

## DEVELOPMENT, VALUES, AND SOCIOCULTURAL EVOLUTION

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*ABSTRACT: This paper examines the idea that there is a process of sociocultural evolution, that it is pre-eminently one of values development; that our development practice should support the advance of sociocultural evolution—values development—as the goal of development. I indicate how this has concrete, practical implications for development practice and for its evaluation. The overall goal is to coach into being a better society, at all levels of collectivity, as marked by the way we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to Earth.*

### INTRODUCTION

Global warming and the financial crisis have challenged us to question the adequacy of our approach to supporting development. While the several dimensions of development—economic, political, social, technological—each need to be addressed, there has been concern to find an indicator of development that defines an overall goal and provides a measure of progress and achievement of a whole society. Measures such as well being, happiness, and freedom are proposed but each confronts both conceptual and practical limitations. Not least, they each pose the question “to what end?”

This paper examines the idea that there is a process of sociocultural evolution, that it is one of values development; that our development practice should see the advance of sociocultural evolution—values development—as the goal of development. I indicate how this has concrete, practical implications for development practice and for its evaluation. The goal is to coach into being a better society, at all levels of collectivity, as marked by the way we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to Earth.

Looking at the sweep of history, we see the great advance of knowledge, the growth of science and technology, and the enrichment of material culture. We also see the complexification of governance structures, shifts in worldviews, and most especially, shifts in relational norms. I suggest that what we recognize as progress and regress is expressed above all in the nature of relationships—how people saw themselves and others in the world—how they related to one another, to nature, and the cosmos. And, yes, material advance, governance, and worldviews seem correlated with the shifts in norms both causally and consequentially. And, when we think of how we want the world to be, do we not conjure up a more kindly, collaborative, world—one where we are each citizens of the world with a shared awareness of our mutual interdependence, our shared concern for the common good, one in which these very changes in how we relate generate a more governable, peaceful, healthy, equitable, materially, artistically, spiritually rich society, a society that supports human fulfillment? If this is our idea of progress, if we see a development path of societal norms—a path still to be fully experienced—is this not the path that we would wish to advance on? Doesn't this suggest that our key concern in

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development intervention is our overall impact on values, on societal norms? If so, this will surely affect not only what we do but, especially, how we do it.

In what follows, I make clear how I see what values are and argue first that values develop, that they develop in individuals, in societies, and in the global and evolving network of interdependent nations. Having discussed what values are and how development is observed and measured, I proceed by examining the development of the individual and the dynamic of values shift. In describing the dynamic by which individuals and society develop and co-evolve I argue that societies follow the same stages of development as the maturing individual. I show that, as we can measure individual development towards fulfillment of human potential, so we can also measure social development by the same criteria.

This understanding gives us a significantly new paradigm that is consilient<sup>2</sup> with other paradigms of human maturation, thus meeting Kuhn's requirements (1962) for the advance of understanding. While, for our purposes it needs also to be linked with the understanding of the process of organizational complexification, this appears to be eminently feasible.<sup>3</sup>

The values development paradigm has consequences for development practice—the goals to which it is directed, the way it acts, and the criteria by which it is evaluated. Thus, I am introducing here a way of seeing development that, so far as I have discovered, has not been aired in the development discourse.

Lastly, I raise the question of what it means for development practice in this time of runaway global warming, the significance of values in addressing this and its impact on development, and the choices we need to consider with regard to where we put our efforts.

#### WHAT VALUES ARE

Our personal values—the criteria we apply, consciously or by habit and inculcation—are expressed in the *priorities* assert in the choices we make and the behaviours we exhibit.<sup>4</sup> Drawing upon developmental psychology, biology, and organizational development, Brian Hall and Benjamin Tonna (Hall, 2006) identified an 'inventory' of 125 human values each of which they have named, explicitly defined, and described, and located on a developmental path of four phases and eight stages.<sup>5</sup> It is this work that I principally draw upon here in my discussion of values and values shift. This work makes values observable and measurable.

