

# Possible Mistakes of Late Action-Logic Actors in a Polarized World

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Last summer, when we began trying to map the possible mistakes of late action-logic actors, the world was not as polarized as it is today. There had been no global debate on mandatory face masks, or whether people had a right to gather in church in the midst of a deadly pandemic. Nor had millions marched after the killing of George Floyd and called for defunding of police, only to be confronted by further police brutality in some places. Our organizations, communities and families had not gone through the upheaval of 2020. Nevertheless, we had plenty of examples of polarized situations and our own attempts to be of use in these situations. We both felt that, in spite of each of our longtime commitments to personal, organizational, and social development toward complexities of thought and simplicities of awareness that can bridge social differences, and our attempts at creating mutuality as an antidote to polarization, we had often fallen flat on our faces. How could we have gone wrong in so many ways, we asked ourselves? And would it be of benefit to ourselves and others if we studied and shared the patterns of our mistakes?

Thus began an attempt at aggregating our phenomenological, first-person experiences and reflections related to this topic, in order to share them at the September 2019 Growth Edge Network Conference. This being a gathering of many late action logic actors, we planned to expand our sample size and analysis based on the participants' responses and additions. This article now reflects such changes, including, at the end, three later e-mailed reflections. We are delighted by the offer of *Integral Review* to publish the current version of the essay and we invite further responses from readers of this essay.

At the outset of our conference presentation and dialogue about this topic, we admitted to our audience that the announced title of the session demonstrated one of the mistakes to which late action-logic leaders are prone. When we had proposed the session, we had called it "Common Mistakes of Late Action-Logic Actors". Upon actually getting serious about planning the session, however, we very quickly realized that we had no empirical research on how *common* such

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mistakes were. We were largely extrapolating based on our own limited experience and some observations of those around us. Hence the revised, more humble title “Possible Mistakes of...”

## Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #1

*Overconfidence in one’s ability to accomplish one’s initial vision, based in part, paradoxically, on one’s humble ability to correct one’s subsequent path based on one’s openness to feedback.*

During our preparation, we had next realized just how ambiguous the word “mistake” is in any developmental context. At earlier action-logics with short time horizons and concrete goals, as well as little sense of longer-term purposes and strategic plans, a particular action that fails to achieve its goal is likely to be perceived, quite simply, as a ‘mis-take’ (a ‘take’ – an action – that ‘mis’-ses its immediate mark). At a later action-logic, the same action may be viewed less as a mistake and more as one of dozens of initiatives necessary over time – to generate the feedback about ‘local’ conditions that will eventually be recognized as the early part of the path toward realizing the ultimate purpose. From this difference in how persons at different action-logics may interpret a mistake, we can infer:

## Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #2

*Too much attention to long-term purposes and outcomes and too little attention to creating a culture and leadership development process that attunes more and more participants to the value of mistakes in the service of purposive learning.*

Another way of thinking about mistakes late action-logic actors may commit in a polarized world, which raises the stakes and the tension, is to delineate mistakes that early action-logic actors are likely to make. Later action-logic actors are much less likely to make such mistakes, except when a situation ‘triggers’ them to fall back.

Actors at the earlier action-logics (Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever) are likely to use forms of unilateral power to try things, which do generate common mistakes, as the following table succinctly (and very incompletely) suggests.

**Table 1. Common Early Action-Logic Mistakes**

Action-Logic	New Type of Power Available	Relationship to Feedback	Common Mistakes
<b>Opportunist</b>	Coercive	Rejects altogether	Damages & loses other’s trust
<b>Diplomat</b>	Charming	Agrees in order to make others happy	Can’t critique in-group
<b>Expert</b>	Logistical	Accepts only from masters, Data has final word	Fails to see own axioms or others’ perspectives

<b>Achiever</b>	Productive	Welcomes single-loop feedback	Believes goal justifies means
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Actors at the later action-logics generally avoid the common mistakes of those at the earlier action-logics, because they increasingly exercise mutual types of power and inquiry. Their increasing ability to offer and receive double-loop and triple-loop feedback permits them and the teams they are working with to transform in the midst of action. Thus, in general, they act in trust-enhancing ways rather than trust-diminishing ways. However, they are susceptible to fallback to earlier action-logics, at which times they are susceptible to committing the early action-logic mistakes. A significant proportion of so-called ‘late action-logic mistakes’ are probably committed in states of fallback.

### Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #3

*Late action-logic actors may commit mistakes typical of early action-logic actors under conditions that trigger fallback.*

However, there are different, more subtle kinds of mistakes endemic to the later action-logics as well.

