

# Human Systems: A Selection of Developmental Schemes

Models of individual, family and group development drawn from various sources and adapted by Professor S. L. Chorover (layout by Jovan Ristic)

Note that all stage/age boundaries are approximate. Case-to-case variations are to be expected.

## MODELS OF INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT

SHAKESPEARE  
*As You Like It*  
 (II, vii, 139)

All the world's a stage,  
 And all the men and  
 women merely players.  
 They have their exits  
 and their entrances,  
 And one man in his time  
 plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages.

PHYSICAL /  
 BIOLOGICAL

**BIRTH-3 MONTHS:**  
 human infant exhibits extreme neoteny (is born in a relative state of neurobiological, psychological and sociocultural immaturity in comparison to many other mammals); may be early defined by caretakers as "easy" or "difficult"; "fussy" or "calm"; sleeps a lot; its nervous system is anatomically and physiologically "incomplete"; it is relatively insensitive and unresponsive to environmental changes (noises, etc.); early reflexes include sucking, tonic neck, grasping, etc.; head needs to be externally supported; gaze alert...

FREUD  
 (psychosexual)

**ORAL PHASE:**  
 Context/Focus: **feeding; mouth/breast**  
 unable to distinguish between self and other, and between internal and external stimuli/sensations; net affirmative maternal responsiveness to needs (if consistent and neither excessively harsh nor unduly permissive, encourages infant to assume a "psychological set" of trustful passivity="optimism"); net negative maternal responsiveness to needs or net inconsistency is liable to be experienced negatively by the child (nonverbally) as aversive or painful, thus encouraging infant to assume a "psychological set" of mistrustful passivity = "pessimism"

ERIKSON  
 (psychosocial  
 development –  
 viewing persons-  
 in-contexts)

**INFANCY:**  
 SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS:  
 infant and primary caretaker (usually biological mother)  
 MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK:  
 to get needs (mainly oral/nutritive) met;  
 MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS:  
 basic trust vs. basic mistrust;  
 FAVORABLE OUTCOME:  
 drive and hope  
 UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME:  
 apathy and fearfulness; autism; paranoia

## MODELS OF FAMILY AND GROUP DEVELOPMENT

### FAMILY

Families are transgenerationally produced and propagated human social systems whose main modes of organization and development might reasonably be expected to parallel generally those in other human systems at both the individual and the social levels.

Let's agree to take the prototypical "family life cycle" as a process involving three successive generations, and to identify its beginning with the coming together of two young persons. Having reached, say, the GENITAL STAGE of psychosexual development (as depicted in the columns to the left) they meet at a point in their lives at which (neuro-bio-psycho-socio-culturally speaking) both are ready, willing and able to differentiate enough from both their families of origin and their current peers in order to form a family unit of their own. The point at which „boy meets girl“ begins a process of courtship and indicates the start of a new family system building process – which may take a variety of trajectories. The following entries trace a typical trajectory from the moment of courtship until the death of both spouses.

### OTHER GROUPS

As this entire document attests, models involving stage or phase theories figure prominently in our efforts to comprehend the organization and development of human social systems at all levels of size and complexity. It should by now be clear that the organization and development process has some generic features – to be expected in all human social systems.

Let us therefore take 9.70 as a close-to-home test case. Parallels to Freud's and Erikson's developmental tasks and crises will be emphasized. Can we identify any of the stages or phases of development through which our own 9.70 collaborative learning system has been and is in process of passing? Please compare and contrast the following account with your experience as a participant/observer in/of the organization and development of the 9.70/03 collaborative learning system. You should also feel free to consider whether this account appears to you to be applicable to the task of understanding the organization and development of other human social systems.

