's way of making meaning. His research and publications on the development of mental capacities in adulthood (*The Evolving Self, In Over Our Heads*) have had an international influence in many fields including management, leadership studies, and organizational learning. Kegan served as dissertation chair for two other key thinkers in this study: Susanne Cook-Greuter and Jennifer Garvey Berger.

David McCallum, S.J., Ed.D. Fr. David McCallum, S.J. is a Jesuit priest and educator. In 2008, McCallum completed his doctorate in Adult Learning and Leadership at Columbia University, Teachers College on the implications of adult developmental maturation for leadership capacity. His dissertation research, *Exploring the Implications of a Hidden Diversity in Group Relations Conference Learning: A Developmental Perspective* (2008), generated the only empirical evidence of fallback in human

development of which I am aware. Susanne Cook-Greuter participated in and provided guidance to McCallum during the group relations conference in which his study was set. McCallum uses Torbert's Developmental Action Inquiry as the principle conceptual framework in his research, study, and consultation work. He presents workshops and retreats, consults to organizational change processes, and facilitates leadership development. McCallum serves as special assistant to the president of Le Moyne College in Syracuse, N.Y.; Director of Mission & Identity, responsible for aligning the institution with its Jesuit, Catholic mission; as well as Interim Dean of the Madden School of Business where he also teaches leadership.

Chuck Palus, Ph.D. Charles (Chuck) Palus is Manager of the Connected Leadership Project at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, NC. As a research scientist, his focus is on how leadership is created and maintained among people working together on complex challenges. Palus earned a doctorate from Boston College for his research in adult development where he also taught in the business school and psychology department. He is lead researcher and co-designer of "Leading Creatively," a five-day experiential program for developing creative leadership, and "Facing and Solving Complex Challenges," a custom program for developing connected leadership. His publications include "Making Common Sense: Leadership as Meaning-making in a Community of Practice" and "The Leader's Edge: Six Creative Competencies for Exploring Complex Challenges."

William R. Torbert, Ph.D. William R. Torbert is co-founder of Action Inquiry Associates, which provides organizational transformation consulting services, leadership development workshops, and the Global Leadership Profile (GLP) instrument for

assessing individuals' characteristic leadership style for acting and inquiring. Torbert received his Ph.D. in Individual and Organizational Behavior from Yale before launching his career in academia. He taught leadership at Southern Methodist University, the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and then, from 1978-2008 at the Carroll Graduate School of Management at Boston College (BC), where he also served as Graduate Dean (the BC MBA program's ranking rising from below the top 100 to #25 during his tenure) and later served as Director of the Organizational Transformation Doctoral Program. Torbert is the author of several books and articles including "Seven Transformations of Leadership," *Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership*, and *The Power of Balance: Transforming Self, Society, and Scientific Inquiry*.

Data Collection Methods

Interviews. Interviews served as the primary method for data collection with the key thinkers. I conducted six interviews between October 14th and December 5th, 2011 with Torbert for previous research I undertook exploring the fallback phenomenon with one key thinker, and one final interview on March 4th, 2013. Data collection with the other five key thinkers began in August 2012 and ended in January 2013. The number of interview sessions with each key thinker ranged from one in one case, to seven in three of the others. All 27 interviews combined totaled approximately 32 hours: Palus, seven interviews totaling over seven hours; McCallum, seven interviews totaling over seven hours; Torbert, seven interviews totaling over eight hours; Berger, three interviews totaling just over four hours; Cook-Greuter, three interviews totaling three-and-a-half hours; and Kegan, one interview, just under one hour. Most of the interviews were

conducted via online video chat, but occasionally phone conversations with no video took place.

I used an interview guide approach (Appendix B), because it allowed me to follow a focused and structured schedule of questions without completely sacrificing the benefit of flexibility that the conversational interview approach allows (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 2002). There can be much variance along the spectrum of interview design. On one end of the spectrum is the conversational interview in which questions are generated during the interview. On the other end is the standardized open-ended interview approach in which deliberately crafted and ordered questions are strictly adhered to without deviation during the interview.

The interview guide approach operates between the two ends of the continuum and, depending on how much the interviewer relies on the guide's questions to structure the interview, can operate either in a relatively structured way or as a support for more informal conversation (Patton, 2002). Particularly given the embryonic subject of study, having the ability to adapt questions based on the data that emerged during the interviews was critical and extremely beneficial.

In keeping with Charmaz's (2006) interview recommendations which position delving into collective practices ahead of asking about the individual's experience of them, I placed knowledge questions about the theory at the beginning of the interview protocol (Appendix B), saving questions about the key thinkers' personal experiences of the fallback phenomenon for the latter part of the interviews. This allowed me to both establish rapport with the key thinkers and to provide them the space and time for reflection on their experience of the fallback phenomenon in their own lives.

Charmaz (2006) emphasized the importance of not only identifying and exploring themes during interviews, but also analyzing the data after interviews and looping back in pursuit of answers to still unclear questions and to fill holes that still exist in the theory. She wrote, “Grounded theory interviewing differs from much in-depth interviewing because we narrow the range of interview topics to gather specific data for developing our theoretical frameworks as we proceed with conducting the interviews” (2006, p. 29). I employed this practice of building on and clarifying data generated in the prior interviews throughout the interview season. The final interview conducted with each key thinker excluding Kegan (with whom I only conducted one interview total) was dedicated to clarification of ideas and themes that were generated over the course of all interviews with each individual key thinker.

Audio of the interviews was digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim. I transcribed 11 of the interviews myself. I contracted with a transcriber to transcribe the remaining 16, and I also listened to each of these recordings in full while correcting the transcriptions where necessary.

The decisions I made about what was included and what was not in the transcription process was as important an aspect of data collection as the interviews themselves. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe the transition from the evolving interaction of an interview, to the abstraction of audio recordings, to the final fixed written transcription. What was in its origins a living and emerging process may become the concrete and often, final, word. I was deliberate in my approach to this process in an effort to remain true to the experience and affect of my conversations with the key thinkers. I repeatedly returned to not just the transcribed word, but also the audio of the

interviews as I prepared for subsequent interviews within and across key thinkers and analyzed the data. I made a purposeful attempt to stay as close to the experience of my ongoing interactions with the key thinkers as possible.

One of the critical components of my research design was the integration of a prior pilot study I had conducted on the lived experience of fallback in post-conventional individuals. The stories generated as a result of this pilot study were recounted to the key thinkers during the interviews as I asked them to make sense of the stories. Next, I describe the pilot study that served as the impetus for research question number four:

How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?

Pilot study. During the spring of 2011, I conducted a pilot study with three participants whose individual developmental action logics were previously measured² through the SCTi-MAP Professional Sentence Completion Test³ (SCTi-MAP also known as the LDP; Cook-Greuter, 2004). Developmental stage theory posits that those operating from later action logics possess a broader understanding of earlier action logics

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² It should be noted that administration of the instrument occurred at different times prior to and not for the purposes of this study for each participant.

³ Building upon Loevinger's Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT; Walsh, 1998) and Torbert's Harthill Leadership Development Profile (HLDP; Rooke & Torbert, 2005), Cook-Greuter developed the SCTi-MAP (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007). This instrument consists of 36 sentence stems, and participant responses allow trained evaluators to construct images of how participants frame their own actions and their worldview. The SCTi-MAP is designed to determine the action logic which functions as an individual's dominant way of making meaning, and reference to the participants' score on this instrument added a quantitative benchmark to the pilot study's qualitative research design.

by virtue of having already occupied and transformed through them (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Kegan, 1982; Loevinger, 1997; Torbert, 1994, 2004; Torbert et al., 2008). Therefore, the SCTi-MAP was used to purposefully identify participants with measurements representing each of the post-conventional action logics categorized as Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist in an effort to select the most information-rich participants who have the developmental capacity to provide salient examples, descriptions, and insights on the fallback phenomenon and to analyze patterns and anomalies (Patton, 2002) along the spectrum of post-conventional developmental action logics.

The interviews with the three participants in the pilot study occurred between April 12th and 21st, 2011. I conducted individual interviews with each of the participants totaling 210 minutes between April 12th and April 16th. In addition to these individual interviews, I conducted one group interview on April 21st which was 90 minutes in length. I digitally recorded the audio of the interviews and transcribed them. This combination of individual and group interviews enabled an exploration of the phenomenon of fallback through an understanding and descriptive analysis of how participants constructed meaning from the world in which they live (Glesne, 2006).

Data analysis occurred in two phases. The first phase of analysis followed the initial individual interview with each participant. I used inductive analysis to identify specific patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2002) in the individual interview data around the concept of fallback. I then attempted to identify, from a general perspective, any over-arching themes across participants.

Because the participants were measured at different primary action logics, I anticipated finding differences between the themes present in each participant's responses. This is significant because developmental theory posits that there is a qualitative difference in the way in which individuals make meaning at each stage along the developmental spectrum. Selecting participants who were measured as making meaning from distinct stages of development allowed me to explore the ways in which fallback is experienced and described both similarly and differently by individuals at different developmental action logics.

I then conducted deductive analysis by holding up the interview data against the existing theoretical framework (Patton, 2002) of stage development theory and developmental action logics, specifically (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Torbert, 1994, 2004; Torbert et al., 2008) in order to understand how the fallback phenomenon fit within and diverged from the existing developmental theory based on the stories the participants told about their experiences of falling back.

The group interview (with the same individuals) served as a source for additional data collection, and also allowed me the opportunity to member-check my analysis of the individual data to verify that I had accurately reflected participants' perspectives. Participants' contributions in the group interview provided new interpretations and ideas, which informed the cumulative findings of the pilot study.

The pilot study was an invaluable step in the process of exploring the phenomenon of fallback. It tested the assumption in the existing theory that development is always forward-moving; suggested possibilities for expanding the range of interpretations of how one makes meaning differently than one's center-of-gravity action

logic would suggest in given circumstances; and through its generation of stories about the lived experience of fallback, provided a launching point to inform future studies. In fact, this empirical pilot study revealed that there were many more theoretical questions that needed answering before further empirical work on the lived experience of fallback could be effectively conducted. Charmaz wrote,

Grounded theorists evaluate the fit between their initial research interests and their emerging data. We do not force preconceived ideas and theories directly upon our data. Rather, we follow leads that we define in the data, or design another way of collecting data to pursue our initial interests. (2006, p. 17)

The data and findings from the spring 2011 pilot study were integral to the design of the interview protocol for the theoretical research conducted for this dissertation, in that they provided what Glesne (2006, p. 27) describes as an “understanding of direct lived experience instead of abstract generalizations” along the path to theorizing. Gaps within the existing theory guided the creation of interview questions for the pilot study participants. In a reciprocal manner, the findings and the unanswered questions from the pilot study participants significantly informed the interview protocol that I used with the key thinkers.

I sent a summary of the findings from the pilot study (Appendix C) to the key thinkers in the course of the interview season. In the grounded theory tradition of “mov[ing] back and forth between theoretical interpretation and empirical evidence” (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 152-153), specific examples of fallback recounted by the pilot study participants (see Chapter Four, Part IV) were posed to the key thinkers in an effort to bridge their theoretical understandings with the actual lived experience of the fallback phenomenon.

The conceptual framework of stage development theory also informed the interview protocol. This interplay of empirical data and theory in the conduct of research is one of the tenets of the grounded theory method and is referred to as *abductive reasoning*.

The logic of abduction entails studying individual cases inductively and discerning a surprising finding and then asking how theory could account for it. The researcher subsequently puts all these possible theories to test by gathering more data to ascertain the most plausible explanation. Abductive reasoning resides at the core of grounded theory logic: it links empirical observation with imaginative interpretation, but does so by seeking theoretical accountability through returning to the empirical world. (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 46)

The strategy I undertook in the coding and analysis of the interviews is the subject of the next section.

Data Analysis Methods

Initial codes using *structural coding* and *hypothesis coding* (Saldana, 2009) were derived from the initial interviews. Both of these coding methods are useful in exploratory investigations. Structural coding employs the research questions in the coding process, while hypothesis coding holds the data up against a hypothesis—in this case, that fallback does exist.

Given that this research is based on the understanding of the phenomenon of fallback by key thinkers, I employed *in vivo coding* (Saldana, 2009), using the specific words of these key thinkers, which “help[s] us preserve participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55).

I first reviewed the interview transcripts applying *descriptive* and *holistic coding* (Saldana, 2009), to broadly summarize the content of passages as I read them. Both descriptive and holistic coding comprehensively look at the data, with descriptive codes

used to identify topics or broad categories, and holistic coding used to identify broader themes, rather than focus on line-by-line analysis. This first pass at interview coding informed the analytic memos that I would write directly following the coding of each transcript.

The coding and analysis process was multi-pronged and simultaneous. I used inductive analysis to identify specific patterns, themes, and categories (Patton, 2002) that emerged from the interviews, while also employing deductive analysis by holding up the interview data against the existing stage development theory frameworks (Patton, 2002) of each of the key thinkers.

Given that the series of interviews with each key thinker took place over an extended period of time, I returned to both the transcripts and the interview recordings when I commenced my data analysis in earnest. I would listen to the audio of the interview while reading the transcript. Then, I would code the transcript, often for the second time, but not access the codes from any earlier analysis I may have assigned until I had completed the second round. In the cases where an earlier and a later set of codes existed or emerged, I would then analyze the two, taking note of anything that I had missed in either coding pass, and also noting and questioning any transformation that had occurred in my thinking over time.

In an effort to assess the interpretive validity of my coding, I asked a fellow doctoral student who is familiar with constructive-development theory to separately code one of the interview transcripts. My goal in doing this was to test inter-rater reliability to see where we matched up, and where we did not, and ultimately to be privy to someone else's interpretation of the complex ideas and theories that were emerging in these rich

conversations with the key thinkers. For the most part, the second coder identified the same codes as I did, however he also identified a theme I had missed in my coding, and this led to my being more cognizant of this theme as I moved forward.

My analytic memos written directly following the coding of each interview served as a combination of recounting and analysis of the codes and data from the transcripts, and personal reflection and analysis on my thoughts and felt experience at the time of the interview compared with my current experience of it. I would also make connections between themes that had emerged across key thinkers, and note questions that were generated as a result of the particular interview that I wished to ask any of the key thinkers. I also included a list of individuals and theories referred to by the key thinker during that interview as a reminder of additions to the literature review that may be warranted.

Once all interviews were re-listened to, coded, analyzed, and documented in individual analytic memos, I summarized and analyzed across all memos of a given key thinker. I removed all personal reflections and references to other key thinkers, for these analytic summaries would serve as a next step in my efforts to ensure interpretive validity. Glesne (2006) recommends *member checking*, also referred to as *member validation* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), as a method for validating a researcher's interpretations with one's participants. I utilized this method with the key thinkers, emailing the transcripts from all interviews with each key thinker and the respective analytic summary of their data to that key thinker, and asking them to provide any feedback in the form of clarification, correction, or additions. Only two key thinkers, McCallum and Berger, responded to let me know they had reviewed all of the documents. McCallum provided

feedback, noting that he had no additions or significant corrections to suggest, having found them accurate, complete, thoughtful, comprehensive, and insightful. Berger provided minor clarification on three conceptual points.

The final step in my process was to code the analytic memos written for each key thinker and analyze for themes across multiple or all of the key thinkers. However, it would be erroneous for me to suggest that I was only looking for what was there, as I also was in pursuit of what was missing altogether. I interrogated the data by asking questions such as: What does it mean? Why did they say that? Why didn't they say something else? Is there divergence between the key thinkers? What's different about their understanding? What's the significance of that? What are the linkages? What's not linked? What are the holes in the assumptions about fallback? In my analysis of the data, I kept in mind the purpose: to end up with arguments and claims that I could substantiate about the key thinkers' understanding and framing of fallback within the theory, how fallback could play a paradoxically positive role in developmental growth, and how future research could be designed to open the door of our understanding of the complexity of fallback and human development even further.

I address my role as a researcher who is simultaneously traversing my own developmental path, and the role that this dual relationship plays in this research, in the next section.

Researcher's Role

I have been drawn to the study of the fallback phenomenon since I was first introduced to adult development theory at the outset of my doctoral program. I found the theory's general assertion that once we progress to a given developmental aptitude, we

consistently make meaning and act from that level unless we make a conscious decision to act from an earlier level, in conflict with my actual lived experience. I regularly find myself unconsciously operating from a meaning-making structure that is earlier than my measured center of gravity action logic as measured by the Harthill Leadership Development Profile. Therefore, my quest to further elucidate and articulate this nuanced understanding of development is certainly influenced by the intersection of the theory as it currently exists and the unanswered questions from my lived experience.

Glesne (2006) noted that the researcher's views, goals, outlook, and interests influence one's choice of the kind of research one conducts; one's experience of the world influences what questions one asks, how one asks them, and what kind of knowledge one values; and that the very way one designs one's research is values-based. Charmaz (2006) points out that the researcher's ways of constructing meaning of the world influences the researcher's analysis of the data, findings, and themes.

My intense interest in and personal experience with human development and the phenomenon of fallback encouraged a heuristic inquiry approach, in which a focus on the researcher's self-awareness and growth is integral to the research (Patton, 2002). I was purposeful at the beginning about how I would attempt to keep my bias in check. I made my perspective and voice explicit from the outset of the study design, through data collection, and data analysis. I engaged in reflexivity along the way, adding to the data the inevitable subjectivity I brought to the phenomenon being studied and to the research design (Patton, 2002), which ultimately contributed greater validity to the research (Peshkin, 1988). I took note of what I reacted strongly to (either positively or negatively) throughout the research process in my analytic memos, which helped me identify my

subjectivity, and I included this reflexive data in the overall analysis. Ultimately, I believe my attention to my own subjectivity through personal reflection and often explicit conversations with the key thinkers helped make this a stronger, more robust, and more authentically nuanced body of research.

The research design described in this chapter attempted to combine a theoretical exploration of the phenomenon of fallback in human development within six key thinkers' individual theoretical frames and within the overall framework of constructive-development theory, with the lived experience of the phenomenon in three post-conventional-measured individuals. Through this research, I hoped to cultivate a greater understanding of the full experience of developmental expression and movement, and to determine under which conditions a seeming fall backwards in development might actually generate a developmental leap forward. Finally, I sought to discover how future research on the fallback phenomenon could best be designed to move our current understanding forward. In the next chapter, I detail the findings generated by this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of fallback through interviews with six key thinkers in the field of developmental theory. In this chapter, I address each of my five research questions:

1. How do we more deeply understand the fallback phenomenon as situated within current developmental theory?
2. How do key thinkers in the field of adult development and leader development understand the fallback phenomenon within their own theoretical frame?
3. What role may fallback play in developmental growth?
4. How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?
5. How might the fallback phenomenon be researched with participants in the future?

Chapter Four is divided into four parts. In Part One, I address research question one: *How do we more deeply understand the fallback phenomenon as situated within current developmental theory?* In this section, I construct the phenomenon of fallback within current stage development theory using an accumulation of data from all of the key thinkers. This situation of fallback within the current theory provides both a refresher on constructive-development theory and a new lens through which to understand the theory's first principles.

In Part Two, I detail each key thinker's responses to research questions two and three. These questions are: *How do key thinkers in the field of adult development and leader development understand the fallback phenomenon within their own theoretical frame? What role may fallback play in developmental growth?* In this section I separately recount each key thinker's conceptions of the definition and distinctions of fallback, its causes, the fallback experience, alternative hypotheses, the importance of understanding the phenomenon, and the role that fallback may play in developmental growth.

Each key thinker's section is divided by subheadings that reflect specific categories for understanding fallback that emerged in the interviews. In many cases, these categories are the same across all key thinkers. However, each key thinker gave varying amounts of attention to each category. Some categories resonated more with some theorists than others. It should be noted that Kegan's section is much more condensed than the others with fewer subheadings. This is because Kegan's contributions were collected in one interview, whereas each of the other key thinkers were interviewed between three and seven times. The key thinkers' interpretations are presented sequentially in the order with which I commenced the series of interviews with each of them: William R. Torbert, David McCallum, Chuck Palus, Susanne Cook-Greuter, Jennifer Garvey Berger, and Robert Kegan.

It is important to note that Part Two of Chapter Four in keeping with research question two, presents each key thinker's theoretical framing of fallback. In order to present the theoretical interpretations of the fallback phenomenon by each key thinker – many of which are presented here in writing for the first time – most comprehensively

and authentically, I do not offer my own analysis in this section. My analysis across all key thinkers can be found in Part Five of this chapter.

After exploring the fallback phenomenon and the role it may play in developmental growth through each key thinker's theoretical lens, in Part Three, I address research question four: *How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?* In this section, I present the stories of fallback told by the three post-conventional participants from my 2011 pilot study and recount in aggregate the sometimes similar, but often divergent sense the key thinkers made of these stories. The inclusion of this research question in this study was an important aspect of my research design. The intersection of theory and reality is critical to the grounded theory approach to the research that I undertook. Interweaving the lived experience of fallback with the theoretical exploration of it allowed each key thinker access to the nuance and complexity of the human experience of fallback that I challenged them to make sense of.

In Part Four of this chapter, I address research question five: *How might the fallback phenomenon be researched with participants in the future?* As I began to conceptualize the design of my own dissertation research, I struggled to identify the participants, the settings, the questions, and the instruments that would allow me to meaningfully, accurately, and empirically explore the lived experience of fallback in participants. The possible questions were limitless, but the methods for revealing answers to them seemed inadequate and imprecise. The vast array of possible options and challenges for pursuing research with participants to explore their own experiences of fallback was daunting. Ultimately, I chose to pursue another path in hopes that finding a

place for fallback in the theory would provide direction for its study with individuals outside of these key thinkers in the future. Therefore, it was critical that in the study I undertook with the key thinkers, I attempted to remove the obstacles that lay in the way of future research by elucidating the opportunities and avenues for discovery that lay ahead. Using data generated from all of the key thinkers, I explore in Part Four the need, the design, the questions, and the importance of future empirical research to further elucidate the fallback phenomenon.

Finally, in the last section of this chapter, Part Five, I undertake the synthesis and analysis that traditionally makes up the entirety of Chapter Four in a dissertation. I take this departure from the traditional format of Chapter Four, because of the importance of having the key thinkers' voices and theoretical interpretations of fallback presented in their fullness. This chapter serves as the theoretical debut for much data and understandings offered by the key thinkers not only about fallback in human development, but about the constructive-development theory itself. Much of what is reported in this chapter has not been addressed at all in the constructive-development literature, and certainly has not been addressed in the literature in this way. Yet, a synthesis and analysis of these data and the positing of specific claims are equally important to understanding the phenomenon of fallback. Therefore, the last section of this chapter, Part Five, is dedicated to my synthesis, analysis and claims. In this section, I attempt to make sense of it all; to provide some structure to the fallback phenomenon and its place in developmental theory through the following six claims:

1. So much exists in the current developmental theory that accounts for the fallback phenomenon, yet, the aspects of stage development theory that focus on the bi-

directional nature of human development, movement both forward and back, have largely been ignored.

2. What is most important in defining the boundaries of fallback is not whether one expresses a less complex developmental capacity through thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, but that this expression is in the absence of all other options to think, feel, or behave differently.
3. Fallback, under the right conditions has significant potential for facilitating developmental growth, and given the increased likelihood for these conditions to be met in post-conventional stages according to the characteristics that distinguish them, growth from fallback is more likely to occur at the post-conventional stages of development.
4. Fallback is part of a mutually-defining term, the other component of which is spring forward.
5. There are five overarching causes of fallback. These include: ordinary triggers, physiological brain responses, contextual “gravitational pulls,” challenges to identity, and unresolved trauma.
6. Having a theory for understanding fallback acknowledges the full lived experience of what it is to be human, exposes the myth of consistency and onward and upward development both in self and in developmental theory, and provides the basis for reconceptualizing fallback as a paradoxically positive aspect of human development, which has broader implications for the exercise of leadership.

Part I, Research Question One: How Do We More Deeply Understand the Fallback Phenomenon as Situated within Current Developmental Theory?

Developmental center-of-gravity vs. developmental range. My whole framing of fallback at the beginning of this research was based on my own understanding that we have a center-of-gravity action logic at which we are capable of making meaning, and when we don't make meaning from that level of development, if not by choice, we are falling back. Over the season of data collection, my understanding of center-of-gravity expanded to include a full range of developmental options for making meaning or sense of the world around us. The full range of options approach to development was one that was widely held by most of the key thinkers, and frequently invoked in their explorations of the fallback phenomenon.

Palus was the first to challenge my established definition of center-of-gravity as a pinpoint, and as the norm. He explored the center-of-gravity metaphor, noting our capacity to be in our center-of-gravity, or an arm ahead, or a foot that's a few steps back, at any time. We have a range of action logics that we may tap into to make sense, consciously or unconsciously, in any moment. He claimed that the center-of-gravity is not a fundamental truth. Instead, it is a metaphor, a rule of thumb, a description of facts. It is the place you live most of the time, and it indicates that you are all there, in your full range of development, all at once.

Berger described our sense-making as "a set of capacities that we have." She said, "There is something about sense-making that seems to be more stage-y than state-y to me... And, I don't see people sort of winning and losing those willy-nilly." She claimed

that we show up with the same capacities most of the time. One's center-of-gravity stage describes this: it is the stage at which most of *us*, is.

Torbert posited that the center-of-gravity action logic is an illusion, and that one's stage actually fluctuates all the time. He made clear that he envisions some kind of range around one's center-of-gravity, and that this range is something we access through our falling back. He noted that those at later action logics actually spend less time in their center-of gravity, often by choice, given that most situations, environments, and contexts operate in an earlier action logic space.

When I posed Palus's exploration of the center-of-gravity metaphor to McCallum, he cautioned against taking the metaphors too literally. Nevertheless, it became clear that the developmental instruments themselves, while measuring an individual's center-of-gravity, also reveal a range of development. The distinctions between Cook-Greuter's and Torbert's sentence completion tests and Kegan's Subject-Object Interview are detailed next.

Developmental instruments. Palus noted that Cook-Greuter's instrument (and Torbert's though not mentioned explicitly) for measuring development, while identifying a mean or center-of-gravity, really shows a full distribution of one's meaning-making. He claimed that Cook-Greuter's developmental assessment, the Integral Sentence Completion Test, Maturity Assessment Profile (SCTi-MAP) shows the full complexity of how a person makes sense of the world. Berger concurred that the SCTi-MAP measures where you developmentally spend most of your time. Palus pointed out that Kegan's Subject-Object Interview (SOI), on the other hand, is focused on getting the person to

their highest self, their highest capacity to make meaning through the repeated push for reflection.

Berger confirmed that the aim of the SOI is to determine one's *highest sustained demonstrated score*. She noted that Kegan's developmental instrument measures what's possible, not where one spends most of one's time. It determines how you think, the world you see, not what you think about. Berger posited that the highly supportive nature of the interviewer-directed SOI offers the benefit of encouraging growth. She explained, "One of the things it does is it pushes you beyond yourself and gives you more headroom." Berger clarified that though the interviewer can help push you to your highest, sustained, level of sense-making, he or she can only do so if you are already capable of holding the concept.

Cook-Greuter also explored the difference between the developmental assessment instruments. She noted that Kegan's Subject-Object Interview measures cognition, how one thinks, how the mind works. Alternatively, her own and Torbert's sentence completion tests measure ego development; how one makes sense including behavior, emotions, affect, moral development, and lines of development (e.g., cognitive, relational). Like Palus, Cook-Greuter also explained that the sentence completion tests reveal a range of stages, not one primary stage, and one's center-of-gravity is not even the stage most often scored. Rather, as Palus points out, the score on the SCTi-MAP is actually the center-of-gravity operationalized; it is the center point of the distribution of one's scores on a normalized curve.

Cook-Greuter noted that her sentence completion test, the SCTi-MAP is a projective test, taken without support, which measures an individual's automatic or

normal response; “how a person tends to behave most of the time.” Cook-Greuter’s instrument reveals a variation in the distribution of responses to the sentence stems. The individual demonstrates their flexibility in responding to different situations, which often includes a choice to respond from earlier stages of development.

Berger identified one critique of the sentence completion tests as the potential that exists to game the instrument, given its privileging of vocabulary, sentence structure, complexity of language use, intelligence, and conceptual notions. She explained that one is unable to dig deeper to discover what’s underneath a given sentence stem response.

Cook-Greuter described Kegan’s Subject-Object Interview as measuring an individual’s optimal behavior in an environment of support in the form of an interviewer. Cook-Greuter criticized the SOI, noting that its assessment of one’s highest meaning-making capability does not provide a realistic representation of one’s development. Further, she noted that the developmental level and subjectivity of both the interviewer and the scorer of the SOI can act as powerful agents capable of pulling up or dragging down one’s developmental score. Berger agreed, noting that the SOI has been criticized for the significant role interviewer quality plays in determining one’s score, for better or for worse.

Cook-Greuter acknowledged that both instruments have distinct advantages. The advantage of the SCTi-MAP is the rigor of its manual and logical underlying sequence. The SCTi-MAP is best at finding out where somebody makes meaning from, and revealing the range of developmental options they use. In fact, she posited that responses that span a full range of development indicate a more flexible, resourceful, mature individual. Whereas, responses scored only as late stage would indicate an attachment to

being post-conventional. Cook-Greuter suggested one advantage of the SOI is that it provides much data that can be analyzed for other patterns (e.g., personality) beyond the sole assessment of developmental level.

At present, what all of the instruments seem to focus on in their assessment is a pole on the developmental path that does not capture the full picture. Palus explained,

It's looking at a normalized curve, and I guess that's an operationalized version of the center-of-gravity idea. You draw the distribution of the scoring of these sentences, then you naturally come out with a center. So, that's where we place people. We say that, that's where you seem to live the most.

Palus pointed out that while the focus of these instruments on one stage may be clean, it may not be the most accurate representation of the full complexity of a person.

He continued,

So, that's a useful construction, but you can look at it two ways. You can say, "Well, it's a nice summary to say that your stage of development is X," but, then we all do that. We say, "Well he's an Alchemist. He's an Achiever. And, she's a conformer." Is that a helpful summary of that? Or is it actually more correct the way it was originally in the scoring? You know that there's a distribution...the distribution's your pattern.

Palus suggested that the theoretical field overestimates the stability of one's center-of-gravity developmental level. His claim is supported by the single most significant piece of reporting on the developmental instruments as a point on the line of the full developmental spectrum.

Cook-Greuter claimed that the various developmental maps – her own, Torbert's, and Kegan's – offer a sense of where one came from, where one is, where one may be going, and what the challenges might be. However, she conceded that the map is an abstraction. It provides useful guidance, but "never can do justice to the actual complexity of human life."

Palus's biggest critique was that, though we do have evidence that we are measuring what we say we are, the instruments are an indirect inference and just not fine-grained enough to reveal the underlying, enduring structure of one's meaning-making. He wondered how accurate these tests really are given the trickiness of one's psychology, and noted that if the tests may not be accurate, this also calls into question fallback. Yet, Berger contended that while none of the developmental measures are without flaw, they are valuable, because they offer a useful piece of information about an individual's development.

Clearly, the field of stage development's overestimation of the stability of one's center-of-gravity developmental stage, perpetuated by its developmental assessment focusing on a point on the developmental continuum, in combination with its onward-and-upward emphasis has significant implications for our current understanding and framing of fallback. In the next section, the key thinkers' conceptions of the developmental stages, their characteristics, and the phenomenon of fallback within these are explored as the key thinkers begin to situate fallback within the existing developmental theory, making the connection between the two explicit for the first time.

Characteristics along the developmental spectrum. As the key thinkers explored the phenomenon of fallback, they often reflected on the tenets of stage development theory and the characteristics of the stages themselves. This exploration revealed that post-conventional individuals have greater capacity to notice, to describe, and to grow from fallback, as they begin to see the gap between their espoused ways of meaning-making and the way they actually show up. Further, this capacity is largely

linked to the later stages' increasing practice of awareness, openness to feedback, and desire to develop.

Torbert noted,

The problem is, of course, that for the whole first half of the developmental spectrum one isn't conversant with the notion of consciousness, and so recognizing what higher or lower, earlier or later action logics is unusual. Nobody does it in the first half of the developmental spectrum, which means 95% of all of humanity, or so...all of the children and most of the adults.

Torbert described the developmental spectrum⁴ – from the pre-conventional Opportunist; through the conventional Diplomat, Expert, and Achiever; to the post-conventional Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist – as marked by a focus on unilateral needs and actions at the earlier action logics to a focus that is more mutual at the later action logics. Behavior, generally habitual in the conventional action logics, becomes less so as one progresses along the developmental continuum. Context, which largely dictates success or failure in the earlier action logics, may be strategically used as a structuring tool to facilitate success and development by later action logic individuals.

Cook-Greuter described the characteristics of each stage during developmental transition, noting a rejection of the prior stage when one initially leaves it behind. The Expert turns away from the Diplomat that he was, yet he remains dependent on a network to give him value. She noted that Experts are edgy and often unhappy. Yet, once transitioned, the Achiever relaxes. The Individualist rejects the conventional structure and societal brainwashing that has marked the prior stages. Interestingly, this rejection of all that has been known leaves the Individualist unsure of who s/he is. The Strategist is

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⁴ The brief overview of Torbert's eight main action logics is reproduced from Chapter Two in Appendix A for ease of reference.

embedded in an historical and global sense of belonging. This embeddedness provides certitude; a felt experience of knowing one's self, including one's shadows. Cook-Greuter noted that this certitude is sometimes inappropriate and is exhibited as an underestimation of the mystery of things. On the contrary, the Alchemist is open to confusion, paradox, and mystery, living in a mode of inquiry where nothing is certain. Cook-Greuter concluded that those in the differentiating levels (Opportunist, Expert, Individualist) tend to suffer more than those in the integrating levels (Diplomat, Achiever, Strategist) in their ironic rejection of what remains a part of who they are.

Berger suggested that the later stage individual tends to be more inclined to surrender to the beauty, power, and simplicity of the earlier developmental stages, becoming more comfortable leaning into them as one embraces more learning and expansion into the earlier self. She noted that post-conventional stages exhibit greater acceptance of others' perspectives and of their own shadow.

However, Cook-Greuter argued that while the ideal post-conventional individual has access to all of the levels before and uses them choice-fully as tools, many post-conventional individuals are so attached to complexity and to being at a higher level they don't understand that all levels are necessary for functioning well. As a result, they tend to suffer. She suggested this may be a result of their personality; a need to be more than others.

While descriptions seem to cast action logics and their characteristics as distinct and often opposite, Torbert offered that developmental terms and concepts are better described as moving along a spectrum of consciousness, complexity, awareness, and

development. Torbert delved into the spectrum of consciousness from lessening to widening that characterizes earlier and later action logics.

The early stages are concerned with the relationship between body and thought, and self-awareness is taken for granted. Torbert continued to explain that as one moves along the developmental continuum, consciousness increases, and there's a complexification of the subject. According to Kegan's conception of subject and object, one can only be aware of what is object. At later action logics, one does become aware that there is a thing that is subject, too. Torbert noted that "development leads towards increasing awareness, and increasing self-awareness, and increasing awareness of the subject transforming into object." Torbert explained that this is so, because at the late action logics, causation is interactional, not unidirectional. This means that whatever *it* is, takes place in interaction with one's action logic. Therefore, one's action logic forms the meaning that one ascribes to a thing.

Torbert highlighted the transition in one's focus from the Achiever through the Alchemist. He explained, "You're trying to reach goals if you're at the Achiever level, and you're paying less attention to process, more attention to content and what the outcomes are in the outside world." Those operating from the Individualist action logic are just developing the ability to focus on the interplay of one's thoughts and behaviors and cultivating an attention on what is influencing these thoughts and behaviors. The Strategist action logic exhibits an even greater capacity to hold the interplay of cognitive and awareness systems. Torbert contended, "The Strategist action logic is the first one that really begins to try to trace whether we are doing what we think we ought to be doing in a given moment." While both Strategists and Alchemists increasingly cultivate their

own meditative capacities, it's not really until one reaches the Alchemist level of development that the very focus of the action logic is this moment-to-moment awareness. The Alchemist action logic has what Torbert depicted as "this attention that's observing more closely the whole inner process, as well as the whole ongoing transaction process between me and the outer world; me and other people." Later action logics enjoy not only greater awareness, but a stronger trust of one's own intuition.

The full developmental range reveals a cognitive focus at the earlier action logics, spanning to a focus on attention at the later action logics. Torbert explained, "Our attention fluctuates wildly all the time, even when we're relatively late action logic... The distinction is that in the movement from Strategist to Alchemist, you begin to distinguish between the attention and the pattern of thought." This ever-increasing awareness leads to a more frequent noticing of the incongruities in one's life and actions. He continued,

As one moves towards later action logics, one would expect that the person would become more cognizant of those differences between large parts of one's life, because one's increasingly looking at one's life across context and over long periods of time, not just moment-to-moment.

