

# The Many Faces of JEDI: A Developmental Exploration

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**Abstract:** Many organizations and communities have grown initiatives dedicated to advancing justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) at a time when global and local inequities are front and center in the societal discourse. The movement towards JEDI is simultaneously full of positive transformative potential, and full of both ideological and interpersonal conflict. This paper explores the JEDI movement in organizational contexts using a developmental lens. It applies the structure of seven action-logics from adult development theory to describe how one's orientation to JEDI issues may mature over time. It offers suggestions for how late action-logic actors can become more effective in the JEDI space by recognizing the dynamics at play and intentionally supporting and expediting vertical development of the actors involved.

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## Introduction

A graduate student I work with has been painstakingly organizing a training on anti-Black racism for their entire department. The night before the training, the departmental director drops a casual note to say that they are tied up with some deadlines and cannot attend after all. The graduate student is rather upset, having counted on the director's presence to legitimize the investment of everyone's time to learn, and to communicate that this topic is everyone's business. The next day the graduate student sends a note to the director, expressing understanding of the circumstances and a hint of disappointment. "I wonder what we can do about our departmental culture where deadlines always feel more important than learning in community?" the note asks. The director writes back defensively and at some length, listing all the books they have read on anti-Black racism, mentioning that their best friend growing up was Black. "I'm already woke and didn't need the training", is the subtext. The student comes to me for advice, baffled by the response. How could the director be making this about *them*?

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I have often observed this kind of phenomenon while working in organizations on issues of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (summarized by the acronym JEDI<sup>2</sup>). So often it feels like people are ships passing each other in the night, ostensibly in the same conversation but actually talking about different things. In this case, the graduate student sees the need for the community to be learning together on JEDI topics, and takes issue with an outcome-driven system where meeting deadlines always trumps being in process together (Jones & Okun, 2004). The director is rather oblivious to the larger departmental system or their impact on it. They think they have made an individual choice about an individual learning opportunity. This disconnect is echoed in much of the discourse over systemic racism – a term that found currency over the summer of 2020 in unprecedented ways – where people in our systems (education, health, policing) took offense to the allegations of systemic racism. “But there is not a racist bone in my body” was a common sentiment (to which Vicky Mochama (as cited in Cole, 2020, p.34) clapped back on Twitter: “Maybe racism is a skin condition”). Radley Balko (2020), writing in the Washington Post, observed that

systemic racism [is] often wrongly interpreted as an accusation that everyone in the system is racist. In fact, systemic racism means almost the opposite. It means that we have systems and institutions that produce racially disparate outcomes, regardless of the intentions of the people who work within them.

The confusion between systemic and individual impacts could be at play in the example of the director and graduate student. While it could be explained away as a misunderstanding, I tend to think that their disconnect runs deeper and has to do with the breadth, depth and complexity of their meaning making and subsequent engagement with the world. Since I have been exposed to the theories of adult development, I can’t help but think that there is a difference between the director and the graduate student in terms of their action-logics – that is, the way they each interpret their surroundings and react when their power or safety is challenged (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). In this paper, I wonder out loud: what if our orientation to JEDI topics is coloured, not only by our politics and ideologies, but also by our stages of development? I write out of a hunch that seeing the JEDI space through a developmental lens may benefit our ability to make sense of our interactions within this space and on its peripheries.

## **My Own Location**

I explore these topics as a scholar-practitioner who has been immersed in JEDI over the last decade. I spent much of my twenties in environmental and social justice movement spaces, then played institutional JEDI leadership roles at a large university and a major city government. I have consulted at several other institutions. I’m writing primarily based on my engagement with the JEDI discourse in Canada, which is closely linked to the discourse in the United States, and may also have global resonance to some extent. As well, I write as a first generation immigrant from the Middle East, Muslim by birth, settler on Coast Salish lands. I identify as queer and as a woman of colour. I also carry a ton of privilege, including that of a PhD. I have a sense of belonging to the social justice movement. My professional roles have also taken me to the edges and outside of the bubble of JEDI advocates. I have acted at times as a mediator and bridge-builder with folks who

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<sup>2</sup> Some groups and organizations use the JEDI acronym where the letter D stands for decolonization.

are explicitly opposed to a social justice agenda, and have therefore got a view of the movement from outside. In short, the challenges of dealing with difference, power, and inequity are *my* challenges – important to me personally and professionally – and I write in pursuit of transformation towards a more just world.