### STAGE I:

The coming together ("engagement?") is an encounter (negotiation process) in which the two individuals must somehow reconcile many and varied traces of their respective (and collective) pasts – including attitudes toward marriage and family that have been shaped by their respective experiences growing up in their own families of origin. Each arrives at this point with more or less different worldviews, valuesystems and lifestyles. Typically, this part of the process is marked by an interplay of "approach/avoidance" behavior by both partners, and by "family problems" traceable to differences, disparities and disapprovals on all sides. This initial "entry" phase involves the working out of basic trust/mistrust issues. From a structural/developmental point of view, can it be seen as a counterpart of the developmental processes described immediately to the left and right of this column?

### STAGE I: PREAFFILIATION:

Consider the situation of an MIT undergraduate student poised, so to speak, at or before the actual point of entry into a particular classroom on the first day of a new spring term at MIT. What social influences are playing upon her or him? Has s/he arrived, at least at a provisional decision to consider committing to this class? Given that this one was chosen from among a number of other possible HASS elective classes to attend, are there still likely to be some unresolved commitment issues? How about personal and social demand characteristics of the upcoming semester? Is s/he operating under any significant academic/extracurricular constraints/ foreseeable time conflicts? How (in what ways) and how much (to what extent) is her/his readiness, willingness and ability to act conditioned and constrained by social influences arising from a tension between having some genuine personal and social interest in being a serious student of the subject

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**3–6 MONTHS:**

gaze follows moving objects; eyes focus; smiles; responsive to mother's face, hand/ mouth activity; head erect; social responsiveness; laughter; eye-hand coordination; orality; binocularity; sits supported; legs bear weight; reaches; localizes sounds; explores; cries easily

**6–12 MONTHS:**

responds to own image in mirror; babbles; squeals; apprehensiveness with strangers; interest in people & toys; plays "peek-a-boo"; responsiveness to own name and "no!"; moves from supine/sitting to prone; may begin creeping/ crawling; approximates thumb and forefinger; supports own weight; vocalizes "ma" "ba" "da" etc.; social interest; independent movement; may walk with support; possible time of weaning; begins to feed self; exploratory behavior, "adventurousness" and self confidence; evinces teething-related discomfort; irritability; excitability; responsiveness; creativity

**12–18 MONTHS:**

vocabulary; negativism; turns pages; climbs; plays; builds; scribbles; runs; hand preference; follows directions; 3-4-word phrases; points/ turns toward named objects; dressing ability; alternates between independent and dependent activity; obeys and disobeys instructions

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before us and desiring to pursue, instead, some other competing interests? Are there any other boundary conditions to consider? How well does it fit into your schedule? What is s/he (instead) thinking? Is s/he experiencing any approach/avoidance conflict(s)?

**STAGE II:**

"Marriage" (or its equivalent in terms of "commitment") and the establishment of a common household entails for both partners a transition from a state of relative independence to one of relative interdependence. Ideally (but not invariably) the new relationship is based on trust built up in the course of the preceding set of more or less explicit negotiations. Not atypically, this is a point at which unresolved (and perhaps transgenerationally "inherited") issues of power and control come to the fore. As each partner struggles (in his/her own habitual way) to realign connections/separations involving previous social relations (including families of origin), a further mutually and reciprocally acceptable cycle of conflict and reconciliation of differences necessarily takes place. Among the problems commonly encountered at this stage may be mentioned: residual ambivalence concerning loyalties to families of origin; issues of "commitment," distance regulation, sexual adjustment and disappointed initial expectations.

**STAGE II AT THE POINT OF ENTRY:**

Amid continuing approach/avoidance conflicts, one enters the place. Safely seated and beginning to settle in, the prospective participant is now concerned about personal safety and security issues. What will the class be like? Will it be a fun? Who are the instructors? Who are the other people here? Will the workload be heavy? What will I need to do to get through (or ace) it? How much time and effort will I have to put into it? Will I get what I want out of it (gradewise and otherwise)? Will I have a good learning experience?