Torbert pointed to the importance of even having a sense of consciousness and when we are acting from the unconscious as factors in fallback. Palus agreed, reminding us that stages of development are in fact *orders of consciousness*. Palus further asserted that consciousness is a key component to an understanding of human development and fallback.

The developmental spectrum and the experience of fallback. It seems clear that where one sits along the developmental spectrum would influence one's ability to not only recognize and reflect on one's fallback experiences, but also to grow as a result of them. According to Torbert, when one's primary developmental action logic is in the

conventional range, one has less capacity to even recognize that one is falling back to an earlier stage of development, because the awareness of one's behaviors and thoughts in the moment is not present.

Berger noted that Kegan claims that the third order, or Diplomat, is the earliest that one is able to have a sense of one's own psychology and identity over time, a condition that is necessary for the recall of fallback. Based on her own research and practice, Berger contended that it is from possibly the Diplomat and certainly the Expert stages forward that one is able to access and reflect on fallback experiences. She understood why I had chosen post-conventional measured participants for my pilot study rather than individuals in the conventional range given that they have language around fallback and the capacity to see it.

Torbert explained one's outlook from a conventional action logic perspective. He said,

Yes, we can see things, we can hear things, but that's just natural, we think. Everything that's worth anything is out there to be seen or tasted. The one who is tasting is sort of taken for granted in a sense.

It would follow, that the earlier the stage of development one falls back to, the harder it is to emerge from, because there is less capacity to be aware in the moment, from that earlier meaning-making structure, that fallback is happening. Likewise, the earlier the center-of-gravity action logic one occupies, the longer one is likely to stay in that fallback position.

While Torbert's assessment of the action logic to which one has fallen as a determining factor in one's recovery from fallback was not identified by the other key thinkers, his assessment of one's center-of-gravity action logic as a determining factor in

one's fallback recovery was identified by the others. In fact, this was one of McCallum's findings from his 2008 study – the later one's center-of-gravity action logic, the more one notices the falling back, therefore the shorter the fallback periods (McCallum, 2008).

McCallum acknowledged the irony of this in that it may appear that those at post-conventional action logics fall back more frequently. When in fact, those at later action logics have access to an “encompassing consciousness” that more frequently notices fallback – access that those at the conventional action logics do not possess.

Cook-Greuter also expected that one's speed of recovery from fallback would be pre-determined by their pre-existing developmental level given that the later action logics have more in-the-moment awareness to recognize fallback when it's happening. She further claimed that those at later action logics also have access to more tools to recover from fallback than earlier developmental action logics. She identified a willingness to seek support and an inclination toward self-reflection as two of these tools.

Cook-Greuter noted that willingness to seek support has been shown to be stage-dependent, with individuals at the conventional stages up to Expert avoidant of feedback, while Achiever and later stages of development seek it out. Torbert similarly mused that those at conventional action logics are unlikely to share their most difficult and vulnerable moments with friends. Yet, post-conventional stage individuals thrive on hearing friends' difficulties, sharing their own, and seeing what comes of it.

Cook-Greuter explained that individuals at the post-conventional stages understand that feedback aids self-improvement, enriches relationships and self, and helps identify blind spots. However, she also noted that willingness to seek support may be personality-dependent.

Cook-Greuter identified self-reflection as another component of growth from fallback. Here again, the later stage individuals have a leg up on their conventional counterparts, given the natural inclination in the post-conventional stages to reflect, reframe, imagine the benefit of the experience, and grow. She elaborated that those in conventional stages of development are not naturally reflective and often need help in order to gain a new perspective.

Torbert also pointed to the desire that post-conventional individuals have to understand and cultivate their own development. He explained,

I think what is true is that only people going into post-conventional stages begin to have a deep interest in [fallback]. It tends to be, in general, too threatening for people whose identity is completely enmeshed with their actual behavior. Where they don't have any distance between the two. And, it ultimately requires looking back and forth between behavior and intent to do anything with it.

However, McCallum offered a different take on this. Based on his research, he noted that while those at later action logics have more capacities and resources to pull from to help them catch and recover, they don't necessarily employ them better than those at earlier action logics. So, perhaps later stage individuals are capable of catching their own fallback quicker, but not necessarily more effective at learning from it than earlier stages.

Berger noted that post-conventional-measured individuals have the ability to notice experiences of fallback to various places along their developmental band either in the moment or shortly thereafter. Torbert similarly pointed out that at the later action logics "you are more likely to catch yourself more quickly when you're falling back, because you've separated out this attention that can notice what you're doing in real time."

Cook-Greuter suggested that not only one's ability to notice and recover from fallback, but one's experience of fallback would be subjective based on one's developmental level. She noted the existence of darkness and evil at all levels of development, and identified an awareness and acceptance of the inherence of both good and evil in one's inner processes and one's tendency for projection, as signs of developmental maturity. She suggested that the earlier stages idealize the darkness away and would likely judge and reject the negative internal experience. Whereas, the later stages are aware of the darker aspects of self, and don't fight against this awareness. Instead, they just notice and accept it, and don't act on it. In fact, Cook-Greuter suggested that those at later action logics would be less concerned about a negative internal experience and perhaps wouldn't experience it as fallback. She acknowledged that the acceptance of the whole of human experience offers freedom to those at later action logics.

While Cook-Greuter explored the presence of darkness, Kegan offered perspective on the presence of light. He suggested that many erroneously classify glimpses of oneness, or being connected with those and that which surrounds us (which are most often experienced by those at post-conventional levels) as fallback. When in fact, he considers these almost always positive experiences "fall forward." Kegan described the dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy, noting that in Order 0 (Torbert's Imperial), the infant's way, the world is an extension of self – or all subject. In the Fifth Order (Torbert's Strategist and Alchemist), in enlightenment, one takes the world's perspective, and there's an emptying of the subject – or all object.

While these theoretical musings on human development are helpful in understanding one's developmental experience as one traverses the developmental continuum both forward and backward, the key thinkers acknowledged that there are challenges to integration of the theory with practice. These challenges are described in greater detail in the next section.

Challenges to integration of the theory with practice. Torbert noted the potential trap of developmental theory, the theory he helped establish, saying,

As we know, plenty of people can become delighted by the mental fantasies and disciplines of thinking developmentally, and they don't necessarily apply it directly to their own awareness, though they may imagine they are. I mean, certainly, any theory, and developmental theory in particular, can become a kind of a trap where you ultimately end up lost in words and not actually experiencing the moment of development.

Torbert pointed to the consultants and academics who understand the theory and are out in the world teaching it to others, noting that these same individuals, when they return to their own work, their own environments, themselves have a hard time integrating it. He identified one challenge to integrating this theory with practice as contextual gravitational pulls. Many succumb to the path of least resistance. Instead of challenging self and environment to grow developmentally together, individuals may allow themselves to settle into the atmospheric norm.

Palus claimed that the sense of a developmental hierarchy that characterizes stage development theory often leads to feelings of judgment and shame in those who are assessed on the developmental measures relative to others. One-on-one coaching is often needed to fully explain the assessment and address concerns, yet practitioners are often working with groups rather than individuals, and resources of time and money are limited. He also felt the developmental assessment instruments are problematic to use in practice.

He stated that the tools we have currently are crude, cumbersome, and require significant time and money in development, in administration, and in scoring. Palus believed it would be “brilliant” if there could be serial administration of instruments (time one and time two), but the aforementioned challenges hinder this.

Palus identified his own tension at having to use the metaphors of stage development in practice, while not fully feeling that they are sufficient. Nevertheless, Palus acknowledged that a theory is useful if people can understand it. Even if not perfect, it helps to frame, to have assumptions and a common language.

Finally, Palus – like Torbert in his earlier noted reference to many succumbing to the path of least resistance – conceded that questioning leads to a hard life, given that we don’t have data to disprove the existing metaphors of stage development theory. Palus’s statements suggest that it is easier to work with what is valuable about the existing stage development theory, particularly given his professional focus on practice instead of theory, rather than constantly question what doesn’t seem exact. Yet, Palus felt the questions still need to be asked, the points still need to be raised, and he and other key thinkers do so in the critique of stage development theory, which follows.

Critique of stage development theory. Palus referred to stage development theory, stages, and fallback as cultural artifacts. He described them as social constructions created in the midst of culture. He defined *constructive-development* as the progression in one’s meaning making. He said, “We’re *constructivists*.” We *construct* our meaning. These *constructs* of stages, stage development, and fallback are *constructions*. All of this is to say that they are not fundamental truths. They are useful

metaphors, good rules of thumb, and tools for understanding and talking about the real, yet subjective, felt experience of falling back.

Palus invoked the *hero's journey*, and suggested that the Achiever's interpretation of heroic living would be an ending with a neatly tied bow. Yet, a post-heroic construction acknowledges the messiness of life and our interaction in it. Palus criticized stage development theory for glorifying the later action logics as those where life is easier and trauma-free, a critique that Cook-Greuter also offered. Invoking Jon Kabat-Zinn⁵, Palus claimed that we, at all stages of development, are subject to "the full catastrophe of life."

Palus noted that in his work with leadership coaching, the assumptions of constructive-developmental theory can be helpful and provide a common language and understanding. However, he believes that stage development is a simplistic approach to what is likely much more complicated and messy. Palus referenced critics of the theory: Kurt Fischer who claims that adult development theory is too crude to adequately predict human behavior and psychological constructs; Michael Basseches who suggests that development is chaotic and random, and marked by ups and downs; Daniel Dennett who notes that consciousness is constrained, and much smaller than we think, so why even focus on the small part of ourselves that does act from consciousness?

In spite of all of this, Palus claimed that stage development theory is a proven theory that explains how an individual's complexity of meaning-making develops over time, noting that it has withstood challenges, has held up under rational philosophical

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⁵ Jon Kabat-Zinn is the founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center and author of *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*.

analysis, and provides a depth of understanding. When asked why do we embrace this theory, Palus responded, “We love these big theories that seem to account for everything.”

Yet, the constructive-development and stage development theories do not account for everything. The phenomenon of fallback has largely been neglected in the field. In the next section, the key thinkers explore why this may be.

The elephant in the room. If fallback is such a clear component of our human development, why has it not been studied? Torbert took an historical approach to the question, noting that the field of adult development is young. He explained that in the beginning, studies were on where most of the population is – the conventional action logics. At these conventional action logics, individuals are largely unable to recognize fallback. Even beyond the conventional action logics, it’s difficult to imagine the concept. Torbert said,

...Inevitably, there was more a study of comparative statics. “What does this person who’s at this stage do, compared to that person who’s at that stage?” Rather than, “What is the phenomenological experience of a late action logic person?” ... You have to be able to describe the phenomenon you’re asking about to the person.

Cook-Greuter suggested that the reason fallback has not been studied so far, the reason she herself has not studied it, is because of its negative connotations in the midst of the positive focus of those in the humanist, constructivist field in which constructive-development theory resides. Similarly, McCallum posited that developmental theory has heretofore (and primarily by the integral set) had a fascination with onward and upward – the later or higher stages of development – with a notable gap in appreciation for the “hidden divergence in development.” Echoing Cook-Greuter’s and McCallum’s claims,

Berger criticized the field's and the theory's neglect of fallback, claiming that it denies the real lived experience of fallback in self and others.

Torbert suggested that the inability to concretely describe the fallback phenomenon stems largely from assumptions among the theorists that they mean the same thing. Torbert acknowledged,

...Nobody's ever really made distinctions. Like, what is the difference between short-term and long-term? And, is it more likely that one would fall back at one action logic than another? And, how long will it take? Does the action logic that is your center-of-gravity determine how long your fallback is likely to be?

Further, Palus declared that the theoretical field is weak on pursuing empirical truth, and more specifically, pursuing empirical truth that is disconfirming: that looks for the outliers, that seeks to discover where the theory breaks down, where the edges become ragged. He suggested that fallback may reside at the ragged edges of stage development theory. He acknowledged that the claim that developmental movement is forward is questionable, because we are not always able to make sense from our most complex stage. However, Palus cautioned that making fallback a theory of its own without poking at the experience would be falling in step with the shortcomings of the existing theory.

In the next section, I take on Torbert's and Palus's challenge to dig more deeply into the experience of fallback. My second and third research questions concern the long overdue exploration of the assumptions and distinctions of the fallback phenomenon examined through each key thinker's theoretical lens. In the pages that follow, I poke at the experience of fallback in hopes of doing justice to the full, lived experience of human development.

Part II. Research Question Two: How Do Key Thinkers in the Field of Adult Development and Leader Development Understand the Fallback Phenomenon Within their own Theoretical Frame?

Research Question Three: What Factors May Facilitate Developmental Growth as a Result of Fallback?

William R. Torbert, Ph.D. As an undergraduate student at Yale, Torbert was confronted in a religious studies seminar by a professor who challenged the values Torbert espoused given his actions in that moment. Torbert was struck by this exercise in authenticity and harshness which offered a first glimpse at how conflict, when conducted with mutuality as a goal, can transform relationships and individuals, not only in academia, but also in the real world. This professor would later become one of Torbert's most influential mentors, Chris Argyris. Both Argyris and Don Schön, Torbert's seniors in academia and in the field of action science, devoted their professional careers to the exploration of how one can become aware of and reconcile one's theory in use with that which is espoused. Torbert embraced the criticality of making all aspects of one's self vulnerable, not partitioning certain aspects off, in both self and organizational learning.

Torbert is among the seniors of a set of developmental researchers, which includes Robert Kegan and Susanne Cook-Greuter, both by whom he has been influenced. His developmental measure, the Global Leadership Profile (GLP) is the latest version of the sentence completion test instrument developed by ego development theorist Jane Loevinger, Susanne Cook-Greuter, and Torbert, more or less successively.

Torbert's understanding of fallback is influenced by David McCallum and the findings from his 2008 empirical study, which revealed the occurrence of fallback in all

eighteen participants. However, beyond McCallum's research, Torbert noted that the theorists all seem to make assumptions that they are talking about the same thing with fallback, but the assumptions have not really been put to the test. In the next section, Torbert makes his assumptions about his understanding of fallback explicit.

Fallback defined. Torbert defined fallback as the “unintentional movement back ...from one type of meaning-making to a different type of meaning-making,” the length of which could span from seconds to months. He described fallback as “a period of time during which you are operating at an earlier action logic than is your supposed center-of-gravity action logic, without realizing that you are doing it at the time.”

Torbert distinguished the fallback we were discussing, one in which there is a *temporary* loss of capacity, from permanent fallback. He noted that permanent fallback would entail a real loss of capacity, and could be caused by old age, physical trauma, or brain trauma.

We explored the nuance of fallback as a passive versus an active phenomenon. Torbert contemplated the components of the word “fallback,” with “fall” and “back” both implying passivity – the reverse of action. A definition of “action,” what it is, and what it is not, was important in Torbert's frame. Torbert posited that “action is action towards a specific intent which one is willing to create new structures in order to realize.” He noted that action is *not* behavior that can be habitual. In fact, Torbert suggested that action as described in his definition may be more accurately noted as a factor in development in that it is “action against the existing order based on a vision of a better order.”

Similarly, Torbert suggested that it is important to understand what fallback is not. His definition of fallback does not include the active, intentional, strategic, *choice* to act

from an earlier action logic, which one might employ as a protective mechanism in relationships of distrust to avoid being taken advantage of. Torbert added, “Or another reason you’d use the earlier action logic is because you think that the other person is at the earlier action logic and will understand the message from that same action logic more clearly.”

During our final interview, which took place a-year-and-a-half after the first six, Torbert’s distinction of fallback as focused on meaning-making, and action as a component of active growth, not passivity, had changed. In this final interview, Torbert identified action as a prerequisite for fallback. He suggested that if one had a thought from an earlier action logic, and did not notice or reflect upon it, that it would not be fallback. He believed if there was a thought from an earlier action logic, even if it *was* noticed but still not acted upon, it would not be fallback. In fact, he declared that fallback would occur only if the thought from an earlier action logic leads to behavior that one notices as different from one’s center-of-gravity action logic, and if this noticing of incongruence has an impact on one’s ongoing experience.

Torbert conceded that a challenge in identifying fallback if it necessitates behavior is in how one can recognize behavior, given that behavior may in some circumstances be a behavior of non-action. He also noted that identification of fallback requires the cooperation of first and second persons inquiring in real cases. Ultimately we will be unable to identify the occurrence of fallback every time.

As we contemplated potential examples of fallback in thought with no associated behavior, Torbert’s declaration that fallback cannot be earlier meaning-making alone if it is not expressed outwardly, softened. In the end, Torbert conceded that fallback could be

experienced in one's inward thoughts alone, if recognition and correction take place. However, he could see the possibility of fallback marked by thought only, not action, with the conditions noted above, only occurring in those who hold advanced action logics.

In this claim, Torbert identified consciousness as a prominent component of his understanding of fallback. Torbert pointed out that consciousness is usually defined as anything that we can reflect on or think about. However, Torbert's conception of consciousness is a distinct form of attention from thought that is capable of interpenetrating thought and action. Torbert posited that action logics concern a spectrum between cognition and awareness, and that all along the spectrum, attention fluctuates. He noted that the form of consciousness that he refers to is rare, and that fallback is a trial and error process in search of higher consciousness.

I asked Torbert if he thought something could be described as fallback if one has a watching awareness of its occurrence in the moment. Torbert explained that the watching awareness that recognizes the difference between one's normal developmental capacity and one's current incapacity would be an early form of awareness, or "quasi-awareness." This early form of awareness would be characterized by a critique of one's current capacity compared with one's intent, possibly generated by an intermediate action logic that provides critical perspective on fallback, but not fully from one's center-of-gravity. Whereas a true observing awareness produced by one's center-of-gravity would be non-judgmental and would be able to provide options in the moment.

Causes of fallback. Torbert suggested that it's rather easy to conceive of how fallback would occur. He noted both biological and societal catalysts for fallback. His biological catalysts for fallback included ordinary triggers, developmental transition, and

unresolved trauma. Context and new learning fall under his second category of fallback causes, societal catalysts.

Biological catalysts. From a biological perspective, Torbert described development as a more intricate structure built upon a base self-awareness. He posited that the “intricate structures might be blown over by a wind...and then one would be back on the ground of the earliest structures...” This “wind” often takes the form of an ordinary, “automatic,” more “passive” digression into habitual, less strategic, and less attention-al patterns of earlier action logics. In fallback caused by ordinary triggers, Torbert claimed that one’s capacity to connect to the moment-to-moment attention is compromised by factors which include laziness, feeling tired or depressed, getting caught “in the heat of the moment,” or stuck in group norms, particularly when the culture of a given environment doesn’t have the “understructure” to support operating at a consistently high developmental level.

Torbert described an organizational environment in which he experienced fallback resulting from ordinary triggers. He said,

We didn’t pay a lot of attention to our organizational stage of development, and I was the one who was always trumpeting the importance of doing so. I just didn’t even take the analysis of our situation terribly seriously. I didn’t apply the [developmental] theory to us regularly and with real questioning intent.

Moreover, Torbert posited, fallback always seems to be present during developmental transition. Torbert explained that the very nature of transition involves a falling back to what’s known in the process of developing to the newly aspiring (and still largely unknown and not-yet-mastered) meaning-making structure. He noted,

[In] any movement from one action logic to the next in the leap forward, there’s a period when one is ambivalent between the two meaning-making systems, and one is simply returning to one’s settled center-of-gravity, and then moving

forward to the newly aspiring center-of-gravity. So, certainly in the move between action logics, one can see it's inevitable there.

In fact, Torbert suggested that this transition process is often experienced as traumatic.

He explained,

The movement from one action logic to another is itself traumatic...In Kegan's [*The Evolving Self*]...he [says]...that depression is characteristic of...being in between action logics. And, he even says there's a specific type of depression that is characteristic of each particular stage change.

Fallback prompted by trauma, and not just trauma experienced in developmental transition, is another cause, according to Torbert. He explained,

It seems so often possible to find the cause in terms of some elements that weren't really well digested as one moves through the action logics to begin with. Traumatic events...obviously traumatic events, but probably also other events that didn't necessarily feel traumatic at the time, but established a very strong perspective on something that is pre-verbal in nature that we, ourselves, don't recognize. And so when a reminder of that form of trauma or a person who could be seen as playing the role of the traumatizer in the earlier experience, when somebody like that comes along, our sense of being at risk for survival in some way comes into play. And, we're suddenly sort of caught up in the situation where we repeat archetypal patterns...The degree of trauma probably affects how often [we] fall back to that stage...We sometimes talk about the most common fallback position that different people take, and I think that is associated with the relative difficulty of mastering that earlier stage to begin with.

Torbert recalled a personal example of trauma generated by living in different cultures, frequently with different languages, early in his life. His family moved often, which resulted in the loss of friendships and the need to make new friends. Torbert remembers struggling to feel safe and included, often fearing being outside of the group and having no friends. This experience from an early time in Torbert's development seems to have some connection to his life-long tendency to fall back to Diplomat in relational struggles.

Torbert offered the story of a friend in the throes of a traumatic life event who seems to be in full fallback. He suggested that an alternate hypothesis for this trauma is that she's very early in a new stage of development, and when she is challenged with making meaning in this space, she's reverting to an earlier, known stage of development. He suggested that this experience is being prompted by a current, rather than a past trauma that she is going through.

Torbert suggested that the more serious the trauma (either past or current), the longer it would take to recover from fallback. Until one resolves this trauma (often characterized by stress, fear, physical injury or illness, feelings of exclusion, self-judgment, shame or depression), one will continue to fall prey to the fallback it prompts. However, Torbert noted that the same catalysts for fallback might also serve as catalysts for development in a different context or in the midst of different relationships. He pointed to injury as an example of a prompt for fallback, noting that injury may also result in bringing forth one's biggest Self. ("Self" and "Selves" is capitalized throughout the dissertation to emphasize a reference to the higher or bigger self to which one may aspire).

The stability or instability of one's developmental structure is clearly influential in the capacity we bring to given situations. Additionally, Torbert points to society as a determining factor in one's susceptibility to fallback. His societal explanation for the ease with which fallback can occur is that given that the majority of the population can be found in the conventional action logics, there are larger populations to reinforce the early action logics. Therefore, there are more forces, a greater contextual gravitational pull, supporting the earlier action logics, and causing those whose center-of-gravity is more

complex to succumb to less complex sense-making. Societal catalysts for fallback are detailed next.

Societal catalysts. Torbert identified the role that society plays in catalyzing fallback given that 95% of the population falls within the conventional stages of development. Torbert pointed to contextual gravitational pulls as catalysts for fallback particularly in conventional stage individuals. He noted that early action logic individuals are unable to recognize and influence context, and don't know how to shift their behavior to make the most of or to "manipulate" the context they are in. However, he noted that integral theorist Ken Wilber refutes the claim that context and environments have their own action logic. Torbert explained that Wilber believes a higher action logic individual who enters an environment filled with lower action logic individuals will actually pull the developmental expression of those in the environment up.

Torbert noted that in the key-thinker-wide, universally-recognized home context, fallback often occurs for multiple reasons. He suggested that familial relationships are often subject to archetypal patterns, which are the most challenging for one to see. Further, parents are invested in their children staying the same, as the parents themselves may have largely stayed the same. Torbert also noted that individuals tend to fall back in familial relationships and in home contexts simply because they can, whereas in public, one is less likely to be forgiven for behaving badly. Further, one expects to be able to rest at home. Torbert noted that the experience of fallback at home is often a passive one characterized by sleep, possibly as an attempt to escape old patterns that family relationships and contexts tend to call forth. He posited that in the home environment, it

takes a lot to want to change one's behavior. Yet, in newer environments this is not the case.

However, Torbert also identified new environments and new learning as potential catalysts for fallback. He explained,

It's appropriate to go back to the beginning of the developmental spectrum when you're in a new situation ... When one is beginning over again, one is sent back to one's beginnings. And, so it probably is true that more of the material from early encounters in life is brought to the forefront by, again, starting something new.

In an earlier section of this chapter, Torbert played with the necessity of action or behavior for fallback to occur. In this section, Torbert explored action in fallback in the context of conscious choosing versus unconscious falling. He noted that in a new job setting, for example, one generally finds one's self acting from the Diplomat action logic, and often this is not a deliberate choice. Yet, those at later action logics begin to distinguish between what is situationally-appropriate and what is situationally-inappropriate, and can identify what is situationally-inappropriate as fallback. Torbert clarified that when one unconsciously operates, it is fallback. But, once one becomes aware of one's use of a given stage in a given circumstance and consciously chooses to act a certain way, it is no longer fallback. Torbert's theoretical conceptions of the experience of fallback, including its characteristics, and the feelings, behaviors, and actions associated with it are detailed next.

The fallback experience. Torbert posited that the experience of fallback is unique to each individual and is influenced by one's current center-of-gravity action logic, by the action logic to which one falls back, and to one's own personal history and experience of that fallback action logic in one's initial traversal through it. Nevertheless,

understanding what the fallback experience looks and feels like for others may provide insights into how it manifests in one's self.

Torbert's personal experience of fallback is marked by an inability to connect to "richness" and his own "vital core." He describes falling back as a "flattened world experience"; a "re-experiencing" characterized by past archetypes along a "familiar downward tunnel," during which he loses the "capacity for choice in action."

Torbert noted fallback may be generally experienced as: intellect trumping intuition, cycling in the fallback position, trauma, shame, depression, and loss of other's perspective and of empathy. When one is in fallback, he suggested one may feel stuck, "struggle-y," and safer, though he notes that feeling safer is an illusion. Actions and behaviors associated with fallback include: blaming others or projecting; repeating archetypal patterns from the original event and the action logic at which one was during that event; sleeping to avoid further fallback patterns; behaving unilaterally; privileging one's own experience over others; becoming self-protective and minimizing risk; and becoming less conversational and less perception-testing. Now that I've offered Torbert's understanding of how fallback may be experienced, I outline his thoughts on the importance of understanding fallback.

The importance of understanding fallback. Torbert identified the importance of this research to our understanding of human development and fallback, noting that it bridges the historic divide between first-person phenomenological research and third-person empirical research. He acknowledged the unique nature of this research on fallback in that it employs a combination of first-person experience and third-person theory to inform third-person theory that is useful to first persons. In other words, this

research accesses the phenomenological, lived experience of the key thinkers and the participants from the 2011 pilot study, and this lived experience in combination with the key thinkers' theoretical understandings will create a more robust and complex theory that will ultimately benefit individuals in their actual experience of living and developing.

Yet, Torbert pointed out that at this point we just don't know the answers to these many questions. This is new territory. He declared, "I mean you do realize that you are, in effect, asking me to probe beyond where I've probed before. They aren't easy questions, which is part of why they are good questions." He noted that having a way of understanding fallback within developmental theory provides additional tools with which to be able to approach the question of fallback.

Torbert noted the importance of having both a theory of development and a theory for understanding fallback, because the theory helps one to frame, understand, and act. It is necessary to relearn how we pay attention in order to recognize fallback and to be able to use this recognition. If one can reframe why one is acting from an earlier stage of development from a developmental perspective, one is no longer subject to the action. It is fallback until one is able to put a new frame of *choice* around the behavior. Torbert suggested that understanding fallback helps one recover from it, because it puts the possibility of recovery right in front of you.

According to Torbert, the phenomenon of fallback exposes the myth that we are consistent in our actions and behaviors. He stated, "We have a dream that we are more consistent than we actually are. Once we begin observing ourselves more closely, we do begin to see that we fall back." Torbert noted that the importance of understanding human development and fallback to leadership is that it helps leaders identify their

espoused theory versus their theory-in-action, allowing them to respond in a more timely and authentic manner. He explained,

It allows you to see discrepancy between what you, or your group, or your organization claims it means to be doing and what it's actually doing...in order to become more response-able at more moments of time. To actually see what's going on and work from that insight rather than operating based on a myth about what's happening.

An understanding of fallback and its role in development allows one to “re-establish synchrony with yourself and the world,” and ultimately leads to greater success. Torbert suggested that understanding fallback highlights that the work in developmental growth is ongoing and continual. He noted, “It highlights building the developmental process into your everyday activity rather than thinking it will go on somewhere else.”

The role of fallback in development. It seems apparent that fallback has the potential to play a role in developmental growth. Yet, that begs the question, how? Torbert defines developmental growth as a “progressive movement...a biologically-driven process toward higher self-awareness.” Once one achieves a higher action logic, the “needs” characteristic of the earlier action logics have a different pull, and one’s response to these needs will be different. Torbert is careful to point out that developmental growth is not sudden permanent enlightenment.

Torbert contended,

Once we begin observing ourselves more closely, we do begin to see that we fall back... Once you begin recognizing it, you realize that your whole myth about who you are is off kilter... it sort of highlights that the work of developmental movement is really ongoing and continual. And, indeed, the later the action logic to which one has developed, the more one is called to continue to work. The work gains in intensity, it doesn’t get easier.

In fact, Torbert argued that developmental growth from fallback, while possible, is not automatic. He explained,

Well, of course, it obviously doesn't do so directly, I mean in the direct sense. It's precisely the reverse some might say. It's developmental decline at the moment it occurs. And, so it can lead to developmental growth only if it's treated in a certain way.

We discussed how the cause of fallback might affect one's recovery and growth from it. Torbert thought that fallback prompted by emotion or trauma would be more likely to lead to growth than a more habitual form of fallback. However, he noted that growth from fallback marked by emotion would require more support. Given the likelihood of those at later action logics to seek feedback and support for an experience that reveals one's weakness and vulnerability, post-conventional individuals would be more likely to experience growth from this kind of fallback than would their conventional counterparts.

Torbert suspected that the length of time one spends in fallback would also influence one's ability to recover and grow from it. He noted,

The more extended the fallback, the more stickiness and glue and gravity is being exerted in that person's life, the harder it would be to develop from it. And, even McCallum's findings were that there seems to be some tendency for quicker recovery from fallback at the later action logics. So, it seems as though the shorter fallback is associated perhaps with a growing practice that helps one see these things, whatever that practice is. So, the answer may be that it's harder to turn long-term fallback into growth than short-term fallback.

In the previous pages, Torbert considered the conditions that might influence one's ability to grow from fallback. The causes for fallback and the length of time one spends in fallback were explored and for both of these one's ability to recognize the fallback was a critical element in developmental growth. In the next section, I undertake an exploration of how one might recognize fallback.

Recognizing fallback. Torbert suggested that one is able to recognize fallback when one notices the gap between espoused ways of showing up and actual, between

one's normal effectiveness and current. The first step in the process of growth from fallback, recognition of its occurrence, is connected to attention and awareness. Torbert explained,

It requires developing this sense of what is sometimes called a "free attention." Attention which, although it notices what is going on outside and inside, is not actually captured by it, is not sucked into it totally so that one becomes one's thoughts.

Torbert contemplated the variation with which different action logics may notice fallback. He suggested that when an Expert falls back, one's behaviors in fallback are not noticed as object. However, when an Alchemist falls back, there is more likely to be a recognition of primitive emotions and behaviors. He noted that the triggers for fallback may be the same for both the Expert and the Alchemist, but what differs is the resources one has to notice and interpret the fallback. Torbert posited that these resources for noticing and interpreting are consciously learned through one's development, and that the tools that individuals use to recover from fallback and the effectiveness of these tools likely vary by person.

Torbert believed that fallback could be recognized close to or in the moment of its occurrence, and posited that the closer to the state of fallback one is able to reflect on it, the faster one's recovery from it. He mused,

It's interesting, the more we talk, the more the rapidity with which one can transform subject into object, and treat it as object, emerges as really a significant element in terms of how fallback works and how one recovers from it.

The transformation of subject to object may also depend on the catalyst for fallback that one experiences. Torbert suggested that fallback prompted by ordinary triggers (e.g., habitual, exhaustion) would likely be easier to recover from, because one recognizes the

habit. On the other hand, fallback precipitated by trauma and marked by emotion, which is based on archetypes, would likely entail a more difficult recovery.

Torbert identified three categories of methods that support recognition of fallback: first-person, second-person, and third-person. He explained,

The first-person methods have often in the past derived from spiritual traditions...all of the first-person practices are meant to create a quiet space at the core that is able to be attentive to what's going on – the physical forms of martial arts, and so forth, are all so that you can be situated and moving at the same time. There's both something quiet and something active at the same time, rather than either one or the other. So, that's what one's seeking to cultivate ultimately.

Meditation and tai chi are both examples of first-person structures that are focused on the phenomenon of experiencing one's own attention and getting out of habitual patterns.

Torbert also pointed to reflection as a tool in recognition of fallback, suggesting that it may engender one's ability to see one's younger self from a different space, and with less judgment. Torbert identified an exercise that allows one to delve into a felt experience and put new words to it, thereby taking what is subject and transforming it into object. This process of transforming what is subject into object cultivates a subject-awareness, a self-awareness that is wider than thought itself. It is an exercise in developing one's trans-conceptual or pre-conceptual awareness that Torbert noted is so important to the post-conventional individual.

Torbert suggested that it also helps to have someone around you who is willing to point your fallback out to you. This led to the oft-raised question throughout the interview season: is fallback in the eye of the experiencer or of the observer? Torbert responded that fallback can only be determined by testing it out with the person supposedly experiencing the fallback. Identification of fallback in others necessitates inquiry in each case. However, Torbert noted that fallback might be empirically

impossible to measure when one doesn't notice it in self and isn't confronted about it by another.

Torbert explained that second-person methods are built around

...observation of the activity you are engaged in with the other second-persons. Just as you can set aside time to meditate, you can set aside time in a group for process reflection, after-action review, pre-action preview, check-ins and check-outs. So, you begin to divide the time so that it doesn't automatically go into whatever line of thought is first introduced in the meeting... You institutionalize an effort to generate ongoing observation of how the group functions.

Torbert suggested that within these second-person environments, parallel practices and structures coexist alongside pyramidal practices and structures allowing productive action to take place while at the same time building a capacity for effectiveness and reflection into the process. He terms these "beginning liberating disciplines" and "communities of inquiry." Examples include "group dynamics observation methods" (such as the conference studied in McCallum's 2008 research), and cross-functional teams and self-monitoring groups in work settings.

Torbert claimed, "Third-person methods I think are the least known in a sense. Third-person methods would be better ways of making collective decisions." These are useful as a tool for avoiding fallback into paralyzed and polarized positions. Third-person methods involve directing attention to one's own actions and external information that contributes to an understanding of the situation. These might take the form of reflective writing on a group's process undertaken by one or several members of the group and shared with the others as an additional source of data which is frequently experienced as an effective method of perspective-taking.

Treating fallback. Once recognized, the second step in transforming fallback into developmental growth is to treat it. Torbert identified several methods for so doing. At

the top of the list is analyzing past actions without attaching “sharp, harsh, mental judgments.” Instead, Torbert suggested approaching the fallback episode with tolerance and forgiveness. Thinking about fallback developmentally may help with this. Writing about it may serve this function, as well. Torbert reflected,

My ability to see my own experience in the moment was informed by the kind of insight I got from writing the autobiography...Once I wrote my way through it, I came to realize that yes, my conscience was being developed by this crisis.

Torbert suggested that developmental growth may be characterized by one's ability to take a different perspective and respond to the same situation differently following recovery from fallback. One aspect of this treatment may be staying in community, staying engaged in the environment and with people who provoked the fallback.

Communities of inquiry such as those described in the second-person recognition of fallback may also provide support for its resolution. In these settings, an observer brings the group into the capacity to observe in a non-judgmental way by making the incongruities visible as an involved participant, demonstrating the next steps and how these next steps can be more effective. Torbert offered the “difficult conversation method” as a tool in this work. Through this second-person analysis of first-person practice, an individual is given the opportunity to work through desired outcomes and the frames supporting these outcomes, in contrast to the actual outcomes and frames that have influenced the situation thus far.

The middle step in developmental growth from fallback – participate. Torbert added a middle step in the process of growth from fallback that lies between *recognize* and *treat; participate*. It is in the space of participation that structured interventions and

contexts may help support growth from fallback. Contexts supportive of development would be those in which skills are developed and feedback is given related to the next level of development. Torbert pointed out that late stage individuals (i.e., Strategists and beyond) tend to recognize environmental effects on their developmental capacities and attempt to structure the environment to support their development. How might one do this?

Torbert suggested recognizing patterns, fortifying oneself to not respond in the same way, and exhibiting a willingness to suffer the repercussions of challenging the norms in relationships. He advocated viewing every action, every moment, of every day as an opportunity for development, and “consciously choos[ing] to put the structures in place that will support our developmental growth – whether that’s communities of inquiry, or surrounding ourselves with higher action logic individuals, or pursuing spiritual forms of reflection.”