I write also from the edges of the adult development community where I have many connections and have been both a skeptic and an observing participant in its communities of inquiry. What I present here is not based on an empirical study, but rather draws on my understanding of the action-logics as articulated by leadership scholar Bill Torbert. Over the years, Bill and I have mapped the development of the notions of power (Erfan & Torbert 2015), inquiry and mistakes (Torbert & Erfan, 2020) at various action-logics.<sup>3</sup> The current exploration of orientation to JEDI at each action-logic arises from a conversation with Bill, for which I am very grateful. I am additionally influenced by the pioneering work of Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas, and by scholars Toni Gregory and Michael Raffanti who devoted much of their careers to growing the conversation on social justice beyond identity politics. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, they wrote on “diversity maturity” and offered some sketches of a developmental path towards it. While I am alert to the pitfalls of developmental thinking (see below) I find myself helped by the mapping projects that these scholars have undertaken. Their maps orient me and compel me to choose the version of myself that shows up for every interaction. At times they offer protection against simply being snatched by my fear responses, or by the dominant mindset of the environments or groups I find myself in. As I engage in this form of mapping below, I do so with a hope that it is similarly helpful to my colleagues in the JEDI movement.

## Introduction to Adult Development

At the core of adult development theory is the idea that true grownups are rather rare. Most of us adults live in the constant possibility of growing up, and could make major cognitive, psychological, behavioural and spiritual step-changes in our adulthood as we do in our childhood. The basic idea is as old as the wisdom traditions, such as the work of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet Attar of Nishapur, who articulated the path of the soul in a seven-stage spiritual journey. A secular variation of such a path has been researched and theorized by modern day psychologist and leadership scholars, and supported by advancements in the field of adult neurogenesis which documents appearance of new neurons in the adult brain. Adult development theory states that we can trace a line of development between an individual’s younger and older self, which goes through somewhat predictable territory with several plateaus. Several methodologies exist for estimating these plateaus (also known as action-logics) at any given time for any given individual.<sup>4</sup> Like leveling up in a video game, each action-logic gives us new powers, new capacities to deal with complexity: not just new skills and tools (like a new weapon) but new mindsets and paradigms (like the ability to see the game in three dimensions, rewrite the plot, or change the definition of winning). Research has shown that leaders at later action-logics are more effective in complex organizational contexts. Subsequently, adult development theory, while acknowledging the gifts

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<sup>3</sup> For a full exploration of a developmental trajectory spanning the action logics through a lifetime, see Bill Torbert’s 2021 autobiographical exploration, *Numbskull in the Theater of Inquiry: Transforming Self, Friends, Organizations, and Social Science*

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the Global Leadership Profile <https://www.gla.global/the-glp-overview/>

of each action-logic and its appropriateness in the right context, generally has a normative bias towards vertical development, which is to say that it advocates in favour of growth towards the later action-logics especially for those who aspire to higher leadership roles.<sup>5</sup>

I pause here to acknowledge that adult development theory can be prone to elitism and exceptionalism, with its privileging of “more developed” ways of being, which could fly in the face of the basic JEDI commitment to equalizing. I have long been alive to this fear. At times I have indeed found the adult development field elitist: too focused on the top tiers of corporate entities, and less concerned with the pursuit of societal goals like justice. On a personal level, I have also witnessed developmental ideas weaponized and used in oppressive ways, sometimes by supposedly “developed” people to put others down or create separation between an “us” and a “them”. But more often I have experienced adult development ideas as status-quo challenging and liberatory. I have seen these ideas trouble hierarchies, patterns of domination and authoritarian uses of power. Importantly, developmental theory points to the shortcomings of unilateral power exercised by earlier action-logics, and advocates for development of a capacity to exercise mutual power, characteristic of later action-logics. Mutual forms of power have an orientation towards integrity, generosity, reciprocity, and the collective – which are well aligned with JEDI goals.

In organizational settings, a developmental analysis often turns our ideas of power and hierarchy upside down. It exposes, for example, the inefficacy and shortsightedness of the archetypal strongman leader who may be sitting at the helm. It daylights too, the key role – and key struggles – of informal leaders. In the case of the graduate student and the director introduced above, a developmental lens would illuminate that the person with the lower organization rank (the student) has the higher developmental rank. The student is seeing complexity, cultural and systemic patterns that the director doesn’t see. This is not uncommon. Your boss, teacher, or parent can well be acting from an action-logic you have transcended. This can make for a frustrating situation, but an awareness of their relative developmental rank can help the later action-logic actor bring the kind of patience and respect to their interaction with the earlier action-logic actor that one might bring into dealings with a younger sibling. It’s not that the director “doesn’t get it” because they are apathetic or not as smart or as well-read. It is that they don’t get it in the same way the student does, because they are elsewhere *developmentally*.