Here, as a rule, approach/avoidance conflict gradually gives way to "attentive exploration" with a view toward resolving some of the basic trust/mistrust issues that must be dealt with in making even a provisional commitment to the process of becoming a member of the group. The underlying and frankly self-centered question at this point is, "What's in this for ME?"

Assuming that the goal is to develop a relatively open and cooperative (as compared with closed and competitive) learning situation (which is our stated aim), it is appropriate at this point for leadership:

- to allow – indeed, to support – the need for group members to maintain their distance;
- to let them approach at their own speed, while at the same time inviting trust;
- to facilitate exploration of substantive curricular topics while stimulating/entertaining discussion of commitment issues;
- to provide information regarding the demand characteristics of the situation, goals and objectives. The likelihood of dropouts is quite high here.

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### 18–36 MONTHS:

continuing postnatal myelination of spinal cord; capacity for bladder/bowel control

### ANAL PHASE:

retentiveness/explosiveness; possessiveness; anal zone becomes focus in connection with "power and control" issues in connection with toilet training and/or maturation; child experiences pleasure from anal "holding in" and "letting go;" controlling/appropriately releasing urine and feces and, by extension, hygiene/cleanliness become issues; becoming independent requires discipline and self-control; "learning styles" begin to emerge with self development and interactions with others sowing seeds of future mental/behavioral patterns; for example: in the extreme, either "obsessive/compulsive" and "impulsive/hyperactive" behavior may develop out of early experiences with things and other persons (psychoanalysts are thus intensely interested in what they call "object relations" (including relations with both parents & extended family)

### TODDLER:

SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS: child and parents; nuclear family  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK: to learn to hold on and to let go  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS: autonomy and self esteem vs. shame and doubt  
FAVORABLE OUTCOME: sense of self-control and will power  
UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME: resulting from parental permissiveness: problems in management of aggression; resulting from parental over-restrictiveness: extreme obedience to authority; conformity; need for approval; shame, doubt; fear of loss of power and control

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### STAGE III:

With the birth of a child, the family undergoes a transition from a dyad to a triad. Here the focus of negotiation shifts to issues of parental interdependence in the face of mutual responsibility for the well-being of a highly dependent new family member. The new parents must concurrently adjust to big changes in their relations with each other as well as their conjoint responsibility for an extremely needy infant; common issues at this point in the process include increased feelings of abandonment and/or fear of the loss of the other's love by one or both of the partners.

### STAGE III POWER AND CONTROL:

Once their initial commitments to membership in a group have been made, prospective (now provisional) members must come face to face with the reality of the group and begin to negotiate various issues with each other within it (e.g. determining the parameters of their individual and collective responses to the demand characteristics of the unfolding situation).

What is **really** going on here? Who is in charge? How do I fit into this arrangement? What is my status/role here? What am I supposed to be doing, thinking, learning? Do I like it? Notice that these questions are only slightly less self-centered in topic and tone than the basic trust/mistrust questions listed above.

This is a phase of the process in which members of a group-in formation must needs struggle with each other and with the nominal leadership (where such exists) to arrive at some "definition of the situation" that is reasonable and workable for them, both individually and collectively. Who is to determine the nature and scope of the prevailing rules and goals? The likelihood of dropouts continues to be quite high here, as is the probability of frankly hostile, aggressive, and negative behavior toward the group development process itself and those responsible for imposing it. Not uncommonly, the effort to gain a degree of power and control leads to proposals to formalize the proceedings by enacting rules, regulations, voting procedures, etc. The result of following these leads is invariably the establishment of a "zero-sum" game in which every disagreement is "resolved" by having some winners and some losers. During this rather chaotic phase, a leadership aiming for a more "win-win" approach needs to focus on allowing resistance to be expressed and rebellion to be developed within limits conducive to the protection of individual rights and general safety. In order to be effective, leadership will continue: a) to provide activities conducive to increased individual and collective competence, b) to clarify (insofar as possi-

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ble) the nature, scope and origins of the collaborative learning model, c) to "normalize" the power struggle presently going on, and d) to explain why it must be undergone in order to reach achieve the next developmental stage.