#### VALUES DEVELOP

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<sup>2</sup> E.O. Wilson, (1999) *Consilience: the unity of knowledge*. New York, Vintage Books.

<sup>3</sup> Sara Nora Ross (2006) *Effects of a Structured Public Issues Discourse Method on the Complexity of Citizens' Reasoning and Local Political Development*. [Ph.D. dissertation]

<sup>4</sup> Note that you may hold many values but some values might trump others in specific situations. For example, you may value truth telling but there will be circumstances in which other values—loyalty, personal safety, consideration of another's safety or feelings might trump—be given *priority*—over that value. The notion of prioritization of values is a distinctive contribution of this work. Note that Hall has additional ways of seeing values, notably, as the mediator between our inner and outer experience and understanding of the world.

<sup>5</sup> The Values Distribution Map in Annex 1 arrays named values by Phases and Stages of development.

The Values Distribution Map in Annex 1 arrays 125 values (they are labels that carry definitions of their content) over four Phases and Eight Stages of development.

It depicts values development as a sequence of stages on a horizontal dimension. Progress through that map requires new values to build upon prior values. This might require reverting to acquire values that had been earlier missed. This is because the exercise of values demands skills and values development requires building skills—exactly as one needs to build skills in becoming a more advanced performer on an instrument or in, say, mathematics or chemistry. The process can be seen as a series of loops of incorporation and transcendence that might be imagined as a spiral.<sup>6</sup>

The development process is likely to involve several threads or themes, each with its own values track.<sup>7</sup> While the process is usually incremental, at times it might be transformational. That is, it can manifest as a reformation of a core constellation of aspired-to and lived values. This can be quite sudden—a potentially life-changing epiphany.

While the underlying dynamic driving this development process and the sequence of stages traversed is the same for all, every pathway is unique. There is no one right way. There are many paths up the mountain, as they say, and no one can ever tell others the path they should take, how they should live their life to become developed.<sup>8</sup> However, we can measure progress and regress, and we can design changes with an eye to their developmental impact. And what is true for individuals is true also for societies and collectivities large and small.<sup>9</sup>

Not least, we can determine the stage of values development expressed by a particular behaviour or by the relationships built into institutional design. Accordingly, we can design for development—expressing and designing for more developed relational expressions in what we are trying to do and how we are going about it.

#### DEVELOPMENT OBSERVED AND MEASURED

Looking at the sweep of history, we see the great advance of knowledge, the growth of science and technology, and the enrichment of material culture. We also see shifts in worldviews, governance structures, and relational norms. Norms are co-determinate with these other markers of change.

What we recognize as progress and regress is expressed in the nature of relationships—how people have seen themselves and others in the world—how they related to one another, to nature, and the cosmos. No doubt examples will be offered of traditional

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<sup>6</sup> As the title suggests, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan's *Spiral Dynamics* offers this view.

<sup>7</sup> Notional descriptive labels that have been given to such themes in the course of personal values analysis include, for example, "Compassion and Empathy", "Personal Faith Integration", "Global Concerns and Vision", "Human Dignity". Asked whether they recognize themselves in these themes and to tell stories about how the themes have been expressed in their lives, individuals are readily able to do so, often quite movingly.

<sup>8</sup> The metaphor of a single path has its limitations, however. As we have seen, values analysis of an individual is likely to reveal several developmental themes—distinct, often interrelated, threads reflecting the specific interests revealed in the life story of personal expression of interests, work, and relationship. At any time, the level of values attainment of particular threads might be different but there will be a centre of gravity that can be seen as a level of development of the whole.

<sup>9</sup> At the bottom of the Values Distribution Map (Annex 1), stages of societal development, as indicated by their style of leadership, are related to stages of values development.

societies exhibiting high relational values both among themselves and to nature. But that was within their circumscribed world and before contact with the West.