Development is not necessarily correlated with education (so many PhD holders are relatively early in their development, stuck at the Expert action-logic) or with conventional success (average CEOs rank only one step ahead of the PhDs, at the Achiever action-logic). On the other hand, going through adversity, including, for example, experiences of migration, ostracization, poverty, war, illness, or death of a loved one, can grow a person psychologically and spiritually and expedite vertical development.<sup>6</sup> Many Black, Indigenous, refugee, disabled, trans and queer folks I know are among the most alert to the nuances of a situation, moment-by-moment unfolding of group dynamics, presence of multiple conflicting perspectives and visions, the influence of the rules of

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<sup>5</sup> There are some excellent primers on adult development theory that reference the relevant research and current state of knowledge and theorizing in this area. See, for example Petrie (2020).

<sup>6</sup> This is by no means always the case. The literature on post-traumatic growth points to the tremendous role of context in determining whether we grow or shrink as a result of adversity. Understandably, some of us become closed off, guarded and simplistic in our meaning making in response to oppression, especially if we lack familial, community or professional support to process and recover from psychological hardship.

the game and their arbitrariness, and access to creative problem-solving and bold alternatives. They come by their later action-logic honestly. They have not gone to leadership development programs or personal development retreats. But they possess self-knowledge, systems knowledge, and a capacity for what the Mi'kmaq call “two-eyed seeing” (Bartlett et al., 2012), which comes from a daily need to survive in contexts where one doesn't quite fit in. They possess what feminists have called epistemic advantage (Narayan, 2004). Since they are not shielded by the privilege of living in a world that is made in their own image, they need to integrate, negotiate, adapt, reject, or protect on a regular basis. They experience a level of complexity in daily life that necessitates more complex ways of sense-making and action, which they have no choice but to grow in order to get by.

In making these claims I have no intention of glorifying oppression or justifying inequity by reference to its positive developmental side effects. But part of the reason that the JEDI movement is exciting to me is that it recognizes the enormous gifts of the margins and the outsiders, and has the potential of lifting into positions of power, historically<sup>7</sup> marginalized people whose lived experiences have actually prepared them to be the post-conventional leaders we need in this moment. As such there is alignment between the JEDI movement and the imperatives of vertical development. As a more fundamental level, the two also share a commitment to creating the conditions for human flourishing for all.

## The Action-logics

Different schools of adult development theory describe the stages of development in somewhat different ways. Here, in its most condensed form, is Torbert's articulation of the seven action-logics (as cited in Petrie, 2020).

1. Opportunist – Deeply concerned with their own needs. Tries to win any way possible.
2. Diplomat – Focuses on conforming with the rules and norms of the organization or peers.
3. Expert – Motivated to gain mastery and expertise. Values logic and respects other experts.
4. Achiever – Driven by goals, achievement, and meeting the standards they have set for themselves.
5. Redefining – Inspired by meaning and purpose. Challenges the status quo to find new ways.
6. Transforming – Generates organizational and personal transformations. Sees the system they are in.
7. Alchemist – Leads with fluidity, seeing the interdependent nature of things. Integrates wisdom and a global conscience.

The action-logics are often portrayed as steps, ascending towards Alchemist. Unlike various classifications of personality types (e.g., Myers Briggs), the basic notion here is not that one belongs in a certain category, more or less stable across one's lifetime, but rather that one moves up the steps, traversing potentially all of the action-logics in a lifetime. The linear path is, of course, a simplification of the growth process itself. In reality, the steps are not orderly or evenly

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<sup>7</sup> By “historic” I mean since the early days of colonization in this context, recognizing the term is problematic since history existed long before colonization.