	<b>3–6 YEARS:</b>	<b>PHALLIC PHASE:</b>	<b>PRESCHOOLER:</b>	<b>STAGE IV:</b>	<b>STAGE IV: INTIMACY AND TASK ORIENTATION:</b>
	<p>bodily control; both gradual and sudden changes from infantile to juvenile physique, behavior</p>	<p>(note the gender bias implicit in Freud's pre-occupation with male psychosexual development and penises): genitals become focus; interest in sex differences and "where do babies come from?" and "how does the seed get in there?" etc. Freudian "Oedipal complex" presumes sexual identity of boys is significantly shaped by earlier interactions with mother; sexualized imagery (if present in sufficient kinds and significant degrees sows seeds of anxiety, hysteria, questions about own sexuality; phobias, rigidity; feelings of guilt, shame, alienation, awkwardness, helplessness, and incapacity in interpersonal relations.</p>	<p>SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS: family and nursery school or daycare</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK: to make; to go after, to imitate</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS: initiative vs. guilt</p> <p>FAVORABLE OUTCOME: purpose and direction</p> <p>UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME: see column to left</p>	<p>The partial exit of the first child from the immediate world of the family unit and his/her entry into the larger world of the neighborhood, local community and school (or daycare) initiates another shift in parental relations. As the child begins to move toward relative independence, both parents and child(ren) continue to participate in sharing (consciously or otherwise) thoughts and feelings, and doing things together. If and when additional offspring arrive, problems come to include sibling rivalries and the differential treatment of relatively preferred and rejected children.</p>	<p>Amid continuing normative and membership performance crises (e.g. trust/mistrust; power/control) an unmistakably increasing sense of belonging, interdependency, involvement, mutuality and goal orientation begins to emerge. (In the context of past 9.70 classes, this has tended to emerge first and for most individuals/peers at the level of the study group. At the level of the class-as-a-whole, intimacy and task orientation are more difficult to achieve; they not only usually take much longer to develop but also are somewhat less strong. Activities become increasingly emotion-laden (meaningful) and the focus of the struggle shifts. Instead of being directed against the process and the leadership, it begins to be increasingly aimed at the attainment of more substantive goals: e.g. a degree of mastery of the subject matter. There is increasing evidence of individual and collective competence; a growing ability to make plans and to carry them out (albeit not without considerable intellectual and emotional turmoil). In continuing pursuit of an open and negotiable learning process, the system as a whole should be steered through a supportive and flexible series of tasks and activities while constantly discussing and attempting to clarify the thoughts and feelings (both negative and positive) that are being engendered. Power and responsibility for directing the group formation process must continue to be shared in the face of fluctuating individual and collective performance.</p>
<p>...Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel And shining morning face, Creeping like a snail Unwillingly to school.</p>	<p><b>6–12 YEARS:</b> fine muscle control; physical growth rate beginning to slow</p>	<p><b>LATENCY STAGE:</b> extension of object relations beyond family; sense of personal/social competence engenders and reinforces sense of "self-esteem"; ego identity; frequency and intensity of incidents in which family norms are being tested (and possibly found wanting) through encounters with social influences arising from community and peer groups; devaluation of parental omnipotence</p>	<p><b>YOUNG CHILD:</b> SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS: neighborhood and school</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK: to make things; to compete and cooperate with peers</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS: industry vs inferiority</p> <p>FAVORABLE OUTCOME: self-esteem, competence and skill</p> <p>UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME: low self-esteem</p>		