Shifts in norms provide a distinctive measure of human development. Since norms express values, and values become expressed in a developmental sequence, *we can measure development progress*, as progressive or regressive shifts in society's norms—its values—along the values development trajectory. These norms can be observed and measured.<sup>10</sup>

The historical trajectory of values development is marked by periods of advance and regression, but the grand sweep is developmental.<sup>11</sup> While ideas and technology are prime drivers of this trajectory, and reflective of it, the core process is one of values development for the expression toward what we can appreciate as the expression of our full humanity—or not, when norms regress.

#### A LIVING SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

The theory of values development takes a living systems perspective. It postulates that human individuals are social animals biologically distinguished by a capacity for speech that is critical to the formation of complex cultures. It further postulates that individuals exhibit a phenomenon of maturation, that a key dimension of maturation is expressed in shifts in the priorities—the values—that are reflected in behaviour, specifically in relational behaviour. These shifts are driven by changes in the individual's view of the world and relation to it—to self and other—and the expectations of role performance presented by society in the environmental and technological context.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Hall describes the process by which we move through developmental stages and mature as individuals. He also describes the dynamics of values shift and the transitions between stages in individuals and groups, and he has effectively applied this understanding to the practical task of shifting the values of organizations. By its application, we can observe: the relative weight—priority—attached to different values; where lived values fall on our development trajectory; the foundation values that have been built upon to provide the basis for lived values; and aspired-to values—values that are not yet lived into. And we can observe all this for collective entities from dyads, to teams, organizations, and societies.

But we are able not only to understand the requirements of a proposed change, most importantly, we can observe the degree to which shift occurs with the adoption of new norms. Measurability provides criteria for assessing progress.

#### THE DYNAMIC OF VALUES DEVELOPMENT: THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS

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<sup>10</sup> Explanation of how the values of an individual, or a collectivity, or a publication, are measured is too lengthy to describe here. Suffice it to say that computerized survey procedures and document analysis have been effectively used and validated. They allow us to measure and track development. A validation report on this technology concluded: It seems clear that the Hall-Tonna Values Inventory is a reliable instrument as measured by the standard tests of reliability (test-retest and split-half). In addition, a variety of analyses of validity have been conducted, including content validity, construct validity, and convergent validity. Current updated reliability and validity studies are underway and we are confident of a replication of the previous results of the reliability and validity of the (values) Inventory. Given the seemingly abstract nature of values, these results demonstrate the robustness of this measure.

<sup>11</sup> "The arc of history is long but it bends toward justice." Martin Luther King.

Individuals learn to survive their early years—and to secure what comforts, satisfy, and give them pleasure—by exhibiting behaviours that bring the responses they seek. They engage in what Maturana and Varela (1987) have called “consensual coordination”—the reciprocal learning of one another’s signals and responses. In short, they become acculturated and, learning the benefits of conforming to social expectations and the costs of not conforming to them, they are largely externally directed in their choices. Seeking meaning, too, they are likely to accept the meaning of the world that the culture offers them and its implications for who they are in it.

As we age, and regardless of the culture we are in, we move into a succession of roles that make ever-new demands on us. In a Western culture, for example: being left at nursery school without a parent or care giver, each successive elevation to a higher grade school, taking a job, getting married and becoming parents, all these and other shifts in our role and context require adaptation, and inspire new accomplishments. They also require us to shift our priorities. These shifts are commonly accompanied by a sense of our world getting bigger with challenges to who we are and how we relate to this increasingly larger world. At some point, we might find ourselves reflective about what we believe to be right, increasingly aiming to live by our own norms—becoming internally directed. (This is the transition in lived values from Stage 4 to Stage 5. See map Annex 1.)

As we live increasingly into what we believe to be right, whereas, before this transition, the end justified the means, means now need to be congruent with ends. The dynamic that drives values development is awareness of behaviour that proves not fit for purpose or congruent with belief. Discomfort at this realization evokes change. But shift depends on having integrated the values from which the shift builds.<sup>12</sup>

#### VALUES DEVELOPMENT IN COLLECTIVITIES

Values shift in response to challenges. Both individuals and societies are challenged by the demands of new roles and changes in context. Crises, especially, provoke values shift. They can come in many forms. Some might be chronic, such as the crisis of abject poverty. Some might be seen as recurrent, normal, or transitory—drought two years out of five, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods. Such crises bear on both individuals and societies. Other crises with societal impact would include the war and displacement. War has had transforming effects on societies. Certainly, both the 1914-18 and the world war of the ‘forties had transformative impacts in many countries.