distributed – one could live at an action-logic for decades (think Donald Trump, a septuagenarian Opportunist), or grow through multiple action-logics – maybe even skip one or two - over a short period of time (think Greta Thunberg, possibly a teenage Alchemist). Additionally, one’s growth may be uneven across various dimensions of life (think Pablo Picasso, Transforming as an artist, and an Opportunist in relation to the women in his life) so that each person is traversing multiple overlapping, in-synch and out-of-synch strands of development. Familiarity, substantive knowledge and practical skill in each dimension clearly impact the strand (so that if you are just picking up a basketball, you are likely focused on mastering Opportunist on the basketball court, even though you are functioning at Achiever in your day job as a lawyer --- and the fact that you are an Alchemist in the spiritual realm does not prevent you from struggling to become Expert when it comes to JEDI issues). I imagine these strands as multiple stems of beans growing together, distinguishable from each other, and each providing scaffolding for the next (which is to say that, eventually, you can leverage your capacity as Achiever in the court of justice to upgrade your basketball game). To the degree that we can categorize a person at a stage, we may do so by estimating their center of gravity action-logic, a kind of weighted average of their stage of development across multiple dimensions at a specific time. This is what the developmental instruments measure, usually through an in-depth questionnaire to sentence completion exercise.



**Figure 1:** Dimensions of development are distinct from each other and provide scaffolding for one another like bean stems.



**Figure 2:** Levels of development are like rings on a tree trunk, each later action-logic expanding beyond and encompassing the earlier action-logics.

Another depiction of the action-logics is as growth rings on a tree trunk, with Opportunist at the center and Alchemist on the outer edge. This metaphor suggests that each action-logic is more expansive and inclusive of the action-logics that come before it. This means that a person who has developed into the post-conventional action-logics (Redefining or later) has access to the



capacities available to someone at a conventional action-logic (Achiever or earlier), but not the other way around. We can build the skill to exercise range: the ability to draw on the capacities of multiple action-logics, based on what is needed in the moment or who we are dealing with. It has been suggested that the ability to exercise range is perhaps even more important to effectiveness than one's stage of development (Petrie, 2020). By the time one arrives as Alchemist, the courageous and wise integration of earlier action-logics is perhaps *the* defining competency.

To complicate things, the description of linear or radial progression through the action-logics is challenged by the fact that people also have a tendency for “fallback” into earlier action-logics when they are triggered or under stress (Livesay, 2015). Many of us have a favourite or habitual fallback. For example, we can function as Achiever but become a super Diplomat, trying to please everyone, when we are not at our best. The difference between falling back and consciously exercising an earlier action-logic can be invisible to observers (if my typically trusting team leader suddenly pressures me to do thing her way, I may not know if she is *choosing* her Expert or *falling* into it) but an intentional exercise of an early action-logic can save a situation which a fallback into an early action-logic can break.

It has been said of the future that it is already here, it is just not very evenly distributed (Gibson, 1993). I feel similarly about the past. And I feel this way about the action-logics: they are already here, available to each of us. Those we have already spent a lot of time visiting are more available to us than those we haven't yet unlocked. I imagine the latter lying dormant under the waters of the collective consciousness – sometimes we have access to them only momentarily, intuitively or through the body. Though we have a center of gravity action-logic, each of us may find ourselves thinking, feeling, behaving and meaning-making from the archetype of the others in different circumstances. Below, as I explore attitudes towards JEDI issues at each action-logic, I write in the first person to illustrate this fluidity. This exploration is not autobiographical per se- my actual examples are often inspired by observation of the archetypes in others around me - but the first-person voice feels appropriate because I recognize myself in all the action-logics. I write in this way as a way of minimizing mine and the field's tendency towards hubris, to reduce judgement, and with the hope that you the reader can see yourself reflected in multiple action-logics as well.

## Opportunist

As Opportunist, I am intently focused on myself, my lot in life and my attempts to “win” in concrete ways: money, sex, cubicle by the window. I value freedom and generally dislike rules, especially rules that tell me not to joke or swear or say certain things because I can be offensive to other people. I like to be clever. Getting away with breaking the rules is both legitimate and satisfying to me, and I look up to people who do this well. Simultaneously I support punishment for the cheaters who get caught, especially if they are not me. A concern for equity or justice, in the sense of righting the wrongs of the past, is almost nonsensical to me because I have a very limited historical view. I feel that what happens to us in life is more or less random, people get ahead by luck and by the virtue of their street smarts. Yes, there are the “less fortunate,” but that doesn't feel like something that needs to be corrected. Social hierarchy is natural and good. I'm good with pyramids – especially if I am located towards the top.