Torbert noted that fostering developmental growth in one’s self

...ultimately requires a willingness to put specific times into practice on a daily basis. But, as part of gradually sculpting the life so that the productive work and the practice work on the awareness are permeating one another. And, that you’re not just practicing at certain times, and doing what you have to do in life at the other times. But, in a way, you can almost back into it by creating more and more little moments of practice, then it kind of gives a different definition to the moments that aren’t practice.

Torbert earlier identified context as an overarching cause of fallback. He also claimed that context is a determinant in one’s recovery from fallback, aiding in providing the feedback and support for developing skills at the next level of development. He explained, “If you’re in a context which gives you feedback and support in developing skills related to the next action logic, then probably it’s easier to move.” Torbert

suggested that structures enticing people to begin to learn about themselves provide a starting point for development. Additionally, those at later action logics have likely engaged in the most work themselves, and may therefore provide a broader repertoire of tools to others to aid in recognition, recovery and growth from fallback.

To be sure, challenges exist to creating these structures. Torbert claimed that across all structures one commonality is imperative: participation within them must be voluntary. “If they’re required to do it, the more you force them to do it, the less they’re going to want to volunteer for it. It’s important that they be choosing into it themselves.” Participation within these environments requires vulnerability, “a reducing of one’s armory.” Torbert noted that much of the population is at the conventional action logics and would perceive these developmental structures and interventions as a threat, because it requires you “to be with people in a way where you’re self-disclosing rather than putting up a front.” In some ways, these structures must be kept partially hidden to limit negative responses from those who are unable to developmentally “hold” these interventions. Yet, he said,

It’s difficult to know how to make them available, so that people who are attracted to them have the choice to move toward them. But, so that they don’t invite negative responses from people who can’t yet digest why they would do that kind of thing.

Torbert acknowledged that ultimately, the most effective structures would vary by the center-of-gravity action logic of each individual. This proves a daunting task: first in the identification of each individual’s action logic, and second in the design and delivery of customized structures within comprehensive settings. For instance, individuals in the conventional range are unlikely to share their most difficult and vulnerable moments with friends. Therefore, therapy may be a context in which conventional stage individuals can

reflect, participate in identifying other options, and treat the fallback differently. In contrast, friendships of support and challenge may provide the conditions through which growth may be sparked from fallback in post-conventional individuals who are more likely to make themselves vulnerable to others. Torbert further noted that Strategists and Alchemists tend to increasingly cultivate meditative capacities, making meditative structures another tool in growth from fallback.

Unquestionably, developmental growth requires work. Torbert explained, “No matter what anybody says about this kind of work, it’s not going to be done unless I want to do it. In other words, there’s no one to do it for me. So, it only becomes important as we ourselves give it importance.”

David McCallum, S.J., Ed.D. David McCallum recounted the lineage of those who influenced his understanding of developmental theory. It began with Robert Kegan, whom McCallum encountered in his pastoral counseling work as he began to apply the developmental frame to individuals dealing with their faith and life challenges. Through Kegan and his neo-Piagetian, constructive-developmental approach, McCallum discovered Ken Wilber. McCallum’s study of life stage theories led him to Carl Jung, and then to Bill Torbert and Susanne Cook-Greuter.

McCallum first came across reference to fallback in developmental theory in Bill Torbert’s work, and through Torbert’s writing, he discovered reference to fallback in Cook-Greuter’s work, as well. He noted,

There’s not a lot of mention of it, as you know. There is sometimes, I think, a blind spot in the literature of adult development that focuses on the upward and onward attitudes toward the benefits that come with increasing levels of consciousness or cognitive capacity. But, they’re very static in the sense of how that direction can actually be reversed under certain conditions. So, Bill’s [Torbert] work is the first place I recall having it referenced.

McCallum's own life experiences further influenced his understanding of fallback, as he began to notice the difference between his measured center-of-gravity and the way he "showed up" under certain conditions. He then began to notice it with others. McCallum's 2008 dissertation is the only published research in which empirical evidence of fallback has been reported. In fact, all eighteen of McCallum's research participants, no matter their scored center-of-gravity (as measured on the SCTi-MAP), experienced fallback.

Fallback defined. McCallum defined fallback as "a temporary regression of an undetermined duration that is catalyzed by experiences of anxiety and distress such that individuals behave with a logic of action that is markedly less complex and adaptive than their developmental potential suggests is possible." He added that the experience of fallback is a cognitive constricting of capacity, one in which no options exist.

McCallum believed that fallback does exist and that it is inevitable in life, given that the interaction of both internal and external environments will not always match up. He noted that there is so much empirically available to support this in our own interactions, in observation of others, in our environment. He pointed to the contextual occurrences of sin and criminal acts as supporting data. He noted that while these are not our constant state of being, they do happen.

McCallum classified fallback as a state. He claimed that fallback only becomes a stage when it is long-term. He also made mention of permanent fallback noting that he thinks it could occur when the actual self meets so many instances of not living up to the idealized self over an extended period, that it gives up. He noted that permanent fallback would be very much influenced by external environment.

Causes of fallback. McCallum identified three primary causes of fallback including contextual “gravitational pulls,” “disorienting dilemmas,” and ordinary or regularly experienced circumstances. He suggested that ordinary fallback might be prompted in situations of uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and illness.

McCallum emphasized the importance of environmental context in our ability to bring our best Selves at any time. He identified one’s home or community, organizational settings, new learning, and society as contexts that frequently prohibit that from happening. McCallum identified going home as a catalyst for fallback, a catalyst which seemed to be universal amongst the key thinkers. He noted that it is often experienced with dread, resistance, and a pull back to former roles. Napping is a normal activity, serving as an opportunity to withdraw and also to shore up for what is to come. McCallum acknowledged that he, too, takes naps when he goes home to slow down from the pace of his normal life and to meet the pace of his mother’s.

McCallum noted that being in community, whatever that is, the place that we live in company with others at other developmental levels, is another place where fallback is experienced. He suggested that there’s something about the present home holding environment, perhaps the one that has known us for some time, that pulls us back to who we were earlier. However, one’s home or community may be only one of several environments that are ripe for pulling one back into the context’s action logic.

McCallum identified a significant catalyst for fallback in his own life as “work mode.” He described work environments as having a “gravitational pull,” bringing individuals down on a fairly consistent and sustained level to whatever the culture’s action logic is. McCallum described this issue of discrepancy between an organization’s

culture and an individual's action logic as "goodness of fit." He suggested that when there's a goodness of fit issue one has the choice to leave, to stay and transform culture, to stay and conform to culture, or to carve out a supporting space.

McCallum identified unfamiliar circumstances and environments as potential catalysts for fallback. He explained,

When we are taken out of our familiar circumstances, and the kinds of conventions and supports that prop up our best behaviors, our best capacities, are taken away – yeah, that's going to be a condition that's probably going to instigate a little bit of regression.

McCallum pointed to deep change processes in organizations in which individuals' roles and functions are shifted as an example of this. Inevitably, he noted, individuals will experience an implementation dip. On the societal level, McCallum noted that the removal of social supports and expectations may result in survival conditions in which one may experience a loss of belonging, security, and the capacity to meet basic needs.

McCallum identified sociologist Jack Mezirow's notion of "disorienting dilemmas" as another catalyst for fallback. McCallum described disorienting dilemmas as experiences that transform or challenge one's perspectives, unsettle one's meaning-making, add complexity, and cause cognitive dissonance. The realization that one's biases are no longer adequate for describing reality has a real emotional impact.

McCallum noted that particular causes often prompt fallback to specific developmental stages. These and the experience of fallback through McCallum's lens are explored next.

The fallback experience. McCallum described some of the typical fallback action logics and their corresponding behaviors. A characteristic fallback action logic prompted by conflict is Diplomat. The Diplomat may play nice in an effort to maintain

relationships at all costs. Yet, a fallback to Expert may present as an attempt to get control, manage, learn, or prepare. The individual falling back to Achiever may push aside feelings, focus on purpose, mission, and achievement. While individuals have the capacity to exhibit all of these behaviors at any time even when not experiencing fallback, what characterizes these behaviors as fallback is an individual's lack of conscious choice in a given moment or situation.

McCallum noted that the experience of fallback is often marked by anger and an egocentric feeling sorry for self. This may take the form of passive-aggressive, snippy behavior. Other experiences of fallback include uncertainty, loneliness, hurt, and loss. In fact, loss was frequently referenced by McCallum when exploring the experience of fallback: loss of choice, capacity, adaptive resources, connection, creativity, possibility, dimensionality of the human experience, presence in the moment. For example, in the case of conflict, what is lost is the knowledge that conflict can often lead to creativity, and when it is constructive, can lead to deepened, more authentic relationships. McCallum offered another loss: forgetting what we know we are when we are at our best. In other words, we lose a sense of our highest Self.

To guard against this loss of self, McCallum recommended remembering and connecting with our exemplars. He explained,

Our interaction with our heroes; the religious figures that we are drawn to and inspired by; the example of people who are dear to us and have managed similar challenges in a really graceful way – we actually have these kind of introjects available to us in our internal repertoire to help us. Like, “Oh yeah, I can show up in a different way here. I have access to these better angels of my nature, if I can just sort of pause for a moment and take a step back.”

McCallum acknowledged that in fallback there is a loss, there is suffering, there is something that we must experience as absent that *can* snap us back to attention, make us

notice, make us question. He argued that this noticing might bring us closer to God. He explained,

[Jean De Caussade] had this notion that every adversity that comes up in our lives, is actually God's invitation for us to transcend our egos... He wrote a book called *The Abandonment to Divine Providence*, and basically it's suggesting that every life experience, ordinary as it might be, trivial, mundane, tedious – these are all opportunities for us to move into union with the divine. And, again it's like the wisdom literature. It's a way of framing experiences of suffering, of loss, of disorientation as opportunities for the good. It's a basic orientation in faith that really, God means for our well-being and not for our woe. If that's our fundamental, existential orientation, then regression itself is something that is precious, at some level.

The exploration with McCallum to this point has focused on the phenomenon of less complex meaning-making than one is optimally capable as explored through the lens of fallback. In the next section, alternative hypotheses to fallback in human development are explored.

Alternative hypotheses for fallback.

One center-of-gravity or variance across domains. McCallum explored the possibility that there may not be one center-of-gravity action logic that one sometimes falls back from. That instead, one may have multiple action logics in one's different contextual domains or along one's different developmental lines. However, this explanation does not fully make sense to McCallum, because he believes that one has a central line of cognitive awareness or self-concept that is immutable across domains. McCallum suggested that some people may just have a personality that leads them to be a Diplomat in conflict situations, for example, no matter their developmental capacity. Thus McCallum argues in favor of a center-of-gravity developmental concept which allows for one to fall back to a less complex developmental stage than one is capable in certain contexts.

The brain/mind connection. McCallum offered that the cognitive structures of the brain may play a role in one's experience of fallback. He explained that the limbic portion of the brain, where emotion and primitive fight-flight responses are housed, when stimulated can override the prefrontal lobe, where cognition resides. Effectively, he argued, there is a biochemical response to certain stimuli that may not allow one to access the cognitive developmental tools that may constitute one's best Self – one's developmental center-of-gravity. McCallum also noted that the ability to quell the brain's response to these stimuli are the very same awareness/mindfulness practices that are also so seemingly important to avoiding fallback, recovering from fallback, and growing from fallback; and also those practices that tend to be most used by those in the later developmental action logics.

The importance of understanding fallback. McCallum pointed to the constructive-developmental field's focus on the positive, forward-moving aspects of development. He suggested that an understanding of fallback reveals some of the "blind spots" in the existing theory, painting a more realistic picture that acknowledges our shadows.

McCallum mused that when we understand and acknowledge the fluidity in developmental movement, we are able to recognize our hypocrisy and build humility. Understanding fallback helps to remind us that we need to be diligent to our own development, to minding the way we show up in the world, and measuring it (without shame or judgment but with a commitment to reflection) against the way we like to tell ourselves and others that we do. An understanding of fallback allows us to reframe it as a ground for possible growth – a positive spin on what at first glance seems to be a

negative, though inevitable experience in human development. McCallum drew parallels between fallback and depression. He reflected,

When you grow in depth, you're sorting through stuff in your unconscious, you're developing self-awareness, and a kind of capacity for emotion, and also for empathy with others who suffer. I started to realize all these beautiful benefits and treasures that were hidden in the muck and crap [of depression].

In this statement, McCallum makes clear how having a perspective from a higher place on an experience of fallback can be beneficial.

McCallum noted that many of the same benefits of understanding fallback for developmental theory can be applied to the importance of its role in the exercise of leadership and leadership development. Fallback provides a recognition that we don't always show up at our best, helps us expand our options in how we do show up, and encourages us to set explicit intentions for our interactions. It promotes a sense of resiliency – the ability to learn, to fail, to adapt, and to learn again. McCallum argued that an understanding of development gives us more freedom and opens up new possibilities. The fallback framework reinforces the practices that support development: debrief, diagnose, determine next steps, and return to action. Understanding fallback allows us to not take the practices of leadership (e.g. making sense of our own and others' fallback, failure, and conflict) for granted.

McCallum applauded organizational cultures that recognize development as a process. Though he acknowledged it is often impossible to meet everyone where they are developmentally, there is a way in which one's thoughtfulness about the meaning-making, fears, and motivations of individuals at each stage of development may help those exercising leadership make a meaningful step in that direction. The kind of environments that can be created to support individuals bringing their best Selves can also be given

attention. But perhaps most importantly, the developmental perspective and understanding that it is not always onward-and-upward may allow us to have empathy for others and how they make sense of the world as they are. And, this acceptance might be just what prompts development.

The implications to leadership development and practice of this work, the theory of human development, and the seeming reality of fallback within it, often seem somewhat detached and vague. However, McCallum made them tangible. Leaders need to: (a) create the environment in which individuals can bring their best Selves, and (b) when they don't, support individuals in their recognition, learning and development from the circumstance. In the next section, McCallum's understanding of the role fallback may play in developmental growth and the conditions necessary for this to happen is made more explicit.

The role of fallback in development. McCallum hypothesized that the shorter, more dramatic fallback episode may be more effective in getting one's attention, and that the longer, protracted fallback period, may require help from others to recognize it, given that one is likely more embedded in it. Yet, he suggested that the catalysts for fallback are likely much less important than the resources one has in one's repertoire for arresting the fallback and rebounding from it.

He identified recognition of fallback, reflection, feedback, reframing, and acceptance of its inevitability as tools for developmental growth. McCallum suggested that one is able to recognize fallback in others, because they wear it on their faces and in their bodies. There's an unwillingness to show vulnerability, a grasping for control

(often in the form of unilateral decision making by leaders), and an acting and speaking from the head.

McCallum noted intention as a factor in noticing fallback in one's self. If one has a stated intention of living congruent with the way one desires to show up in the world including how one interacts with others, noticing when one doesn't happens more frequently. McCallum championed the importance of awareness, which extends beyond the mind in recognizing fallback – getting to the balcony about our mental processes, checking in with the heart, paying attention to one's desires – resulting in an expansion of freedom to choose to make sense and act differently. McCallum acknowledged that this noticing of incongruence is something that is more a goal and a reality in the later stages of development.

McCallum pointed to intention as an important factor in not only noticing but also learning from fallback. He gave two personal examples of falling back. In the first, while attending a group relations conference, McCallum was obliged to remain physically present and to be in relationship with the person with whom he experienced a conflict. In this environment there was also a voluntary opting in and implicit intention of growth. Both the necessity of staying present and the implicit intention of growth seemed to play a key role in McCallum's development from his experience of falling back. In the second example McCallum offered, the "real world" example, there was no such implicit intention, and the players could and did walk away from each other and the situation. There was escape, an opportunity to not remain present.

McCallum also explored projection – both the light and shadow of it – and the role it may play in fallback. He recalled from his study that the later stage individuals

seemed to have the awareness to identify both when they were being projected upon and to realize when they were projecting on others. This helped them either to catch themselves in the midst of falling back as a result of projection, or to work through it more effectively when they did fall back.

McCallum suggested that what is also important in growth from fallback is a recognition that falling back is part of life; we are not in control. Again, he pointed to the paradox of fallback: that suffering and pain are often necessary in order for growth to occur, for something new to emerge. McCallum claimed there is a spiritual understanding that can be gleaned from fallback. It brings us closer to the divine. McCallum noted,

That kind of disorientation and sense of suffering, or whatever kind of emotional language you might attach to that experience – upset – will actually prompt a kind of reflection process. And, if we actually do get to the point of revising our perspectives, our biases, then a kind of transformation has taken place that has widened our view. It's given us another level of depth in our interpersonal, social intelligence. And, that becomes a huge asset for the future. So, my tendency is to see regression in a potentially positive way.

McCallum suggested that framing the fallback as an indication that something positive, some growth is on the horizon, is helpful in both recovery and learning from fallback. He explained,

I find some people just have an instinct that life is about learning. Yes, we make mistakes, and we do things that we regret. And, from a certain religious perspective, we sin... You know, one way of thinking about sin is from the Greek *hamartia*, "to miss the mark." "I've missed the mark, and now I'm going to learn and figure out how to hit the mark the next time." That's really healthy and adaptive as a stance towards life.

McCallum reflected on the paradox that suffering can lead to insight when we make the choice, or when it is made for us, to turn shame and regret into gratitude. So much seems to have to do with the way we approach the world in terms of the outcome of

suffering. He noted that individuals are powerfully capable of shifting the meaning they make from their experience. Yet, that capability seems to be very much influenced by one's developmental level. Perhaps the individuals who are "powerfully capable" are those who have traversed the earlier stages and are now supported in their later stage for doing so.

McCallum acknowledged that while fallback would seem to be inevitable, what can support one's growth as a result of fallback are one's internal and external structures. These structures supporting development from fallback are detailed in the next section.

Structures supporting development from fallback. McCallum identified one's holding environments (the environments where one lives and works), relationships, and *internal self-scaffolds* (those interior tools and resources that one calls on during times of fallback) including practices, experiences, and instincts as critical in supporting one's development from fallback. He described techniques and practices that support one in the cultivation of the highest Self, even when doing so in the course of one's hectic life can be challenging. He suggested focusing on the beginning and ending of the day and the transitions in between. He encouraged making it appealing, incorporating rituals or symbols as reminders, and releasing expectations of perfection or exactness in practice. McCallum listed the benefits to the practice as greater awareness and feedback in the moment, and also feedback when one has fallen away from them. McCallum indicated that the spaces in between that are carved out through these practices allow for the diminishment of ego, and the privileging of the beauty, connection, and possibility in the cosmic whole. McCallum concluded that the goal is to access all tools – the mind, heart,

and gut – for perspective-taking and reframing without judgment which allow us to pay attention to patterns, experience resiliency, accept, and recover.

McCallum admitted that the internal self-scaffolds noted above are not profound or unreachable. One has access to them all the time, yet one does not. It's not until the later stages of development and potentially the later stages of life with the benefit of earned experience, that one begins to be able to take a deep breath, connect with spirit (whatever or whoever that is for each person), embrace an outlook of curiosity, and fight through the shame and guilt of falling back to take perspective, that may actually make fallback developmental. But, then, sometimes one – no matter one's level of development – does not access one's internal self-scaffolds. And, McCallum does not know why that is.

McCallum also identified the external resources that aid in one's recovery from fallback. He noted the importance of relationships, of having people in one's life that help point out one's fallback and support one through honest, direct, and timely feedback. He referenced the importance of narrative (one's own individual, familial, environmental, societal) and environment to how one responds behaviorally and developmentally to fallback. McCallum claimed that context matters, both in getting us there, and getting us out.

McCallum described developmentally-supportive environments as those that prize experiential learning, recognize development as a process, and that offer a positive and constructive framing. McCallum stated that environments supporting both recovery and learning from fallback include dynamic states that are safe, empowering, and that both allow and prompt deeper insight, perspective, and safe reflection with no judgment or

threat. He identified classrooms, situations of one-on-one counseling, confession and organizations as settings that can hold this space, but argued that real thought must be put into how to create and sustain these environments. McCallum noted the presence of both support and challenge as key to environments supporting growth, in general, and in response to fallback.

McCallum pointed to those at later developmental levels as having not only a responsibility to bring their highest Self, but also to create the conditions for others to do so. He argued that there's a sense of a moral imperative to shepherd the development of a world that looks beyond self to the sustenance and care of all.

Chuck Palus, Ph.D. Palus identified Robert Kegan and his book, *The Evolving Self*, as the initial influences of his understanding of human development. He noted that Kegan synthesized the work of Piaget, Loevinger, and Kohlberg, explaining,

These were all people who saw development as sort of a ladder or stairway to heaven kind of idea. And so, first of all, it influenced me in that sense of, well okay, there's widespread agreement that development has these sort of growth characteristics.

Palus listed the “constellation of assumptions” of humanism as upward progress, lower to higher, less to more consciousness in development. Palus also appreciated Kegan's humility about the theory that can be seen in Kegan's claim that theory itself is a construction, an attempt to understand people. Palus noted that Kegan says “development is messy,” and his theory doesn't try to exactly account for everything. Palus elaborated,

That's maybe why I'm comfortable with the idea, yeah sure fallback, why not? And, how are we to know how it actually works. Because, our research hasn't been that thorough to tell you the truth. We have a lot of good research, not to put it all down. But, the unknown is larger than the known.

Palus identified Michael Basseches and his theory of dialectical thinking as influential in his understanding. Basseches's theory identifies humans' ability to hold opposing thoughts, see systems as dynamic and change as normative (though Palus acknowledged that Kegan would likely categorize this as a post-formal concept). However, unlike the stair-step approach to stages in stage development theory, Basseches describes the "stochastic" acquisition of a chaotic mix of tools for living; tools that we later employ to address what life calls for. Palus explained, "It doesn't necessarily assume forward progress. It assumes more a journey through life that naturally goes up and down. That growth isn't naturally forward." Palus went on to explain that these tools can be acquired through indoctrination or experience, and mused that the definition of maturity may be that the tools for living are "increasingly based on experience, rather than rote learning or indoctrination."

Bill Torbert also had an influence on Palus's thinking about development. He said Torbert's theory emphasized "that people are complicated, that we can't neatly put them in any stage of development. That even using these instruments that put a person in a stage, that they're actually somewhat crude instruments." Susanne Cook-Greuter was critical in building Palus's understanding of the scoring of the developmental instruments. Through her, Palus came to understand that while the instrument reflects a full range, it is one's center-of-gravity, where one lives most of the time that is reported.

Finally, Palus pointed to evolutionary philosopher Daniel Dennett as theoretically influential. Palus mused,

...I think I've taken from him...an idea that actually consciousness, our conscious behavior, the place where we live in language, which is a lot of what this is about, is a very small part perhaps of who we are as people. So, there's a very

fundamental mistake that people tend to make, which is how to inflate consciousness. And to think, “I’m in charge. I have free will.”

According to Palus, Dennett claims that our consciousness is constrained by the norms around us. Palus explained, “He believes that consciousness has a material basis in our genetics, and evolution, and our brains, and our society. I also believe that.” In response to my question about who influenced his perspective on human development, Palus noted that Dennett’s theory may largely differ from much of constructive-development theory. He said “in making me think about Daniel Dennett and other ways to study consciousness, I think it’s probably corrective. I think the humanists have probably assumed too much.”

Fallback defined. Palus offered a “traditional” definition of fallback:

Fallback is an inevitable part of a growth process, in which people realize that they fail to consolidate some aspect of their growth, and whether consciously or unconsciously, they are unable to enact an action logic or stage of development, and they find themselves operating at a lower level than what they had hoped.

Palus liked the subjective, phenomenological, emic-perspective nature of this definition, which is also representative of a theory of growth. He found this to be a good tool that is true to a person’s experience of the fallback phenomenon. The subjective aspect of this definition seemed to offer some freedom to Palus as I pressed him to defend or clarify some of the words he chose such as “inevitable,” “consciously,” “unconsciously,” “operating,” and “hoped.”

A potentially *conscious* inability to enact: Yes, according to Palus, the subjective experience of fallback is marked by an awareness or consciousness that one’s behavior is not as one had hoped. Yet, it can also be an *unconscious* inability to enact? Yes, confirmed Palus, there is a subjective awareness of operating from a lower action logic

than what one would hope (*hope* implying consciousness), but there is also an uncertainty of where that lower action logic operating is coming from (unconscious).

Palus agreed that this definition also gives something of a subjective license for diagnosis of fallback in self and in others. After all, fallback as a *thing* doesn't exist. What exists is our *construction* of it. So, this definition allows for the subjective experience of fallback entering our awareness. We become cognizant of fallback, *conscious* of it, in self and others. And, the subjective definition gives us a tool for naming something that is often experienced as scary.

I asked if *operating* from an earlier action logic is inclusive of thought and meaning or only action. Palus confirmed that operating is action, noting that after all, these are *action* logics. In fact, he suggested that the presence of a lower level feeling with a choice not to act at that lower level is indicative of a higher stage of development. Therefore, Palus described fallback as becoming subject to an earlier level of development, accompanied by an awareness of the gap between your most evolved capacity to act and the way you actually show up. He explained,

So, if a person's just sitting there sort of internalizing all of this and being overcome by childish feelings or something, if you don't act on those, then that's almost the definition of a higher stage. So, for me it's like you're almost a puppet of this lower level. And, you're aware enough of it to be kind of taken aback by your own behavior.

I continued to probe, asking if fallback is in fact an *inevitable* part of a growth process. Palus responded,

I'm not always sure it's fallback, per se, but everything I know tells me that this experience of not being sort of self-consistent, is fundamental, and yes it's part of the growth process. It might be the fundamental thing that we come up against as we grow older, is that we are inconsistent. And, growth is either taking steps to close the gap, or to sort of live in peace with your inconsistencies. But, either of

those are about growth. So, yeah, whatever it is, it's a part of growth. That's for sure.

I restated from Palus's definition, "...they find themselves operating at a lower level than what they had *hoped*." Does one hope to operate at their center-of-gravity or highest possible action logic? Palus answered that, no, one's hoped for developmental expression differs by context. He reflected on his own personal experience. He said,

I don't think that I hope, when I go out into the world, that I'm always a Strategist or something. Even though I'm capable of that. Wow, I'm not surprised if I'm not... Come on! If I could just be sort of socially, self-consistent, Stage 3. If I can be aware of the feelings of others, wow, if I can just stand in that successfully, I'm good. That's all I hope for, sometimes. Just let me not insult this person... So, I think sometimes I'm happier – people are happy to be operating wherever they are. And, it's only really fallback if they say, "Oh, this is not working. This is not good. Wow, I could really use some higher order wisdom here. But, I can't get there." That to me is more the essence of fallback.

It would follow, Palus argued, that what fallback is *not* is acting from a lower action logic than that which you are capable. Rather, *it is* only fallback if the highest action logic of which you are capable isn't working, and you seek access to, but can't get it.

Palus noted that while this traditional, "party line" definition of fallback is useful, it is not set and final. It is just one step in our discovery of the full truth. He explained,

There is a conscious aspect of it. But, as I said before, I think a lot of what is actually going on is unconscious. It's the tip of the iceberg, sort of thing. So, we just have to be careful. We're talking about the tip of the iceberg, here. And, all of our theorizing about the tip of the iceberg, runs the risk of ignoring the iceberg.

Criteria. Palus argued that fallback does exist as an observable phenomenon, but it could be interpreted in different theoretical ways. He cautioned not to just throw everything under one fallback theory and assume it all fits. Palus emphasized the need for criteria, for thresholds, for tests to determine what rightly counts as fallback.

Time was one of these. Palus identified 30 days as a potentially good measure, noting its connections to historic Outward Bound programs, Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) programs, CIA initiatives around brain-washing – a period of time that is beyond normal human perturbations, that would indicate a real spiritual crisis. Thinking of McCallum's research setting – a three-day group relations conference – Palus wondered if the essence of developmental challenge leading to growth can be distilled into say, three days. Are there settings that allow fallback and possibly growth to happen in a shorter timeframe?

Palus wondered if McCallum's research participants were describing fallback. Or, were they describing a temporary discombobulation that is just part of new learning? Palus asked, should another category of fallback be created called *pseudo fallback* or *apparent fallback* that names those learning experiences that have similar characteristics to fallback, but may just be about new learning? Does it need to be externally diagnosed? Would this even be possible given the limits of our measures for objective assessment?

From here, Palus offered that another categorization for fallback could be the *emic* versus the *etic* perspective. He recalled from his academic days that emic referred to one's subjective experience, and etic to the objective diagnosis of an experience. He considered if it is enough that an individual subjectively self-identifies their phenomenological experience as fallback, noting that one's phenomenological experience may feel like fallback, but it may be temporary disequilibrium. Palus suggested that perhaps what is needed is the criteria that allows one to provide a self-diagnosis. One of those criteria may be a subjective sense of fundamental incapacitation.

Palus also noted his pull to want to think of fallback as an uncharacteristic and dramatic fall to an earlier stage; to classify it as almost a deterioration of an action logic that may be permanent. He referred to the Christian theme of “fallen” which would seem to be irreparable fallback, requiring God-like intervention.

Palus explored his personal experience of fallback. The normal ups and downs of development have not been a surprise in his life story. He noted there’s nothing dramatic there, and his ordinary experiences of being at his limit or unable to figure things out have seemed just normal. So, how does one distinguish what is just the normal ups and downs of life, and what is fallback? Palus emphasized making the criteria for fallback stringent, representing something dramatic, a higher bar, not just trivial happenings. His consistent recommendation of this stems from his desire for the construct of fallback to be both theoretically and practically useful. He noted, “I don’t want to see it everywhere.”

Cautions. Palus cautioned against an understanding of fallback that encourages identifying it in order to separate from and reject it. Instead, the positive part of knowing more about *me* in that state of fallback is that *I’m* not going anywhere. Palus suggested, “It’s an ‘and’ place when you fallback, it’s not an ‘or’ place. It’s not flipping between poles.” He posited that one must take a long-term perspective on the whole self, the full range.

Palus also cautioned against *theory abuse* – imposing our theory on the lives of others. He said we just don’t know enough. That this is the problem with a theory of fallback. There is not enough data. The science is not precise. And, in fact, what we may judge as fallback, may be the individual living in the post-conventional space, accepting what life is – the whole of it. Palus told the story of the monks who give up

everything to sit on the side of the road with their rice bowls. He said if they are doing it to seek enlightenment, it doesn't work that way, and he noted that would be an Achiever motivation. But, if they just *are*, if they just accept that *it is, that* is the path to enlightenment. And, Palus noted, perhaps a developmental measurement wouldn't show that.

Finally, Palus cautioned against characterizing the back-and-forth-movement between the meaning-making one knows and that to which one is aspiring that is inherent in developmental transition as fallback. He noted that in CCL's *Learning from Experience* program, they have identified an S curve, which depicts an implementation dip followed by ascent to a higher level of functioning – learning is marked by a temporary setback leading to a positive gain. This also describes what seems to happen in developmental transition and the fallback that is inherent in it. One encounters a challenge to understood ways of knowing and making meaning, which often throws them down to an earlier way of understanding, perhaps in an ongoing see-saw motion between the two, and as part of the reach to the next level of meaning-making. While this makes sense to Palus, he claimed that it is just what naturally happens. It's not an exception. And, fallback, to Palus, seems to necessitate an exception.

Causes of fallback. To the when and why of fallback, Palus responded,

I'm going to press this a little bit and say that fallback is almost the norm, and operating at the higher level is often the exception. So, I'd say *when* is actually more common than maybe the field wants to say. I think we're under a certain illusion that there's a real stability point at this advanced level. I'm really entertaining the idea that the *when* is most of the time, and the *why* is because we can't help it.

Palus identified family relationships, organizations, and societies as providing a gravitational pull that keeps us in the lower level. Where does this gravitational strength

come from? Palus noted that the majority of individuals reside in this less complex space.

He explained that post-conventional individuals are rare, so the norm is lower. He posited,

Dyads, as we know, tend to replicate family dynamics, which also can be lowest common denominator sorts of things. Organizationally, collectives also will tend to operate at their lowest common denominator. And, societally, I think, if you just read the paper, you see how God-awful low most of the dialogue is almost all the time. I think it's a little bit of a fancy we have to think that there's significant numbers of people spending significant amounts of time at this advanced level, and that it's kind of rare that they fall back.

Given that a significant percentage of the population can be found in the conventional range of development, it's no wonder that the limited number of individuals who inhabit the post-conventional stages would be pulled down to the contextually-predominant level of development expression. In support of his claim that fallback is the norm and advanced sense-making is the exception, Palus suggested one only need look at the evidence that surrounds us to see that this is the case.

The fallback experience. Palus reflected that many of the transformational experiences identified by his dissertation participants through phenomenological, subjective, self-report, could be categorized as regressive experiences of a negative nature. In fact, Palus noted that a lot were “dramatically negative,” horrible, stressful experiences in a “primitive state.” During these experiences, Palus noted, the participants felt isolated, alone, were incapacitated, rendered stupid, helpless, unable to cope, existing in a primitive survival state during which the “machine is having trouble working” and is experiencing “breakdown.” Palus wondered what the relationship is between incapacitation and fallback.

Palus hesitated to name these negative transformational experiences fallback. He seemed to prefer the term regression. However, he did acknowledge that the incapacitation described by his participants may be analogous to fallback, or perhaps overlapping, or a category of fallback experiences, or “possibly a fallback of kinds.” He described his participants’ experiences in “a survival action logic” as traumatic, debilitating, a loss of later developmental bandwidth during which they were not fully intact or awake.

Palus again referenced the CCL program, *Learning from Experience*, in which participants often described experiencing an implementation dip in learning: “it felt awful,” “I was emotionally challenged,” “there was a loss of effectiveness,” “I was stumbling around.” All of these descriptions, both from the CCL program and from Palus’s research participants can and have been used to describe one’s experience of fallback.

At other times throughout our interviews, Palus described the experience of fallback as difficult, dissonant, developmentally negative, trapped, unable to function high on Maslow’s hierarchy, unable to self-actualize. Palus observed that whether fallback is experienced as shocking and disruptive does seem to vary by one’s highest level of complexity. He suggested that there’s more an awareness and acceptance of the reality of that part of self in the later action logics. Therefore experience of fallback just *is*.

Palus also noted the effect of cultural narratives on one’s experience of fallback and development. In the West he pointed out, the emphasis is on progress. In the East, the focus is on now. Palus encouraged embracing the Eastern view: be still, be mindful

of now, expand *now*. Don't attach to your own development. Accept the full catastrophe of life with all of its ups and downs.

Palus accepted fallback as a phenomenon, as a *thing* that people experience. However, he did not embrace the theoretical framing of fallback as a departure from what normally happens in one's development, even if developmental theory doesn't emphasize this fact. His alternative hypotheses for the lived experience of fallback are described next.

Alternative hypotheses for fallback.

The full catastrophe of life. Palus offered an alternative explanation for fallback that is based on the center-of-gravity developmental metaphor. From this metaphorical perspective, one could actually be spread out through many stages of development at once. So, operating from an earlier developmental stage than is one's center-of-gravity would not be fallback, because one has access to any of those stages at any given time, or "living in a different part of your mass." He explained, "So in that sense, fallback isn't a reversal of growth. It's just acknowledging that we're complicated people, and we have all these things going on simultaneously inside of ourselves." Palus, remembering Kegan's claim that development is messy, asked, what if fallback is the norm?

The alternative hypothesis that Palus is proposing is that it is the whole experience of life. Palus charged that currently the field of adult development tends to take a cookie-cutter approach in both its theory and practice, resulting in an Expert-level discourse, much of the time. He called the framing of fallback, likewise Expert. Palus argued that what is needed is a paradigm shift in the framing of fallback. How might one approach the framing of fallback from the different developmental stages? And, might it

be conceived completely differently from the post-conventional stages? Might fallback be seen as just a part of the full catastrophe – the whole thing?

Palus suggested that perhaps the distinguishing feature of fallback is not if it occurs (assuming that it always does), but how one responds. For instance, if one is aware of it happening in self, is it fallback? Palus noted that the Ironist/Unitive perspective is said to have the ability to be aware of what other layers are doing; a detached center point. There is a succession of masks spinning, and the Ironist is aware of this succession of masks spinning. He wondered where that awareness comes from.

Palus acknowledged that moments of heightened consciousness are experienced more frequently by the Alchemist. Yet, the Alchemist also has just as much access to the less conscious, less complex parts of the whole. Though the Alchemist may embrace the presence of those, may construct a completely different relationship to those (one that is less about denial, shame, judgment and more about acceptance, inquiry, and even humor), may express those earlier action logics differently, the Alchemist is all the same just as exposed to the “travails of humanity” that show up as our more primitive, shadow self, as the Expert is.

