

ADULT DEVELOPMENT: A GLOBAL IMPERATIVE

Linda E. Morris, Ed. D.¹

ABSTRACT: As individuals and adult educators we consistently face an array of what seem to be increasingly complex challenges. These run the gamut from battling poverty and illness with their deleterious and deadly effects, to acquiring literacy and workplace competencies and to building expertise in communication, collaboration and innovation. And we live in a time of rapidly shifting technology, social and political unrest, and burgeoning environmental threats. How are we to grow, thrive and lead? One option is to consider what we can learn and apply from adult development theories and practices for own and others' intentional development -- and then to deliberately act to foster adult development in individuals and within organizations and communities. There are, of course, many views of what constitutes adult development and how it occurs. In this paper, written to initiate dialogue and discussion, I focus on the perspective that development in adulthood represents a set of substantive qualitative changes that we may undergo moving from dependency to interdependency, from being shaped to a great degree by our environment, to constructing and co-creating thoughts and views. Theories, e.g., by Boydell, Cook-Greuter and Kegan, are related to concepts of individual, workforce and community development, and intentional/deliberate adult development practices in universities and the workplace are described.

Keywords: adult development, development, stage theory, constructive developmental theory, deliberately developmental organization, development organization

As I write this paper, the contentious presidential election of 2016 is in full swing in the United States. Listening to the candidates and their supporters and noting the contrasts that abound, I have begun to consider that what is at play is not a clash of political parties or theory but a developmental collision, perhaps more ubiquitous and difficult to mitigate or overcome than party or political differences. While political commentators and the media discern differences in values, temperament and character, I wonder: Are these candidates at different points in their developmental trajectories?

Grasping the concept of development in adulthood and comprehending how we and others develop and take charge of or influence the journey is critical not only to understanding political candidates, but also for preparing ourselves to function as individuals, workers and citizens in our complex world. Perusing a newspaper, exploring the Internet, or listening to radio or television, we are constantly bombarded with information, scenes, and sounds of the challenges of our times: abject poverty, crippling and deadly illnesses, the churn of labor markets where demands for specific skills and knowledge are rapidly shifting with the spread of technology, social and political strife and endangered environments. This is the backdrop for us and the adult learners we as adult educators, managers and leaders serve.

My purpose in writing this paper is to highlight the need to be more explicit and intentional about development throughout adulthood and to provide increased and varied opportunities for development. As an adult educator I have focused on both adult learning -- helping learners to "acquire, enhance or make changes in knowledge, skills, values and worldviews" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007. p.277) -- and

¹ Adult Development Associates, linda_morris11495@yahoo.com

development -- to “unfold, to grow into latent potential” (Smith & Taylor, 2010, p. 49). For me, as a member of learning and development groups in consulting organizations and university faculties, advancing adults’ learning has been an explicit goal and encouraging their development more often an implicit one. Given the challenges of today’s workplaces, communities and nations, it is now time to more explicitly concentrate on promoting adult development to prompt longer term shifts in perspectives and behaviors, simultaneously continuing to support adults’ immediate and short-term learning needs.

Meeting these ends requires intensifying actions to:

- Further understand the integral relationship between adult learning and adult development.
- Explore theories of adult development. For example, identify one or more framework(s) for development through adulthood as a basis to engage in dialogue and developmental experiences.
- Investigate broadly. Theories and practices relating to adult development can be discerned in multiple disciplines (e.g., psychology, management development, organizational development).
- Reflect on current practice. Though we may not have been *explicitly* focusing on adult development, the perspectives and practices we use (e.g., self-directed, transformational and transformative learning) may in fact be strategies and tactics to foster development, calling out for a framework to bind them together.
- Learn and act together. Through dialogue and knowledge sharing across roles, venues, countries, and perspectives we may move more quickly towards greater, more comprehensive and more universal understanding on the process and enablers of adult development.

Included in the paper are discussions on development theories and practices, including the current focus on *developmental* or *deliberately developmental* organizations. Given the field’s depth and breadth, what is here is the top of the tip of an iceberg, informed and limited by my study and practice, primarily within the United States. Yet, by sharing my views within this international forum, I hope that the ensuing dialogue may be useful to practitioners, managers and organizational leaders from other perspectives and countries as we all support human growth and development.

Adult Learning and Adult Development: An Integral Relationship

Adult learning and adult development are connected and similar but distinct concepts; both are factors in how adults change and grow. Understanding the dimensions and facets of these inextricably combined processes helps us to become aware of or to determine possible outcomes of learning or development opportunities, focus attention on them and create occasions for growth.