My support for the equal opportunity programs that claim they are leveling the playing field depends on whether they will benefit me or not. If I fall into one of the identity categories that will get ahead because of the program, then I am all for it. In fact, I deserve such a program. I'll check the "Indigenous" box on the application form if I think I can get away with the claim that my great great grandmother was Native American, and I will lean into my minority race/gender/disability/sexual orientation if that can give me a leg up. If I happen to be an unmistakably straight, white, able-bodied man (or, say, a cisgender lesbian in a queer context where trans women are being prioritized), then I am opposed to these programs. They are unfair and tyrannical, too much like social engineering. I might be compelled to march on the street protesting them. You want me to sit down and talk with people who promote these ideas? Talking with the enemy is a waste of time and a sign of weakness. I am in the right! I'll call the lawyers, the police, or take this into my own hands. If I sound full of double standards, that is because you don't need to be principled when your primary motivation is your own ascent.

## Diplomat

As Diplomat I have come to realize that my agenda to do well for myself is better served by getting along with other people. So I shift my focus from "winning" to "fitting in." I become keenly aware of the social norms and protocols in my peer circles, and I do everything I can to conform. JEDI is fashionable right now? I'll be all about it! I will look for and comply with the explicit rules *and* the unwritten ones. I'll memorize the right things to say to be politically correct, not because I think they are right in an objective sense, but because I would hate to upset anybody. I am politically correct in the truest sense of the word. I am the master of virtue signaling on social media. I'll take down the selfies of my privileged self next to children in a remote African village, and replace with selfies of me at the bookstore buying antiracist titles, because that's fashionable now.

Much like Opportunist, I don't have principles of my own. I am told I flip flop a lot, but that's because I am trying to make everyone happy. I'm friendly and agreeable to anyone I happen to be with at the moment. If I am among people who think the political correctness of our times is bogus, I'll likely go along with that too. I won't challenge my sexist co-worker, or my bigoted uncle at the family dinner. I will sit and nod and laugh at the jokes because harmony feels good.

If I can confide in you for a moment, I will tell you that these times of political polarization around diversity issues have been really hard on me. I feel torn and confused when I go from one environment or group to another. The different groups at my work don't get along with each other and I hate that. I hate conflict. First I try to fit in with all of the groups, but when they find out that I am playing all sides they will shred me to pieces. To make my life less complicated, I try to retreat into a bubble of people who are just like me. I hang out in cliques, have a whisper circle, or join affinity groups. But even this is little protection. My in-group shreds me to pieces sometimes because I am not totally up on what we are supposed to say now, and I accidentally said "blind spot", not realizing I was being ableist. I worry that I am not "Black enough" or "queer enough" or "leaderly enough". In order to belong, I participate in outing and shunning other people who say or do the wrong thing. I jump on the bandwagon because the bandwagon feels like the safest place to be. But I live in constant fear of being disposed of by my in-group.



## Expert

Tired of the emotional mess of living as Diplomat, I advance myself to the land of objectivity. Here, in the Expert mindset, I am no longer at the whim of the different groups and what they feel is the right thing. Instead I rely on policies that are created and implemented by professionals, and use them as the arbitrator of social relations. The human rights code is a favourite of mine. It defines discrimination, the legitimate grounds for a violation, and it comes with a clear set of operational steps to follow when there is a complaint. At my workplace, we bring in trained and accredited professionals – lawyer, mediators, consultants – to settle a conflict with objectivity and reference to policy. They determine who is right and who needs to be corrected or punished.

To me, the conversation about justice, equity and inclusion has to be rooted in policy. The impetus for organizations to pay attention to these issues is compliance with government regulations, and the impetus for employee to pay attention to these issues is compliance with organizational rules. The rules are our problem solving tools. Everyone needs to be trained on them on their first day on the job. Training, training, training. Then, if people have a problem with each other they would know how to bring forward a complaint so that it can be dealt with fairly and efficiently, without gossip, and under conditions of confidentiality. The more our processes depersonalize conflicts and objectify the problem, the more comfortable I feel.

As Expert, I also have an immense interest in research and data. Everything should be evidence-based including diversity and inclusion efforts. Census, surveys, numbers tracked on dashboards, and solid evaluation data to show program effectiveness are crucial so that our efforts have credibility. If representational data tells me that diversity is not a problem, I will believe it. I generally don't question the validity of the scientific method and believe that inquiry is objective if based on good technical practices. If I am a credentialed expert like a professor, I am also aware of the power of theory and will put out material to help settle some of these issues. It could be critical race theory I write about, or it could be eugenics. As long as there is evidence, it is valid science and my right to talk about it is protected by academic freedom. The suggestion that my research questions or conclusions are driven by my politics is ludicrous and you would know it if only you cared about evidence as much as I do.