Palus criticized stage development theory for glorifying the later action logics as those where life is easier and trauma-free. He claimed that we, at all stages of development, are subject to the full catastrophe of life. Palus invoked James Hillman, a Jungian, who calls for embracing the whole of the human experience, the darkness and the light, “the ashes.” He also recalled Susanne Cook-Greuter’s reminder to him that the Ironist’s perspective, the unified perspective, calls for the unification of darkness and light, good and bad, growth and decay.

Palus argued that fallback is the norm no matter your stage of development. He suggested that what I'm terming fallback is really just the human experience, is really just the Jungian archetypes, that don't go away, that are bigger than us. We shouldn't be shocked when it happens. He noted that unresolved trauma is not an individual experience. Every human experiences it to some degree. Fallback is just a handy rule of thumb for understanding acting in a regressed way.

Palus conceded that fallback does exist as an observable, felt phenomenon. Yet, he insisted that we just don't know enough. Fallback needs to be better understood. It needs to be validated. Calling it fallback, making it "a thing," a theory, seems to deny that it is part of us all the time. He cautioned that there is danger in posing fallback as an anomaly of who we really are, and taking that as a proven theory. Palus's interpretation of fallback is just that: a rejection of, a cutting-off from the earlier me. To him, fallback seems to say, "I've fallen back. I've regressed to something that I am no longer." It assumes movement, rather than acceptance of the whole system. It frames fallback as, "I do not accept it as me. It's something that I need to fix."

Consciousness is small. Consciousness is a key component to an understanding of human development and fallback. Yet, Palus pointed out that our consciousness is actually very small in the full realm of the whole. He likened consciousness to a raft on the ocean. If fallback is housed in consciousness, then it sits on that raft. He claimed that the raft *doesn't determine* the weather or the ocean. Rather, the raft *is determined by* the weather and the ocean. Therefore, we can't just look at the raft to the exclusion of all of the forces acting upon it. We have to look at the whole thing, and much of the whole thing might be housed in the unconscious.

Palus's understanding of consciousness and its scope is informed by Daniel Dennett who posits that our consciousness is limited, therefore most of the time, we are likely operating from what is automatic or the unconscious. Palus wondered how often action logics permeate the unconscious mind. He clarified that unconscious is outside of our willful control, and can be characterized as reactive and instinctual. If this is the case, and fallback is an unconscious operating from an earlier stage of development, Palus claimed that fallback is probably more the norm than the exception. Palus explained,

Maybe action logic is a teeny, tiny, little thing in consciousness. And, most of the time, we're actually operating somewhat unconsciously or automatically. That's not fallback, that's just the norm. And, you're lucky if you ever operate out of your action logic.

Palus also proposed that perhaps we have a higher center-of-gravity that is more conscious, and a lower center-of-gravity that is more instinctual, engrained, survival-oriented. Maybe our "habitual" fallback action logic is actually our lower, more primitive one. In his own life, Palus believes in something he calls *primary* and *secondary stability*. He described primary stability as our conscious acting from our center-of-gravity action logic. When that fails, our more primitive, instinctual secondary stability kicks in.

Alternatively, Palus wondered how much action logics, consciousness, and complexity override characterological orientations such as being emotional? He asked, does that change, or is that constant through all of the developmental levels?

Ultimately, Palus believes we're in all stages of development all of the time. He's not sure that something is lost and then recovered in one's experiences of fallback. Rather, he thinks it's just the norm of having all of one's self available all of the time. Palus believes that the developmental integrity of the whole is very different from

consciousness. We can lose conscious awareness of the whole, but our developmental integrity continues to work. He cautioned against trying to measure or diagnose fallback solely based on what one is consciously aware of.

Palus advised that to explore the tip of the iceberg (consciousness) without paying attention to the whole iceberg (consciousness + the larger whole including what happens in the space of the unconscious) would be a mistake. The unknowns about human consciousness far outweigh the knowns. Therefore, Palus argued it's imperative that we keep our ideas open and not settle too easily on a constructed truth that is only one facet of the whole picture.

While Palus was skeptical that developmental theory can account for everything, and that fallback as a construct offers any greater clarity, he was willing to entertain the possibility, offering an example of fallback from his work with individuals in organizations. Palus suggested that fallback can and does happen at the individual level, in dyads, teams, organizations, and societies. It also happens all along the developmental spectrum. Palus pointed out that even the Alchemist doesn't claim to be operating up here all of the time.

The fallback example. Palus offered an example of a CCL client and walked through the different levels of analysis. At the individual level, Palus told of Bob, a measured Alchemist behaving in a unilateral, authoritarian, pulling rank way. Seemingly motivated by anger and fear and a sense of needing to be protective, this episode marked by high emotion lasted between eight and 24 hours. Palus noted that what is interesting about this example is that it could be interpreted either as a fallback – an unconscious acting from a less complex stage – or as a conscious choice to use one of the tools in the

Alchemist toolbox, employing an earlier action logic to preserve the holding environment of learning. It was a powerful example most noticeably in the way that Palus thought his way through it. Through this one example, Palus explored: catalysts for fallback, recovery from fallback, and alternative hypotheses to fallback.

Palus pointed to the gravitational pull of organizations as the catalyst for Bob's fallback. Jane is a worker at Bob's company who was in charge of managing the leadership development program. She represented the norm of Expert that likely is also the organizational action logic. While Bob is an Alchemist, he is navigating the tension between the levels, the pull of the system. Palus introduced Bill as Bob's right-hand-man.

Palus believed that Bill was pivotal in Bob's recovery from fallback. He identified the power of dyads, the strength in numbers of post-conventional measured individuals, and described the dance of one falling back and the other stepping forward. Palus also pointed to the technical aspects of Bob's recovery from fallback, noting that this included huddling, dismantling, and rebuilding through reflection, discussion, and feedback.

Palus offered multiple alternative hypotheses to fallback in this situation. He pointed to the limited scope of one's consciousness, noting that we act out of our unconscious most of the time. Palus offered the alternative hypothesis that fallback is the norm and an advanced center-of-gravity is the exception. He described Bob's behavior as reactive and instinctual and wondered if Bob's action logic was actually permeating his unconscious mind. He pointed to primary and secondary stability, observing that when Bob's primary stability, his center-of-gravity action logic failed, his more primitive, instinctual secondary stability kicked in. Palus wondered if Bob's higher center-of-

gravity that is more conscious, was overridden by his lower center-of-gravity that is more instinctual, engrained, and survival-oriented.

Palus also noted the theoretical field's overestimation of the stability of one's center-of-gravity developmental level. He noted that Bob is often described as emotional and, in fact, admits this about himself. Palus contemplated the extent to which action logics, consciousness, and complexity, override characterological orientations such as being emotional? Does that change, or is that constant through all of the developmental levels?

The example Palus provided offered seemingly limitless possibilities for making sense of the experience of fallback. Yet, Palus remained unconvinced that fallback, not as a phenomenon, but as a theoretical construct, added value to an already imperfect theory. While he acknowledged that there was recovery from fallback, Palus did not say explicitly that there was growth. Accordingly, that was my next line of questioning.

The role of fallback in development. Palus was fairly pronounced in his skepticism about an easy relationship between fallback and growth at the outset. However, as we explored the idea, talking extensively about the participants in his dissertation research, he seemed to come to the conclusion that many developmentally transformational experiences actually are quite negative in nature.

Palus's dissertation explored positively transforming experiences in the adult lifespan. The "transformational threshold" that Palus sought to describe in his study included experiences that were powerful, life-changing, significant, a clearly important part of the participants' narratives. In his research, conducted with adult males (potentially exclusively, since Boston College was at one time men only) of all ages, who

were largely middle- to upper-class, bright, and successful, Palus identified going back to school, getting married, and having a child as transformational experiences.

Other transformational experiences that Palus recounted from his participants' stories sounded very similar to other stories of the experience of fallback. He described his participants' transformational developmental experiences as,

I had to go down, I had to crash into the wall, I had to have an awakening. I saw that, boom, it really hit me, because of this thing. It stopped me in my tracks and made me look at life differently. So now I have this precious narrative that I hold onto. It's my faith. There was a deep dark woods, and I went into it and suffered a bit, but look I'm still on my feet. I'm doing alright in the world.

There is growth, there is development, there is ascension from the ashes in these stories Palus's research participants told of their transformational developmental experiences.

Frequently, Palus pointed to the importance of narrative in growth from fallback.

Interestingly, he noted a common recurrence of *the hero's journey* in these stories. He often identified the hero's journey as the narrative of the Achiever, the narrative of confident, well-bred, middle-class men, the narrative of the American culture/dream.

Palus suggested that growth was more likely to occur from temporary fallback rather than long-term fallback. He said that long-term fallback would indicate living in a smaller space for longer and would be caused by illness or "crashing." And, while that would be challenging to deal with, it is part of the human experience that no one is immune to. It is, in the words of Jon Kabat-Zinn to whom Palus referred often, "full catastrophe living." Palus acknowledged that "learning [and living] involves struggle."

Palus clarified that while fallback may prompt developmental growth, it doesn't always. He identified three options from fallback: you can go down, you can go up, or you can stay where you are. In order to go up, certain conditions must exist including:

taking one's self as object, directing one's attention to one's own earlier action logics and their behaviors, reflection, learning from and embracing mistakes, perspective-taking, trying to have a bigger mind, and environments of challenge (which reveal earlier action logics and behavioral correlates) and support (offering new perspectives). A detailed examination of these tools supporting growth from fallback is conducted next.

Tools supporting development from fallback.

Narrative. I asked how Bob, from the organizational example of fallback that Palus offered, ever got to be an Alchemist if the space he lives in is an Expert one. How does one leap forward? Palus, invoking Dan McAdams and Ken Gergen⁶, responded that it's our narrative that gets us there; a narrative that today is built on multiple identities as a "condition of the modern world," each springing from the one that blew up before it. Palus noted that both Torbert and Cook-Greuter understand and use the role of narrative in stage development, employing developmental autobiographies and their inflection points as indicators of one's developmental complexity. Palus suggested that narrative is also a prominent component of Kegan's fourth order (Achiever) "author[ing]" of life story. Palus claimed that what allows one to escape the gravitational pull of one's environment are the multiple identities that make up one's life story. One is able to see one's self as distinct from the identities which one was characterized by before, earlier in one's life. Bob is an Alchemist, because he has a story, a narrative that gets him there.

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⁶ Dan McAdams is a personality and life span developmental psychologist and author of *The Stories We Live: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. Ken Gergen is one of the leading figures in social constructionism and author of *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*.

In addition to one's individual narrative, Palus identified the significance of cultural narrative. In Palus's own dissertation research, transformational experiences during decade age frames (e.g., 30s, 40s, 50s, etc.) were prevalent. He pointed out what a western construction this is, noting that there's nothing inherently different about turning 30 versus 33. Yet in Palus's research, the occurrence of transformation at the decade markers was notable.

Palus identified both the presence of reflection and differentiation from our earlier selves (taking self as object) as a prompt for growth in his participants' American, privileged construction of life. If taking one's self as object supports developmental growth, these Western-constructed opportunities to do so, would therefore lead to growth at those times. Palus illustrated how this idea may be construed: "I, at 40, am so different from who I was at 20. That was me then, earlier, less mature. This is me now." He noted it's the Achiever's story that is supported by our culture's Achiever orientation – the success-driven, onward-and-upward story of the hero's journey. Palus noted that inherent in this "objectification" is a rejection of the earlier me.

Palus identified the prevailing story of growth from fallback as socially and culturally constructed, and Achiever in orientation (in the West). Palus proclaimed, "Nothing can stop you. No setback is permanent. Always upward. You have a higher self, now go for it." Once again, it is the hero's journey, the American success story, with Jungian archetypes inbuilt, but also confounded by social class. Palus argued that it's a story that only a limited few may be able to relate to. He wondered what is the narrative of those living in poverty and incapacitation? Nodding to the problematic

surround of some peoples' lives, Palus asked, might they not "have good stories to live into, anymore?"

However, Palus also warned against imposing our stories, our theories, on the lives of others. Throughout our interviews, he cautioned against proclamations and judgment about fallback, because we just don't know, we don't have enough data, the facts aren't all available. Yet, he later noted that the truth, the facts, can lead us down a destructive path. He identified "wisdom communities" such as religious or secular spiritual traditions and aligning one's self with the growth aspect of these communities' narratives as supporting growth from fallback. He suggested that society is in danger of killing these narratives. Palus recalled,

I read a story in which a fundamentalist Christian woman who believed in creation, six-thousand year-old creation, said that she got involved in studying evolution and science, and went into a part of her life in which she was actually, like, thinking systemically about biology and about history from a Darwinian viewpoint. But then she said, "That was a big mistake. Because, it really took away, it kicked the foundations out from underneath me. I lost my faith, and I want it back. I think it was wrong. I don't think this evolution stuff is correct. I think it's Godless. Now I'm in a place in which I'm trying to sort of work my way back to a simpler faith."

Perhaps the stories we live into lead to more constructive development when they are not necessarily completely factual, but they are positive. Through Palus's exploration of this alternative approach, the truth, the validity of a theory, came up in a different way, a way that privileges not having all the facts, because the facts can sometimes be destructive. Palus wondered, in the absence of a constructive narrative, when one experiences fallback, what vices does one turn to?

Resources. Palus acknowledged that many of the negative experiences that his dissertation participants spoke of were ultimately positively, constructively

developmental – the participants were constructing their experiences. I asked how? Why are these growthful experiences? Because, Palus responded, these participants had every advantage to make them so, not the least of which was financial. They had insurance, they could get therapy, and often their families were a source of support, as well. The holding environments that supported growth were inclusive of physical well-being, mental well-being, social class, and wealth. Although those with wealth may have more access to resources to support their development, the role of environment in one's growth from fallback is equally as important.

Environment. If one does hope to operate out of a so-called higher stage versus a lower stage, how does one do that? Palus's answer was definitive: "It's social." One's development can be influenced by external supports. He claimed that society is a factor in individual developmental expression. One's developmental stage is societally and culturally influenced. We "catch" ideas and ways of making meaning like an epidemic, from our surroundings. He explained,

Some of this developmental stuff is in the water. Kids are just more comfortable with, multiculturalism, for example. It's a post-formal sort of idea, yet it's almost the new floor level of consciousness – to be multiculturally aware to some degree. There's new things happening in society in terms of orders of consciousness that don't require necessarily you growing them, so much as tuning in to them, and aligning yourself with them. Growth is partly who and what you align yourself with.

What other structured environments might support growth from fallback? Group relations conferences and Shamanistic ceremonies were two environments that Palus acknowledged seemed to generate fallback, and in which growth from fallback seemed to have occurred (taken from the empirical research conducted by McCallum and my own pilot study). When development is an integral part of a coaching business, when one-on-

one coaching is a component, and when using organizational or cultural developmental levels instead of individual, Palus noted there can be successes in developmental growth.

The importance of understanding fallback. Palus confirmed that growth from fallback is possible, and that reason alone provides evidence that it's important to understand fallback. He also explored CCL programs focused on leadership through which one can see the correlations between the lessons learned and what may be learned from fallback.

Palus noted that in CCL's youth-focused programs, the development of leadership is supported by plotting one's life trajectory, being made aware of developmental options, and giving deliberate attention to leadership development. This is similar to human development, and it led me to think and ask about the connection between fallback and leadership development. Palus again referred to the CCL program, *Lessons of Experience*, in which individuals recount lessons they've learned from experience, with the hopes that others may learn from these same experiences. They also have a program called *Learning from Experience* that was generated in response to questions from participants such as, "If these are the experiences, how do you learn from them?"

In the *Learning from Experience* program, one category of leadership development is hardships and the ability to create a positively transforming experience from a negative event. Palus noted a correlation here to optimism, which CCL views as a hallmark of leadership. He explained that how one treats failure is a good indicator of their leadership ability, and the effective treatment of failure would include practices such as acknowledge, reframe, inquire, embrace, and re-engage.

In Palus's descriptions of these CCL programs, he identified assumptions about leadership development that closely parallel those in human development and in an understanding of the role that fallback may play in both: development requires a deliberate focus, there are lessons to be learned from when one fails, and these lessons teach us that failure is a powerful tool in growth. While the programs he described were similarly positively-oriented and precise in their proscription of the steps in one's ascent up the ladder, Palus continued to take issue with the field of adult development.

Yet, in spite of Palus's emphasis on the flaws of the theory, he pointed out that constructive-development theory and an understanding of fallback are useful even if they are viewed from a specific frame of development, or are not complete or completely accurate. Does it work when I try to operationalize it? Does it make sense to others who I work with? Does it give them some sort of framework to work with – a launching point, so-to-speak? Palus suggested that this is the measure of the value of a theory. Is it a good tool?

Finally, Palus noted that the life-long, process-orientation of development allows us to look at and be looked at as a whole person in process, not just the person as we appear now. Palus told a story of a conversation he recently had with one of his clients who was making a comparison between culture change in organizations and developmental stage transitions. The experience of this is interestingly similar with feelings of being: in the middle; not this, but not that; not fully embracing what worked before, yet not yet good at what we aim for. And, the experience of culture change and developmental transition: it doesn't feel good, discouragement, mental overload. As a result, many individuals act out and/or quit. Palus suggested that perhaps we can help

people going through transitions by pointing out the whole process in that it may offer hope. He claimed there's an empathy that comes from understanding development and fallback – for self and for others.

Susanne Cook-Greuter, Ed.D. Susanne Cook-Greuter's understanding of human development has largely been influenced by Robert Kegan, Jane Loevinger, and William R. Torbert (through their years of work together). Kegan's focus on the need for support and challenge in human development has been particularly influential in her understanding and work.

What Cook-Greuter loved about Loevinger's theory was its measurement of the whole human's approach to life using language. She felt the Loevinger Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) provided an ideal marriage between psychology and the measure of ego development. From Loevinger's sentence stem instrument, and embracing the rigor that a scoring manual could provide, Cook-Greuter's own sentence completion test, the SCTi-MAP was built.

Cook-Greuter's understanding of fallback has been influenced by years of thinking about it and the lived experience of others. However, she noted that studying fallback has not been of interest to her, because she's been focused on the positive of development, not the hurdles. She did acknowledge that fallback is part of learning and was explicit about the fluid and bi-directional nature of development, saying that in her experience, developmental movement is often two steps forward and several steps back.

Fallback defined. Cook-Greuter originally defined fallback as “a way of responding to life, less than the ordinary or the well-established way one is capable of.” She identified three types of fallback based on recovery times: total regression, temporary

regression (lasting a while), and situation-related momentary (brief, not visible over a longer time). However, over the course of three months and three interviews, her definitions and types evolved, revealing the complexity of fallback in her quest to understand it. Components of Cook-Greuter's developing definition at different times (during my research and interview process) and for different types included: "a way of responding to life, less than the ordinary or the well-established way one is capable of;" not a choice; opportunity to come back/recover; an inevitable "part of meaning making as a human process;" something that happens to me; "helpless being subjected to the experience;" involuntary; "at some level you remain capable."

Cook-Greuter ultimately settled on definitions for two different kinds of fallback. First is *temporary fallback* (initially she referred to this as "temporary regression" and "situation-related momentary"), which is prompted by stressful situations, going home, and encountering old triggers. For a period of time, there's an earlier behavior, but there may also be awareness of that earlier behavior in the moment. In temporary fallback, she explained, there is an ability to come back up, to return to one's well-established stage of development. Second, she defined *permanent* or *long-term fallback* (initially she referred to this as "total regression"), which is marked by a total loss of capacity to reason, to see, to feel what one saw, felt, and reasoned before – a complete loss of access to the later level. Cook-Greuter stated, "The whole thing goes down." One is helplessly subjected to the experience. She explained, "If somebody even under the best of circumstances in that situation asked you, 'So can you imagine?' you just can't even imagine, anymore what you were able to totally have as part of your repertoire before. Just gone. Completely gone."

Cook-Greuter contemplated the metaphor of fallback, which would seem to imply that there is some return; there is an opportunity to come back. Accordingly, when she later identified permanent occurrences of complete loss of capacity catalyzed by a serious life event or when one's physical survival is at stake such as at the end of life or terminal illness, she decided that perhaps a different term was necessary. *Serious regression* is the term Cook-Greuter coined for acting from an earlier stage of development from which there is no return, or no hope of return. Cook-Greuter gave an example of an older woman measured as Unitive (Torbert's Ironist) at one time, and as Achiever ten years later. Cook-Greuter suggested that hers was a choice to permanently regress as she embraced the functional needs of her final years.

Cook-Greuter was pronounced in her distinctions about what counts as fallback and what does not. She claimed that fallback requires action. It is separate or different from who we are. She argued that fallback *is not* fantasizing, because fantasizing is normal in humans at all levels of development. Fallback is not thoughts, or internal processes, which are all part of who we are as humans. In Cook-Greuter's definition of fallback, action or behavior is a condition. However, she conceded that behavior can be broadly defined.

Cook-Greuter emphasized that an important distinction to make in defining the criteria for fallback would be the time of one's noticing and recovering from fallback, and how it differs in earlier versus later action logics. At the earlier stages of development, she suggested there would be a longer time to notice and recover. At the later stages, there is almost simultaneous awareness, and one has the choice to respond differently. In fact, Cook-Greuter asserted that being able to take perspective in the

moment of one's acting from an earlier stage would suggest that one has not helplessly fallen back, because there are options.

Cook-Greuter proposed that the temporal unit of analysis of fallback might influence its framing. If one is doing a moment-to-moment analysis, the back and forth motion would be constant. Whereas a look at one's overall development over a longer period of one's life would more clearly show a starting and ending point with the possibility of turbulence in between. Cook-Greuter suggested another important distinction would be the number of stages one falls back – the distance between one's most complex stage and the stage to which one falls.

Ultimately, Cook-Greuter noted that understanding fallback is valuable even if all we have are definitions and distinctions. She argued that these basic distinctions are crucial in providing some *thing* that can be accepted or challenged based on further data. In her opinion, the distinctions must include the length of time in fallback and the distance between one's most complex and one's fallback stage.

Causes of fallback.

Challenges to survival. Cook-Greuter suggested that catalysts of permanent or long-term fallback could be serious illness or the end of life. In these situations one may become completely self-centered and survival-focused. She believed long-term fallback would entail a loss of faculties, a loss of concern and capacity to care for others, a loss of a questioning mind, a lack of flexibility, and a real clutching to attachments. In long-term fallback there's an involuntary loss of other options to *act* differently. She explained,

And, that happens certainly sometimes at the end of life. It can happen to serious, serious illness. I have one example of somebody with a heart attack, and later reported that during the time the person was in the hospital, she completely became self-centered. And, the only thought she could have was about, "How do

I survive?” The family, everything else, went away. And, later on, after recovery and all that, she was responding that the greatest surprise and hurt that she felt really, she couldn’t imagine that she would ever lose the capacity to care for others. Or, to be concerned what the family would go through. But, she did. So, that to me is a total regression. Even so, this one was temporary, but it was total for that time.

Cook-Greuter noted that though there was a complete loss of other developmental capacity during the period of illness, when the individual recovered, what was lost to her during that fallback period, returned. On the contrary, had the individual’s developmental capacity not returned, the permanent loss of her more complex capacity to make sense would have been a serious regression according to Cook-Greuter’s definitions.

Challenges to identity. Cook-Greuter identified stressful situations as catalysts for fallback, such as those generated by the group relations conference at which McCallum conducted his research, and at which Cook-Greuter was present. It was during her thinking about this study that Cook-Greuter added to her definition of fallback: *behavior* different from what the SCTi-MAP would indicate. In thinking of the McCallum study example, she hypothesized that post-conventional or later stage individuals would recover from fallback more quickly than those at the earlier stages. This hypothesis is in keeping with developmental theory that posits that the later developmental stage one is capable of, the more awareness, more resources to recover, and more recognition of fallback they would have.

In McCallum’s study, his participants had access to their internal processing, but there was often not action associated. The falling back was an internal felt experience, not an external behavior. I asked Cook-Greuter if action as a criteria for fallback still held in this context. She did not respond directly to the question. However, she noted

that group relations conferences reveal gaps between one's ideal self and the way one actually shows up. Cook-Greuter reflected on the extreme challenge to self-identity that is experienced in this environment. One becomes aware of being projected into roles by others, and this confuses one's own behavior. She noted that these settings often reveal how individuals at all levels are still so little in control.

Attachment. Cook-Greuter identified attachment as another catalyst of fallback. Attachment to being right, to having all of the answers, can be seen in a fallback to Expert which is common when one is operating in one's area of expertise. She identified clues that this is happening including when one's tone changes, one's general openness and questioning mind goes away, and there is certainty without humility – "I know this." Cook-Greuter claimed that even those at the post-conventional stages experience fallback of this kind. Cook-Greuter offered an example of the Magician's (Torbert's Alchemist) attachment to complexity, even when it's not appropriate. She suggested that a loss of flexibility may provide a clue that fallback prompted by attachment may be at work.

Environmental norms. Cook-Greuter's work with Bill Torbert over the years revealed the challenges that organizational norms pose to post-conventional individuals trying to work within and transform organizations. Cook-Greuter explained that organizations with these norms often do not appreciate what their post-conventional members have to offer, and overwhelm them with the "ordinary daily stuff." Strategists experience this as a loss of ideals and vision, which are not seen as practical by the organization. Individualists experience it as a loss of imagination and exploration, which are not understood or appreciated. These stressor situations cause individuals to revert to what's most familiar rather than what's most complex, and Cook-Greuter identified the

organizational pull to what's functional as one cause of long-term fallback that may be exhibited through burnout and ultimate giving up of capacity.

Would she always characterize this organizational gravitational pull as fallback? She acknowledged that it depends. If an individual is adaptable, one may make the *choice* to operate from a less complex developmental level in this environment. On the other hand, the pressure from the organization may force one into this smaller place.

Cook-Greuter identified going home as another environmental norm-induced cause of fallback that may express itself through feelings and behavior. Why is this so? She explained,

Just the ancient triggers. There are, you know, even probably, I'm just guessing, but from what we read about neurobiology; that there must be pathways in the brain that are so strong, because they have been there for so long, and reactivated again, and again, and again, that they're just very strong. So, when they get triggered, you know, it happens.

The going home example was one in which she noted that later stage individuals may have the capacity to watch it in the moment, while earlier stage individuals may only realize what happened once they leave the environment. Cook-Greuter classified this kind of fallback as temporary. When one leaves the trigger environment, one recovers to one's "average" developmental capacity and has the opportunity to see differently through self-insight.

Cook-Greuter identified another environmental circumstance in which one's identity is challenged – communication in an unfamiliar language. She explained that being unable to express oneself and not being perceived as one is accustomed, one feels clumsy, dumb, like a child. She noted that a slightly different experience is a change to cultural context, whether it involves a different language or not.

Cook-Greuter explained that contextual norms in the form of organizations, families, or cultures may result in a shift in the way one presents oneself, because the context won't recognize the more complex individual. I wondered if showing up differently than one's most complex self would be fallback or a choice. Cook-Greuter noted that perhaps the answer lies in the experience of the individual.

Alternative hypotheses for fallback.

Fallback is the norm; center-of-gravity is the exception. When I posed one of Palus's alternative hypothesis to fallback – that fallback is the norm, and acting from our center-of-gravity stage is the exception – Cook-Greuter conceded that this could be so. She noted this may particularly be the case for post-conventional stage individuals, because the reality of daily life falls within conventions. It's a functional adjustment to decide to show up in a way that one can be accepted and recognized. She noted that perhaps the norms of an organizational culture pull developmental expression down in that environment in certain individuals, yet one's full developmental capacity is still available in its greater complexity in different domains.

"Trigger back." Cook-Greuter created a new term, "trigger back," to describe occurrences of developmental dips when one encounters a nonintegrated, never-developed aspect of self. She included trauma as a type of "encapsulated" area (in the words of nationally-recognized developmental psychologist Gil Noam) and suggested that these are triggered within. She offered the example of a student engaging in passable learning of a topic in school, then later relearning the topic when it becomes valuable to the student to do so.

I questioned if the ancient triggers that Cook-Greuter identified in fallback generated by a return home to family may take the form of encapsulated aspects of self, and that these are themselves catalysts for fallback. Cook-Greuter did not respond whether she agreed or not. However, later in the interview we revisited an earlier discussion about how certain sentence stems on the SCTi-MAP that are particularly related to parent/child relationships often do generate a lower level response that continues for a few sentence stems following the catalyzing stem. Cook-Greuter noted that in discussions of these sentence stem responses, individuals often become quiet and withdraw. She acknowledged that the dip in score and shift in behavior around these stems may indicate an unintegrated aspect of self related to family, with the stem possibly even serving as a prompt for fallback.

Cook-Greuter identified several potential catalysts for fallback including challenges to survival, challenges to identity, attachment, and environmental norms, as well as some alternative theoretical explanations for what may take place during one's experience of fallback. In the next section, I explore to what degree fallback may play a role in developmental growth.

The role of fallback in development. Cook-Greuter noted that one does have choices in one's recovery from fallback to either forgive one's self or to change one's expectations of one's own identity. She claimed that growth from fallback occurs when one accepts that part of one's identity is having a broader range of being in different circumstances.

Cook-Greuter thought that growth from fallback may be dependent upon "going in" conditions: one's most complex developmental capacity, or the severity of the

circumstance, or possibly both. She also noted that the length of a fallback period may affect one's ability to grow from it: the shorter the fallback period, the more likely one is to grow from it; a longer fallback period would suggest greater distance from one's more complex self, and therefore would be less likely to result in growth. However, Cook-Greuter suggested that what prompts fallback likely has less to do with one's growth from fallback than the circumstances of one's recovery from it.

Cook-Greuter identified the "coming out" conditions supporting growth as one's pre-existing support system that could remind one who one was, and/or one's willingness to ask for support. Coaching, therapy, and dialogue groups in which process issues and questions are discussed may provide the kind of structured support that aids developmental growth. At all levels of development, Cook-Greuter suggested that a mentor relationship is extremely valuable to one's development.

Cook-Greuter pointed to societal movements as having the capacity to catalyze developmental growth in subsets of the population. The women's movement was one of these, prompting development in many women from Diplomat with identification as helpmate and mother of children, to Expert with their own lives, their own jobs, their own identity.

However, Cook-Greuter acknowledged that while developmental growth is often seen as positive, there can be fallout, particularly in relationships. The person who grows may challenge or leave the partner who has not. She identified the transition from Achiever to Individualist as particularly challenging when the partner remains in the conventional developmental stages. The newly post-conventional Individualist often rejects their conventional partner, unable to appreciate what the individual in the earlier

stage has to offer. Yet, if the relationship can survive this transition, when the Individualist transitions to Strategist, often their perspective on their conventional partner shifts. Cook-Greuter noted that Strategist and later individuals have the capacity to see everyone and everything as sources of learning and joy, and have less of an attachment to the hierarchy of developmental levels. She declared that it is a post-conventional responsibility to have compassion for those at earlier stages and how they make meaning.

In fact, Cook-Greuter criticized many in the field of adult development for their attachment to privileging developmental transformation, vertical growth (development through the stages), over horizontal growth (development within the stages). She argued that the best way to aid others in their development is to support them where they are and celebrate successes. She advised preparing the soil, watering, providing sun and nutrients, and seeing what happens, rather than attachment to another's development for one's own gratification. She stated, "You don't blame the little seed that doesn't grow for being one that didn't." When one is at home with one's self, growth is natural.

Cook-Greuter acknowledged that getting stuck is as much a possibility as growth from fallback. She said, "It seems that any event in people's lives has the potential for both greater growth, and inside on a kind of standstill or a fallback, actually." Why does standstill or even deterioration happen? She suggested that one circumstance is when the gravitational pull of the environment supports the functional and practical Achiever, not the later growth of the post-conventional, which is a luxury. Ultimately, Cook-Greuter does not know why sometimes there is growth from fallback and at other times, not. She attributed it to "the mystery of life," claiming that though we don't have the answer, it is

still our responsibility to provide the container for growth to occur; one that includes support, challenge, and rewards.

Cook-Greuter noted,

I think fallback is probably a natural part of, as I said, of the process of just being alive. But, certainly having the perspective of compassion would help the recovery, would help the process, would help one's self to forgive for the moments when one did experience one's self as falling back.

While the fallback phenomenon may be an inevitable part of life, it seems to be an inevitable aspect that has eluded further discussion and research. She added that an understanding of fallback will lead to the creation of a road map for what is currently uncharted territory, a road map for continuing growth.

Jennifer Garvey Berger, Ed.D. Jennifer Garvey Berger's understanding of human development is most strongly influenced by Robert Kegan who served as her dissertation chair at Harvard University. She's a trained interviewer and scorer for Kegan's meaning-making assessment instrument, the Subject-Object Interview (SOI). Based on the SOI, Berger created the Growth Edge Interview, a non-research focused instrument that she uses with clients in her human and leadership development consulting business. The Growth Edge Interview differs from the SOI in that she uses it to assess an individual's developmental range rather than the highest sustained developmental level, which is assessed through the SOI.

Susanne Cook-Greuter, William Torbert, David Rooke, and Kurt Fischer have also influenced Berger's understanding of human development. Specifically, what she is drawn to is their focus on developmental bands and ranges to determine the way we actually live in the world, as differentiated from Kegan's constructive-development focus on one point on a line of developmental possibility. Cook-Greuter and Torbert, both

descendants of Jane Loevinger's theory of ego development, have most influenced the way Berger thinks about fallback, specifically given their exploration of one's "range-ness," or the full range of one's developmental capacity.

Berger noted that Kegan rarely writes or talks about fallback, barring his reference to a footnote in his book, *In Over Our Heads* (1994), in which he states that to have a personal experience of fallback, one must have a vantage point on it from one's bigger self. Berger's own personal experiences of fallback have helped her develop a more nuanced approach to developmental theory; one that includes developmental "bands" (a term that she uses to describe an individual's full range of developmental capacity), "tethers" and "holes" (terms that she uses to describe the events or circumstances that pull one back to an earlier stage of development, and the subsequent place to which one falls).

Fallback defined. Berger offered two different conceptions of fallback, and in both she noted that fallback is an inevitable part of the human experience. The first she defined as occurring within an individual's developmental bandwidth or range, a deviation from one's center-of-gravity big Self to one's smaller self. She distinguished that what makes operating from an earlier self within one's range fallback is the complete loss of higher order meaning-making capabilities. While in fallback to one's smaller self within one's developmental range, an individual has fewer capacities to make meaning of the world, and makes sense through a constrained "smaller aperture." Berger noted that the size of one's range and amount of time that one spends in one's smaller self is dependent upon the individual. She said this kind of fallback is to a developmental place we know well, though we don't always like it.

Berger noted that in her work with clients, she sees a tendency for a favorite fallback action logic, rather than a regular occurrence of multiple fallback action logics within an individual's developmental range. She suggested that fallback to this "basin," "cup," or "second home" can be triggered under certain circumstances, and often individuals can identify what those circumstances are. Berger pointed to parent/child relationships and interactions as catalysts for fallback, to which one brings one's smallest, least developmentally-capable self.

Berger's second conception of fallback is a falling to a significantly smaller self outside of one's normal developmental range. In contrast to fallback within one's developmental range, which one knows well, this is a place of meaning-making that is not well-known; a place of sense-making that is abhorrent and outside of one's regular life.

The length of time one spends in fallback seemed significant in Berger's exploration of it within her own frame. She noted that long-term fallback occurs in places in life when we are smaller and have fewer capacities for a long time. During long-term fallback, one's perspective narrows such that one is unable to get out of "stuckness" at this time, when one would have had the capacity to get out before. Berger identified environments and circumstances prompting long-term fallback as illness, unemployment, bad marriages; places where we feel trapped or stuck.

Berger noted that fallback by its nature must be temporary. It could not be permanent, because permanent would then be a new normal of developmental sense-making. In permanent fallback, Berger suggested, there is a shrinking of capacities and options. Individuals are unable to see the fallback, because they *are* it.

Through Berger's examples of fallback in her own life, another distinction seemed to come forth. Perhaps in temporary fallback, you maintain the knowledge that you will recover what is lost. Whereas in long-term to permanent fallback, there is no such certainty that what is lost will return.

I offered Cook-Greuter's hypothesis that fallback necessitates *acting* from an earlier stage of development. In other words, if there are only earlier thoughts and feelings without action, Cook-Greuter would not classify the phenomenon as fallback. In response, Berger made this distinction in her own definition of fallback: fallback occurs when one's perspective narrows, and one can contain only one idea for a time; when there is a loss of something that you would otherwise have access to. It is fallback if an earlier thought, feeling, or action exists in the absence of other thoughts, feelings, or actions. Stated differently, it's fallback if the earlier meaning you make is in isolation; if you lose the capacity to make meaning from your biggest Self.