According to Merriam and Brockett (2007, pp. 5-6), *adult learning* is: “a cognitive process internal to the learner; it is what the learner does in a teaching-learning transaction, as opposed to what the educator does. Learning also includes the unplanned, incidental learning that is part of everyday life.” Hoare (2011, p. 397) defined *adult development* as “systematic, qualitative changes in human attributes (e.g., intelligence,

insight, social cognition) as a result of interactions between internal and external environments.” Further, she noted, “Each person’s life stage, itself an internal dynamic, influences the way one sees oneself in the world” (p. 397). She pointed out:

Adult learning is itself a developmental quality and process. Such learning includes a change in behavior, a gain in knowledge or skills, and an alteration or a restructuring of prior knowledge. Such learning can also mean a positive change in self-understanding or in the development of personal qualities such as coping mechanisms. (Hoare, 2011, p. 398)

Boucouvalas and Krupp (1989) conceptualized adult development and learning as circular and asserted that adult development refers to growth or change in the nature, modes, and content of learning, which in turn leads to further development and forms a continuous cycle of development and learning. Boydell (2016), whose theory of Modes of Being is described later in the paper (Figure 1), linked development to learning and to crossing a threshold from one mode --or stage-- to another while retaining the capabilities that emerged in a mode appearing earlier. Tennant and Pogsen (as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p.322) observed that “the raw materials in the process of development are the organism, with its constitutionally endowed equipment and the social environment with its historical and cultural formations. Development thus proceeds through a constant interaction between the person and its environment.”

Among the thoughts that come to mind when considering the concepts of adult learning vis- a-vis adult development are:

- Both deal with changes—learning in terms of specific knowledge and skills, development with changes in underlying attributes.
- Learning may often be mastered in the short term; development is likely a longer term happenstance.
- With learning we might speak of designing learning activities; with development it may be more appropriate to focus on generating or establishing environments for growth.

Our Developing Selves

Theories of adult development abound. Our challenge is to understand them and how to use them to encourage development. In their robust review of adult development theory, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) noted that adult development is best understood from a multi-disciplinary approach. Hoare (2011, p. 398) listed the following as attributes that can and may develop during the adult years: “intelligence, cognition, emotional maturity, identity, interpersonal competence, ethics, spirituality, generativity, insight, self-esteem, flexibility, and historical awareness (sentience).”

Cook-Greuter (2004, p. 3) distinguished between lateral and vertical development:

Both are important, but they occur at different rates. Lateral growth and expansion happens through many channels, such as schooling, training, self-directed and life-long learning as well as simply through exposure to life. Vertical

development in adults is much rarer. It refers to how we learn to see the world through new eyes, how we change our interpretations of experience and how we transform our views of reality. It describes increases in what we are aware of, or what we can pay attention to, and therefore what we can influence and integrate. In general, transformations of human consciousness or changes in our view of reality are more powerful than any amount of horizontal growth and learning.

Developmental Assumptions and Trajectory

Cook-Greuter (2013, pp. 2-3) compiled the following list of tenets of constructive developmental theory (which is a *stage theory* of vertical development) and notes that “full-range” human development theories share most of these assumptions. The list represents a synthesis compiled from results of thousands of hours of work by many researchers and practitioners:

- Development theory describes the unfolding of human potential towards deeper understanding, wisdom and effectiveness in the world.
- Growth occurs in a logical sequence of stages or expanding world views from birth to adulthood. The movement is often likened to an ever widening spiral.
- Overall, world views evolve from simple to complex, from static to dynamic, and from ego-centric to socio-centric to world-centric.
- Later stages are reached only by journeying through the earlier stages. Once a stage has been traversed, it remains a part of the individual’s response repertoire, even when more complex, later stages are adopted as primary lenses to look at experience.
- Each later stage includes and transcends the previous ones. That is, the earlier perspectives remain part of our current experience and knowledge (just as when a child learns to run, it doesn’t stop to be able to walk). Each later stage in the sequence is more differentiated, integrated, flexible and capable of optimally functioning in a rapidly changing and ever more complex world.
- People’s stage of development influences what they notice and can become aware of, and therefore, what they can describe, articulate, cultivate, influence, and change.
- As healthy development unfolds, autonomy, freedom, tolerance for difference and ambiguity, as well as flexibility, self-awareness, and skill in interacting with the environment increase while defenses decrease.
- Derailment in development, pockets of lack of integration, trauma and psychopathology are seen at all levels. Thus later stages are not more adjusted or “happier.”
- A person who has reached a later stage can understand earlier world-views, but a person at an earlier stage cannot understand the later ones.
- The depth, complexity, and scope of what people notice can expand throughout life. Yet no matter how evolved we become, our knowledge and understanding is always partial and incomplete.
- Development occurs through the interplay between person and environment, not just by one or the other. It is a potential and can be encouraged and