**Table 2. Possible Later Action-Logics Mistakes**

Action-Logic	New Type of Power Available	Relationship to Feedback	Common Mistakes
<b>Redefining</b>	Visioning	Offers critical, structural, double-loop feedback	Can sabotage own power in “idiot collaboration”
<b>Transforming</b>	Praxis	Welcome receiving as well as offering double-loop feedback	May not quickly recover from fallback
<b>Alchemical</b>	Mutually-transforming	Plays the action-logics like musical instrument, generates transformational “shocks”	May overheat situations with single-, double-, or triple-loop feedback
<b>Ironist</b>	Liberating Disciplines	Creates organizational systems that generate single-, double-, or triple-loop feedback	?

One possible mistake of the Redefining action-logic is to engage in the memorably-named practice of ‘idiot collaboration.’ By this, we mean holding the value of collaboration as an ideological absolute, a decision process to be used in all cases. This is one of the kinds of self-contradiction that the Redefining action-logic can fall into, due to its relativizing recognition that no philosophical logic, nor psychological action-logic, can prove itself true to someone inhabiting another action-logic. Collaboration therefore seems necessary on every decision in order to properly respect all participants’ perspectives in a process. But this is not feasible, nor desirable, given the time-constraints and commitment-limits inherent in any project, as well as the impatience

with such a process typical of the early action-logics. ‘Idiot collaboration’ refers to the self-contradictory process of creating an absolute in the name of relativism. In so doing, the person at this action-logic mutes their own discretion and power, a serious mistake.

### **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #4**

*The Redefining action-logic may overgeneralize the virtues and efficacy of pure collaboration in all decisions.*

In each case of transforming from one action-logic to another, there initially tends to be a disdain for the previous action-logic, as part of the cognitive-emotional differentiation from that action-logic. Because the Redefining action-logic is the first that recognizes that we all act through our (different) action-logics, it may lead to an illegitimate sense of superiority and arrogance in regard to all of the prior action-logics. This sense of superiority is illegitimate in two senses: 1) in that persons who are just beginning to explore the implications of the Redefining action-logic often continue to operate from earlier action-logics a great deal of the time; and 2) in that, by favoring their new-found capacity for offering critiques of earlier action-logics, they are overemphasizing the ‘deconstructive’ aspect of transformation and underplaying the ‘reconstructive’ initiatives necessary for successful transformation.)

### **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #5**

*Actors at the Redefining action-logic may disdain and critique the unconscious absolutism of the earlier action-logics, while not noticing it in their own tendency to engage in absolute relativism.*

In contrast to the realistic/materialistic tendency of the early action-logics, actors at the Redefining action-logic can develop a deep commitment to a more idealistic/spiritualistic vision of life. They may tend to dismiss the material realities that impact others (and themselves). For example, first-person ‘mindfulness’ practice may become the solution for all life problems, along with an implicit or explicit dismissal of second- and third-person disciplines for addressing ethical dilemmas and structural, societal issues of economic and political injustice.

### **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #6**

*The Redefining actor may start caring about the spiritual and act dismissively about the material reality that impacts self and others.*

The inefficacy associated with these performative contradictions can gradually motivate a person to evolve toward the Transforming action-logic. This action-logic realizes that in a human world characterized by multiple action-logics, few of which even recognize the possibility of other action-logics or the possibility of exercising mutual power, we need to inquire-in-action in each new conversation, new setting, and new project. A new kind of question arises: Which action-logic and type of power (or which blending of types of power) is it most timely to exercise when? To even approximate effective action consistently, it is necessary to work, not only with a theory of

individual action-logics, but also with an analogous theory of event action-logics, and with attentional disciplines which allow one to see incongruities in the moment of action and to act reliably with theory-and-practice-reconciling praxis power.

## **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #7**

*The Transforming actor may have developed theory and skills for working with self or a single other individual (as in coaching) in a timely way; but may as yet have little theory or associated practice skills for intervening in a timely way at the organizational or historical scale.*

Even if the Transforming action-logic actor is working with some kind of organizational development theory, strategizing action using both individual and organizational development theory is very difficult to do in reflection, and all the more so in the midst of action. Even more difficult is estimating how historical eras transform, since one has often lived most of one's life in but one such era. Thus, leaders at the Transforming action-logic are often as shocked and stymied as anyone else by sudden social changes, such as the Black Power movement of the late 1960s, the #MeToo movement of the late 2010s, and the Covid-19 Pandemic cum Black Lives Matter movement of 2020.