## Achiever

Not unlike Opportunist, as Achiever my attention is on success, but I have the advantage of the interpersonal skills of Diplomat and the technical skills of Expert to succeed with. Here, I want to win by the rules – more or less. I'm interested in more abstract forms of success like recognition and legacy, and often I want to expand the sense of achievement to a team or organization. My sense of myself is as an initiator and agent, not a pawn in the system, so much so that I am in denial of the weight of social barriers on myself or others. Although I look to society for values and definitions of success I am able to choose my direction for myself. Will my happiness consist of getting the top marks in the class or of snatching the handsome guy sitting in the third row? Will I move to New York to become a famous artist or stay in my small town and triple the size of the family business? The choice is mine.

In many ways, the world of the past 50 years has been constructed in the image of my ambitions. I live and breathe the American Dream (even if I live in Canada) and hold dear the meritocratic ideas that animate it. I believe that one falls or flies as a result of their own effort, so I take credit for my successes and feel responsible when I fail. If I am an immigrant or an outsider of some sort, I get really good at survival skills (Nieto & Boyer, 2006) and I work so hard that I sometimes perform the dominant culture even better than the people of the dominant culture. I have sympathy for the less fortunate. I give to charity if I have the means, and I believe in the possibility of people pulling themselves up by their boot straps. I am President Obama, telling Black kids to go to college because everyone knows that an education is the key to the dignified life, and if these kids could only believe that they are as good as anyone else they could make it too (Sandel, 2020).

As Achiever in an organization, I am conscientious and self-aware, attuned to feedback about my behaviour and happy to apologize if I offend someone. I go on retreats and work on myself. In the inside pocket of my suit jacket I carry some inspirational quotes: “The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.” (O’Brien, n.d.), “If you are not aware of how you are part of the problem, you can’t be part of the solution.” (Torbert, n.d.), and “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” (Angelou, n.d.).

I choose an orientation towards JEDI that understands and frames it as a positive, benefiting both individuals and the bottom line. I am excited by the studies on how diverse teams make an organization more innovative and effective. I make presentations on the return on investment of inclusion measures to the board (Douglas, 2020), and I am motivated by being able to say “we’re a leader in inclusion”. I believe that justice can both feel good and be good for business, and I’m mostly interested in the kind of justice that *is* good for business. I want to decolonize bigger, better, faster (never mind that bigger, better, faster are colonial adjectives – I don’t get the irony) and I use a change management framework to do it right. My team gets trained in conflict resolution skills, communication strategies, and gratitude practices. We process group dynamics in meetings and believe that everything, including major wrong-doings like sexual abuse, can be worked through if we talk about them the right way and for long enough. We have self-generated group agreements, and will rely on them first, avoiding the laws and formal policies if we can. Ninety-nine percent of the time, whatever happened was just a misunderstanding. We actively build a positive, collaborative culture where differences are valued – but it is our commonalities we emphasize. Our diversity trainings begin and end with “at the end of the day, we all want the same things.” We are all one.

## **Redefining**

“Can the Achiever *be* any more misguided!?” I wonder in my burgeoning Redefining voice. I watch how the independent, meritocratic, capitalist, neo-liberal Achiever mindset has created the world we live in, and I enumerate the costs. I point to environmental damage, exacerbations of inequalities and widening class and racial gaps, despite promises of “we’re all one” and “opportunity for all”. How could we pretend we are all in this together, when the differences are so stark? How can we pretend our diversity initiatives are working when it is evident that they only

really benefit White women (Smith, 2018)? As Redefining I am at the centre of a massive social reactions to what feels, to many, like the American Lie. I am the social justice warrior.<sup>8</sup>