- facilitated by appropriate support and challenge, but it cannot be guaranteed.
- While vertical development can be invited and the environment optimally structured towards growth, it cannot be forced. People have the right to be who they are at any station in life.
- The later the stage, the more variability for unique self-expression exists, and the less readily we can determine where a person’s center of gravity lies.
- All stage descriptions are idealizations that no human being fits entirely.

A useful context for understanding and presenting an overall view of adult development is that of a trajectory – a life journey – illustrated in Table 1. As with the tenets above, the table is based on study and analysis of multiple researchers and perspectives, and earlier renditions were developed in conjunction with Tom Boydell (2016).

Table 1
The Trajectory of Development

<u>As they develop, adults become more able to...</u>	
• Be aware and intentional	• Connect with others
• Make their own meaning	• Be collaborative
• Take initiatives and risks	• Be independent and interdependent
• Be systematic and systemic in problem solving	• Identify and act consistently with a purpose

Note: Adapted from “Revisiting Adult Development: Changing Capabilities, Perspectives and Worldviews,” by L. E. Morris and C. D. Klunk, 2016, *Adult Learning*, 27, pp.3-6.

Developmental Practices

As individuals and in our roles as students, educators, parents, siblings, children, church members and/or citizen we encounter many situations that require us to go into and beyond ourselves. If we accept the assumptions above (or some of them) and presume the trajectory to be real, we may intentionally adopt practices that may shift our capabilities to be, for example, more systematic, connected with others, collaborative, or independent then interdependent. Even without specific guidelines for such actions, we and others can adopt and experience practices that lead to growth.

These include incorporating learning processes leading to increased understanding and growth into multiple aspects of life, for example:

- Self-directed learning
- Transformational learning
- Experiential learning
- Reflection (coupled with any type of learning)
- Journal writing for reflective practice

Drivers for Developing Adults in Organizations

The workplace, where so many of us spend so many hours, may be viewed as a cauldron and as a foundry for development. Internal and external factors alike propel today's organizations to place increased emphasis on developing employees to build individual, organizational and even societal capabilities. Employees' careers are increasingly fluid, and people are far more likely to engage in a variety of positions at a number of companies (or be self-employed) than in the past, making learning and development activities a recruitment as well as a training factor. Organizations continue to face complex challenges including globalization and ever-shifting technology. Learning and development strategies deployed by organizations and management consultants are employed to increase skills and capabilities

In one sense, the idea of adults developing in the organization or workplace is not new — perhaps it is even “old hat.” Organizations provide on the job learning, rotational assignments, classroom training, elearning modules and management development. Indeed, *Training Magazine's* “2014 Training Industry Report” estimated total US expenditures for training and development in 2014 to be \$61.8 billion (2014, p. 17), with average expenditures for large companies at \$17.6 million, mid-size companies at \$1.5 million and small companies at \$338,386 (p. 18).

Despite the magnitude of such expenditures, organizations struggle to obtain the leaders they seek. For example:

Nearly 60 percent of respondents to a recent McKinsey survey say that building organizational capabilities such as lean operations or project or talent management is a top-three priority for their companies. Yet only a third of companies actually focus their training programs on building the capability that adds the most value to their companies' business performance. (Gryger, Saar, & Schaar (2010, para. 1)

Gryger et al. (2010) reported that only about 25% rated training programs as “extremely” or “very effective” in preparing various employee groups to drive business performance or to improve the overall performance, noting that training programs are misaligned with what is thought to be the capability most important to a company's business performance.

Leadership skill, for example, is considered by the majority of respondents to be the capability that contributes most to performance. Yet only 35 percent of respondents say they focus on it. And only 36 percent of executives consider their companies better than competitors at leadership development. (para. 10)

Petrie (2014) in a white paper published by the Center for Creative Leadership assessed the current situation of leadership development and noted (p. 5):

- The environment has changed—it is more complex, volatile, and unpredictable.
- The skills needed for leadership have also changed—more complex and adaptive thinking abilities are needed.