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	<b>12-18 YEARS:</b>	<b>PUBERTY:</b>	<b>ADOLESCENT:</b>	<b>STAGE V:</b>	<b>STAGE V: DIFFERENTIATION/ INTEGRATION:</b>
<p>...And then the lover, Sighing like a furnace, With a woeful ballad Made to his mistresses eyebrow.</p>	<p>puberty; major growth spurt occurs earlier; gradual/sudden appearance of secondary sexual characteristics; increasing differentiation/integration of personal mental and behavioral characteristics (attitudes, beliefs and values, actions, practices) characterize "adolescence"</p>	<p>return or reactivation of phallic phase coupled with sexual maturation; depending on prior experience acquired in earlier stages, narcissistic object love (see Shakespeare's description) may or may not become focus</p>	<p>SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS: peer groups; same and opposite sexes</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK: to be/become oneself; to accept oneself; to share oneself with others</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS: identity vs role confusion</p> <p>FAVORABLE OUTCOME: development of situationally appropriate identity; transition to adulthood; exploration, integration or repudiation of family culture; sense of devotion and fidelity; satisfactory career choice</p> <p>UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME: inauthenticity; delinquency; neurosis; psychosis</p>	<p>The partial exit of the youngest child from the family and his/her entry into the larger world continues the pattern of partial separations; Children in school bring family beliefs and values and practices into confrontation (and sometimes conflict) with those of the surrounding community with discrepancies provoking and increase in tensions within the family.</p>	<p>As evidence of competency grows (in terms both of intimacy and task orientation), the cohesiveness of the system becomes increasingly apparent as does the somewhat paradoxical fact that group unity depends on the readiness, willingness and ability of the membership to recognize that their own (formerly highly problematic) diversity as a source of their own great and unique strength. Freer expression of thoughts and feelings in a social context that demands mutual respect and support and honest/forthright constructive criticism as well as positive feedback leads to a lessened preoccupation with power problems. Leadership comes to be seen less and less as the power/responsibility of identifiable "leaders" and serves increasingly as a function that simply moves around in ways that are responsive both to collective needs and personal imperatives. The group itself comes to be viewed by its members as a more or less distinct compositely unified system with a definite identity. "Giving to" the group (and its members) comes to be regarded as a value complementary to "getting from" them. (Compare with Stage II)</p> <p>Traditions begin to develop; repetitive tasks become increasingly regarded as merely "going through the routine", cooperation/collaboration increases at small group levels; more slowly at large group level; complaints of dissatisfaction and "boredom" occasionally resurface; but – if previous crises have been properly negotiated – there is a possibility for intimacy-building and goal oriented activities to become increasingly effective and sustained.</p>
<p>...Then a soldier, Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard. Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel, Seeking the bubble reputation Even in the cannon's mouth.</p>	<p><b>18-30 YEARS:</b></p> <p>peak of physical development and sexual activity</p>	<p><b>GENITAL STAGE:</b></p> <p>(early adulthood): depending on prior experience acquired in earlier stages, narcissistic object love (or its equivalent) may or may not be increasingly supplanted by couplings involving more mutual and reciprocal relations; conflicts between dependence upon and independence from family of origin</p>	<p><b>YOUNG ADULT:</b></p> <p>SPHERE OF SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL RELATIONS: adult community apart from family of origin</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL TASK: to redefine oneself in relation to significant other(s) (distance regulation)</p> <p>MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL CRISIS: intimacy vs. social isolation</p> <p>FAVORABLE OUTCOME: solidarity with others; love; affiliation</p> <p>UNFAVORABLE OUTCOME: isolation, loneliness; alienation; anomie</p>		

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**30-40 YEARS:**

...And then the justice,  
In fair round belly  
with good capon  
lined,  
With eyes severe  
and beard of formal  
cut,  
Full of wise saws  
and modern instances.  
And so he plays his  
part.

**40-50 YEARS:**

**50-60 YEARS:**

...The sixth age shifts  
into the lean and slip-  
pered pantaloen,  
With spectacles on  
nose  
and pouch on side.  
His youthful hose,  
well saved, a world  
too wide  
For his shrunk shank,  
and his big manly  
voice,  
Turning again toward  
childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his  
sound.