Berger continued her explanation, pointing out that a condition for fallback is that there must be a loss of capacity with the knowledge that you could do a thing (e.g., take more perspectives, hold a bigger picture, etc.) before or in another circumstance. She pointed to her own experience of fallback when she moved from the United States to New Zealand. She recalled,

I had the feeling that there were parts of a house, and I'd explored the whole house, but some doors were shut. And, I knew there was stuff behind those doors, and I knew that they had been in my house, but in that moment, I knew that I couldn't get into them.

Berger also explored experiences of "falling" that feel good: falling in love, falling in bed together, thrill rides, getting lost in a book, alcohol and drug use. She

identified these as states of consciousness that are not fallback, and perhaps the distinction is that each of these examples involves choice.

Throughout the interviews, Berger's ideas about fallback progressed. She began to notice, not just during our interviews but in her own life and practice, the difference between fallback and regression, and the connection between fallback and growth. She wondered if fallback should be one side of a mutually-defining concept. She offered that just as big Self as a concept cannot exist without small self, perhaps fallback requires spring forward. Perhaps fallback is not regression, but regression with perspective and growth. She suggested that the dual nature of the concept helps make it "identifiable, nameable, study-able, possible." Her ongoing reflection seemed to impact how she identified fallback, which is important as she continued to explore the potential causes of fallback examined next.

Causes of fallback. Berger identified four overarching catalysts for fallback, which include ordinary triggers, contexts, major life events, and unresolved trauma.

Ordinary triggers. Berger posited that we all encounter triggers for fallback in our daily lives that cause us to feel our capacities shrink. She noted, "It's clearly true that when you are totally stressed out of your mind, or you're exhausted, or whatever, we all know that you do not have your full capacities. We know that. We can feel them slip away." She identified stress, fear, tension, crisis, exhaustion, jet lag, rage, shame, loss, overwork, failure, and hunger as ordinary triggers of fallback.

Contexts. Contexts and the individuals and relationships that inhabit them can also be catalysts for fallback, noted Berger. These *domains* that encourage the smaller self are often identifiable by, but vary across individuals. For some, organizations and

their norms “pull” on one’s center-of-gravity. Berger stated that often these organizational pulls take the form of evaluation methods, promotion methods, clarity or lack thereof of goals, lack of or too much leadership, or the organization’s approach to failure.

For others, the home environment and parent/child relationships provide the context in which fallback is likely to occur. Berger noted that in her experience with the SOI, responses to questions about parent/child relationships often indicated a less complex level of sense-making. She recalled, “I realized early on that I would steer people away from times when they were talking about their parents or even their children, because somehow those times felt less productive to me.” Berger explained that these primal, genetically enmeshed relationships have a tendency to call forth a younger self whose history and meaning is tied to an earlier identity. Berger mused,

...The relationships we have with our most primal companions are our parents and our kids, I think. Those are ancient relationships...ancient in our lifespan, and also ancient in our mammalian progression. They bring up drives to protect at all costs. They have wandering and confusing overlapping identities. They are genetically... they are us, you know, and yet they’re not us. I think there’s a way that...just as we know that you can have superhuman strength when you’re trying to save your baby, you know, all that kind of stuff...I think there’s some genetic pull that calls on us to be more enmeshed with those relationships. And as we get older...and the one especially with our parents, we all know it’s hard to grow and evolve relationships as people grow and evolve. And I think it’s probably really hard for our parents to see us as our biggest Selves.

Berger offered further clarification of the relationship between context and one’s developmental capacity. She explained,

I clearly do believe that development is mediated by context so that it’s not like it has no impact. But, I don’t think that context creates development, so that we just bring some random self from place to place. I guess this is where the idea of a band is most helpful. Our context can bring out our bigness or our smallness.

Berger also noted that one's identity is dependent upon who one is in relationship with others (e.g., funny, smart). Therefore relationships are the context in which one's identity is formed. If you remove the individual from these identity-forming relationships, the center-of-gravity of identity may be thrown out of whack. Berger pointed to the importance of context and relationships in the developmental capacity we have access to, noting that sense-making happens "of and with" context.

Major life events. Berger pointed to major life events as possible triggers for long-term fallback: unemployment, bad marriages, the death of a loved one, illness or injury. She remarked that in these circumstances, one often feels one's capacity become constrained. In the case of physical illness or injury, life may literally get constrained as physical capacities are lost and one loses control, prompting one to feel victimized. Yet, she acknowledged that even these events that could in no way be construed as positive, do sometimes provide the spark for one to bring one's biggest Self rather than falling back to one's smallest.

Berger noted that major life events are often new experiences. She offered the examples of the uncertainty, the lack of knowing of first time motherhood, taking a new job, and moving to a new country as triggers for fallback. She remarked on the paradox of these "rich learning zones," in that these seemingly positive circumstances, those that are often cited by the theorists as catalyzing developmental growth, allow us to be in touch with our full capacities, *both* big and small. Again, she noted, what triggers fallback is dependent upon each individual.

Unresolved trauma. Also specific to each individual are "buttons" that may trigger fallback related to unresolved trauma, suggested Berger. This trauma, which may

not be psychologically diagnosable trauma, but instead represents unintegrated aspects of one's earlier development, provides what Berger identified as a negative magnetic developmental pull to an earlier sense making. She referred to unintegrated aspects of self variously as "potholes," "earlier rings in the tree," "earlier layers of the onion," or "tethers" to our smaller self. Berger explained that when one is triggered by someone or something representing something unresolved and unintegrated from an earlier stage of development, it's like hitting a pothole in one's development. She noted that development is like an onion or rings on a tree, and fallback would represent holes in the onion of development or "pockets drilled in."

Berger connected this magnetic pull to earlier sense-making prompted by unintegrated aspects of self to the Kegan and Lahey *big assumption exercise*, now known as *immunity to change*. She suggested that assumptions born in a younger self become tethers for fallback later. She guessed that these younger assumptions are born when one is between seven- and twelve-years-old, when one is aware enough of the world to start believing things about it. Berger explained that these immature assumptions that were true when one was young and provided a mechanism for sense-making then, never grew with the individual. Now these assumptions provide the magnetic pull to one's smallest self in certain circumstances, eliciting a "worm hole effect" in one's development.

Not developmental transition. Berger noted that developmental transition would not be identified as a catalyst for fallback within her theoretical frame. She suggested that the see-sawing back and forth between two adjacent stages of development during developmental transition is a normal piece of growing. One has not yet fully transcended

the next stage of development at this point. Therefore, perhaps it's only fallback when one is all the way forward, secure or embedded in a developmental stage.

In this section, I identified what constitutes a catalyst for fallback and what does not through Berger's theoretical frame. In the next section, I explore her specific understanding of the experience of fallback.

The fallback experience. Whatever the catalyst for fallback, Berger argued that the experience of it generally doesn't feel good. She described it as feeling: self slipping back, constrained, smaller, not into our fullness, the field shrinking, certainty solidifying. She also suggested that there can be an almost pleasurable experience of fallback allowing one to even feel powerful as a rush of testosterone pulses through. Berger noted that one's experience of fallback may be largely influenced by one's surrounding cultural narrative; one that extends from family, to organization, to environment, to broader society as a whole.

Berger suggested that fallback is marked by loss: of perspective, of full capacities to be bigger, of ability to answer questions and imagine possibilities, of options, of language/theory/distinction, of the idea that you can make a thing different. She explained that during fallback, there may be a shift in mindset from one that is growth-oriented to one that is resigned to circumstances as just the way the world is.

Berger offered that behaviors in fallback can be primal, or experienced and viewed as "behaving badly," acting impulsively out of anger and hurt, the inability or unwillingness to take perspective, black and white, brittle. She noted that those with an early center-of-gravity action logic can feel as though "everyone is against me," and the experience is marked by projection, a victim stance, and blame of others.

Yet at the post-conventional level, the experience of fallback can differ. She reflected that often it is not shameful, there's a bit of a "glint in the eye" as the post-conventional individual uses the experience to recognize the fallback as an indication that something is important to one's self. Berger used analogies of a washing machine or ocean waves to describe the jarring quality of fallback that lets you know that you are growing.

Berger told of her relocation to New Zealand from the United States. She said she felt back and forth, smaller and bigger for days at a time. She had no connections, didn't feel whole, and she had this tremendous sense of not knowing. Yet, she knew that in another circumstance, she would know how to handle the experience. She remembers,

...I really had this sense that my identity was hung up on a clothesline, flapping in the wind. And, I didn't know which pieces of it were going to blow away, and which pieces of it were going to stay on the line, and which new things were going to come up. It just felt so in process.

During this prolonged fallback, Berger had experiences all along the developmental range, dipping down to earlier capacities, and revisiting old territory that she had already left behind. She recalled, "I feel like I visited all of the rooms."

Yet, how did she know she was in fallback? How does anybody? Berger thought that recovery from fallback would differ by person, and the ability and length of time to recovery would be dependent upon one's developmental level. She suggested that those at earlier action logics would recognize fallback only after the fact, or possibly not at all. Those at later action logics would be able to recognize fallback after the fact, and possibly in the moment as they noticed a gap between the ideal Self and the actual self. However, she argued, even when one is aware of fallback happening in the moment, one may still be unable to eschew the feeling and experience of it completely. She said,

“...my Magician friend...watches it and sort of dances with it. He takes it as a signal, and still he gets swept up in it.”

Berger believed the length of time that one is in fallback may also play a role in one's ability to recover from it. She mused that the longer one is in fallback, the longer one has no vantage point, the longer the bigger Self is lost. The shorter the period of fallback, the quicker a vantage point is gained allowing one to see a gap in ideal and actual self.

Berger identified behavioral clues for identifying fallback in others: they dig in, polarize, stop listening, shut down. She noted that there are all sorts of protective metaphors that describe the observed experience of fallback in others and mentioned two: they “go to grounds,” “circle the wagons.” Yet, perhaps the experience of fallback which one may believe is dictated by the mind, may in fact be dictated by the brain. This alternative hypothesis to fallback is described next.

Alternative hypothesis for fallback. Berger noted that there are circumstances in which individuals are physiologically incapable of accessing their most complex developmental capacities. She identified catalysts that trigger primal responses as having a connection to the amygdala, a part of the brain that is not mediated through language. Stress conditions on the brain may result in a reduction of cognitive capacity, leading to a constriction of meaning-making experienced as fallback. Berger suggested that there are likely innumerable biochemical and neurochemical factors in the body and the brain, as well as clinical, psychological factors that might explain the fallback phenomenon. These various lenses are useful in providing other possible interpretations for the fallback

phenomenon. In the section that follows, Berger explains how fallback may facilitate developmental growth.

The role of fallback in development. Berger believes that fallback and developmental growth are connected, “woven from the same cloth.” She contemplated, “A piece of growing forward has to be this potential that our earlier selves show up. I don’t have a theoretical way of understanding that not being a companion to developmental growth.”

However, Berger noted that growth from fallback does not always occur. The outcome of fallback can be that one grows bigger, one shrinks smaller, or one’s developmental capacity remains untouched. She believed that growth from fallback can only occur once one is able to reflect on the experience from one’s bigger Self.

It would follow then, that how or what causes one to grow from fallback likely differs across the lifespan. Berger claimed that in the earlier action logics, in which awareness and self-reflection are not as readily available, growth occurs in opposition to one’s earlier self. The unsuitability of prior sense-making systems is a catalyst for growth. Yet, later in the developmental spectrum, moment-to-moment awareness and self-reflection are hallmarks. Berger described her Magician (Alchemist) friend’s experience of fallback, noting that he’s able to touch his earlier developmental spaces and learn from them; he gets sucked in, but then notices and learns. She argued, one may be able to deny it for a period, but one is unable to un-know a more complex world, so there may be no choice but to “fall forward” in response to fallback.

Berger was quick to point out that she doesn’t think fallback in isolation, no matter where one sits on the developmental spectrum, leads to developmental growth. It

is the reflection afterwards allowing one to stretch and to make choices that plays a role in developmental growth. She noted the factors that lead to growth from fallback as: losing capacity and then getting perspective on the loss of capacity, noticing what one can't do, acquiring nuance and distinctions, and watching one's self as different from the Self one otherwise knows.

Berger suggested that one's narrative of self offers a touchstone against which to hold up one's current behavior or meaning-making. One's story allows a comparison of both the ideal and the gap, offering language, perspective, recognition and the possibility of developmentally springing forward. She claimed that the power of narratives in one's development extends beyond the individual to all levels of context: the familial, the organizational, and the cultural.

Berger identified self-reflection as another tool that aids in making fallback a developmentally positive experience. She identified reflection from others as another. Kegan notes in his writing that remaining in community with people who are both able to reflect the person one has been, and the person one is becoming, is a significant supporting factor in developmental growth. Berger concurred that being surrounded by people who can help reflect one's fallback to them, name it, and who are willing to hold one accountable are factors in support of developmental growth from fallback. She explained that these connections with others serve as anchors in the construction of self. Reflection on self and by others is key to meaning-making and growth.

In the case of fallback precipitated by unintegrated aspects of self, or "earlier layers of the onion," Berger offered that growth may occur when one "fills in" the context or relationship creating the onion hole, or gets out. Once the unintegrated aspects

of self are brought forward, she noted, recognition of one's own growth may occur, as re-encountering an earlier stimulus reveals how one's ideas have shifted.

Berger posited that growth from fallback can occur when we acknowledge that it is all us, and accept that it's not going anywhere. Naming fallback provides a way to understand and position it. She suggested asking, "What does it give you to go there? How can you grow in relationship to it, without rejecting what it represents?" Berger again returned to a story of fallback in her Magician friend in his relationship with his mother. She recounted,

He then could reflect on that, and talk about how those sort of more primal emotions and experiences of all that was a signal to him. That something really important was going on for him, and that there's real richness in this relationship, and that he was sad that his mom was going to die. That he could see the days of her presence on the planet counting down, and that there was some kind of howling despair in him about that.

Berger championed the need to pay attention to fallback (including awareness of physical cues such as the need to eat, sleep, breathe), make friends with it, name it. She recommended approaching it with curiosity and compassion. Don't seek to deny it. Berger argued that when one has a love of one's younger self, one can see it as an indicator of "sacred territory," and growth from fallback is more likely to occur.

It seems clear from Berger's reflections, that fallback may play a pivotal role in prompting developmental growth, particularly in those further along the developmental spectrum. In the next section, I recount why she feels an understanding of fallback is important to individuals at every stage of development.

The importance of understanding fallback. Berger shared that in her work with leaders of organizations, questions about fallback in human development are the most commonly asked, because this felt experience of the role one's small self plays in one's

life is so prevalent. Yet, the current focus in the field of human development, in all fields she claims, is on going forward. She explained, people are seduced by the biggest Self, and don't like the earlier self much. Most individuals wish to reject that earlier self, and Berger notes that it's not easy to get to a place of learning from it, when you reject it.

Berger highlighted the value in bringing attention to what is holding people back in the smaller self. She noted that in individuals, understanding fallback can help reduce the amount of time spent in the small, out-of-control self. In organizations, leaders need to make space for fallback to occur, for the small self to show up, "for people to be full humans."

In groups, fallback can be talked about, teams can identify the pulls on smallness in their individual members, identify pulls on bigness, and build psychologically spacious environments that pull people towards the biggest Self. She noted that insomuch as fallback may be seen as a form of failure, or that failure may be a catalyst for fallback, framing fallback in a positive light may be an important contributor to organizational success. She referred to research that has shown that organizational cultures with a mindset that growth occurs from failure, experience greater innovation, creativity, healthy treatment of conflict, and team success.

Berger pointed to stress and stressful environments as common causes of fallback. She noted that given that "leaders are often stressed out of their minds...and work with people who are stressed out of their minds" fallback is going to show up often. Berger argued that leaders need to understand the distinction between personality characteristics and stages of human development. Fallback offers leaders a frame to understand that people are growing and changing, not still.

Berger posited that naming fallback, and having language and a framework around it, helps people understand the phenomenon that is taking place. She explained, “You’re making developmental theory more textured, more nuanced, more whole, by describing this piece of the theory that people have mostly ignored. Because, developmental theory is so forward-looking, and it’s necessary to also be looking back.” Berger suggested that this research in which we are attempting to create distinctions, “stake out territory,” establish boundaries, “fence the field,” allows the terrain inside or on the edges to be studied, “played with,” and for a new set of questions to be asked.

Berger posited that the experience of fallback helps shift our thinking about developmental theory to one that is more nuanced, that makes room for developmental bands, rather than a fixed pinpoint of meaning-making; one that includes space for tethers and holes to earlier stages of development. She argues that there are lessons to be learned from falling back. The experience of fallback may encourage an appreciation of development as something you have to work on.

Berger invokes the *onion metaphor* to help individuals understand that in human development, we contain it all, all of the stages that have come before. She identified fallback as an integral piece of what makes an individual whole. It’s not always positive, and it doesn’t always feel good. However, primal emotions and experiences are a signal that something important is going on, providing a wake-up call that may lead us to our bigger Self. She championed the need to pay attention rather than reject the feeling.

Berger suggested that naming fallback, having a place for it in the theory of human development, helps people recognize it and recover from it more quickly. Naming it allows you to become friends with it and find out what it’s trying to tell you.

She declared, “I think it’s really hard to learn from things you hate [and deny].” Berger noted that understanding fallback leads to the ability to use it and work with it differently, which makes the experience of fallback less painful in the long run. She recalled telling her son during his periods of fallback,

“I want you to know, everybody feels this way. This way that you are feeling, it’s a momentary feeling. I don’t know whether it’s going to last a little while or a long time. But, there is this now, and then there is something else that comes after now. This is a moment.” And, it reminds me of all of those “It Get’s Better” videos that were so moving. That idea that when you lose yourself, you are going to find yourself, again. When you’re in your small self, big Self is not gone. It’s just not with you right at that moment.

Berger was clear on her belief that fallback is part of a common human experience. She suggested that fallback teaches you to be gentle with yourself, and allows you to have compassion for others without trying to fix them. She called the full range of development a gift. She said,

It is normal that we dip into these places...it’s not wrong or bad. It feels like what it is to be alive. And so, what it is to be alive is to stretch into the full range of our humanness....the full range of our development.

Robert Kegan, Ph.D.

Fallback defined. Kegan defined fallback as occurring when one makes use of meaning-making structures that are less complex than the most complex meaning-making structure that one has developed. Kegan navigated his way around a scope and understanding of fallback by exploring distinctions and conditions. The definition of fallback he offered, he originally classified as regression in a developmental context. Soon after, though, he began to assert that genuine regression would actually be devolution; the complete loss of complex functions. Whereas, he asserted, fallback

would be a temporary inability to use one's most complex functions. He also thought fallback could be identified in the place, the gap, between competence and performance.

Kegan offered that parents and going home are a typical prompt for what many like to describe as regression or fallback. In the example he gave, a twenty-three year-old girl felt like a kid in the company of her parents, one particular interaction prompting her to go "ballistic," and actually behave like a child. In this moment, she felt like she was ten-years-old and involved in power struggles of that time. This emotional and immature response to her mother resulted in her feeling horrible, with the worst part being that she could see herself feeling and behaving like a kid – a recognition that "this is not me; this is not me today."

In our dialogue about the twenty-something's experience of going home to her parents, Kegan noted that she had a frame to look at the situation, to make a judgment, to have feelings about it, and to recognize the gap between her "competence" and "performance" that would not have been present if she had fully lost her most complex self. He explained to her,

That can't be a full-on regression where you lost your current capacities completely, because your current structure, your current way of knowing yourself, your current way of looking out on the world, didn't actually disappear completely. And, you didn't actually fall back from it completely, because it was still there observing you feeling like and acting a little bit like a ten-year-old. And, then not liking seeing yourself acting this way.

As a result of this higher level observing of lower level meaning-making behavior, Kegan posited that fallback did not occur in this situation. However, when I asked if she had potentially lost access to her complex self, lost other options, even for just a moment, he conceded that she may have. He said,

Maybe fallback is a good word here for naming a situation like that, where in a sense, you can't have utterly lost it, because how did it come back so quickly? You can't have devolved; then suddenly re-evolved. There just may be some way that you temporarily lose touch with that more complex self. And, maybe fallback is a good term for that, because it's not making this hard claim that you regressed in the sense that you kind of lost that complexity. It's still, that system is still there, but you just couldn't connect with it in that moment.

He continued,

...If any part of you is feeling or thinking, "Oh this is childish," then that can't be the child, you know, who is doing that analysis...That's got to be the more complex self. So, you're kind of pushing here in a good way as to whether I actually think there could be situations where you kind of lose that entirely, at least for a time. And, if you're asking me whether I think that kind of thing can occur, yeah. My answer would be yes. And, that might be lots of different situations.

Kegan also explored the idea of there being situations in which one may choose to suspend the complex self, but he was unsure if that choice would result in a full loss of complexity and perspective. The data from the interview suggests that he did not think it would. Instead, one could effortlessly choose to return to one's more complex meaning system at will.

He asserted that fallback happens many times a day, every day; and, that when it happens, you're not your best self, and it would be better to be your best self. Yet, he also entertained the idea that maybe fallback is not all negative. He acknowledged that the implication of fallback to developmental theory is that development is not so clearly linear.

As our conversation progressed, a more nuanced definition of fallback emerged. Fallback is one's un-chosen use of meaning-making structures that are less complex than the most complex meaning-making structure that one has developed, such that one has temporarily lost the capacity to see the gap between how one is showing up and how one

wants to show up, to frame, to judge, and to have feelings about the experience from one's most complex self in a given moment. In this or these moment(s) of fallback, one is not able to have perspective on or take as object the experience. The more complex self is taken over by something simpler.

Causes of fallback. Kegan felt there could be many catalysts for fallback including those of the ordinary, getting triggered variety. He additionally noted three other catalysts for fallback, and one developmental phenomenon during which fallback takes place, but for which the experience is already highlighted in the existing theory.

SCARF and the brain/mind connection. Kegan noted his interest in the connection between the brain and mind, and from here emerged an explanation of the parts of the brain, where what is housed, and how one part influences the other. There's the neocortex, the rational part of the brain. Kegan sees his theory of developmental complexity matching up with the theory of development of the neocortex. Then, there's the amygdala – the part of the brain that does not evolve and that has the job of assessing threat.

Kegan referenced brain scientist David Rock, and his SCARF model, each letter indicating a specific threat area: S = status, C = certainty, A= autonomy/freedom, R = relationships, F= fairness. Kegan explained that when a trigger that threatens one of these areas is set in motion, the amygdala may jump to action in protection of the once physical, and now more often psychological, self. Once there is no perceived immediate threat, the neocortex can take over and begin to take perspective on the perceived threat and one's reaction to it.

Kegan referenced one's parents as powerful people in one's psychological landscape who are often experienced as triggering one of the SCARF areas. He also acknowledged that developmental transition may trigger a "raw area" which the amygdala may experience as a threat to one's existence. These triggers can lead to the experience of being taken over by a less complex way of making meaning, of feeling destabilized and at psychological risk, of losing connection to the neocortex.

Not developmental transition. Kegan confirmed that fallback is a frequent occurrence in developmental transition. However, he noted that the concept of the back-and-forth movement, the fluidity between the stage that held you and the stage that you are moving into, is already part of the "natural experience of transitions," and they are at present accounted for in the literature. Kegan described the multitude of developmental distinctions between levels that can be identified along the path to developmental transition through the Subject-Object Interview. He explained,

You may know from the whole Subject-Object Interview scoring system that first of all, theoretically, there's an infinite number of developmental positions between any two equilibrated systems... Like between the third and the fourth order, you know there's the position where you're enough able to kind of see that you tend to be kind of dependent on the external world to define reality for you. And, you have begun to have some uneasiness with that. But, you don't yet have a kind of internal place to stand for your own. And, that's sort of a little beyond the third order. We call that 3(4).

And, then there's a place you can identify where the person has a tendency, they've begun to construct their own position, but they're still very influenced by significant others. So, they tend to kind of move back-and-forth. You can sometimes see it in an interview over the course of an hour, between the three-ish and four-ish side. And, we call that 3/4, or 4/3, depending. We just kind of have to make a choice whether we think they're more on the new side, the four side, or they're more on the three side. So, those are two identifiable scores, identifiable developmental positions. They are both transitional positions – as was 3(4) – but they're places where you'd expect to see a lot of fallback all the time, because the person doesn't have an absolutely firm place to stand anymore. They've got the

old way of making meaning. And, the new way has started to emerge, but it hasn't necessarily kind of won the field, yet.

And, then there's the place where the self-authoring has kind of won the field, but it has to work very hard to not be sucked back into, and drawn back into, let's say the feelings or expectations of the very closest people, and most important people in your life. So, you're using your self-authoring energies, but largely to keep the person at arms' length. Kind of like, "I almost don't want to hear what you're evaluation is, because I'll get too drawn to it." We call that 4(3).

Now all these transitional positions – 3(4), 3/4, 4/3, 4(3) – they're all transitional positions. They're all ones where, especially the 3/4 and the 4/3, you should see lots of fallback if you want to call it that. But, it's really just kind of the process of being dis-equilibrated, gradually moving to some new equilibrium.

In this detailed example, one can see the constant forward-and-backward movement that can take place almost constantly in the midst of developmental transition. In contrast to what he described occurring during developmental transition, Kegan posited a non-developmental transition experience of fallback would occur when one is fully equilibrated in one stage, but gets triggered and is taken over by an earlier developmental position. Using Kegan's example above, this would be a person who is already fully embedded in order 4, but falls back to order 3.

Trauma. Kegan agreed that trauma may be a catalyst for fallback. He offered a description about what happens developmentally when one undergoes trauma and then later works to reintegrate that aspect of self. He said that when trauma happens at a time in one's life when one is constructing the world in a simpler way, there is a literal or psychological feeling of one's life being at risk. Kegan explained,

People may have a kind of experience, which we could call dissociation. And, the way that you survived that situation was to kind of remove yourself in some way from it. So that it's not happening to you. And, that is in a way a brave and heroic thing to do. To essentially keep yourself from being psychologically annihilated in those kinds of situations. And, it has a big cost, which is usually that some piece of your experience gets bracketed off. Or *encapsulated*, in the terms of a colleague of mine, Gil Noam.

Kegan suggested that while the rest of the self develops and becomes more complex, the bracketed self is left at that *historical and developmental time*, and that way of meaning is preserved. Kegan explained that later, when one is psychologically strong enough, one is able to reintegrate parts that were left behind.

Kegan noted that in these situations, therapy is often a structure that supports recovery and reintegration from the fallback caused by trauma. The therapist allies with the more complex self, they talk about the experience, and the emotions can be discharged. Kegan stated that without this kind of support when fallback from earlier trauma is triggered, the emergence of memories may lead to a debilitating experience of fallback. In fact, one's *self* and the way one responds to the outside world was identified by Kegan as another catalyst for fallback.

Self. In discussing the concept of self, Kegan said,

My bias is that as you become more self-authoring and beyond, that you should have more facility in kind of taking responsibility for what's going on inside you, and kind of being better able to regulate it. So, you would at least be less inclined to say, "You triggered me," and more that, "I triggered myself." So, one of the important but very hard ideas for people to grasp once they start learning about triggering and all of this, is that no one can trigger you but yourself. People can do outrageous things. But, it's only a consequence of how you are responding to those outrageous things that lead you to be triggered. So, that kind of taking responsibility that you kind of did that to yourself, is a capability that seems to get better with, if not ultimately require, this fourth-order, self-authored kind of thinking that I was talking about.

In the above statement, not only does Kegan assert that an individual may be triggered to fallback, but that same individual may be a significant determinant in whether the trigger is experienced as a fallback, thereby making the individual a potential cause of fallback. The capacity for one to take responsibility for one's own role in making fallback a phenomenon that one is subject to, or instead taking the fallback

trigger as object and deciding to respond differently, depends upon that individual's level of development. In fact, Kegan noted that it's not until his self-authored fourth order of development that one is able to take responsibility for one's own fallback, thereby no longer playing a catalyzing role in fallback's occurrence. The potential for fallback to facilitate developmental growth is addressed in the next section.

The role of fallback in development. As Kegan noted, one's willingness and capacity to take responsibility for being triggered seems to be influenced by one's developmental stage. He also hypothesized that one's developmental capacity may influence one's recovery from fallback. Kegan noted that the frequency of falling back would likely be lower in later developmental levels (specifically fourth order; Torbert's and Cook-Greuter's Achiever, and beyond), decreasing with one's meaning-making complexity. He suggested that at these more complex developmental orders, one would have greater recognition and avoidance of trigger situations. Further, when fourth order and later individuals did fall back, he thought they would be more adept at recovering, as they would have a greater ability to choose mental activities to get themselves un-triggered.

It's clear that individuals, particularly those at the later developmental orders, are capable of recognizing and recovering from fallback. But, can fallback prompt developmental growth? Kegan didn't know how to answer this – had, in fact, hardly considered it before our conversation – yet, he continued to remind me that he was skirting the question throughout our interview and ultimately came back to it. He analyzed the question according to the different prompts we had discussed for fallback.

To go to the question that I never really addressed, because I don't really know what I think about it, but this thing about whether I think fallback could actually

be in the service of further development. I think in that particular situation, the trauma situation, that it certainly could be. It could be that the thing that is making it more difficult for the person to move forward is that there are things from their past that really need to be reclaimed, and worked through, and brought into the light – not just the light of consciousness day, but also the light of your currently more complex self. And, in doing that, you may be aided in making a transition that was otherwise in some way blocked.

Can fallback caused by ordinary triggers prompt growth? Kegan confirmed that in circumstances that involve reflection and identification of the gap between how one showed up and what's desired, the result can be a "strengthen[ing of] the muscle that is developing."

Kegan identified a similarity between the research he is doing on organizational cultures that are deliberately developmental, and our interview about fallback and its ability to prompt development given the right conditions. In these environments that he is studying, the organization is attempting to deliberately trigger out of control, uncomposed, "touch the nerve" responses. The goal is to identify one's limitations in order to support one overcoming them and connection with one's growing edge. He suggested that the environment may not be so developmental if that's where it stopped, but these organizations have also put in place structures supporting growth such as deeper explanation, unpacking of situations, and showing concrete examples. He explained,

They're basically putting this in front of the person, and people get triggered. Okay, and you can call the way they behave falling back. Because, they do the things people do when they're triggered. They either fight, or they flee. Sometimes, they literally flee. One I watched on tape where the person just broke into tears, and just walked out of the room and slammed the door. But, usually it's a more psychological flight. They get very quiet. They become depressed. They feel embarrassed, and shame, and so on.

However, on the second and third days, when the neocortex has an opportunity to respond following the initial response of the amygdala to the threat, the individual has a

new relationship to the weakness or limitation, and Kegan believed this new relationship is the result of the fallback experience. Kegan said,

Most people come to feel that even though it was maybe their most painful experience at work – it's very embarrassing, and so on – that it was just like a huge boost forward in their development. Because, you know by the second and third day, they're not triggered anymore. They're looking at this kind of thing, and they kind of, it's given them a whole new relationship to what is a real weakness, or a real growing edge, that they never would have identified on their own if they hadn't been triggered first.

Kegan was the last key thinker I interviewed during my season of data collection, and his thoughts on fallback close this section on the sense each key thinker made of the fallback phenomenon through their respective developmental frames. The next section of Chapter Four focuses on the key thinkers' responses to the specific stories that pilot study participants told of their own lived experience of fallback.

Part III. Research Question Four: How Does Each Key Thinker Make Sense of the Stories that Post-Conventional-Measured Individuals Tell About Their Fallback Experiences?

In the Spring of 2011, I conducted a pilot study to explore, beyond my own occurrences, what the on-the-ground experience of fallback is in post-conventional measured individuals. The findings from that study were particularly telling for me in that none of the pilot study participants even attempted to say that they didn't fall back. Moreover, they all believed that fallback has, when treated a certain way, contributed to their development. Yet, while I had set out to elucidate the phenomenon of fallback through the lived experience of individuals, I found myself with more questions that I felt needed addressing by the theorists. A critical question for this study was how the key

thinkers through their developmental, theoretical frames made sense of the lived experience of fallback described by the pilot study participants.

Each key thinker received a brief summary of findings from the pilot study, which was to serve as a launching point for our interviews, and as contextual background on my thought processes coming into this research (Appendix C). Therefore, the key thinkers had “met,” at least briefly in written form, the participants from the pilot study early on in the interview process. During the course of interviews with each key thinker (with the exception of Kegan with whom I had only one interview), I posed different scenarios that were offered by the pilot study participants describing their experiences of fallback. I then asked the key thinkers to make sense of these stories that the participants had told.

In this section, I share one-by-one the pilot study participants’ stories, and the subsequent interpretation of them by the key thinkers.

Liz, Individualist.

When something comes up and I get pissed off, and I think, “You don’t know, I know better.” Well, that’s kind of falling back into that, “I’m better than you, I’m smarter” thing. Now, if that isn’t falling back into an Achiever, I don’t know what is. You know, the competition. Your ego triggers something. “Fine, do it your way.” You know, instead of just being open even though the other person annoys you. Not being annoyed. Being able to see there’s another perspective that’s important instead of competing with the perspective. And, I get caught in that a lot...at home.

Berger often assessed the participants in the pilot study as operating in a smaller self, but a self that is part of their developmental band. She offered Liz’s story of finding

herself operating from an earlier developmental level at home, as an example of fallback within Liz's developmental bandwidth. Berger attributed Liz's identification of home triggers as catalysts for fallback to the magnetic pull backwards of certain relationships and events.

Mitch, Strategist.

When the recession hit this practice, I went into a degree of panic mode, and I just was not functioning well, and I didn't quite know how to pull myself out. It was a combination of the passage of time, I got some consultations of different types from business people, just a variety of different things, and I finally pulled myself out of the panic and started making more effective decisions. There were moments I just felt paralyzed...I just wasn't sure what to do. There's a reduction in income in a situation where there are relatively fixed overhead expenses, like malpractice insurance, rents, staff salaries, etc. And, I just needed to figure out how to get through that, which involved laying off some people, cutting some expenses, shifting the business in different ways. So, the panic that I felt was just a kind of regression. I was a wreck for a while. It was probably several months.

I remember thinking I was just going to call a businessman I know in Atlanta and say, "You've got to come out here, you've got to take over, I'm just going to give this thing to you. I don't know what I'm doing." I was just going to capitulate. And, I'm normally a take-charge kind of person... "give me the bad news, and we'll figure out how to deal with it." But, this was...I just wanted to put my head in the ground. And, that...I don't know how far down that progression went, but this is not normally how I would solve problems.

There was really an emotional sense of terror that I was going to run through all of my savings...that I would finally just be homeless. And, I was having a hard time making realistic decisions, so I tended to fall into some inactivity for a while. I can still feel moments of panic, but they tend to last seconds versus much longer stretches of time. And, I think I have realistic back-up plans if needed. So, I don't think it resulted in...it might have resulted in some delayed decisions...I don't think it resulted in any impulsive decisions. And, a rededication to what we're doing and not doing.

In contrast to her assessment of Liz's fallback tendencies at home, which she classified as occurring within Liz's developmental range, Berger identified Mitch's recession-prompted fallback experience as taking place outside of his normal developmental band. Berger highlighted the absence of other options in Mitch's story. Mitch described a fallback experience marked by *inaction*, in contrast to the action that Cook-Greuter suggested is a prerequisite for fallback. Berger described Mitch as being *tethered* to an earlier stage of development. She suggested that when his context shrunk, he shrunk, too. She observed, "He's locked in. Yeah, he's not saying, 'should I be paralyzed, or should I do something else?' He's just paralyzed, that just was it."

Torbert noticed the basic, primal fears that marked Mitch's experience of fallback, likening Mitch's story to some of his own personal experiences of fallback in which he experienced "sheer woundedness" or injury. He noted that fallback may be "extreme" in the length of time one experiences it.

Torbert's categorization of Mitch's fallback as extreme and Berger's assessment of it as outside Mitch's normal range suggests classification as extreme both because of

the length of time of the fallback and the quality of it knocking his entire world for a loop. This second *knocking for a loop* explanation helped add distinction to Berger's second definition of fallback as outside one's normal range. Additionally, Mitch's example of fallback may indicate the across-the-board shutting down of capacities in every relationship and all realms of one's life that Berger also referred to as "a place of sense-making that is abhorrent and outside of our regular lives."

When I described Mitch's story of his fallback experience when the recession hit his business during the interviews, I described him as being "thrown back" which raises the question of the nature of a relationship between being "thrown back" and "falling back." Perhaps when one is thrown back, it represents a complete assault to one's meaning-making structure, which may be similar to the primal response one often has to threat.