## **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #8**

*A change in Zeitgeist or historical epoch is initially likely to frustrate a Transforming actor's efforts at timely action.*

What some gradually realize is that, in spite of their theory of transformation and their well-intentioned efforts to practice it, they are in fact repeatedly – nay, constantly – falling back to earlier action-logics in their daily life. Some kind of unfamiliar exercise of awareness – some kind of meditation-in-action – is necessary if we are to find the post-cognitive attention that can, in real-time action, trace our own and others' thinking, feeling, acting, and impact on the presenting situation and assess the degree of efficacy and mutuality that is being generated.

We begin to seek out – not just single-loop feedback that changes specific actions to improve the likelihood of reaching a goal, and not just double-loop feedback that can change our strategy or action-logic – but also triple-loop feedback that can awaken a 'bare' attention or 'pure' consciousness, again and again and again. This requires a humble, comic, lifelong, spiritual, relational, Alchemical commitment to a task never completed. Only this commitment and developing capacity to offer and to receive triple-loop feedback provides traction at historical moments of changing paradigms.

Whereas the Transforming action-logic can fool itself about how often and for how long it experiences reality in a fallback mode, this is less likely at the Alchemical action-logic because its primary practices involve testing how many of the four 'territories of experience' (outside world, sensation of one's own behavior, thinking/feeling, and bare attention) it is in contact with at a given moment. What is more likely at the Alchemical action-logic is that one gets vilified,

ostracized, hunted and killed for creating so much disruption in people's early action-logic habits and assumptions (e.g. Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, Martin Luther King).

## **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #9**

*An actor at the Alchemical action-logic may disrupt early action-logic habits and assumptions to such a degree that people react violently.*

But does getting killed necessarily count as a mistake? Socrates, Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King all knew that they were risking death every day and quite deliberately continued to do so. They and their visions are remembered and are inspiring to this day because of what they were willing to die for – a kind of mutual, non-violent action inquiry.

The repeated references to fallback to earlier action-logics in the previous paragraphs invite several additional comments. First, by no means all early action-logic behavior by someone with a later action-logic center-of-gravity represents fallback, or a mistake. It may represent a calculated attempt to engage a person or organization at their earlier action-logic center-of-gravity, in order to establish initial contact and trust as a basis for a conversation or project that can gradually transform toward later action-logics.

Second, fallback is not the only source of 'mistakes' at the later action-logics. Each later action-logic occupies an incomparably larger 'territory' than the earlier action-logics, not only because it includes the territory of all the earlier action-logics, but also and primarily because it recognizes a much vaster realm of possibilities in its own right. Whereas the early action-logics through Achiever operate in the historical, durational dimension of time, the later action-logics gradually become familiar with two more dimensions of time – 'presence in the present' and the 'volume of all possibilities.' But, during one's long apprenticeship in each of the later action-logics from Redefining on, there are many opportunities for mistakes. During the apprenticeship period of exploring a new action-logic, a person or an organization will often 'get lost' among the many possible responses to the moment, or may mis-estimate the energy charge of a particular response one chooses.

## **Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #10**

*During the apprenticeship in each action-logic, one often tends to get lost among the many new possibilities for action that become available and may act ineffectually.*

Furthermore, a person may evolve to a late action-logic along just one or two lines of development. In such a case, the person's non-mutuality along other lines of development reflects their early action-logic in that realm. (Think Picasso's alchemical treatment of shapes on canvas, in contrast to his opportunistic treatment of the women in his life.) This uneven development results in a sharp dichotomy between the light and the dark sides of the personality.

## Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #11

*Uneven development across different lines (practical, cognitive, emotional, ethical, aesthetic, spiritual) can lead to a dichotomy between unilateral and mutual action in different spheres.*

A final kind of mistake that we have experienced at later action-logics is the mistake of engaging earlier action-logic actors in a fashion that is too peer-like, too I-Thou, early in the relationship. An attempt to clarify mutual boundaries may be interpreted as a violation of boundaries. This mistake may be motivated by a spiritual loneliness on the part of the late action-logic actor, and may be received as a threatening, seductive, or manipulative pre-mature intimacy by the early action-logic counterpart. Sometimes, this breach is resolved almost immediately by either party making it discussable and by a joint establishment of agreeable boundaries.

## Possible Late Action-Logic Mistake #12

*A late action-logic actor may prematurely seek a late action-logic relationship with another, arousing suspicion and withdrawal by the other.*

We would like to end by thanking the participants at the original Growth Edge Network session for raising many questions and offering various illustrations of possible late action-logic mistakes in a polarized world, which we have tried to incorporate in this paper. There are undoubtedly more such possible mistakes, and we encourage readers of this article to suggest some. Indeed, we have already received the following suggestions about additional ‘possible mistakes’ on the GEN website since our conference conversation, reproduced here with permission from commentators.