- The methods being used to develop leaders have not changed (much).
- The majority of managers are developed from on-the-job experiences, training, and coaching/ mentoring; while these are all still important, leaders are no longer developing fast enough or in the right ways to match the new environment.

As for the future, he continued:

- This is no longer just a leadership challenge (what good leadership looks like); it is a development challenge (the process of how to grow “bigger” minds).
- Managers have become experts on the “what” of leadership, but novices in the “how” of their own development. (Petrie, 2014, p. 5)

Management and leadership development literature, thus, provides valuable information on efforts to promote adult development in the workplace.

Promoting Development

Two perspectives on adult development seem particularly useful in developing strategies to promote development in organizations: Tom Boydell’s Modes of Being and Learning (2016) and constructive-developmental theory (McCauley, Drath, Paulus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006).

Modes of Being and Learning

According to Boydell (2016, p. 11), development is “moving away from isolated, fragmented atomism, to joining with one or more relatively localized communities or sub-sets of people, thence to a larger unity, seeing everybody, everything, as part of an integral whole,” describing it as “decreased duality, increased unity.” The Modes framework, then, exemplifies a stage model of development, in this case, on the dimension of *worldview* “in the sense of my perception of, and relationship with, the context in which I find myself” (Boydell, 2016, p.11).

Boydell (2016) posited that development occurs in distinct stages that appear in a particular sequence; once a new stage is reached, previous ones remain but have a different significance. Rejecting the notion of a ladder, he noted he preferred the image of nested eggs (Figure 1); as the whole egg expands, each wave can get bigger.

The Modes of Being and Learning framework originated in the 1980’s (Boydell, 2016). Over time, Boydell and his colleague Chris Blanter found that in their management and organization development world people related more readily to a threefold condensation of the seven Modes into three Stances (Boydell, 2016).

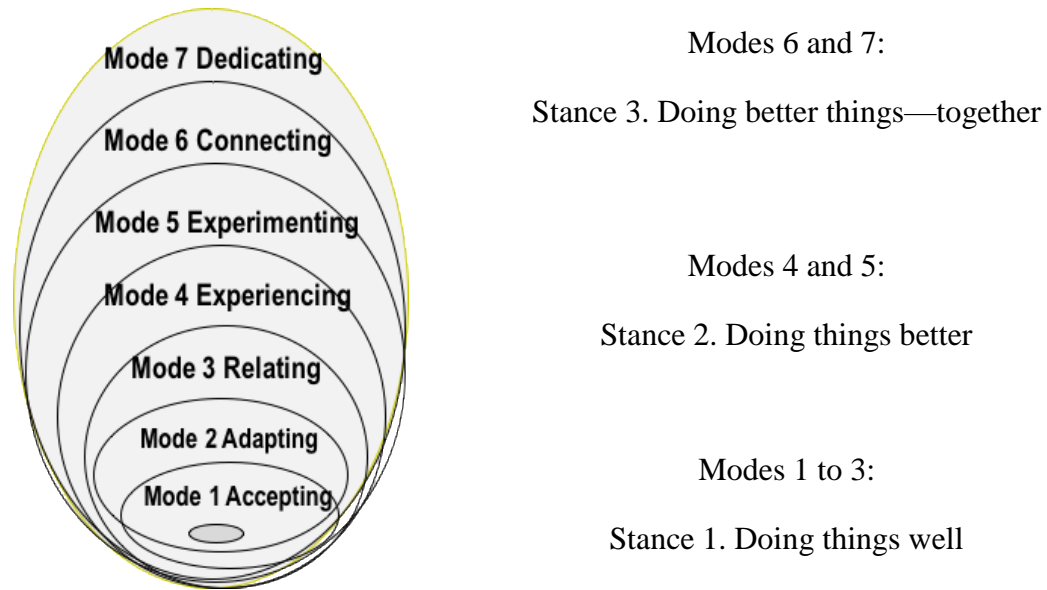


Figure 1. Modes and Stances.

The Modes and Stances are very much about how people relate to and operate in the world. Perhaps that is why I have found this perspective so helpful in designing learning activities and analyzing training programs. (Interestingly, Bloom’s taxonomy was an input into Boydell’s thinking when developing the theory [T. Boydell, personal communication July 4, 2002].) For example, at one organization, when we assessed our training activities, we found that while our intention was to build a workforce capable of problem solving and initiating actions (Mode 5), the methods we most frequently used were lectures, didactic instruction, and question and answer sessions (Mode 3). We then substantially changed our approach. See “Facilitation of Development” (Boydell, 2016) in the Special Issue on Adult Development in *Adult Learning*, Volume 27, for a more in-depth discussion of the framework and application suggestions.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

McCauley et al. (2006, p. 635) noted that constructive-developmental theory is the developmental stage theory most frequently used in the management and leadership literature. Defining *constructive-developmental theory* as “a stage theory of adult development that focuses on the growth and elaboration of a person’s ways of understanding the self and the world” (p. 634), the authors provide an overview of it. They review how the constructive-developmental frameworks of Robert Kegan, William Torbert, and Lawrence Kohlberg have been applied in the theoretical and empirical literature on leadership and management.