My thinking is rooted in a postmodern view of the world: knowledge, truth, and morality exist in relation to culture, society, and historical context, and are not absolute. I am alive to and appreciative of difference. I am fascinated by the cultures of others, and possibly by the cultures of my own people whom I left behind while I was assimilating (Nieto & Boyer, 2006). I have become aware of my identities – particularly my marginalized identities- and feel resentful of the ways society has scripted them for me. I may subscribe to an “aggressive victimology” (Cyril as cited in brown, 2021), while simultaneously rejecting the label of “victim”. I see the waters I have been swimming in. I pick up a power analysis that is focused on systems of oppression. When I look at inequities around me, I don’t see personal gains and failures generated by luck or merit, rather, I see systems – sinister systems, rigged systems – with rules constructed by the powerful to produce and maintain inequalities. I see the forces of oppression everywhere, from the design of segregated schools and restrictive covenants that shaped our cities, to the construction of “professionalism” in organizational cultures: the expectation to show up on time and put in eight hours, to use polite language in meetings and leave the emotions out of the workplace are all ways of ensuring those in power are comfortable, so they can maintain social and economic control (Jones & Okun, 2004). I passionately recite historians and critical scholars who have written on colonization, slavery, white supremacy, and patriarchy. I despise everything that smells like the status-quo. The Achiever capitalist outlook on JEDI as “good for business” is repulsive to me. Justice is essential for our dignity as human-beings and it is distasteful to frame it otherwise.

Paradoxically, my thinking is characterized both by a humble awareness that all worldviews are constructed and therefore relative, and, by a clarity and certainty about *this* truth to the point of righteousness. My truth is subjective (I get that) but much like Expert I am confident that I have answers. Meanwhile, like Achiever, I feel agency to act. I am full of creative vision and conviction. I dream up and implement new institutional arrangements that upend traditional power dynamics (like the Youth Council that is in charge of making the final decisions on the adult-designed programs). There is a certain amount of chaos and excitement surrounding everything I do. I attract others who are keen to create new forms of organization and society.

Since I am aware of the existence of multiplicity of perspectives in connection with multiplicity of identities, I see collaboration as a pre-requisite to justice. Exercises of unilateral power feel wrong to me. I will share power and involve others in decision-making, sometimes to a fault (not recognizing that I myself am unilaterally insisting on collaboration). I myself will feel betrayed if excluded from decisions. “Nothing about us without us,” I insist, and I categorically reject the legitimacy of any initiative that doesn’t have justice-denied people sitting at the table. I invite conflict and have some ability to create shared vision across differences. Unfortunately, many of the groups I work with end up having an oppressor who recreates the very dynamics we are trying

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<sup>8</sup> There has been some suggestion that the alt-right, white supremacist movements emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are also a form of rejection of meritocracy and an alternative response to neoliberalist status-quo – See Sandel (2020). On the surface there are similarities between the alt-right movements and the social justice warriors. I do not have enough familiarity with the alt-right communities to responsibly speculate on them, but the question is worthy of our collective consideration.

to work against, and they destroy the group. The bitterness of these repeated experiences of betrayal feeds my disillusionment with the world and renews my commitment to fight.

In the interpersonal space, I commit to the Platinum Rule (“treat others as *they* want to be treated”) and I will stand up for your self-expression - your right to be identified by a new name and pronoun every week if you want to. I have no trouble calling people out, I believe survivors as a matter of principle. I am done with oppressors getting away with their behavior and I am not interested in hearing their excuses. Despite my talk of oppressive systems, my rage is often directed at individuals embodying them, including whoever happens to be in charge in my organization. Sometimes the people I rile against are those I am raging on behalf of: the few “minorities” who have made it to leadership ranks – partially thanks to my own lobbying to put minorities into positions of power ten minutes ago. I am not aware of the irony that I quickly destruct the solutions I helped to construct, when they don’t match up exactly with my idealized vision for them.

In group and organizational settings, I am likely to read a situation exclusively in terms of the patterns of oppression, dismissing personal contributions almost entirely: If the person of colour doesn’t get the job, that is undisputable evidence of racism. If people disagree with the woman in the room, that’s because they are sexist. If a queer person is not excelling, that can’t possibly have anything to do with their competence and to suggest otherwise is homophobic. Even though on the face of it I am a fan of inquiry, I will shut it down if the oppressed are being questioned. Inquiry is violence when it discomforts the oppressed. Do I sound like I hold double standards in favour of the oppressed? That is because I do! The world has been made on double standards! The only way to correct for history is to turn the tables.

## **Transforming**

Skillful negotiation of the polarities, contradictions, differences, and incongruities between people’s talk and their action is my main preoccupation as Transforming. I have strong views and politics, and have been steeped in deeply ideological waters – but somewhere along the way I burnt out as a JEDI warrior. I am aware of the dark side of movements, the impracticality of their critical approach, the brutality towards their own members. I am disillusioned by dogma and see purity claims as empty and antithetical to the project of making a better world. I am not interested in replacing one form of silencing with another, even if there is some resemblance of justice in that. I feel strongly that the liberation and transformative justice we are seeking to bring about needs to be embodied right now in all of our actions. It is sometimes observed that when people first grow into an action-logic they feel annoyed and impatient with the action-logic they have just transcended. Perhaps that explains my frustration with Redefining.