Berger offered a possible alternative explanation based on the role that fear may play in meaning-making, imposing a physiological constraint on the brain. She wondered, "What is the role of those chemicals that are our friends when we are trying to get away from a tiger, and not so much our friends when we're trying to get away from a recession?" However, she noted that the six-month period of fallback that Mitch described is a rather long time for these neurological chemicals to exert influence.

Torbert pointed out that Mitch's approach to the situation and fallback catalyst is now, post-recovery from fallback, different from his original experience of it. This difference in perspective on the fallback situation is one of the tools that the key thinkers identified in one's capacity to identify and grow from fallback. In the moment, Mitch had significant fears of not having his basic needs met. Yet, later, with time, distance,

perspective, and growth, he realized that those things that society seems to think are the most important, were no longer so important to him.

Allie, Alchemist.

But, when I, I mean the times when I'm not quite on top of it... making a choice, tend to be in, what I would say...like I can kind of recognize being at a lower frequency situation. I've been a little lax about practices, but I'm tired, you know, that sort of thing, and it just kind of, I get into a space of, "I don't care." So, mainly what happens is the mind will take off daydreaming, that sort of thing. I can recognize it...things will...I'll be annoyed. I'll really get a response of impatience, impatience and annoyance with people at the house or, whatnot. But, then, that's really a clue to me. I mean, now I know it's happening, and it doesn't feel good is the thing. But, what I've realized with that is the importance of when I do find something like, "that really annoys me" or "that ticks me off," the importance of really letting that in. Not denying saying, "I'm not really ticked off," or "This is silly to feel this way." But, I feel the need to really let in the feeling. And, that's a little hard, too, because there's a dimension of that that feels embarrassing, shameful, you know, like I thought I was beyond this. But, it's really key for it to grow through it. I mean it doesn't always happen in just one time. But, I really have to try to embrace whatever that is and not deny that it's happened or happening.

In response to Allie's example of getting frustrated with individuals with whom she lives and getting lax about practices, Cook-Greuter categorized the experience as being all in the head, just processing. Cook-Greuter noted that while that is how

Alchemists make meaning, it is not how those at the earlier stages do. She posited that the absence of action in this story challenged her to find any fallback in it. She also made a distinction between the subjective back-and-forths in streams of consciousness, which she described Allie's story as, and what she claimed as the very different experience of fallback provoked by going home. Later she referred back to this story and noted that it has both behavior and reflection upon it, which indicated that she might have considered it fallback, after all.

McCallum suggested that Allie's examples of the conditions under which we can get easily triggered by things that we think we've outgrown, certainly alludes to what happens in fallback. He noted that in addition to Allie's example pointing to an experience of fallback, she also makes it a lesson in self-awareness, intention, and development through her response of noticing the conditions, letting the feelings in, and not succumbing to her first reaction to deny or diminish the experience.

I offered another of Allie's examples, this time of an extended period of fallback. She shared,

I probably had months and years when I was in fallback. There were times when I was just caught in something for a long time. I remember there was a...one thing...where I was really caught in this kind of victim stance. Like, what had been done to me that was so unjust and so unfair. It went on for a really long time. And, I was just so convinced that I was totally blameless, and it had nothing to do with me. It was just this terrible person that had seized upon an innocent victim. And, I don't know if it...I'm just not even aware enough to know what level of consciousness I might have been at and how it was a fallback. I mean it

was certainly a fallback. I can remember having fantasies about what I would like to do to this person...I never did it. It was probably a fallback. So, yeah, I think you can be in that for really long periods of time, you know when there are these, these strong patterns and beliefs that are really rooted pretty deeply in us. You can get pretty hooked by them for a long time.

You know part of [coming out of] it was time and distance. And, then it was bit by bit, I did see the things, you know the things I was particularly upset with, different things, I saw in myself. You know, my versions of them. Then it was just. It wasn't, it wasn't by particularly working on that. It was just...other understandings developed where, you know it's like seeing that most people are doing the best they can. Hardly anybody chooses, you know, I'm not going to do the best I can. We're doing what we think is right. And, then, it's like getting that. But, it was a long time before I felt really healed.

Cook-Greuter termed the months and years Allie described as being in a victim stance, “drag back.” Cook-Greuter defined *drag back* as occurring when a situation triggers an unintegrated aspect of self; a piece that is not in sync with the rest. She noted that unintegrated stuff gets stuck and is kept separate while the rest of self grows, and noted that this encapsulated area is subject to repeat triggers. Cook-Greuter claimed that once these pieces are integrated, growth is possible. She offered an example of drag back; when a student just gets through a subject in school with a passing grade, but later finds that nonintegrated information crucial, and returns to fully learn and integrate the knowledge.

Similarly, Berger assessed Allie's recounting of her extended period of fallback in which she felt very much in a victim stance as fallback catalyzed by an unintegrated aspect of self. She mused that Allie's fallback experience seemed to be around one relationship, not all relationships in her life, leading Berger to think that this fallback was prompted by a relationship "pothole." Berger noted that we make sense "of and with" context, and in this context, with this person, Allie's capacities were diminished.

Though he described it using different terminology, Palus's interpretation of Allie's fallback was similar to Berger's in its reference to different developmental capacities in different contexts. Palus allowed that integral theorist Ken Wilber's lines of development could possibly be used to interpret Allie's self-described victim fallback experience. Palus invoked Jean Piaget's term "décolage" which refers to development being fragmented, and compared this to Wilber's early interpretations of lines and the capacity to be at different developmental levels in different domains of one's life. He stated, "I'd be wondering, were there other lines of her life in which she was feeling more Alchemist? Or, was it like the whole damn thing sort of came down around her ears, and she couldn't be an Alchemist, anywhere?"

The idea of having different levels of development in different domains of one's life could fit within Palus's hypothesis that the whole of the development spectrum is present at all times though he did not say this explicitly. In Palus's exploration of Allie's possible full shut-down of developmental capacity there is also some of what Berger and Torbert assessed in Mitch's experience of the recession; an extreme fallback, outside one's developmental range.

I offered Cook-Greuter the possibility that what Allie experienced might be connected to Wilber's states, stages, lines distinction, which posits that instead of having one center-of-gravity stage, we actually have different stages for different lines of our development or in different domains. Cook-Greuter suggested that watching thoughts and producing them as they come along, a stream of consciousness, is a state, which seemed to indicate that she did not consider fallback to be a state. In contrast, Palus and McCallum in the course of our interviews, both defined fallback as a state, not a stage.

I suggested the alternative hypothesis to Torbert, that as the pilot study participants described the different ways they show up developmentally in different aspects or contexts in their lives, this could be made sense of through an understanding of having different developmental stages for different lines of one's development. Torbert could see this possibility that one may be more advanced in one line, and not yet there, in another. Yet, he noted that the advanced line would begin to have a perspective on the earlier line. Further, he described the occurrence in terms of two adjacent stages, which seemed to suggest that he attributed the presence of two different stages of development in different lines or domains of development to what happens during developmental transition, rather than what happens in daily developmental life.

When I pressed him about how this might show up outside of developmental transition, and in circumstances in which the space between the different presenting developmental stages is vast (such as a Diplomat action logic for one line, and an Alchemist action logic for another), Torbert conceded that one could, and some have, made a case against one center-of-gravity action logic across all lines of development. According to this alternative hypothesis to fallback, each line has a separate action logic,

and he likened this to how different situations elicit different stages. He offered examples of how individuals may, in fact, use the more advanced action logic to *avoid* development of the less developed line.

However, Torbert also challenged this conception that disputes one center-of-gravity action logic. He suggested that while earlier stages would be okay with, would in fact likely not even notice the discrepancy in how one shows up in different areas of life or self, later developmental stages would respond to the discrepancy differently. He noted that this alternate hypothesis would perhaps only make sense in earlier stages, because later stages would be motivated to develop the lines that are earlier.

Further, Torbert critiqued the alternative hypothesis given our limited capacity to prove it. How would we know? How could we measure it? Ultimately, Torbert felt it would be important to understand how the lines operate together, as a whole, an understanding that he claimed does not currently exist. He noted that this is all new territory in need of exploration.

McCallum was drawn to the possibility that what Allie described as fallback could have been her last hurrah in one developmental stage before transitioning to the next. He's found that prior to some of his own periods of growth, he experienced an intense resistance to what he now can see was a loss of self-concept that he was overly attached to at the time. McCallum also pointed to the importance of framing these experiences of loss and resistance as key to growth. He explained,

I think there is something really powerful about being able to see...the resistance is in some ways the gathering of steam for a potential breakthrough, a potential kind of loss of oneself, and a kind of movement into that transition space which is very messy and disorienting before a sense of a new self begins to really consolidate, and emerge, and find a sense of competence in the world again.

Cook-Greuter was adamant that Allie's experience was not an example of fallback, pointing out that the story Allie told was all about meaning-making, processing, and thoughts – not behavior. I offered Cook-Greuter's assessment of the scenario as not-fallback to McCallum, who had otherwise agreed that it was fallback. McCallum could see the merit in Cook-Greuter's claim and being reserved about naming this fallback, noting that what is preventing the fantasies she was having from being acted out must be some sort of higher order reasoning. Yet, he also noted that there are many different interpretations of acting. McCallum explained,

So you could feel in a triggered state, and there's always an action of some sort. Whether the person is actually mobilizing to do something is kind of an extreme form. There's lots of ways of thinking about what action is, and the relationship between feeling states, thinking states, and the way one's showing up.

The idea of *disorienting dilemmas*, which McCallum had suggested as a cause of fallback also seemed present in Allie's description. She talked about the strong patterns and beliefs that are rooted pretty deeply inside of us. Perhaps these were challenged by a disorienting dilemma. Later Allie said, "There's something about being confronted with the evidence or the data in the moment, which makes it less easy to run from or deny that can make it really powerful." This seems to be a direct reference to what, according to McCallum, disorienting dilemmas can do. There is also a presence of projection in her description of her fallback and her realization and recovery from it. In Allie's story, recognition occurred, perhaps an accessing of something that was lost – an ability to take perspective, to reframe – that she said came about as a result of time and distance. The other practices Allie noted that facilitated her learning from this fallback were her spiritually-oriented touchstones – meditation and spiritual retreats.

Time and distance as factors that facilitated her learning from fallback stand in marked contrast to another possibility— if being forced to stay in the same space, engaged with the same people would facilitate learning from fallback. If sometimes distance is really needed.

Palus offered another interpretation of Allie's story of fallback, referencing Jungian archetypes, and harkening to his claim that fallback is the norm in the scope of the full human experience. He suggested that not just Allie, but all of humanity has the potential for a victim-orientation. In the case of Allie and from a developmental perspective, Palus offered that her relationship to the victim-consciousness might change, her construction of it might change, her ability to go into alternative constructions might change, but she will never be able to completely transcend it. He explained,

[Her] subtle shift is just kind of acceptance, and some greater degree of awareness, and possibly some greater degree of being able to kind of navigate it successfully. But, it wouldn't go away, because it's just, we're talking about something that's part of the human experience. So, I'm trying to point to those things that are just human. And, until humans aren't victims any more, I think individuals will still always be put in a victim place. You know, society can put us in a victim place. You know, our relationships can put us there. It's bigger than us. So, I guess what I'm saying is, a higher action logic would sort of be at peace with that, but wouldn't any longer expect to be relieved of being the victim... What feels like fallback, sometimes, is just you get another dose of humanity, and that's the norm.

I recounted Allie's story of being at the Shamanistic ceremony, and being in a stuck space where deep-rooted patterns were called forth and healed. Allie said,

I was at a healing ceremony with a couple of...native, indigenous shamans. And, I had, it was something I was very anxious to do. I had done this a year ago. You know it was an amazing experience. But, I actually got down there after, it took a great deal of effort. It's not an easy thing to get to. This one was in central Mexico. You have to drive through the worst states right now with the

killings. I wasn't afraid of that. You know the travel's hard, it's out in the middle of nowhere, then you put on a backpack and hike into these places. But, it was very clear to me, especially after the experience of last year that this was something I wanted to do. But, when I got there, I mean, another stage surfaced where I was just in this place of, "Why did I do this? I don't want to be here." Like I couldn't get myself really motivated to be present. It's like I could see that, but I just was.... And, then realized, but see, I mean this isn't quite voluntary, but all of that was being called to the surface by the sha[mans]...for healing. And, so it was like a whole layer of unconsciousness or unawareness that where I've said like was a fallback thing. Where I'll find myself into the daydreaming and not caring. That I feel like it was somehow just pulled to the surface and then healed.

But, that was a really amazing experience, but I didn't have much control over it. You know it wasn't a choice in the familiar way, the way that's more familiar. I think it was pretty unintentional. I could see it happening, but it's like I didn't care. I mean normally if I saw something like that starting, I could, I could generate the frequency saying, "I don't want to go there," but I didn't care. I think they were, I mean I think energetically they were going after and pulling to the surface patterns that were really ripe to be healed. I mean it's one of those things that I can say I know, and I know what happened, but there's no rational explanation.

But, that kind of work has been extremely helpful to me in the developmental process, because it, they, are able to recognize patterns that we don't even know we have. You know, there are the patterns that we know we have

that we want to get rid of, but then you get to layers of things you don't even know it's there. And, it helped me understand...that whole notion of regression, which is what you're talking about...fallback. But, where, you know certainly, I mean it's well-documented in children. You're looking at it in adults, but the children, when they're ready to make the leap to the next stage often have this regressive period first, and it feels like they're getting worse and then it, they adapt. And, that was my experience...there at that ceremony.

Cook-Greuter classified Allie's experience at the Shamanistic ceremony as a state of disassociation, not fallback. When I asked, as Allie suggested in her story, if it could be interpreted as the acting out that happens before developmental transition, that it was the last hurrah in one action logic before transitioning to the next, Cook-Greuter maintained that it sounded like a state of disassociation, not developmental transition. She went on to describe the varied experiences of developmental transition, saying,

I would think, certainly some of the time that's a possibility, the same way that, what they call "the dark night of the soul" happens. That's a sort of a dis-integration before you re-integrate. But the other is also possible, that there's actually a fairly smooth transition. There's nothing major happening. It's just the nature of growing and maturing...through experience, through thinking, through all kinds of ways.

Cook-Greuter wondered if turmoil is a fallback, and said that fallback leads to growth sometimes, and leads to stuckness at others.

Palus echoed Cook-Greuter's conclusion that what Allie described at this Shamanistic ceremony did not seem to be fallback, but his assessment was based on a much different argument – that Allie opted in. He claimed that over a slightly extended period of time, Allie deliberately chose to engage in an experience, in a setting, that she knew would "challenge the psyche at a very deep level." He offered,

In some ways, you can say that she was at an even higher level of consciousness, maybe, than what she had been at before, by kind of embracing, entering and embracing, a profound experience like that, knowing full well it was going to hurt.

Palus likened Allie's experience at the healing ceremony to that of McCallum's research participants at the group relations conference, noting that both settings were designed to be disorienting. Another parallel between the two settings is the voluntary nature, the explicit intent of those who do participate to grow. Further, this explicit intent and opting in tends to be a tendency of those at more complex levels of development.

The various possible interpretations of the same scenario brought to light the complexity of the fallback phenomenon and the importance of our dedicated attempts to understand it. Several other conclusions and implications emerged, and these are discussed in the next section.

Conclusions and implications. Berger concluded that development took place in the stories the pilot study participants told about their fallback experiences. She said, "...I could see some of what you talk about in your paper. That way that people can use – I think it *is* post-conventional people – can use their experiences of smallness to help them be bigger, be more whole."

Yet, while the examples from the pilot study participants offered Cook-Greuter an opportunity to think directly about what is and what is not fallback, her interpretation differed from Berger's. More often than not, Cook-Greuter claimed that fallback did not exist in these stories. In fact, following the presentations of these pilot study stories of fallback, Cook-Greuter cautioned me to be specific about what I'm defining as fallback: behavior or inner dialogue on past experience. I began to have some clarity that what I

am defining as fallback may be both, and the determinant is what's most useful to those attempting to navigate their way through the developmental spectrum, through life.

During one of my interviews with Torbert, and unrelated to my recounting of stories of fallback by the pilot study participants, he spoke about the importance of having an understanding of fallback to both stage development theory and the exercise of leadership. Torbert explained,

I think [fallback] sort of highlights that the work of developmental movement is really ongoing and continual. And indeed, the later the action logic to which one has developed, the more one is called to continue to work. The work gains in intensity, it doesn't get easier. Or say, "Oh, I passed that test, and now I'm fine for the rest of my life, and I can glide through this." It highlights the fact that it's not going to be done in a three-day workshop or a five-day workshop or an off-site. All these ways of intervening in people's lives to help leadership development are helpful, but you can't begin to imagine that they are going to do the job. It highlights why it's useful to have ongoing first-person and second-person practices in one's life, and seeking out support from people to work on difficult situations when one is probably more likely to be falling back. One realizes increasingly, I think, at least this is what the conclusion that I've come to is, that one wants to work hard at creating an ongoing practicing environment with little communities of inquiry or whatever, and so forth. So, I think what it does is it highlights building the developmental process into your everyday activity rather than thinking it will go on somewhere else.

During the pilot study, Mitch, the Strategist likened fallback to relapse in addiction treatment. He said,

In addiction, it's not unlike talking to people about their relapses. In the fantasy world people go off to 30-day rehab and they come out and think they will never drink again, or use. The reality is that most people slip after addiction rehab. However much money they spend and however long they go, the most likely outcome after addiction treatment is relapse, and the addiction treatment industry does not publicize this. What they publicize is that you come here, and you're good for life, which is complete nonsense. But if you work with the clients and say, "Look we're not telling you to relapse, but let's talk about what happens if it does and how we're going to deal with that. And, then you're going to learn from one or several of these, and you're finally going to get yourself where you come out over here, and you're at this false, or let's say, insecure level of recovery. And, we go back and forth a few times, and you're finally going to catapult yourself to a secure level of recovery where the relapse becomes much less likely.

You've been down the relapse road a few times and you think, unless I do this, I know where this is going. I know myself by now. So I can head this off now. I've made this mistake three times. So let me be honest with myself. Do I really want to make this change or not?" It's trial and error work and a lot of that trial and error learning has to happen out in the real world. You can't learn it.

The parallel between the two statements was striking, with both quotes pointing to: the fact that development isn't going to happen in an instant, the opportunity for growth to occur from fallback, and the importance of people in the real world understanding that development is not all onward and upward, sweetness and light. To think that you have this problem once, and you do a little bit of work to address it, and then you're just going to move along past it, is not realistic. Developmental growth is lifelong work. If those occasions when we fall back can be used as tools in that work, it's crucial that we craft an understanding of how that may be.

Palus voiced frustration at the lack of meaningful and different research on human development, suggesting that the limitations of our methods and instruments creates a limitation in what we study. He explained that we go for the "low hanging fruit," asking the questions we think we can answer rather than the ones that we really want and need answers to. In fact, Palus argued that what future research should focus on is better methodologies and fresh ways to approach questions; the development of instruments that can more directly assess and reveal the fine grain of one's underlying developmental structure and one's use of an action logic at any given time. For instance, he noted that the question, if we could objectively diagnose fallback in others, is quickly squashed given the shortcomings of our current tools for developmental measurement.

One important implication for future research on the fallback phenomenon that emerged in my recounting of the pilot study participants' stories of fallback is the

possibility or impossibility of assessing someone's experience of fallback from the outside in. This points to the importance of conducting empirical research with participants that allows the researcher to probe the participants' experiences. In the next section, I explore with the key thinkers the work that still lies ahead in mapping the boundaries of fallback in human development through future research.

Part IV. Research Question Five: How Might the Fallback Phenomenon be Researched with Participants in the Future?

It seems clear that empirical research is needed to test the boundaries of the phenomenon of fallback that I theoretically explored with the six key thinkers. Yet, how might we best go about this?

Design.

Instruments. Given the financial and time limitations of current developmental assessment instruments, Palus suggested the development of a self-report test for use by practitioners; one that is easy to understand, easy to administer (quickly and in groups), and easy to assess. He identified the developmental autobiography through which an individual writes their developmental life story, and self-identifies key developmental moments (and may also self-assess the corresponding stage of development for that moment), as one existing tool that could be adapted. The developmental autobiography uses a general prompt asking an individual to explore in narrative form their transformation across action logics during their lifetime. Palus suggested that this tool be adapted to include a specific probe about the individual's experience of transitions.

In fact, several key thinkers recommended adapting current tools to more effectively study the fallback phenomenon. Cook-Greuter posited that an interview

would be most conducive to uncovering data about a new area of research, such as fallback. She recommended adapting Kegan's Subject-Object Interview (SOI) and using either the researcher's own questions or a combination of the researcher's questions and SOI questions to focus on specific issues and situations related to fallback (e.g., going home, going to another country, class-reunions, serious illness). Cook-Greuter suggested that using an interview will provide structure – which would be useful for comparability – and flexibility to probe participants' thinking.

Berger also suggested the SOI would be a useful tool in conducting research, precisely because it is heavily facilitated by the interviewer. Like Cook-Greuter, Berger recommended employing a domain-specific SOI to identify pockets of an individual's sense-making that could be fallback.

Similarly, McCallum thought that adapting the developmental inventory to include a prompt (in the case of the sentence completion tests) or a question (if using the SOI) about fallback could potentially reveal not only one's go-to fallback position, but also one's developmental ceiling. An example would be asking a person to identify a situation where there was a gap between the ideal way they'd like to show up, and the way they actually did. A person's recounting of a story in which one expressed regret-only would likely indicate a lower developmental ceiling than one that expressed regret and hope or equanimity.

In addition to adapting existing instruments to research the fallback phenomenon, several key thinkers recommended examining the data from existing instruments through a different lens. Berger noted that previously conducted SOI's that assessed an individual's highest sustained demonstrated score could be re-evaluated to reveal the

individual's full range or band. This assessment of one's developmental bandwidth in combination with the initial SOI score, would allow the researcher to identify one's go-to fallback action logics.

While Berger thought that future research for the most part would need to be qualitative in nature, she suggested that from a quantitative perspective one could analyze the parent-oriented sentence stem scores on Cook-Greuter's SCTi-MAP to determine if they are statistically lower than other sentence stems. This suggestion to use the SCTi-MAP to undertake a statistical analysis of emotional sentence stem responses to determine if these are lower than the rest of scores on the instrument was shared by Cook-Greuter. However, outside of this possibility, Cook-Greuter thought using her own SCTi-MAP in a study of fallback would be challenging. She noted that when people are completing the SCTi-MAP assessment, they are of one mind, at one time. Therefore, they are not subject to the different environments and circumstances that might cause them to fallback.

Cook-Greuter and Torbert identified additional development tools and exercises that could be utilized to research fallback in participants in the future. Cook-Greuter believed that document analysis of a participant's developmental assessments might be useful, but only if the assessment is relatively fresh. Further, she thought that conducting analysis on developmental autobiographies written by participants could offer a larger view of their development, but only if the autobiography is extensive.

Torbert suggested that the *difficult conversation method* could be utilized with participants to prompt reflection upon earlier fallback, and thought this would be particularly effective in helping individuals at earlier action logics identify their own

experiences of fallback. He noted that Kegan's *immunity to change* exercise (previously referred to as the *big assumption exercise*) would be useful in discovering the hidden assumptions that both lead one to make a commitment and also to resist it.

McCallum argued that accessing more than just participant self-report would be vital to any research design. He suggested focus groups might be a viable option for use in debriefing. He offered that utilizing developmental inventories would be beneficial, but advised having an outside party score and select the sample pool, as he did in his own dissertation research, so-as to avoid the researcher having that potentially influential knowledge going in.

Setting and participants. Berger recommended seeking participants who had a common experience of a developmentally-rich circumstance with a high likelihood of fallback; one that caused the participants to be “developmentally smaller” for an extended term, which she identified as three months or longer. Examples of these circumstances include becoming a new parent, newly unemployed, newly married, or newly laid off. Cook-Greuter, too, rather liked the idea of focusing on one kind of experience within a study; either one experience that all participants shared (e.g., group relations conference), or an individual experience of the same kind (e.g., going home for the holidays, attending a high school reunion, etc.).

McCallum thought it would be important to access participants in the immediacy of the experience and again through long-term reflection following the experience. Berger, too, thought this would be useful, and suggested conducting pre- and post- (six months to one-year apart) SOIs or SCTi-MAPs with the participants. The pre-assessment

would focus on one's description of one's experience in the moment, while the post-assessment would attempt to access the smaller self once the bigger Self emerges.

Berger noted the difficulty in studying those at conventional stages through recall, versus in the moment, given that their capacity to reflect, to make object, is limited if it exists at all. She recollected that according to Kegan, the third order is the earliest that one is able to have a sense of one's own psychology and identity over time, and Jennifer noted that this sense would be necessary for the recall of fallback. The benefit of identifying post-conventional stage individuals as participants is that they would have language around fallback and the capacity to see it.

Nonetheless, McCallum indicated he would like future research to include several representatives at each stage of development and cross sections within (e.g., of personality type, experience, family history, etc.). Cook-Greuter's ideal research sample would also include participants at a range of developmental levels, and she suggested one could target the participant pool by gender, age, or experience. She noted that, as always in research, the challenge is securing the participants with the specific characteristics around which you have designed your study.

Cook-Greuter suggested that the more participants we can study, the merrier, but advised that the more similarities of participants, the narrower the focus (e.g. the same developmental level), the more comparability and generalizability is possible. McCallum argued for a large sample size –larger than his study's N of 18. Yet, Berger claimed that good data could be generated from a participant pool of eight to twelve, suggesting that a study with any N would move us further along in our understanding than we are currently.

McCallum thought a cross-disciplinary exploration of fallback through different lenses (e.g., biological, behavioral) would be a fascinating area of future research. He noted that other disciplines would have a different explanation and different definition of what it means “to learn.” He also proposed research that explores the connection between the brain and mind, and the resulting impact on the way in which humans make meaning. Specifically, McCallum suggested that adding the scientific experience of the brain to one’s qualitative experience of human development laid upon Ken Wilber’s all-quadrants, all-levels, all lines, AQAL model, would be fascinating. He also identified the potential use of magnetic resonance images (MRIs) to explore cognitive capability and the brain’s structure.

Palus identified the importance of extending our research beyond the usual suspects who are studied in general (i.e., undergraduate students) and those who are studied in our field (i.e., those with the resources to pursue a developmental path). He criticized the field of adult development for often ignoring cross-cultural differences and imposing our developmental perspective on others, calling it a blind spot. Palus suggested that developmental theory may well be a Western fancy, “a certain kind of story that rich people tell each other.”

Palus would like to see fallback explored in non-Western countries, where the issues of living are different. He suggested that poverty, imposed religion, imposed traditions, are all a very different reality for populations outside of the West, and that these are real conditions which limit developmental growth. Palus imagines growth from fallback is very different in different socioeconomic settings in which there are no supporting conditions, where the environment does not promote a growthful narrative.

Instead of assuming and imposing, Palus championed future cross-cultural research that would explore how Western ways of thinking about development and fallback might be useful to participants who are immersed in tradition, experiencing developmental disequilibrium, and who wish to exercise leadership.

Questions. Given that researching the phenomenon of fallback is wide-open territory, the line of research that could be pursued and the questions that could be asked are countless. The key thinkers surfaced five overarching categories in which future research could be focused: boundaries, fallback across the lifespan, the fallback experience, the role of fallback in developmental growth, and the implications of fallback to human and leadership development.

Boundaries. Both Palus and Cook-Greuter indicated that research needed to be conducted to establish the boundaries and to determine the criteria for diagnosing fallback. What is the scope of fallback? Palus wondered if 30 days marks what could be viewed as beyond normal human perturbations.

Cook-Greuter wondered how we shall define fallback and asked questions about how we could measure it: When is it fallback from the perspective of somebody who watches? And, when is it fallback from the perspective of somebody who is actually living in it? Is the framing of it as such action logic-dependent? Is it dependent upon the action logic of the interviewer? What is the unit of analysis? A moment-to-moment experience of fallback or a retrospective look at overall development over time?

Fallback across the lifespan. Several of the key thinkers wondered what fallback looks like through the lens of each developmental level, noting that the identification of fallback in self would differ by each individual and their action logic. They also asked,

what is the experience of fallback across the lifespan? Cook-Greuter was curious about the effects of fallback at old age when one may already be experiencing the loss of mind and capacities.

The fallback experience. Berger asked, “What got you there? What got you out? And how does your experience of being there and now out, change who you are and what you do?” McCallum was curious to explore the specific fallback phenomenon, one’s sense-making of the experience in the present and its implications for the future, and what one’s self-scaffolds are in terms of framing and behavior. He also would like to determine if his own research finding that individuals at later action logics have greater resiliency in catching themselves in fallback and/or the capacity to avoid fallback altogether, actually holds up under future research. Cook-Greuter, similarly, was interested in the influence of developmental level on one’s experience of and recovery from fallback. She asked, is it as developmental theory would have us think, that the later the stage, the quicker the recovery?

Cook-Greuter also wanted to know what are the experiences, behaviors, feelings, catalysts, methods and times of recovery of fallback? Are there differences in the experience of fallback depending on the range between developmental levels – the most complex one is capable, and the level to which one has fallen? How is fallback enacted by different people in different situations? What are the fallback patterns by gender? By age?

The role of fallback in developmental growth. Torbert inquired: why do we sometimes grow developmentally as a result of fallback, and at other times not? Why are

some individuals consistently successful at practicing awareness in all areas of their lives, and others not? Why is trauma at times regressive, and at others progressive?

The questions that Palus would want to ask delve into the practical way of helping people: what are the optimal conditions, factors, and variables for learning from fallback? What kind of supports, holding environments, and facilitation are useful to those experiencing fallback? What are the variables involved in those who handle fallback well and others who do not? Does an analysis of fallback generate more or different types of help for people (and people in organizations) who are in transition? Does it offer a fresh analysis of transitional phenomena? Can understanding fallback help people move forward when in transition vs. decaying? Berger, similarly wanted to know, how can one best take advantage of these times to grow?

The implications of fallback to human and leadership development. Specific to his professional focus on leadership development of individuals in organizations, Palus asked: what is the cause of trauma in the workplace? How can we help people when they're not self-actualizing? How can the workplace be designed so that frustrations can be used developmentally?

“Shooting at a barn.” This is the phrase that Berger used to describe how research on fallback of any kind would be tremendously valuable given that the phenomenon has been so little studied to-date. Cook-Greuter, Palus, and Torbert often remarked that we just don't know the answers to so many of the questions about fallback. Cook-Greuter argued that future research of fallback is valuable given that this is such an unexplored area with no definition currently, and no good descriptions. She also suggested that future empirical research on the fallback phenomenon could uncover a

clearer understanding of what accounts for fallback and what doesn't. Torbert agreed, often suggesting throughout our interviews that empirical research, research extending beyond the theoretical framework, would be needed to answer these and many other questions.

The exploration of the fallback phenomenon through interviews with the key thinkers was rich, thought-provoking, and complex. In the next section, I attempt to make sense of their sense-making, and take an initial crack at mapping the boundaries of the fallback phenomenon.

Part V: Synthesis, Analysis, and Claims

In the following pages, I argue that the phenomenon of fallback can be made sense of and understood through the existing theory of stage development. Next I claim that the most important criteria for defining fallback is the absence of options at the more complex level of development that one is capable – be they in thought, feeling, behavior, or meaning-making. Further, I claim that fallback, under the right conditions has the potential to facilitate developmental growth, and that these conditions for growth to occur are most likely to be met by those in the post-conventional stages of development. I assert that fallback is one part of a mutually-defining term and phenomenon, the other component of which is spring forward. In my fifth claim, I identify and describe five overarching causes of fallback. Finally, I argue the importance of having a theory for understanding fallback to both human and leadership development.

Claim one. So much exists in the current developmental theory that accounts for the fallback phenomenon, yet, the aspects of stage development theory that focus on the

bi-directional nature of human development, movement both forward and back, have largely been ignored.

The theoretical field overestimates the stability of one's center-of-gravity action logic, and this overestimation is perpetuated by the final outcome assessment of one's developmental capacity as a point on a scale. The developmental assessment instruments, in their probing of one's sense-making, yield a range of stages, not one primary stage, and not even the stage that is most often scored. Yet, the score that is presented, that is emphasized, is one point, one stage on the developmental continuum.

In Kegan's Subject-Object Interview, this point is one's highest sustained demonstrated score, the developmental place from which one is capable of making meaning under the best circumstances. In Torbert's and Cook-Greuter's sentence completion tests, this is one's center-of-gravity action logic. Palus explained,

It's looking at a normalized curve, and I guess that's an operationalized version of the center-of-gravity idea. You draw the distribution of the scoring of these sentences, then you naturally come out with a center. So, that's where we place people. We say that, that's where you seem to live the most.

Palus explored the center-of-gravity metaphor, noting our capacity to be in our center-of-gravity, or an arm ahead, or a foot that's a few steps back, at any time. We have a range of stages that we may tap into, consciously or unconsciously, in any moment. He claimed that the center-of-gravity is not a fundamental truth. Instead, it is a metaphor, a rule of thumb, a description of facts. It is the place you live most of the time, and it indicates that you are all there, with a multitude of options for developmental expression, at once.

As Berger made sense of fallback within stage development theory, she likened one's development to layers of an onion or rings on a tree. She explained that we contain

all of ourselves, including the smallest aspect. Each level is transcended and included, not destroyed. Given that all levels are contained within us, we must have the ability to slip into or access earlier stages. Berger posited that fallback is a key piece of what makes you whole.

Torbert posited that the center-of-gravity action logic is an illusion. He explained, “Our attention fluctuates wildly all the time, even when we’re relatively late action logic...The distinction is that in the movement from Strategist to Alchemist, you begin to distinguish between the attention and the pattern of thought.” This ever-increasing awareness leads to a more frequent noticing of the incongruities in one’s life and actions.

It seems that the reality of the developmental spectrum may be that fallback is the norm, and making meaning from one’s center-of-gravity is the exception. Palus claimed that we, at all stages of development, are subject to the full catastrophe of life. Even those in the post-conventional stages experience fallback given the full complexity and messiness that characterizes every stage, no matter its position on the developmental continuum. Cook-Greuter pointed to the existence of darkness and evil at all levels of development, claiming that the earlier stages idealize the darkness away while the later stages notice and accept the darkness.

Yet, Cook-Greuter suggested that the reason fallback has not been studied so far, the reason she herself has not studied it, is because of its negative connotations in the midst of the positive focus of those in the constructivist field in which constructive-development theory resides. Berger criticized the field’s and the theory’s neglect of fallback, claiming that it denies the real lived experience of fallback in self and others. Palus explained why this may be, noting that the theoretical field is weak on pursuing

empirical truth, and more specifically, pursuing empirical truth that is disconfirming: that looks for the outliers, that seeks to discover where the theory breaks down, where the edges become ragged. He suggested that fallback may reside at “the ragged edges” of stage development theory.

I challenge the assumption that exists in the context of a field that emphasizes the onward-and-upward nature of developmental growth – that fallback is negative. None of the key thinkers denied the phenomenon of fallback. In fact, Palus’s persistent challenges were to the creation of a theory around fallback that perpetuated the sense of the phenomenon as something separate from one’s self. Palus’s initial interpretation of fallback was just that: a rejection of, a cutting-off from the earlier me. To him, defining and establishing a definition for fallback seemed to be in service of the claim, “I’ve fallen back, I’ve regressed to something that I am no longer.” He noted that the term fallback assumes movement, rather than acceptance of the whole system. “I do not accept it as me. It’s something that I need to fix.”

It is clear that no matter the claims by the theorists that later is not better, that there is value even in the simpler stages of sense-making, a judgment still exists. Perhaps the judgment is not that earlier stages are less than, rather that later stages are greater. In Kegan’s description of the twenty-something-year-old student who behaved like a child when she went to her parents’ home, he described her experience as, “This is not me: this is not me today,” which would point to a rejection of that earlier self that Palus would assert really is still her.

Instead, Palus stands by an interpretation of those earlier stages of development residing right alongside the later ones in each individual. The full range of opportunities

is there. The shadow is there. He claimed, “It’s an ‘and’ place when you fallback, it’s not an ‘or’ place. It’s not flipping between poles.” In Palus’s view, calling it fallback, making it “a thing,” a theory, seems to pose it as anomaly of who we really are, and if it’s taken as a proven theory, there’s danger in that.

Cook-Greuter’s understanding of fallback differed from Palus’s. She claimed that fallback *is* separate or different from who we are. Fallback is not fantasizing, because fantasizing is normal in humans at all levels of development. Fallback is not thoughts, or internal processes, which are all part of who we are as humans. In Cook-Greuter’s definition of fallback, action or behavior, something outside of the normal internal processes of being a human, is a condition.