The term *constructive-developmental* was first suggested by Kegan in 1980 to refer to a stream of work in psychology that focuses on the development of meaning and meaning-making processes across the lifespan (McCauley et al., 2006). Kegan, for example, posited levels of consciousness or orders of mind, including the following three adult levels described by Petrie (2014, p. 13):

- **3--Socialized mind:** At this level we are shaped by the expectations of those around us. What we think and say is strongly influenced by what we think others want to hear.
- **4--Self-authoring mind:** We have developed our own ideology or internal compass to guide us. Our sense of self is aligned with our own belief system, personal code, and values. We can take stands, set limits on behalf of our own internal “voice.”
- **5--Self-transforming mind:** We have our own ideology, but can now step back from that ideology and see it as limited or partial. We can hold more contradiction and oppositeness in our thinking and no longer feel the need to gravitate towards polarized thinking.

View Kegan speaking on *The Further Reaches of Adult Development: Thoughts on the Self-Transforming Mind* (2013) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoasM4cCHBc>.

According to McCauley et al. (2006), constructive-developmental theory is built on the work of Jean Piaget and part of a large and diverse literature on life-span development, which is concerned with psychosocial growth and aging from birth to death. Other early theorists contributing to this stream include Fingarette, Kohlberg, Perry, Selman, and Loevinger. McCauley et al. reported:

The theory:

- is *constructive* in the sense that it deals with a person's construals, constructions, and interpretations of an experience, that is, the meaning a person makes of an experience.
- is *developmental* in the sense that it is concerned with how those construals, constructions, and interpretations of an experience grow more complex over time.
- takes as its subject the growth and elaboration of a person's ways of understanding the self and the world.
- assumes an ongoing process of development in which qualitatively different meaning systems evolve over time, both as a natural unfolding as well as in response to the limitations of existing ways of making meaning.
- views each meaning system as more complex than the previous one in the sense that it is capable of including, differentiating among, and integrating a more diverse range of experience. (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 635)

Constructive-developmental theory is referred to as neo-Piagetian theory because it extends Piaget's ideas in several important respects. It:

- takes the view that the developmental growth Piaget studied includes the way adults as well as children construct and interpret their experiences.
- moves beyond Piaget's focus on cognition and includes the emotions.
- recognizes qualitatively different *stages* of development and *focuses* on transformation processes — the challenges, achievements, and costs of moving from one way of making meaning to another.

- moves beyond Piaget's exclusive attention on external manifestations of development to also include the inner experience of developing.
- broadens its focus beyond the individual to include a study of the social context and how it affects development. (McCauley et al., 2006, p. 636)

Summarizing their literature review, McCauley et al. (2006, p. 650) observed that “developmental theory is evolving toward a more holistic, integrative perspective that views individual development as one facet of a developing system.” This finding seems consistent with the tenets compiled by Cook-Greuter (2013) and presented earlier.

Additionally, McCauley et al. (2006, p. 650) asserted:

Because it deals with an aspect of leadership that may be taken as basic— the generation and development of meaning for individuals and social systems— constructive developmental theory has the potential to act as an integrative framework in the field. This potential can only be realized to the extent that theorists, researchers, and practitioners work in more interconnected ways to test and refine the propositions generated by applying this theory to leadership.

Kegan (as cited by Petrie) has summarized what researchers have learned about what causes vertical development (transitions from one stage to another):

- People feel consistently frustrated by situations, dilemmas, or challenges in their lives.
- It causes them to feel the limits of their current way of thinking.
- It is in an area of their life that they care about deeply.
- There is sufficient support that enables them to persist in the face of the anxiety and conflict. (Petrie, 2014. p. 6)

Constructive developmental theory and Kegan’s perspective on transition factors have undergirded the Leadership for Transformational Learning (LTL) program depicted by Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, and Asghar (2013). In *Learning for Leadership: Developmental Strategies for Building Capacity in Our Schools* (2013) they described a 15 week graduate program for teachers, delivered first at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and later at Teachers College Columbia, that focused on helping educators understand how to support adult learning and capacity building, including the results of longitudinal research about the program’s impact.