**60-80 YEARS:**

... Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange  
eventful history,  
Is second childishness,  
and mere oblivion.  
Sans teeth, sans eyes,  
sans everything.

**MIDDLE ADULTHOOD:**

marital commitment;  
establishment of  
household; issues  
involving the  
social/sexual division of  
labor, sharing of child  
care and other domes-  
tic responsibilities

**LATER ADULTHOOD:**

Freud's psychosexual  
development theory  
hasn't much to say  
about the lives of sen-  
iors.

**MATURE ADULT:**

SPHERE OF SIGNIFI-  
CANT SOCIAL RELA-  
TIONS: the larger  
community and the new  
family;  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL  
TASK: to provide for  
and to nurture;  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL  
CRISIS: generativity vs  
self-absorption;  
FAVORABLE OUTCOME:  
both vocational pro-  
ductivity and personal  
caring;  
UNFAVORABLE  
OUTCOME: stagnation

**OLDSTER:**

SPHERE OF SIGNIFI-  
CANT SOCIAL RELA-  
TIONS: humankind;  
ourkind  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL  
TASK: to be by virtue  
of having been; to  
deal with the prospect  
of not being  
MAIN DEVELOPMENTAL  
CRISIS: integrity vs  
despair  
FAVORABLE OUTCOME:  
wisdom; compassion;  
acceptance  
UNFAVORABLE  
OUTCOME: loss of  
interest; denial; rejec-  
tion; withdrawal from  
world (grumpy old  
men; hermits, curmud-  
geons)

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**STAGE VI:**

As children reach adolescence, acquire more autonomy and come increasing-ly under the influence of peer group norms; family ties are increasingly tested. Amid conflicts between them and their children, parents revisit or relive their own adolescent conflicts with their parents. This stage or phase begins roughly at the point at which the first child exits the family to establish an independent household. As children individuate and become more independent of and separate from their parents, the latter begin to anticipate the exit from their living unit of the last child.

**STAGE VII:**

In the (once again dyadic) context of the "empty nest," relations between the parents/spouses are further tested. This phase may be marked by increased or renewed closeness between the parents or it may precipitate what has been called "the twenty-year fracture." The nature and seriousness of family problems at this stage depends in part on the manner in which earlier stages turned out (how well or poorly crises were negotiated). It may also be determined by the emergence of conflict with new sets of "in-laws" acquired through children's marriages, by parental illnesses, retirements and grandparenthoods, etc.

**STAGE VIII:**

The aging parents. Developments in later years – up to and including the death of one spouse and then the other – not unsurprisingly tend to be shaped by earlier ones.

**STAGE VI: EVALUATION/TERMINATION:**

Elizabeth Kübler Ross derived from her work with terminally ill patients a conceptual framework within which dying is understandable as a process involving a more or less clearly recognizable (if not entirely invariant) sequence of phases or stages (denial and repression, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance).

In its final phase, the life cycle of a human social group may be experienced in a similar way by at least some of its members. To be more precise, members tend to separate from groups in ways that are both dispositionally and situationally influenced. Thus, all other things constant, our approaches to leavetaking tend to be fairly consistent for each of us from one situation to the next. For most people, endings are usually marked by a mixture of feelings, including sadness and happiness, resistance and relief. (It deserves note that, for some people, in at least some situations, acquired tendencies toward the denial and repression of feeling may blunt awareness and expression of both negative and positive attitudes toward both the group process and its termination.)

Insofar as possible, time should be taken at the end of a group learning experience to review and evaluate the experience as a whole within the context of a coherent conceptual framework. This will hopefully prove conducive to the development of a valid and reliable basis for "grading" the quality of the performance of the system as a whole and of its constituent subsystems (including study groups and individuals). Evidence of group development (or lack thereof) may be derived from a review and/or re-enactment of attitudes and behavior from the point of entry onward (e.g. compare/contrast journal entries, minutes, etc.) from early and later stages.

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