**Yotam Schachter:** I want to add one category of mistake that I don’t recall hearing in the session itself. Once someone has firmly established the capacity for double-loop learning, then a particular discernment is required in each situation: What loop should I feed this information back into? Is this cause for single-loop or double-loop learning? Do I rethink the whole project, or just tweak the implementation? It’s a new mistake only available at higher action logics to double-loop learn from something that only really requires single-loop learning.

**Bill T.:** Hi Yotam, I’m very glad you have reminded me of this particular mistake, quite common in the early period of recognizing the value of double-loop feedback: namely, the implicit or explicit denigration of single-loop feedback and learning. In fact, a single-loop behavioral correction is what is appropriate in the vast majority of instances, and the art of offering or acting on such feedback continues to be an important discipline to practice.

**Jan Weetjens:** One question/suggestion I would have in terms of “mistakes” of later action-logics relate to some of the mistakes that are listed in the paper (superiority, issues with boundaries, ignoring (others’) concrete life challenges, etc.). While people may have entered late action logic, they may still be caught in unresolved aspects of their shadow side. As Ken Wilber would say, they may have “grown up”, but they may still have work to do to “clean up,” or to “wake up.”

I would say that two aspects would deserve particular attention: the first is narcissism. My sense is that late action logic can actually have the effect of bolstering (rather than dissolving) the egoic mind, especially in the early late action logic stages. Some of the “common” mistakes (such as superiority) would point to that. The good news, though, is that, given enough time for ego to run into the stubbornness of reality (and suffering as a result), the person may outgrow this “mistake.”

The second, and more dangerous, “mistake” could be the patriarchal mind, or the “guru” mind, where the person positions him or herself as the one who knows, expecting others to surrender their capacity for discernment and agency. Unfortunately, we see all too many headlines in the press of extreme cases where this phenomenon led to abuse of power and violation of victims. Contrary to the narcissism (which only requires suffering of the ego to be dissolved), the patriarchal mind-frame triggers suffering of others, and can take a long time to be unmasked and dissolved.

**Aftab E:** Thank you Jan. I couldn’t agree with you more and I worry about these very serious and dangerous tendencies among post-conventional leaders. Our Mistake #1, referring to our own over-confidence, was meant to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to the kind of arrogance you talk about here. Perhaps it was too tongue-in-cheek.

**Dimitri Glazkov:** I am not an expert on others. I am only an expert on myself. My observation with my own development is that the stages didn’t arrive in a neat stepping diagram. A metaphor that comes to mind is that of a tool belt. I have various meaning-making models (conceptually similar to Bill’s action-logics) available to me, some are less familiar than others. I choose them according to the situation. Intention, habits, stress, fatigue influence these choices. Sometimes the choices are so fluid and instinctive that they almost seem to combine (like Achiever with a tint of Opportunist, using action-logic terminology). My own sense is that the number of the models I have is quite small, but the combinations of them produce the impression of many more.

My self-development challenge is two-fold: I continue to grow my edge and seek out new meaning-making models. At the same time, I work to be more intentional in what I pick from my tool belt in any given situation and have my choices be less influenced by habits, stress, and fatigue. That latter part is what comes to mind when Jan talks about “clean up” and “wake up”, and shadows. A “mistake” in this context sounds like a gap in intentionality.

In conclusion, each different action-logic is, in effect, playing a significantly different kind of game from the others. Each of our moves is likely to be interpreted differently in several different ways by the other players. Early action-logic players assume all are playing a common game. In actuality, continual effort is required to transform the event into a shared game. This is so at each scale of relationship – whether between marital partners, among organization members, or among citizens of a nation. Failure to create greater mutuality generates greater polarization and distrust. To our knowledge, no one, nor any community of inquiry, has yet ever succeeded in creating a game that seems developmentally fulfilling for all the participants across generations.



The writing of this paper has been a reflective and playful exercise in mapping and typifying mistakes as a way of inviting open conversation and critique of later action logics. While it is probably not very important that mistakes be mapped and typified in a systematic way, it *is* very important that they are discussable among the members of communities of inquiry dedicated to personal and societal development. The challenging and potentially transformative times we find ourselves in call for honesty about our idiosyncrasies as well as our collective illusions, blindness, and patterns of self-deception. To not engage actively in these conversations would be a mistake.