When asked why we embrace constructive-development theory, Palus responded, “We love these big theories that seem to account for everything.” Yet, the constructive-development and stage development theories do not account for everything. The phenomenon of fallback, while identifiable within the construct of the existing theory, has largely been neglected in the field, because it challenges the positive leanings, the forward emphasis that has been a hallmark of the theory to date. In the section that follows, I begin to stake out the territory of fallback, in hopes of crafting an understanding of fallback that may make the existing stage development theory more complete.

Claim two. What is most important in defining the boundaries of fallback is not whether one expresses a less complex developmental capacity through thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, but that this expression is in the absence of all other options to think, feel, or behave differently.

I spent several months considering the different possibilities offered by the key thinkers for what criteria constituted fallback. McCallum suggested that the experience of fallback is a cognitive constricting of capacity, in which no options exist. Cook-Greuter in her own definition of long-term or permanent fallback, noted it as a total loss of capacity to reason, to see, to feel, what you saw, felt, and reasoned before. She called it a complete loss of access to the later level where one is helplessly subjected to the experience. She claimed, “The whole thing goes down.”

Palus claimed that what fallback is not, is acting from a lower action logic than that which you are capable. Rather, it is only fallback if the highest action logic of which you are capable isn’t working, and you seek access to that action logic, but you just can’t get it. In Palus’s stories of transformational experiences by participants in his own dissertation research, he noted that the participants felt incapacitated, rendered stupid, helpless, unable to cope, existing in a primitive survival state during which the “machine is having trouble working” and is experiencing “breakdown.” Palus wondered what the relationship is between incapacitation and fallback. Incapacitation, a loss of capacity, to disable, is precisely how Berger described the experience of fallback. She said there is a lack of other options, and a disabling of complexity.

While the key thinkers variously used “make meaning,” “making sense,” “operating,” “behaving,” and “loss of access,” in their definitions of fallback, Cook-Greuter was the first to state explicitly that fallback requires action. She noted that fallback is not fantasizing, thoughts, or internal process, because these are all part of who we are as humans. Fallback, in her definition requires behavior, though she conceded that behavior can be broadly defined.

The various interpretations of the criteria for fallback may have connection to the originators' of stage development theory's different conceptions of what characterizes development. Kegan's constructive-developmental framing of developmental stages as orders of development or orders of consciousness focused on meaning-making, differs from the ego-developmental framing of stages by Torbert and Cook-Greuter as action logics.

Cook-Greuter noted that Kegan's Subject-Object Interview measures cognition, how one thinks, how the mind works. Alternatively, her own and Torbert's sentence completion tests measure ego development; how one makes sense including behavior, emotions, affect, moral development, and lines of development (e.g., cognitive, relational).

I posed Cook-Greuter's criteria of action to the other key thinkers. McCallum thought there was merit in being cautious in my definition of fallback, not accounting for everything within it. However, he also acknowledged that there are many possible interpretations for behavior. Torbert who had originally been on the side of meaning-making, came out in favor of a necessity for behavior in fallback. However, he eventually saw the potential for both possibilities. Torbert conceded that fallback could be experienced in one's inward thoughts alone, if recognition and correction take place. However, he could see the possibility of fallback marked by thought only, not action, with the conditions noted above, only occurring in those who hold advanced action logics.

Palus, embracing his definition that privileged the emic point-of-view of the individual experiencing fallback, thought that the answer resided in the subjective

experience of that individual. Berger believed that the criteria for fallback is the loss of other options to think, act, feel, perceive where before other options existed.

Toward the end of the interview season, I started to get clarity on my own views around the criteria for fallback. I began to see where some of the key thinkers agreed with each other and the places where their convergence broke down. As I made sense of this, I wanted to share my newfound hypothesis of the criteria for phenomenon with the key thinkers, and Cook-Greuter, given that her understanding had been the furthest from mine, was at the top of my list. During my final interview with Cook-Greuter I suggested the following:

It could be fallback, even in the absence of action, if it's just your thoughts about something, if it's the only option that you have. So, it's not, "I could be angry, or I could take on this other person's perspective, or I could slander this person." But, if it's just, "I'm angry," and that's the only option I have, [that's fallback]... That we have access to a full distribution of stages at any time, and we are all of those. And, we pull on those when we need to. And, sometimes, we're pulled into those, without choice. And, so the pulling into, even if it's part of our normal range, if we're pulled into that, and we don't have a choice, and we don't have other options, then that's what I think fallback might be.

Cook-Greuter was willing to concede that this definition made sense to her based on the data we have.

I believe that fallback in all of its expressions, not the least of which is thought and feeling, but also including behavior whether observable or not, is a true lived experience in human beings. Further, the classification of the phenomenon as fallback should not be dependent upon an analysis of how it is expressed (through thought, behavior, feelings), but rather on if no other options exist in that moment. Palus regularly noted that the value of a theory is in its usefulness. Berger challenged me to consider both what is most useful and what is most theoretically robust in my creation of a theory

for understanding fallback. I think the criteria for fallback that I outline above addresses the lived experience of the phenomenon, and as such meets the standards of usefulness and robustness of theory that Berger and Palus championed.

The possibility of growth as a result of fallback is the topic of my next claim.

Claim three. Fallback, under the right conditions has significant potential to facilitate developmental growth, and given the increased likelihood for these conditions to be met in post-conventional stages, growth from fallback is more likely to occur at the post-conventional stages of development.

All of the key thinkers believed that fallback had the potential to play a paradoxically positive role in developmental growth. Yet, most of the key thinkers also noted that fallback does not always lead to growth. They identified three developmental possibilities resulting from fallback: one can go up, one can go down, or one can stay the same.

The characteristics of stages along the developmental spectrum clearly point to a connection between one's developmental capacity, one's ability to notice and recover from fallback, and the potential for fallback to be developmental. These characteristics reveal that those who both experience fallback to an earlier stage of development, and who have a center-of-gravity developmental stage that is earlier, take longer to notice fallback. Whereas, later stage individuals exhibit an increased capacity to notice and acknowledge the gap between their espoused way of making sense of the world and the way they actually do make sense of the world. Torbert explained,

As one moves towards later action logics, one would expect that the person would become more cognizant of those differences between large parts of one's life, because one's increasingly looking at one's life across context and over long periods of time, not just moment-to-moment.

According to Torbert, when one's center-of-gravity developmental action logic is in the conventional range, one has less capacity to even recognize that one is falling back to an earlier stage of development, because the awareness of one's behaviors and thoughts in the moment is not present. Berger, Kegan, and Torbert noted that the Diplomat is the earliest stage of development that would have the capacity to notice fallback. Additionally, Torbert contended, "The Strategist action logic is the first one that really begins to try to trace whether we are doing what we think we ought to be doing in a given moment."

In fact, one of McCallum's findings from his 2008 study was that the later one's center-of-gravity action logic, the more one notices the falling back, therefore the shorter the fallback periods (McCallum, 2008). He acknowledged the irony of this in that it may appear that those at post-conventional action logics fall back more frequently. When in fact, those at later action logics have access to an "encompassing consciousness" that more frequently not only notices fallback, but recovers from it—access that those at the conventional action logics do not possess.

Moreover, Berger suggested that post-conventional-measured individuals have the ability to notice experiences of fallback to various places along their developmental band either in the moment or shortly thereafter. Torbert similarly believed that fallback could be recognized close to or in the moment of its occurrence, and posited that the closer to the state of fallback one is able to reflect on it, the faster one's recovery from it. He mused,

It's interesting, the more we talk, the more the rapidity with which one can transform subject into object, and treat it as object, emerges as really a significant element in terms of how fallback works and how one recovers from it.

McCallum championed the importance of awareness which extends beyond the mind in recognizing fallback – getting to the balcony about our mental processes, checking in with the heart, paying attention to one’s desires – resulting in an expansion of freedom to choose to make sense and act differently. McCallum acknowledged that this noticing of incongruence is something that is more a goal and a reality in the later stages.

Cook-Greuter also claimed that those at later action logics have access to more tools to recover from fallback than earlier developmental action logics. She identified a willingness to seek support and an inclination toward self-reflection as two of these tools. Given the likelihood of those at later action logics to seek feedback and support for an experience that reveals one’s weakness and vulnerability, post-conventional individuals would be more likely to experience growth from fallback than would their conventional counterparts.

Contexts supportive of development would be those in which skills are developed and feedback is given related to the next level of development. Torbert pointed out that late stage individuals (Strategists and beyond) tend to recognize environmental effects on their developmental capacities and attempt to structure the environment to support their development. Torbert explained,

I think what is true is that only people going into post-conventional stages begin to have a deep interest in [fallback]. It tends to be, in general, too threatening for people whose identity is completely enmeshed with their actual behavior. Where they don’t have any distance between the two. And, it ultimately requires looking back and forth between behavior and intent, to do anything with it.

It seems clear that developmental growth as a result of fallback is possible, and where one sits along the developmental spectrum would influence one’s ability to not only recognize and reflect on one’s fallback experiences, but also to grow as a result of

them. This is important, because it highlights how the description of stage characteristics in the current stage development theory informs an understanding of fallback.

Specifically, this understanding suggests that growth from fallback, given the later stages' propensity to not only notice it, but also to access their more abundant tools to recover and develop as a result of it, is more likely to occur in post-conventional-measured individuals. In the next claim, more nuance is added to the understanding of fallback.

Claim four. Fallback is part of a mutually-defining term, the other component of which is spring forward.

The key thinkers often contemplated the experience of fallback and growth across the developmental lifespan. Berger noted that in the earlier action logics, growth occurs in opposition to one's earlier self. The unsuitability of prior sense-making systems is a catalyst for growth. She claimed that later in the developmental spectrum, there may be no choice but to "fall forward" in response to fallback. She explained,

Something made you leave in the first place – some sense of the unsuitability of that sense-making system. And, that thing is going to happen again, right? I think we don't stay back there, because we can't put the toothpaste back in the tube. Like you can't actually, you can't un-know a more complex world. You can deny it for a time, but I don't think you can un-know it. So, I guess you have to fall forward, too.

McCallum acknowledged that in fallback there is a loss, there is suffering, there is something that we must experience as absent that *can* snap us back to attention, make us notice, make us question. He argued that this noticing of loss, suffering, what is absent, this noticing of fallback might bring us closer to the divine. He explained, "If that's our fundamental, existential orientation, then regression itself is something that is precious, at some level."

All of the key thinkers, as they worked their way into definitions of fallback, did so by distinguishing it from regression or permanent fallback. Kegan claimed that genuine regression would actually be devolution, which he described as the complete loss of complex functions. On the contrary, he described fallback as a *temporary* inability to use one's most complex functions. *Serious regression* is the term Cook-Greuter coined for acting from an earlier stage of development from which there is no return, or no hope of return. Torbert noted that permanent fallback would entail a real loss of capacity, and could be caused by old age, physical trauma, or brain trauma. McCallum claimed that permanent fallback could occur when the actual self meets so many instances of not living up to the idealized self over an extended period that it gives up. Additionally, Palus identified permanent fallback as a deterioration of an action logic that may not come back.

Berger noted that fallback by its nature must be temporary. It could not be permanent, because permanent would then be a new normal of developmental sense-making in which individuals are unable to see the fallback, because they *are* it. She also suggested that in temporary fallback, you know that you will recover what is lost. However, this is not the case in permanent fallback.

Berger first suggested the possibility of the mutually-defining terms of "fallback" and "spring forward." She noted that just as there is no big Self without small self, perhaps fallback is not regression, but regression with perspective and growth. Upon reflection, I discovered a preponderance of mutually-defining terms in developmental theory. There can be no post-conventional stages without conventional stages. There's no consciousness without unconscious, no good without evil. It then follows, that there

can be no fallback without spring forward. Berger suggested that the dual nature of the concept helps make it “identifiable, nameable, study-able, possible.” As already noted, the value of a theory is in its usefulness and theoretical robustness.

Therefore, recovery must be implicit in our definition of fallback. I propose that the term fallback, the phenomenon of fallback does assume movement, but not developmental incapacitation in isolation. I posit that to be fallback, it must be accompanied by progressive movement or *springing forward*.

Claim five. There are five overarching causes of fallback. These include: ordinary triggers, physiological brain responses, contextual “gravitational pulls,” challenges to identity, and unresolved trauma.

Ordinary triggers. Ordinary triggers are our regular companions in the complex and fast-paced world in which we live, therefore it’s important to be aware of their tendency to pull us into our smaller self. Torbert explained that ordinary triggers prompt a passive digression into more habitual, less strategic, less complex developmental capacities. These include laziness, exhaustion, depression, group norms, stress, fear, tension, crisis, rage, shame, loss, overwork, failure, hunger, and jet lag. McCallum also identified circumstances of uncertainty, ambiguity, complexity, and illness, as ordinary triggers of fallback. These additional ordinary triggers noted by McCallum seem to also be those that trigger fallback through the physiological incapacitation of the cognitive mind by the brain, which is the second overarching cause of fallback.

Physiological brain responses. Kegan referenced brain scientist David Rock, and his SCARF model, each letter indicating a specific threat area: S = status, C = certainty, A= autonomy/freedom, R = relationships, F= fairness. The amygdala, where emotion

and primitive flight-fight responses are housed, when triggered by a threat to one of these SCARF areas, can override the neocortex where cognition resides. Kegan suggested that these triggers can lead to the experience of being taken over by a less complex way of making meaning, of feeling destabilized and at psychological risk. Effectively, there is a biochemical response to certain stimuli that may temporarily not allow one to access the cognitive developmental tools that may constitute one's best Self, one's developmental center-of-gravity. Perhaps this is the physiological explanation for why certain circumstances, particularly those tied to one's primitive self (e.g., those involving family) or involving risk (e.g., illness, injury, threat, fear, even if it is the 21st century version of these) nearly inevitably catalyze fallback.

McCallum also noted that the ability to quell the brain's response to these stimuli are the same awareness and mindfulness practices that are also so seemingly important to avoiding fallback, recovering from fallback, and growing from fallback – and the same practices that those at later developmental action logics are drawn to.

Kegan, Cook-Greuter, and Berger all noted that parent/child relationships may prompt a primitive response from the brain. Berger explained, "...The relationships we have with our most primal companions are our parents and our kids, I think. Those are ancient relationships...ancient in our lifespan, and also ancient in our mammalian progression. They bring up drives to protect at all costs."

Cook-Greuter also pointed to the ancient triggers inherent in these relationships.

She said,

I'm just guessing, but from what we read about neurobiology; that there must be pathways in the brain that are so strong, because they have been there for so long, and reactivated again, and again, and again, that they're just very strong. So, when they get triggered, you know, it happens.

Parent and child relationships and the home environments in which they originated were identified within another overarching cause of fallback, contextual “gravitational pulls.”

Contextual “gravitational pulls.” Palus identified family relationships, organizations, and societies as contexts that may pull individuals back to a lower developmental level. He noted that the majority of individuals reside at this less complex space, given the rarity of individuals in the post-conventional stages in our environments. He suggested that these are all settings in which individuals tend to operate at the “lowest common denominator.” Palus said, “I’m really entertaining the idea that the when [of fallback] is most of the time, and the why [of fallback] is, because we can’t help it.” He continued, “I think it’s a little bit of a fancy we have to think that there’s significant numbers of people spending significant amounts of time at this advanced level, and that it’s kind of rare that they fall back.”

Several of the key thinkers noted that organizational cultures in the West are often Achiever in orientation. This is not surprising given that this is the developmental level supported in broader Western society. Cook-Greuter found in her own research and practice that the developmental norms of organizations can be particularly challenging for post-conventional individuals, because these environments don’t appreciate what those at later stages have to offer. She suggested that these environments often cause individuals to revert to what’s familiar rather than what’s most complex. She noted, if an individual is unable to find respite from the developmental oppression in other areas of life, this could possibly lead one to further regression.

McCallum suggested that there's something about the present home holding environment (where one physically resides), perhaps the one that has known us for some time, that pulls us back to who we were earlier. Cook-Greuter also pointed to the developmental pull backwards of the home environment. She classified this kind of fallback as temporary, suggesting that when one leaves the trigger environment, one is able to recover to one's "average" developmental capacity and see the situation differently.

She also identified communication in a foreign language and a change to one's culture as other environments in which one's developmental capacity is limited. She noted that one feels "clumsy," "dumb," "like a child" when unable to express oneself and not be perceived as one is accustomed. Cook-Greuter pointed to the challenges to one's identity that these cultural contexts elicit. In fact, she suggested that contextual norms in any of these settings may result in a change in the way one presents one's self given that the context won't recognize one's more complex self.

It is clear that contextual gravitational pulls may cause us to shift from an espoused way of making meaning and acting to a lower developmental expression in a different circumstance. The inevitability of the gravitational pull on one's center-of-gravity, particularly when the center-of-gravity is in the post-conventional range, is powerfully influenced by the preponderance of conventional range sense-making, discourse, and action in the contexts which surround us.

Challenges to identity. Berger, Torbert, and McCallum identified challenges to one's identity that may take the form of major life events, new experiences, and "disorienting dilemmas" as an overarching cause of fallback. Berger noted that major life

events which may include unemployment, bad marriages, the death of a loved one, illness or injury often catalyze fallback. She also identified new experiences that fall under the category of major life events (e.g., new parenthood, taking a new job, moving to a new country). She remarked on the paradox of these “rich learning zones,” in that these seemingly positive circumstances, those that are often cited by the theorists as catalyzing developmental growth, allow us to be in touch with our full capacities, *both* big and small. It’s easy to see how these events, whether positive or negative in nature, could significantly challenge one’s identity, and trigger feelings of loss of control.

Torbert described the experience of fallback prompted by new experiences as, “You’ve gone down a fairly deep, but familiar tunnel. It’s not a scary tunnel, or it seems less scary than what’s above ground.” McCallum noted,

When we are taken out of our familiar circumstances, and the kinds of conventions and supports that prop up our best behaviors, our best capacities, are taken away – yeah, that’s going to be a condition that’s probably going to instigate a little bit of regression.

McCallum pointed to Jack Mezirow’s “disorienting dilemmas” as another catalyst for fallback in the category of challenges to one’s identity. McCallum described disorienting dilemmas as experiences that transform or challenge one’s perspectives, unsettle one’s meaning-making, add complexity, and cause cognitive dissonance. He noted that the realization that one’s biases are no longer adequate for describing reality has a real emotional impact.

When McCallum described this catalyst for fallback, I thought of the group relations conference that was the setting for McCallum’s dissertation research in which he found the existence of fallback. Cook-Greuter also pointed to group relations conferences when identifying challenges to identity as a catalyst for fallback. She noted

that group relations conferences reveal the gap between one's ideal self and one's actual, and noted that these settings precipitate an extreme challenge to one's identity, revealing how little in control individuals at all levels are.

Unresolved trauma. Unresolved trauma was variously referred to by the key thinkers as "unintegrated aspects of self," "encapsulation," primary signifiers, and "big assumptions." This trauma, by whatever name, was described as creating a "magnetic pull," "onion holes," "tethers," or "potholes" to earlier stages in one's development. Unintegrated aspects of self were regularly connected to the habitual fallback stage that individuals experience.

Kegan suggested that when trauma happens at a time in one's life when one is constructing the world in a simpler way, there is a literal or psychological feeling of one's life being at risk. He explained,

People may have a kind of experience, which we could call dissociation. And, the way that you survived that situation was to kind of remove yourself in some way from it... And, it has a big cost, which is usually that some piece of your experience gets bracketed off, or *encapsulated*.

Kegan suggested that while the rest of the self develops and becomes more complex, the bracketed self is left at that historical and developmental time, and that way of meaning is preserved until one is psychologically strong enough to reintegrate parts that were left behind. The unintegrated aspect and its hopeful eventual reintegration is not itself a fallback, rather the encountering of some person or some thing that resembles that unresolved aspect of development may cause the fallback.

Trauma as a trigger for fallback has links to various other theorists, as well. Torbert said,

I sort of take an Erik Erikson perspective on this, in that he talks about the fact that people don't complete a certain action logic or stage of life – he didn't use the words "action logic," obviously – that they experienced trauma during that particular stage, and they don't resolve it fully... They become capable of later stages, but they're susceptible if situations resemble the trauma situation... to falling back to the earlier stage, I think...

Berger referencing Kegan and Lahey's *big assumption exercise*, noted that these developmental potholes are often tied to assumptions born in a younger self that later become tethers for fallback to one's smaller self.

While the various key thinkers gave these five overarching causes of fallback different names and assigned them to assorted categories, there was significant evidence across key thinkers that these are the primary catalysts for fallback. However, developmental transition as a catalyst for fallback, a cause that I offered to the key thinkers for consideration, was nearly universally rejected.

Not developmental transition. Torbert originated the idea of developmental transition as an overarching cause of fallback. He explained that the very nature of transition involves a falling back to what's known in the process of developing to the newly aspiring (and still largely unknown and not-yet-mastered) meaning-making structure. He noted,

[In] any movement from one action logic to the next in the leap forward, there's a period when one is ambivalent between the two meaning-making systems, and one is simply returning to one's settled center-of-gravity, and then moving forward to the newly aspiring center-of-gravity. So, certainly in the move between action logics, one can see it's inevitable there.

However, Kegan, McCallum, and Berger agreed that developmental transition, while marked by experiences of fallback should not be included as an overarching cause of fallback. They argued that fallback in developmental transition is just a natural element of development that is already accounted for in the theory. Berger noted that the

see-saw motion during developmental transition is a normal piece of growing. One has not yet fully transcended the next stage of development. Therefore, she offered, perhaps it's only fallback when one is all the way forward, secure or embedded in a developmental stage.

Yet, both McCallum and Palus pointed out that if being more explicit about the likelihood of fallback during developmental transition might help people understand what is happening, accept it, lean into it, and have hope, therefore yielding a better outcome, perhaps there is merit. Palus explained,

Maybe if you equip people better to accept these transitional periods as legitimate, and kind of lean into them a little bit, as it were, or expect them, or plan for them, or take two aspirins and go to bed early, that sort of thing, then maybe people would do better.

This list of catalysts for fallback is in no way exhaustive, and as Berger pointed out, the causes of fallback are as varied as the individuals experiencing them. Yet, there is value in naming them. Further, there is great value in being reminded of them, whether for the first time or the ninety-first.

The catalysts for and the experience of fallback were regularly addressed throughout my data collection. Yet, every time I heard these catalysts described or read about them, I knew that this was important, even for me, someone who is immersed in this work, in this data, in this environment through my academic institution, and the communities that remind me of the importance of balance in my non-academic, non-professional life. Naming the catalysts, remembering the catalysts, provides a powerful reminder that complacency is at the door. The value of understanding fallback is in its capacity to remind us that we need to be diligent to our own development, to minding the way we show up in the world, and measuring it (without shame or judgment but with a

commitment to reflection) against the way we like to tell ourselves and others that we do. And, a critical component of recognizing fallback is recognizing the circumstances which prompt it in us, which identifying the overarching causes of fallback helps us to do. In my final claim, I address the importance of understanding fallback in developmental theory.

Claim six. Having a theory for understanding fallback acknowledges the full lived experience of what it is to be human, exposes the myth of consistency and onward-and-upward development both in self and in developmental theory, and provides the basis for reconceptualizing fallback as a paradoxically positive aspect of human development, which has broader implications for the exercise of leadership.

In our final interview, Cook-Greuter and I spoke about the challenge to creating absolute theory in social sciences, particularly that which involves the complexity of human life. She said,

That's exactly the idea of a MAP [Maturity Assessment Profile], is an abstraction, and the useful guiding thing. But, it's always a generalization. It never can do justice to the actual complexity of human life. It just can't. The periodic table – that works. Some of the natural sciences, some of the things work. Nobody has yet challenged the periodic table. But, in human affairs, there's only approximations – better ones or lesser ones.

The factual basis of our existing theories of human development was regularly a topic in my interviews with Palus. He often cautioned against proclamations and judgments about fallback, claiming that we just don't know, we don't have enough data, that the facts aren't all available. Yet, he later noted that the truth, the facts, can lead us down a destructive path, when he recounted the story of the woman who studied evolution, and later claimed this factual knowledge destroyed her faith. He identified wisdom communities and aligning oneself with the growth aspect of their narratives as

supporting growth from fallback. He cautioned that society is in danger of killing these narratives.

Palus suggested that perhaps the stories we live into lead to more constructive development when they are not necessarily completely factual, but they are positive. Through this alternative approach, the truth, the validity of a theory, came up in a different way, a way that privileged not having all the facts, because the facts can sometimes be destructive.

Still – five years following the publishing of McCallum’s evidence that all eighteen of his participants whose developmental scores fell all along the developmental spectrum experienced fallback; two years after my own exploration of the lived experience of fallback in three post-conventional-measured individuals; and four months after my theoretical exploration of fallback with six key thinkers in the fields of human and leadership development – we do not have all the facts to fully understand fallback. Yet an understanding of fallback continues to be, and is perhaps becoming exponentially more important in both the contexts of human development and leadership.

Understanding fallback is important, because it exposes the myth of forward movement in developmental theory, and makes the theory more whole. Berger explained, “You’re making developmental theory more textured, more nuanced, more whole, by describing this piece of the theory that people have mostly ignored. Because, developmental theory is so forward-looking, and it’s necessary to also be looking back.” McCallum noted that understanding fallback reveals the “blind spots” in the field and paints a more realistic picture of development that acknowledges our shadows. Palus

suggested that understanding fallback challenges us in the fields of human and leadership development to think beyond the Expert norm we currently fall prey to.

It is important to understand fallback, because naming it acknowledges the phenomenon, allows individuals to recognize and recover from it, and reveals the lessons that may be learned from fallback, thereby making it less painful in the long run. Palus suggested that a theory is useful if people can understand it. Even if not perfect, it helps to frame, to have assumptions and a common language.

Torbert noted the importance of having both a theory of development and a theory for understanding fallback, because the theory helps one relearn how to pay attention and recognize fallback, use this recognition to reframe one's experience, and recover, given that fallback puts the possibility of recovery right in front of you. McCallum also pointed to an understanding of fallback offering the opportunity to reflect without shame or judgment, recover, and grow.

It is important to understand fallback, because it fosters compassion for one's self and others, and offers a long-term perspective on the whole process of development. Palus claimed that understanding the process of development and fallback as a real component of it, allows one to have empathy and hope. The value of understanding fallback in the process of human development is significant. Berger offered, "That idea that when you lose yourself, you are going to find yourself, again. When you're in your small self, big Self is not gone. It's just not with you right at that moment." She recounted what she tells her son in his moments of fallback,

I want you to know, everybody feels this way. This way that you are feeling, it's a momentary feeling. I don't know whether it's going to last a little while or a long time. But, there is this now, and then there is something else that comes after now. This is a moment.

An understanding of fallback is important to the exercise of leadership for many of the same reasons it's important in the context of human development. Fallback reveals the myth of consistency that both individuals and organizations operate under, helping leaders and organizations identify and acknowledge the gap between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use. Torbert explained,

It allows you to see discrepancy between what you or your group or your organization claims it means to be doing and what it's actually doing...in order to become more response-able at more moments of time. To actually see what's going on and work from that insight rather than operating based on a myth about what's happening.

Palus suggested that developmental theory and fallback as an aspect of it encourages a view of the whole person over time, rather than a moment-to-moment judgment. Similarly, Berger pointed out that understanding fallback allows leaders to see people as growing and changing, not still. She noted that it allows leaders to explore and create contexts and conditions that encourage the presence of the big Self. Yet, understanding fallback, acknowledging it as a reality in human life, also allows space for the small self to show up in organizations.

Understanding fallback and its capacity for developmental spring forward is important, because it reframes fallback in a positive light, and in organizational contexts, reframes failure as opportunities to grow. McCallum identified acceptance of failure as ground for growth, and Palus noted that at the Center for Creative Leadership, optimism and resiliency are identified as traits of leadership. Berger referred to research that has shown that organizational cultures with a mindset that growth occurs from failure experience greater innovation, creativity, healthy treatment of conflict, and team success. Insomuch as fallback may both be viewed as failure, and failure may serve as a catalyst

for fallback, framing fallback in a positive light and treating it as an opportunity for growth may lead to organizational success.

It is important to understand fallback, because it reveals and provides an understanding of the fact that we do not always show up our best, most complex Selves. This revelation has significant implications beyond the theory and into practice, on one's self and in our interactions with others. Understanding fallback allows us not to judge others based on how they show up in any one moment. It increases empathy not just for others, but for self, because it acknowledges that we are not consistent in our meaning-making. An understanding of fallback challenges us to be mindful of making those experiences of fallback, learning experiences. It encourages both a long-term view of development and a moment-to-moment awareness. The former for forgiveness and hope. The latter to remind us that development is a process, is work that must be undertaken throughout one's life. This understanding of fallback allows us to have hope in the work.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of fallback through interviews with six key thinkers in the field of human development and leadership development. This research was intended to: construct an understanding of how the fallback phenomenon fits in the existing theory of human development, elucidate the phenomenon of fallback and its potential for transforming the developmental growth of individuals, develop a clear and universal definition of fallback, and identify the best design and focus for future empirical research on the fallback phenomenon.

I employed a qualitative research design using grounded theory methodology to explore five research questions:

1. How do we more deeply understand the fallback phenomenon as situated within current developmental theory?
2. How do key thinkers in the field of adult development and leader development understand the fallback phenomenon within their own theoretical frame?
3. What role may fallback play in developmental growth?
4. How does each key thinker make sense of the stories that post-conventional-measured individuals tell about their fallback experiences?
5. How might the fallback phenomenon be researched with participants in the future?

Through the evidence generated from an exploration of these research questions with the key thinkers, I asserted the following six claims:

1. So much exists in the current developmental theory that accounts for the fallback

phenomenon, yet, the aspects of stage development theory that focus on the bi-directional nature of human development, movement both forward and back, have largely been ignored.

2. What is most important in defining the boundaries of fallback is not whether one expresses a less complex developmental capacity through thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, but that this expression is in the absence of all other options to think, feel, or behave differently.
3. Fallback, under the right conditions has significant potential for facilitating developmental growth, and given the increased likelihood for these conditions to be met in post-conventional stages according to the characteristics that distinguish them, growth from fallback is more likely to occur at the post-conventional stages of development.
4. Fallback is part of a mutually-defining term, the other component of which is spring forward.
5. There are five overarching causes of fallback. These include: ordinary triggers, physiological brain responses, contextual “gravitational pulls,” challenges to identity, and unresolved trauma.
6. Having a theory for understanding fallback acknowledges the full lived experience of what it is to be human, exposes the myth of consistency and onward and upward development both in self and in developmental theory, and provides the basis for reconceptualizing fallback as a paradoxically positive aspect of human development, which has broader implications for the exercise of leadership.

Significance

The utility of this research can be demonstrated through two primary arguments. First, this research addresses aspects of the theory of human development—specifically, the assumption that development is always forward-moving. Even one disconfirming case is sufficient to demonstrate that this theory, as it currently exists, is inadequate. In the pilot study, I found three. In McCallum's research, he found eighteen. And, in this theoretical study on fallback in human development, all six of the key thinkers confirmed that development is more fluid and bi-directional than the theory suggests. Therefore, developing an understanding of exactly how the phenomenon of fallback fits within developmental theory is important.

Second, since the phenomenon of fallback in stage development theory has not been studied extensively, the findings from the pilot study combined with the findings from this theoretical exploration with six key thinkers provides a detailed and invaluable launching point to inform future studies.

The purpose of this research at its conceptualization was to develop a theory of fallback. As the research season draws to a close, I realize how far away I've gotten from my original bold intent to come away from this dissertation with a theory of fallback. In fact, as has marked so much of my prior research in this area, I have many more questions than answers.

For four-and-a-half years, I dedicated the majority of my academic explorations and intellectual musings to stage development theory. It has only been in the last seven months that I've begun to see how the theory as it exists, could already account for a full range of possibilities in any moment, and include the phenomenon of fallback.

Specifically, in Palus's exploration of the metaphors around development and center-of-gravity, but also in hearing Berger's, then Cook-Greuter's, then when revisiting Tobert's interpretation of the range of development, I see the theory in a whole different way. Yet, the theory hasn't changed.

Even if the phenomenon of unconsciously employing a less complex meaning-making system than that which one is capable – what I refer to as fallback – is already implied in the existing theory, it absolutely was not clear to me. Therefore, my contribution may not be a theory of fallback, may not even be a theory for understanding fallback. However, what I hope it will provide is a different way of looking at stage development theory, a different lens that brings the perhaps-already-accounted-for concept of fallback out of the shadows, so that it can be seen as real, as present.

Further, my goal in illuminating fallback is not to see it so it can be rejected, but to see it, so it can be embraced. *This*, too, is me. And, giving attention to *this*, naming *this*, may help me and others expand our range of options not only for how we make meaning, or show up, or exist in relationship with others, but for how we enter into relationship with self...more authentically...more whole.

In the following pages, I reveal my own process of loss and discovery as I poked at the edges of a theory in hopes of making it more perfect, and ended up with something more messy and perhaps more imprecise, yet all the more hopeful and beautiful than when I started. I explore the key thinkers' and my own evolution of understanding about fallback in human development; examining from whence we came, where the theory stands at present, and what lies ahead for theory, research, and practice. I discuss not only the limits of the theory, but also the limits of this research. Finally, I conclude this

chapter by reflecting on the parallels between my exploration of fallback and my own process of discovery.

Background

In 2008 I was introduced to the field of human development and within that, constructive-development and stage development theories. These theories made sense to me as I reflected on the journey through my life. I could see my evolution along the developmental path, and it was tremendously helpful to have language and a theory as I reflected on my own life, assessed where I was at present, and created a vision for myself in the future.

Yet, where the theory broke down, in my eyes, was in its claims that development is unidirectional, always forward, greater, more evolved. In my own life, I knew that this had not been the case. I could identify many times in the course of a day during which I felt, hard as I may try, that I could not access the highest level of sense-making that I was capable. And, there were extended periods in my own history when I felt my developmental capacity was utterly wiped out, and I truly feared it would never come back.

Nearly five years ago, I began my exploration to figure out if I was an anomaly in a proven theory of stage development, or if my experience was one that was shared by others. It became clear very quickly that I was not a statistical outlier in this theory. In fact, my experience of developmental peaks and valleys seemed to be the norm. So, why did the theories of stage development and constructive-development, theories of increasing complexity, not represent the reality of the complexity of human life? This is the question I set out to answer.

Evolution of Understanding Fallback in Constructive-Development Theory

Challenges to understanding fallback within constructive-development theory. The phenomenon of fallback in constructive-development and stage development theories is noticeably absent. During the course of this research, it became clear that the theoretical omission of the phenomenological reality of fallback might be attributed to challenges which include: the negative framing of fallback in the midst of a predominantly positivist field, the difficulty in crafting a definition given the myriad ways in which the phenomenon can be made sense of, and the challenges to assigning criteria to a phenomenon that has been very little studied.

Negative framing of fallback in the positivist field of constructive-development.

Aside from McCallum, who has done extensive thinking about the fallback phenomenon through his own research, the key thinkers noted that they had never thought about the various aspects of the theory or the experience of fallback, at least not in the way I was asking them to think about it. How could this be?

All of the key thinkers except Kegan explicitly noted that the constructive-development field is overly focused on onward-and-upward and the positive aspects of development. And, fallback, has heretofore largely been framed as negative. Cook-Greuter hesitated to name the phenomenon fallback, variously referring to examples of individuals operating from an earlier stage than one is capable as “drag back,” “trigger back,” and the “hurdles of development.” Palus’s hesitation to name fallback as such and to make it a theory originated from his concern that doing so would imply a rejection of an earlier part of self that exists no matter what one’s measured developmental stage.

The negative connotations of fallback in the positively-oriented constructivist field have limited discussion, theorizing, and research on this phenomenon of fallback which is so obviously a component of human development. Therefore, the exploration that I undertook with the key thinkers was one of largely uncharted territory. I challenged the key thinkers to ponder this critical area of study that they had not thought extensively about before. I told Tobert during an interview,

I do know that I'm – that's kind of what's wonderful for me – that I'm not asking you questions that you just, you've thought about it, you've written about it, you've studied it. It is nice to have you thinking through this, often for the first time. And, I know it's not easy.

Indeed, it was not easy, yet it was incredibly valuable having the opportunity to plumb the existing theory and the phenomenon of fallback with these individuals; the originators of the theory and those who explore human development both in research and practice.