Reference to the Values Development Map in Annex 1 shows (along the bottom of the map) the progression of stages of development of collectivities as defined by their style of leadership or governance. As noted, this starts from authoritarian, and progresses through paternalist, managerial, facilitator, to collaborator and servant leadership styles.

It is the process of moving through these stages that I see as central to the concept of societal progress. And, yes, especially when it comes with material satisfaction. But material satisfaction can be realized at any stage of development in the sense I am speaking of it.

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<sup>12</sup> Once past Stage 4, with increasing inner-directedness, authenticity, integrity, and self-reflection, we are also, as individuals, on what I see as a spiritual path—a path of self-identification with larger and larger wholes. See Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, which describes stages passed through in the course of a religious life that correspond to the stages depicted by Hall-Tonna and discovered independently.

The values of individuals and those of society co-evolve. We develop individually and collectively as we interact with one another and with our context—economic, social, and political, as well as technological, environmental, and informational. As a critical mass of individuals challenges a society's norms, these in turn will shift. One historical example of this happening is the abolition of slavery. A constituency of moral suasion effectively shamed slave trading and led to legislation making it illegal. Other examples of shifts in societal norms and their institutional impact would include: rejection of the divine right of kings; universal suffrage; the end of apartheid; the creation of the United Nations, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—all of which have taken time to impact norms. As society's norms shift so do the values to which people are acculturated. But not all shifts are developmental. They can be regressive.

With awareness and concern for global warming, we might see corporations going green, and governments collaborating to reduce carbon emissions, protect wildlife, or taking other measures for the common good. But the same pressure might evoke regressive self-interested behaviour in pursuit of control or security. Phase I values might come into play and dominate collaborative values. Consider the responses to the threat of terrorism or the depletion of oil reserves.<sup>13</sup> Without doubt, both personal and social crises can readily lead to an inward turning and self-centeredness with willingness even to use any means to provide security for survival, to counter shaming, to assert self-worth, identity, or superiority. Consider Germany's response to the Treaty of Versailles.

We hardly need reminding that ideas have profound impacts on individuals and societies, or that technology can profoundly affect our norms of relating with great social impact.<sup>14</sup> Crises, ideas, technologies, all drive the dynamic of societal values shift. Development assistance, too, shifts values, for better or for worse.

Certainly, norms are not always observed. Actual behaviour does not always reflect expected behaviour and expected behaviour does not reflect aspired-to behaviour. However, they are linked. Each pulls on the other so that while actual behaviour will be influenced by expected behaviour, the reverse will also be true—expected behaviour will be influenced by actual behaviour. Similarly, expected behaviour will be influenced by a sense of ideal behaviour, and again the reverse will be true. Thus, a complex dynamic is set up between actual, expected, and ideal behaviours. But our aspired-to values draw us forward.

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<sup>13</sup> Phase I values include: *Self-interest/Control* (Safeguarding interests, as necessary, in order to survive.); *Self Preservation* (Acting to preserve collective identity.); *Safety/Survival* (Securing vital systems, guarding the safety of all, protecting against personal injury, danger of loss, and setting up systems and procedures to these ends.)

<sup>14</sup> Think of the impact of Siddhārtha Gautama, Jesus, Muhammad, Confucius, Newton, Galileo, Freud, Einstein, Marx, Ayn Rand and Milton Freidman. And see, for example, Jared Diamond's *Guns, germs, and steel* and Helena Norberg-Hodge, who, in her *Ancient Futures*, tells of the impact on Ladakh society of connecting to the market. And note the impact of gunpowder, the printing press, and today, so powerfully, of digital technology.