The course (and later graduate action) was structured around a learning-oriented model for school leadership developed by Drago-Severson (Drago-Severson et al., 2013). The model, based on constructive-developmental theory and “composed of four pillar practices—that is, **teaming**, **providing leadership roles**, engaging in **collegial inquiry (CI)**, and **mentoring**—helped leaders learn about and experience the kinds of practices that actually support adult growth, and *why*” (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, p. 11). Course content and processes included:

1. Conceptions of leadership in support of adult learning and development
2. Constructive-developmental theory
3. Essential elements for enhancing schools, systems, and workplaces to be even healthier learning environments for adults
4. Practices that support adults' transformational learning (e.g., teaming, assuming leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring), as well as the developmental principles informing them
5. The importance of caring for one's own development and learning while caring for the learning of others. (Drago-Severson et al., 2013, pp. 12-13)

Drago-Severson et al. (2013, p. 13) emphasized:

It is important to note that in addition to *teaching* about developmental theory and practices that can be employed to support adult growth, we sought in LTL to *establish and model* the conditions for supporting adult learning and development so that the learners could *experience the practices that support growth while they were learning about them*.

Drago-Severson et al. (2013, p. 158) provided details on how leaders use developmental practices and ideas learned during LTL, including discrete examples of “(a) establishing and nourishing the preconditions for developmentally oriented leadership, (b) implementing and adapting the four pillar practices for growth...and (c) differentiating supports and challenges within the pillars to support adults with diverse ways of knowing.” They also incorporated research findings from the graduates that detailed approaches and practices they adopted in school systems in subsequent years.

Reading about the Leadership for Transformational Program (Drago-Severson et al. 2013) provides a window into practices that not only help individual adults grow and develop, but also contribute to the growth of a community – in this case a cohort of students. Because the students were in fact teachers, we also gain glimpses of the program's impact within a wider community.

An Organizational Perspective

Adults spend countless hours each day in the workplace—in communities of their fellows. One wonders how might they develop if the policies and practices of these workplaces were designed to enhance or enable their progress. Certainly, increasing awareness of development processes and being in a conducive climate for growth may be precursors for individuals deciding to take on developmental tasks.

One option for organizational leaders wishing to foster adult development is to create a *development organization*—where emphases on productivity and development are intertwined (Morris & Klunk, 2016)—which “consciously and intentionally transforms itself through supporting and encouraging the development of its members, who in turn consciously transform the organization, enabling it to meet its strategic goals” (Morris, 1997, p. 53). Morris described implementation of a competency-based framework for

career development, job assignment, and performance appraisal processes, tied to Boydell's Modes of Being and Learning, aiming to simultaneously increase both individual and organizational capabilities. According to Morris and Klunk, "The focus—linked to adult development theory—is on changing organizational strategy and human resource processes" (2016, p. 5).

More recently the concept of *deliberately developmental organizations* (DDOs) has emerged. Kegan, Lahey, Fleming, and Miller (2014, p. 4) characterized these as organizations "committed to developing every one of their people by weaving personal growth into daily work." Highlighting organizational strategy and culture, DDOs reflect the following foundational assumptions:

- Adults can grow.
- Not only is attention to the bottom line and the personal growth of all employees' desirable, but also the two are interdependent.
- Both profitability and individual development rely on structures . . . built into every aspect of how the company operates.
- People grow through the proper combination of challenge and support. (Morris & Klunk, 2016, p. 5)

Moving forward, research on the effects of shifts in organizational strategy, processes, policies and culture will be invaluable towards creating organizations with an increased emphasis on supporting the development of individuals, not only to carry out their current roles, but also to build capabilities for the future. Such efforts benefit organizations and the community at large as well as individuals (Kegan et al., 2014; Morris, 1997).

Conclusion

I have contended that it is now imperative for adult educators, managers and leaders to make explicit and concerted efforts to further the development of adults we serve. In doing so, we have an opportunity to enhance opportunities for individuals to realize their own potential and to build capabilities vital to performing their roles as individuals, parents, workers and citizens and to contributing to society as a whole.

We have an increasing body of knowledge about adult development from research and practice and are positioned to apply and extend that knowledge. The challenge is there. Many of us already engaged. Will we take it on in a rigorous and resolute manner? If we do so, and work together, sharing knowledge, experiences and insights, what might we achieve? What are next steps?

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