Divergence of understanding and lack of data. This exploration provided space to probe the metaphors of developmental theory and fallback (e.g., center-of-gravity, onions and onion holes, gravitational pull, orders of consciousness), thereby making them real. Examining the fallback phenomenon through each key thinker's theoretical frame revealed both areas of convergence and differences of thought around both the existing theory and the phenomenon of fallback. For example, Cook-Greuter's, Palus's, and Torbert's definition of fallback required action. Yet, meaning-making from a less complex stage of development than one is capable was the determinant in Berger's and Kegan's definitions. McCallum's definition fell somewhere in the middle. Interestingly, loss – of capacity, of other options, of complexity – was a thread that ran through each key thinker's exploration of fallback. Cook-Greuter and Kegan considered the role of the distance between one's most complex level of development and the level to which one

has fallen. Palus, Berger, and Cook-Greuter contemplated the amount of time in fallback as a potential criteria for it being assessed as such.

Frequently throughout the season of data collection, the key thinkers would ask themselves, would ask me, would ask the cosmos questions about the boundaries of fallback. Berger asked: What's the time boundary around losing capacities and recovering them? Or is there one? Is it only fallback if you use this loss as a vantage point for growth? Is it permanent regression if you never regain capacities? Cook-Greuter and Palus also pointed to the amount of time in fallback as an important criteria. Cook-Greuter further emphasized the importance of understanding how the distance between one's center-of-gravity developmental level and that to which one falls may dictate the scope of fallback.

So often, these questions and ponderings begged the ultimate categorization question which came up time and again in this study: is fallback in the eye of the experiencer or the observer? Palus wondered: Is it enough that an individual subjectively self-identifies their phenomenological experience as fallback? Because, one's phenomenological experience may feel like fallback, but it may be temporary disequilibrium. So, does it need to be externally diagnosed? The examination of the fallback phenomenon through the eyes of each key thinker revealed the importance of understanding how fallback is experienced across the developmental lifespan, and if the classification of fallback is based on one's subjective experience or a diagnosis by others.

Even though my personal theory of development mandated that fallback must be a component, I, too, came to this research not understanding exactly how and where it fit. In reflection, mine was such a rigid, Expert approach to developmental theory coming in:

we have this center-of-gravity action logic, and this is who we are most of the time. And, when it's not us, we're falling back. Even though I had been studying stage development theory for years, I hadn't allowed myself to think beyond, "We are this stage. This is how things work. And, these are the steps that you take."

Over time through this research process, I began to see where that's not the case, that we're not one thing most of the time. It's what we'd like to be. Especially from an ego perspective, "Yes, I want to be that best Self." But, it's realistically probably not who we are. Berger talked about the layers of the onion to describe the full range of development to which individuals have access. Palus really dug into the center-of-gravity metaphor and claimed that it's much more messy than this idealized version of development that has heretofore been perpetuated by those theorizing, researching, and practicing in the field. Getting my head around the shortcomings of the theory, letting go of some of the perfection of what I thought stage development theory is, was challenging for me. Yet, that's not life. Life is complicated, and so is development.

This exploration of what we know about constructive-development and fallback revealed the many things we do not know. Even within their own theoretical descriptions, there were some contradictions and some evolutions of understanding by the key thinkers. Clearly, this is true of mine, as well. However, this research revealed that an understanding of fallback existed in the current stage development, all along. We just needed to find our way to it.

Our current sense-making of fallback in constructive-development theory.

What this exploration revealed is that so much exists in current developmental theory that accounts for the fallback phenomenon: in the full range of development one has access to

(versus one point on a line of development), in the characteristics of each stage, the capacity one has to notice and their response to this noticing, one's desire to continue to grow, and the increasing tools one has to create an environment that fosters growth. However, these are not the aspects of development that are highlighted.

Eventually over the course of data collection, if not from the outset, fallback as a paradoxically positive aspect of development became clear to all of the key thinkers. Exploring the fallback phenomenon through a positive frame allowed the key thinkers to poke holes in the assumptions of constructive-development. This research brought to light the complexity of both the ways in which humans develop and the phenomenon of fallback.

The discourse among the key thinkers may have been slightly different in the way in which they framed the fallback phenomenon or the specific recommendations for its scope. Yet, the key thinkers' underlying conceptual framing revealed that: fallback does exist, and it can be accounted for in the existing developmental theory; it has the potential to play a significant role in development, particularly with those at the post-conventional stages; and while it may seem to be developmental decline in the moment, fallback involves developmentally springing forward.

To be sure, there was not consensus by the key thinkers on either the criteria or the scope of a definition of fallback, yet it seemed as the interview season progressed, they were ever more hopeful that I would come up with one. That had been my hope, as well. However, the key thinkers and I individually and collectively underwent an evolution in our conceptualization of fallback, an evolution that is still taking place. Ultimately, the exploration of the phenomenon with each key thinker demonstrated the

challenges in naming and exploring fallback heretofore, and the challenges we need to address in order to name and explore fallback in the future.

What we need in order to move beyond our current understanding.

According to the evidence in this study, fallback is a phenomenon that involves temporary developmental decline, which ultimately leads to recovery, and in some cases developmental growth. Understood as such, fallback encourages looking at the whole person over time, rather than in the moment-to-moment possibilities of developmental inconsistency. It can now be embraced in the field, discussed, explored, played with.

Assumptions made by those in the field of constructive-development have encouraged the negative framing of fallback, thereby making it a neglected area of research and discussion. Through this exploration of the fallback phenomenon in current stage development theory, the value of understanding fallback is clear. Even in the absence of a concrete definition of fallback in which all criteria are solidified, we now have a way of understanding the phenomenon that has not existed in the past.

Why is there not the theory and definition of fallback that I promised at the outset of this study? The answer is that we just don't know enough. The phenomenon of fallback needs to be further studied, and a definition and a theory of fallback should come from this future empirical research, once we have it.

Implications and recommendations for theory. The exploration of fallback with the key thinkers played at what Palus described as “the ragged edges” of the theory, adding complexity and generating even more questions. While I believe that the positive, humanist approach to stage development is valuable, I argue it's equally vital that the theory acknowledges the lived experience of development even when it's not forward-

moving. I offer several recommendations for key thinkers, scholars, and researchers as we continue to shepherd the evolution of stage development and constructive-development theories. These include: play at the edges of what is known and studied in the fields of stage and constructive-development; paint the full picture in descriptions of developmental capacity, not just the ideal; and explicitly acknowledge the lived experience of fallback in human development.

I challenge the key thinkers in this study, and all of us interested in developmental theory to engage in discussions about what exists at “the ragged edges” of stage development theory, and to move beyond “the Expert-level discourse,” which Palus claimed marked the field and the theory. I encourage us in the field of human development to engage in discussions about what is not known, not just with those with whom we agree, but with those who challenge us to think differently. My recommendation here is that we treat development of the theory as we would development of self, which is to surround ourselves with those who would both challenge and support us. And, be open to being transformed.

I recommend that future descriptions of stage development theory emphasize that development is not about one’s measured center-of-gravity. As is clear from this study, one’s center-of-gravity score paints just one aspect of one’s developmental picture. Theoretical descriptions should make clear that there is a full range of developmental options, and acknowledge that one’s center-of-gravity, while an important piece of information, does not begin to describe the full complexity of one’s development.

Those in the field of human development need to acknowledge the lived experience of fallback in constructive-development theory by explicitly addressing the

phenomenon in future publications and presentations and encouraging the next generation of theorists to do so, as well. I encourage the open exploration of the role that fallback may play in one's constructive development, and the conditions that encourage this to happen. While these findings indicate that fallback has the capacity to play a paradoxically positive role in developmental growth, I encourage the field to embrace all aspects of development, even those that look scary or like decline in the moment, realizing that the role they play in the long term is one that is integral to growth.

Implications and recommendations for research. Empirical research on constructive-development and stage development theories has been limited and largely theoretical in nature. The same ground has been traversed over and over again, as we study the participants that are available, and ask the questions we know we can answer, rather than pursue the “truths” that lay beyond our grasp. Adult development theory has explored the data that pervades its surroundings: the conventional stages of development at which 95% of the population resides; Western society and culture, and more specifically those who are privileged, educated, resource-rich, and homogenous within it; and the aspects of the theory that we know how to measure. Yet, this leaves a whole swath of developmental levels, populations, questions, and phenomena unaddressed in the research. Fallback in human development is one of these.

One of the primary reasons I did not conduct an empirical exploration of the lived experience of fallback with participants rather than a theoretical study for my own dissertation rather than a theoretical study is that I wasn't sure how to do so. Having the opportunity to explore what future research may look like with both researchers and practitioners was invaluable. While the key thinkers identified challenges to researching

fallback in the future, explicitly probing the possibilities removed some of the roadblocks to studying the phenomenon.

Challenges do exist, yet the opportunities are numerous. Particularly now that fallback can be understood and framed as a phenomenon that has the potential to play a role in developmental growth, perhaps researchers in the field will be more inclined to study it. Researching the phenomenon with each key thinker also allowed the possibility for other explanations for fallback to emerge and to be researched in the future. The key thinkers drew multiple roadmaps that will allow us to more fully, precisely, and with greater data “fence the field” (as Berger would say) of fallback in human development and redraw the boundaries of the existing theories where needed.

As Berger noted, our understanding of fallback is so limited, research of any kind would be valuable. Determining what would be research-worthy on this topic is like “shooting at a barn.” No matter what your specific target, you really can’t miss. Nevertheless, having some specific targets to aim for may help.

The boundaries of our knowledge have been dictated by the limits of our instruments. The existing developmental measures, while providing an important piece of information, offer only one piece. Future research should focus on the development of additional and the refinement of existing instruments that will allow us to identify fallback and examine an individual’s sense-making at a given time. Given the resource-heavy (i.e., time, money, expertise in administering and scoring) nature of existing instruments, the development of instruments that are easier and less expensive to both administer and assess would be tremendously valuable, particularly in extending the scope of the theory beyond research, into practice.

What we have now is a theoretical supposition that fallback requires spring forward, and that the propensity for the noticing, recovery, and the possibility of growth that is necessary for fallback is most likely to be possible at the post-conventional stages, thereby making fallback more of a post-conventional phenomenon. However, we next need to test out this hypothesis and explore the experience of fallback across both the developmental (conventional to post-conventional) and temporal (young to old) lifespan. In so doing, our assumptions based on what we know about the characteristics of each stage and about the scope and boundaries of fallback can also be tested, leading to a more precise definition and theory of fallback.

The stories told by the pilot study participants about their own experiences of fallback uncovered the many ways that fallback shows up in our lives, and exposed the numerous possible theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon. This has implications for the way we research fallback in the future, the questions we ask, and the importance of our ability to further probe the experience of participants over time. We need to explore the phenomenon of fallback not only through post-event reflection (which thereby limits the population with which we study fallback, to those further along the developmental spectrum), but in the midst of developmentally rich and fallback-inducing conditions. Given the importance of one's in-the-moment and after-the-fact sense-making about fallback, conducting research that examines participants' experiences over time and possibly with the administration of pre- and post- assessments of developmental capacity would be valuable to understanding the experience of fallback and its capacity to lead to developmental growth. Uncovering a data-based understanding of what causes fallback in individuals, and the conditions under which one may recover and ultimately

grow is integral to our ongoing discovery of what prompts developmental movement to and through the post-conventional stages.

Extending our burgeoning understanding of fallback beyond individuals, to groups, organizations, societies and cultures is pivotal to understanding the implications of human development to leadership development; specifically the relationship between developmental capacity, fallback, and the exercise of leadership in self and the development of the capacity for the exercise of leadership in others. This may include an explicit exploration of the significance and validity of constructive-development theory and an understanding of fallback in cultures and populations that have not heretofore been studied. It seems apparent that constructive-development theory, stage development theory, and an understanding of fallback are valuable frameworks in the population in which they have been studied. Yet, the limits of the theory are largely unknown, because the field itself has been hesitant to push against them.

As future research explores the hypotheses about fallback related to our own constructive-development and stage development theories, it will also be important to examine the phenomenon of fallback through other lenses and alternative hypotheses. These include the physiological influence of the brain on the structure and function of the mind; the influence of context or domains on the capacity one has in given environments; the effect of unresolved trauma or unintegrated aspects of self on one's development; the limits of consciousness in one's experience of life; and the role of archetypes in providing the narratives that both lead to fallback and one's recovery from it. Perhaps an exploration of these may reveal the physiological, psychological, and behavioral explanations for why certain circumstances – particularly those involving family, illness,

injury, threat, and fear, (even if it is the 21st century version of these) – nearly inevitably catalyze fallback. Cross-disciplinary inquiry into the phenomenon of fallback would be a fascinating area of future research.

As with any good theory, the scope of fallback will likely never be fixed and precise. As Cook-Greuter reminded me, no theory can ever account for the full complexity of human life. This research was merely an initial expedition to begin to chart the territory. It is my great hope that there will be many more explorations that follow.

Implications and recommendations for practice. Where the rubber meets the road for me has always been at the intersection of theory, research, and practice. What is the lived experience of individuals struggling to face the realities of daily life, both challenges and opportunities? If the world in which we live is pleading for a higher level of consciousness, of sense-making, of ability to successfully navigate its increasing complexity, how do we get there? Theory and research are only as valuable as the tools they provide to those who attempt to put their truths into practice in real life, day after day. So, how does our understanding of human development and the movement in both directions along the continuum, influence how we show up in the world and in the environment we foster for others to do so, as well? If mutual, connected, enlightened leadership is desired, how do we get there? Specifically, what is the role that a more nuanced, complex, mutual, and connected understanding of human development, constructive-development and stage development theories within it, and the phenomenon of fallback may play in our quest to understand, to test, and to practice?

Heretofore, stage development theory has not accounted for the inevitability of fallback in spite of the lived experience of many that would seem to prove its existence. Berger noted that the number one question she is asked when she presents to groups of people on the topic of human development is related to what happens when development is not forward-moving; when one is unable for a time to show up with the full capacities that one would otherwise have. No matter how we construct it—as theory or not—it’s imperative that we acknowledge that we do go to this less complex place in our meaning-making. Instead of rejecting it, we need to accept it as reality, and explore how to make it useful and productive. Given that the value of a theory is its usefulness, the understanding of fallback that resulted from this research greatly enhances the practical utility of stage development theory.

The implications of this research for practice are many. The understanding of fallback generated through this research provides a narrative that frames fallback as a potentially positive experience, rather than condemning it as a negative one; an understanding that approaches the phenomenon with curiosity rather than shame; that offers an opportunity to grow rather than decline. Naming it, making sense of it, showing that it does involve a temporary decline in one’s developmental complexity that has potential to lead to something better, makes fallback something that can be utilized more effectively and makes it less frightening. Positively framing fallback allows one to embrace the small self thereby increasing the likelihood of recognizing it, recovering, and growing.

Contexts and their gravitational pull were shown to be potent catalysts for fallback in individuals. Interestingly, context was also identified as a significant factor in

one's recovery and growth from fallback. This knowledge is powerful not only in the shepherding of one's own development, but the fostering of development in others, in groups, and in organizations, in that it emphasizes the importance of context to developmental capacity. The narratives that pervade our environment have significant implications for how we understand our capacity to show up in the world in the best conditions, and how we deal with our inevitable encounters with the worst. The role of narrative also informs the attention we need to give to the stories we tell ourselves and those we tell others. An understanding of the importance of narrative in our experience of fallback is a pivotal aspect of its outcome, positive or negative.

The understandings generated through this research may inform the design of environments: 1) that provide tools and feedback to individuals that may result in quicker awareness of fallback, thereby leading to recovery and development; and 2) that both value the whole person thereby allowing space for the small self to show up, and also create the circumstances for the biggest Self to come forth. Creating contexts that understand the full complexity of humans and create the conditions under which the highest level of development may be fostered is pivotal to the development of humans, the exercise of leadership, and the cultivation of a more civilized and generative society.

Berger encouraged talking about fallback in teams, identifying the circumstances that bring forth the small self, and explicitly creating an environment that encourages the presence of the big Self. Safe environments need to be created in which individuals do not fear exposing their vulnerabilities, and have a mutually-oriented motivation to remain present in the face of adversity and through developmental missteps knowing that there is great value in doing so.

The positive framing of fallback in individuals has interesting parallels to the positive framing of failure in organizations. Individuals who view fallback as an opportunity to notice, learn, and grow seem to navigate the travails of development more successfully. Similarly, Berger noted that research has shown that organizations that view failure as an opportunity for assessment, learning, and growth are more successful. In fact, Palus made an explicit connection, noting that optimism is a characteristic of leadership. It's clear that development is work, but the understanding of fallback generated through this research offers one the opportunity to find hope in the work.

“You don't blame the little seed that doesn't grow for being one that didn't,” said Cook-Greuter. I think this is a profound statement of not only the responsibility individuals and leaders of families, organizations, societies, and cultures have to provide the conditions for one to bring their best Self, but also the reality that one will not, in fact, can not always do so. An understanding of the inevitability of fallback encourages looking at a person over time, rather than judging them for how they show up from moment-to-moment.

This study revealed not only the inevitability of fallback in human development, but also the potential role it plays in developmental growth adding both nuance and complexity to the theory of stage development. I argue that human development cannot be divorced from leadership development, therefore an understanding of fallback and its role in development is crucial to creating an environment in which both the development of the person and of the person's capacity to exercise leadership can flourish, and is integral to preparing leaders who are able to address the increasing complexities of present and future communities of practice.

In the course of the interviews, and particularly in my conversations with Palus, I came to see that any theory, even when not completely grounded in empirical fact is valuable if it is useful. Yet, while my own assumption all along included a positive, growth-oriented outcome from fallback, I was confronted in this study by another possibility, and another limitation to the theory of constructive-development; the theory that I had to this point so enthusiastically embraced.

A caveat: Limitations to constructive-development theory in practice. In this section, I relate my own disorienting dilemma around the usefulness of not only stage development theory, but also an understanding of fallback. This experience is recounted in the following excerpts from my post-interview analytic memos, the first of which was written following an interview with Palus:

It was in this interview that I became very aware of the privileged approach to this theory. People who grow from fallback have the resources to support growth from fallback. Going back to the idea, is it true? Has it been proven? I think the answer may be yes, in the population that we've studied...an educated, well-bred set with the resources to opt into subsidized experiments such as group relations conferences or Shamanistic ceremonies, experiments that support growth. We have a theory that is true based on the experiences of a privileged population. Can fallback lead to developmental growth? Yes, in those who have the resources to support it. But, what the field has perhaps not studied is the population that does not have access to these resources, and for whom fallback may just lead to more fallback.

The weight of this discovery, that perhaps the theory I had so fully embraced was only valuable for a privileged few, burdened my mind and my heart. I posed this possibility to McCallum. The below excerpt was written following our conversation:

Our final moments were devoted to a discussion about the way that human development and fallback play out in other cultures, in impoverished environments, in settings where and with participants who, frankly, development has not been studied, to date. So, is this theory, are these instruments, useful to the Jesuits that McCallum is consulting to in Madagascar and Africa? What about the homeless that live in any city in the United States? This discussion took me back to my early musings about the role Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs may play in understanding development and when it is not forward-moving – when in fact, it plummets down to the bottom of the pyramid.

I think this is such a ripe area for future study. Study it in our own country in populations who are not the white, privileged, well-educated participants of human developmental (or at least stage developmental) studies heretofore. Explore how the societal/cultural developmental level in other countries affects the narratives that individuals construct and pass along. Where might this theory be of most use? And, if it's not valuable for those outside of the circles that we researchers travel in, what might be?

It's clear from these excerpts that constructive-development and stage development theories, and my own burgeoning understanding of fallback slipped off the pedestal more than once in this process. These theories that had been so influential in my own life and development may potentially be nothing more than, as Palus noted, “a Western fancy.” Was all of this theoretical exploration for naught? Does it not even

matter if it doesn't matter for the global population? Perhaps the reader can see a fallback in my own thinking here. Eventually I came back around to an appreciation for what the theories can offer, if not everyone, at least many. Are these understandings useful for the population that has been studied? Yes. And, now we just need to explore this question beyond the usual research suspects.

Limitations of the Study

As noted, this research explored how six key thinkers in the field of adult development and leadership theory and practice conceptualize the phenomenon of fallback in human development. There are several researchers and practitioners doing work in the field of adult and leadership development, each with nuanced approaches to the research and their understanding of it. While the research I conducted does not include a full representation of all thought in the field, I attempted to include a representative sample of the primary thought leaders in constructive-development and stage development theories and their respective theoretical lenses in this study in an effort to clarify, expose, and reconcile the various explanations and interpretations of the fallback phenomenon. Further, while the number of key thinkers included in this research was small, it was also significant in the context of the field, which is still quite young and rather intimate in its scope.

Another limitation of this research is its lack of generalizability in the traditional scientific sense. However, the goal of this study was not to provide generalizability, nor was it intended to reach consensus. Rather the goal of the research was to generate a well-informed theory of fallback that exposes the complexity of human development. While the end result is not a theory or even a definition of fallback, it is a theory for

understanding fallback in both the context of the theoretical framework of human development and the lived experience of it.

The final potential limitation of this research is my own subjectivity. I have an inherent bias based on my personal experience of and interest in the fallback phenomenon. Without a doubt, this bias affected the key thinkers I selected, the questions I asked, and the sense I made of the data. Yet, my attentiveness to my role in the research, and my adherence to making the inevitability of my own subjectivity explicit, not only made me more aware, but yielded even richer and more revealing data.

Conclusion

As I neared the end of this research and writing, I reviewed the analytic memos that in many ways served not only as a researcher's journal but also as a diary of my own personal journey, my own self in process throughout the course of this research. I close with an excerpt of these reflections.

At the end of our final interview, Berger pointed to the irony of my impetus for conducting research on this topic, and the reality of the resulting outcome. She remarked that I set out to add neatness and perfection to developmental theory through my research, but I ended up unraveling the edges and making it more messy, more imperfect.

She was right. I wanted the theory to be perfect. I was attracted to stage development theory, because I thought, "It's clean, and it's neat." But, at the same time, in my research on fallback, I pushed where the theory is not clean and neat.

That is who I am in life. I strive for perfection. I'll admit it. Expert is absolutely my fallback, my go-to place. And, at the same time, I push into the shadows and darkness of my self and do find beauty in the imperfection. Fallback, in it's unraveled edges,

messiness, and imperfection, holds beauty, too. There is something a little disappointing about having one's theory dismantled. It's a little sad, bittersweet. Yet, in some ways, it's a bit of a relief to let go of that expectation. It feels like something better is being born.

Torbert shared with me that earlier in his life, his closing salutation on his correspondence was, "In the struggle." He said he thought "Peace" or "Cheers" or "Sincerely" just sounded too contrite, too Pollyanna, not fully embracing the struggle that marked his life at the time. Since he shared this with me, I've been drawn to "in the struggle" for the way it does capture the messiness, the complexity of life – and since embarking on this research, the messiness and complexity of development, and the complexity within which this phenomenon of fallback is situated.

In this chapter, I guided the reader through my own journey of development as I sought to develop an understanding of fallback, and ended up developing an understanding of myself in the process. I now continue along my hopefully never-ending path of development...in the struggle.

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APPENDIX A

Brief Overview of Each of Torbert's Eight Main Action Logics

Brief overview of each of Torbert's eight main action logics

Action logic (the primary stage or level from which one makes meaning of their world)	Main focus (of an individual's interaction with the world)	Percentage of adult population (n=4,510)
1 - Opportunist – needs rule impulses	Own immediate needs, opportunities, self-protection	4.3
2 - Diplomat – norms rule needs	Socially expected behavior, approval	11.3
3 - Expert – craft logic rules norms	Expertise, procedure and efficiency	36.5
4 - Achiever – system effectiveness rules craft logic	Delivery of results, effectiveness, goals, success within system	29.7
5 - Individualist – relativism rules single system logic	Self in relationship to system; interaction with system	11.3
6 - Strategist - most valuable principles rule relativism	Linking theory and principles with practice, dynamic systems interactions	4.9
7 - Alchemist (Magician/Clown)– deep processes and intersystemic evolution rule principles	Interplay of awareness, thought, action, and effects; transforming self and others	2.0
8 – Ironist – intersystemic development rules process (Torbert, 1994)	Generating ambiguity (Torbert & Herdman-Barker, 2008); transforming others through own role transformation (Torbert, 1994)	?

Note. Adapted from Cook-Greuter, S. R. (2004). Making the case for a developmental perspective. [Technical paper]. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 36(7), p. 279; and Cook-Greuter, S. R., & Soulen, J. (2007). The Developmental Perspective in Integral Counseling. *Counseling & Values*, 51(3), p. 188.

APPENDIX B**Fallback Interview Guide**

I will send the summary of findings from the pilot study to provide a launching point for the interview. This interview protocol assumes that the key thinkers have read the summary.

1. How would you define fallback from your developmental theoretical perspective? (Developmental Action Inquiry, Subject-Object, Integral Approach)
2. Who influenced your perspective on human development (and fallback)?
3. Does your understanding of fallback differ, or is it the same as others who have used fallback to understand development?
4. In your opinion, does fallback exist?
5. What is the relationship between fallback and meaning making?
6. Can you explain the fallback phenomenon?
  - a. When or why do individuals fallback?
  - b. How do you know you're in it?
  - c. How would you know it if you saw it?
  - d. Can fallback be temporary? Long-term? Permanent?
  - e. Is fallback inevitable?
7. How do we account for fallback? What are the causes?
  - a. What is it about going home/relationships that prompt fallback?
  - b. What is it about injury/illness that may prompt it?
  - c. What is projection, and what is its relationship with fallback?
    - i. Is projection a constant in fallback?
  - d. What is the role of intellect versus intuition in falling back and progressively developing as a result of it?
  - e. How might Maslow's hierarchy of needs influence when, where, how, and why we fall back?
  - f. Are there other possible causes?
  - g. Is one prompt/catalyst/cause easier to grow developmentally from than another?
8. How would you critique my hypothesis that fallback does exist and that it may, in fact, play a role in developmental growth?
Offer specific examples from the pilot study before asking each of the following questions:
  - a. Is there another explanation for what participants of the pilot study that I conducted during the spring describe as unconsciously acting from an earlier meaning-making structure than their measured center-of-gravity action logic?
  - b. Is it their "last hurrah" in a current action logic before progressing to the next?

- c. Is it a states/stages distinction, meaning that we may well have multiple developmental centers of gravity (stages) associated with each of our various states?
9. Could fallback lead to developmental growth?
- a. If so, how or in what ways?
  - b. If not, why not?
  - c. What structures, supports, environments would need to be present to allow growth to happen?
    - i. Would this vary based on the primary meaning-making stage of the individual?
  - d. What role would intellect vs. intuition play in recovering from fallback? Growing from fallback?
  - e. What can we do to foster this growth and learning in ourselves?
  - f. What can we do to foster this growth and learning in others?
  - g. Is there a difference between temporary and extended fallback in its ability/capability/capacity to prompt development?
  - h. How can we account for variation in developmental growth after fallback?
10. Why is it important to understand fallback? What can we really learn from an investigation into fallback?
- a. Why has fallback not been explored further?
11. How might fallback impact leadership development?
12. How might I best design research on this topic in the future?
- a. What would you want to know about fallback?
  - b. How would you recommend I structure my research design?
    - i. interviews, observations, document analysis, etc.
    - ii. how many individuals?
      - 1. Of different post-conventional stages? All the same?
  - c. How would your instrument be best used to understand the phenomenon of fallback? (Subject/Object Interview, SCTi MAP, Leadership Development Profile)
    - i. Or is there another instrument you think would help better elucidate fallback in research participants?
  - d. What questions should I be asking?
    - i. Circumstances prompting fallback?
    - ii. What fallback looks like/behaviors associated with fallback?
    - iii. Circumstances/exercises supporting development from fallback?
  - e. Why would you design the research this way?
13. Can you see yourself in this data (*from the summary of my pilot study findings*) in terms of development?
- a. As you look back on your own development, are there any events that stand out in your mind?

- i. Could you describe each one?
    - ii. How did you respond to the event?
  - b. Have you ever experienced fallback?
  - c. What kind of fallback do you think you experience (ordinary/extreme; temporary, pro-longed, permanent)?
  - d. In your experience, is unintentional fallback always negative?
  - e. What exactly do you feel you are losing in those moments (periods) of fallback? Or are you losing?
  - f. Could you describe the most important lessons you learned through experiencing fallback?
  - g. After having these experiences, what advice would you give to someone who has just discovered that he or she has fallen back?
  - h. How do you think these episodes during which you didn't operate from your primary action logic have affected your developmental progress?
14. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about fallback changed since our first interview?
15. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during these interviews?
16. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand fallback better?
17. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

APPENDIX C

Pilot Study Summary of Findings

“In addiction, it’s not unlike talking to people about their relapses. In the fantasy world, people go off to 30-day rehab, and they come out and think they will never drink again, or use. The reality is that most people slip after addiction rehab, however much money they spend and however long they go. The most likely outcome after addiction treatment is relapse, and the addiction treatment industry does not publicize this. What they publicize is that you come here and you’re good for life, which is complete nonsense. But if you work with the clients and say, ‘look, we’re not telling you to relapse, but let’s talk about what happens if it does, and how we’re going to deal with that. And, then, you’re going to learn from one or several of these, and you’re finally going to get yourself where you come out of here and you’re at this false, or let’s say insecure level of recovery. And, we go back and forth a few times, and you’re finally going to catapult yourself to a secure level of recovery where the relapse becomes much less likely.’ You’ve been down the relapse road a few times, and you think, unless I do this, I know where this is going. I know myself by now. So, I can head this off now. I’ve made this mistake three times. So, let me be honest with myself. Do I really want to make this change or not? It’s trial and error work and a lot of that trial and error learning has to happen out in the real world...you can’t learn it.”

-- Mitch, Strategist, likening fallback to relapse

Do we in fact fall back, unintentionally, to earlier action logics...not only temporarily, but for extended periods of time? Might this unintentional falling back play a role in our developmental growth? And, if the answer to all of this is “yes, of course”, why is the phenomenon known, but so rarely named?

Using Torbert's Developmental Action Logics as the conceptual framework, and focusing specifically on the post-conventional action logics, I conducted a pilot study to elucidate the phenomenon of fallback and its potential for transforming the developmental growth of individuals. Interviews, both individual and group, were conducted with three participants representing the *Individualist*, *Strategist*, and *Alchemist* action logics as measured by Suzanne Cook-Greuter's SCTi-MAP. I sought to shed light on this often present but seldom explicitly named phenomenon of fallback in human development in three ways: 1) through exploration of the scenarios that participants described as fallback; 2) through analysis of how participants measured at different primary action logics described their response to fallback; and (3) by delving into the actions, scaffolding, environments, and circumstances that appeared to have supported learning from fallback.

Stage development theory posits that each stage of meaning-making is more complex than and also inclusive of the earlier stages through which the individual has already passed. Therefore, it would follow that one could *choose* to act from an earlier action logic to meet other individuals where they are at developmentally, to accomplish specific tasks, or to optimally function in given environments. All participants described their conscious use of this capacity in given circumstances.

However, the idea that one does also *unconsciously* act from an earlier action logic at times has not been accounted for in stage development theory. Yet, the three participants in this study did not hesitate when asked to describe situations of involuntary fallback.

“When something comes up and I get pissed off, and I think you don’t know, I know better. Well, that’s kind of falling back into that, ‘I’m better than you, I’m smarter’ thing. Now, if that isn’t falling back into an *Achiever*, I don’t know what is. You know the competition. Your ego triggers something. ‘Fine, do it your way.’ You know, instead of just being open even though the other person annoys you. Not being annoyed. Being able to see there’s another perspective that’s important instead of competing with the perspective. And, I get caught in that a lot...at home.”

Liz - Individualist

When asked both individually and as a group how the participants thought these episodes during which they didn’t operate from their primary action logic has affected their developmental progress, all participants claimed that the fallback episodes played a somehow positive role.

“I think ultimately they were really necessary for growth. You know it’s that bringing something to the surface that needs to be healed or released somehow in order to move on. It just had to be in order to grow.”

Allie - Alchemist

This exploration into the phenomenon of fallback in human development provided an initial glimpse into how three post-conventional action logic-measured individuals experience acting from an earlier developmental stage than their primary meaning-making *center-of-gravity*. However, delving into this little-researched topic also uncovered several additional concepts that are ripe for further inquiry.

When entering into the data collection, I had conceptually defined temporary fallback as something that occurred over the span of minutes, days, perhaps weeks. In addition, however, fallback scenarios spanning the course of several months were described by all participants, the occurrence of which took place before a seemingly substantial progressive shift in meaning-making capacity. This prompted me to wonder if these episodes were in fact fallback, or a “last hurrah” of sorts within their primary action logic before transforming to the next, or perhaps both.

“I mean I probably had months and years when I was in fallback... There were times when I was just caught in something for a long time. I remember there was a...one thing...where I was really caught in this kind of victim stance. Like, what had been done to me that was so unjust and so unfair. It went on for a really long time. And, I was just so convinced that I was totally blameless, and it had nothing to do with me. It was just this terrible person that had seized upon an innocent victim. And, I don’t know if it...I’m just not even aware enough to know what level of consciousness I might have been at and how it was a fallback. I mean it was certainly a fallback. I can remember having fantasies about what I would like to do to this person...I never did it. It was probably a fallback. So, yeah, I think you can be in that for really long periods of time, you know when there are these, these strong patterns and beliefs that are really rooted pretty deeply in us. It’s... you can get pretty hooked by them for a long time.”

Allie - Alchemist

Both the *Individualist* and *Alchemist* offered multiple mentions of fallback with a focus on intuition and alternate forms of seeking consciousness versus connecting to intellect in their efforts to recover, learn, and grow from fallback episodes.

“Getting more into body awareness, so when the anxieties come up, trying to locate them as physical sensations versus thinking. It takes it out of the, it takes it away from thinking. Because it’s thinking that gives you the anxiety. You have a thought about being hurt, or you have a thought about being mad, or you have a thought about being anxious. That’s what causes you to have these bodily sensations. So you focus more on the physical sensations of the thought, not the thought. It helps it dissipate, because you can locate it in your body, you can look at it, you can see it, you can feel it. And, if you do that it sort of goes away. It works.”

Liz - Individualist

Interestingly, the *Strategist* described his response to fallback with a particularly intellect-focused flavor, using analysis of systems, problem-solving, and logic as tools to make sense of and learn from the episodes. What role might intellect play in falling back unintentionally and in one’s recovery from it? What of intuition?

To some extent all participants, but the *Alchemist* in particular, referenced the presence of projection in her unintentional fallback episodes. She described powerful shifts in learning and growth from these experiences.

“I mean one of the really important things for me is finally really getting that what’s going on externally in my world is an out-picturing of my...it really is this sense of creating my own reality. If suddenly there’s this string of people that I’m

encountering that are annoying or that...I know now not to go, like it's totally pointless to get into 'You know what they did and what they said?' It's like okay, what in me is magnetizing this at this point? And, it's just amazing how it can shift what world we start to encounter out there. So, that's the, I would say, that's the biggest shift. "

Allie – Alchemist

Projection and shadow emerged as themes in the participants' stories about fallback, which led me to wonder how an exploration and acceptance of one's own shadow might facilitate recognizing and learning from fallback, and ultimately assist us in creating our own reality. It is to the importance of understanding fallback that I turn next.

Why does understanding fallback matter?

The literature notes that certain conditions exist that may cause individuals to exhibit behavior indicative of earlier stages (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; Kegan, 1982; McCallum, 2008; McCauley, et al., 2006; Torbert, 2004). However, while the phenomenon of temporary fallback and its role in human development have been addressed in the stage theory literature only cursorily, the implications of this connection are far-reaching. While each individual's meaning-making structure and experience of fallback is unique within the broader framework of his/her center-of-gravity action logic, the phenomenon of fallback appears to exist all along the developmental spectrum (McCallum, 2008). Cultivating a greater understanding of fallback, and understanding that fallback is an inevitable aspect of human development, no matter one's developmental action logic, can help make the

process—often marked by risk and ambiguity (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Cook-Greuter & Soulen, 2007; McCallum, 2008)—less frightening.

Identifying one's primary fallback action logics and the circumstances which prompt the occurrence of fallback allows greater presence and awareness in the moment, enabling an individual to respond more effectively, and for fallback to be experienced as an opportunity for learning (Torbert, 2004). This learning may be a primary agent in developing the aptitude for more complex ways of making meaning of the world and may actually prompt human beings to transform to later developmental action logics.

Structured interventions have shown promising results in the developmental movement of an individual through post-conventional developmental stages (McCauley, et al., 2006). The findings from this study on fallback may inform the design of programs that can provide scaffolding and/or interventions that lead to quicker in-the-moment awareness of fallback, and therefore its recovery and analysis.