As Transforming in the JEDI space, I believe fiercely in justice, the manifestation of love in public, as Cornel West has said. I don’t dismiss critical analysis but I hold conviction at arm’s length to be examined. Part of being equitable means that I am as critical of my own frameworks as I am of others, and I am learning to do this with generosity and care. I agree with Redefining that the world orders are fundamentally unjust and we need to bring this house down. I also know that you can’t dismantle weight-bearing walls when there are no other supporting structures (R. Soutar, personal communication, Jan 15, 2021). If you demolish quickly and indiscriminately, you crush the inhabitants, and those who are already marginalized are likely to suffer most. I am

strategically focused on building new supporting walls in order that the old walls can be taken down. I stand for transformative change in vision, strategy and tactic, but am not ashamed to use conventional tools – diplomacy, data, incremental change tactics – in those moments when they are more effective than revolutionary tools in moving us along.

I am keenly aware of the influence of systems *and* individual agency when it comes to JEDI issues. In moments of conflict, I don't assume that what is happening is strictly interpersonal, nor do I read it purely as systemic. The conflict between men and women in my department over who is doing more of the institutional housekeeping or emotional labour, is not *only* their fight. It sits against the backdrop of patriarchy and the unconscious expectations of gender roles that subtly colour our thinking and action. I recognize and make these patterns and histories explicit, but reserve enough of a beginner's mind to then look at the specifics of the situation. The way we undo patriarchy- and other oppressive systems- is through how we handle specific situations like this. Engaging this conflict can lead to personal development (the parties cluing into how they are responsible for [co]-producing the situation), new local strategies (revising team arrangements and feedback mechanism) and systemic change (a reframing of what types of labour we value as an organization, and a tracking system to make workload distribution transparent and equitable). Systems and individuals are much more interdependent than typically acknowledged. Individuals – even those who have done harm – have the capacity to do better when we engage in “principled struggle” (Lee, 2020), and give them a chance for a do-over (T.M. Nahanee, personal communication, Mar 15, 2021). And transformative change can happen when there is a critical mass of individuals brave enough to live in truth (Havel, 1978).

My worldview is shaped by an understanding of polarities – situations where there is truth and wisdom on more than one side of an issue (Johnson, 1992) – and I have practical skills in working with them. I lean in the direction of working with groups and I see the task of leadership as caring for the whole of the organization. I construct teams and decision-making tables that are inclusive of the “diversity tensions” we are navigating (Thomas, 1996). In my circle there are many unusual suspects and unlikely allies. I am as concerned with representation (which identities are present) as I am with the meeting of different paradigms and points of view. If we can't have Indigenous youth in our meeting (they have better things to do, and we're not yet decolonized enough for them) I at least introduce a reading or a song or a ritual that might bring their voice and presence into the space. I don't simply give everyone equal opportunity to speak. Instead I use my power to create spaciousness and amplify the voices of those who have been on the margins – then create careful spaces for the voices of dominant groups too, because we won't make any lasting transformation if they nod in agreement out of politeness or fear or numbness, and then go back to their desks wounded and un-transformed and continue to do what they have always done. I see the concept of diversity itself as being expansive – not only about identity markers, but about differences in action-logic, in feeling states and perspectives that are taken up – sometimes just momentarily – by different people at different times (Thomas, 1996).

I am quite adamant that we need to create spaces where people from different walks of life can enter the conversations on JEDI topics, even if it means some are going to be clumsy and say the wrong things (Joseph cited in Stayton, 2019). Sometimes I take on a third-party neutral role, in order that I can stand slightly outside of polarized situations and help with a genuine exploration of the views. I bring everything I have – theory, data, truth-telling, charm, humour – to this

collective meaning-making and attempt at co-creation. I have learned too that it is wrong to hide behind my “neutrality.” There are moments when I need to draw strong boundaries, protect a group from itself, practice generous exclusion (Parker, 2018), confront hypocrisy, raise a mirror up to a community, and make myself unpopular. In my best moments I have the feeling that I am lending my maturity – my ability to hold multiple truths and give people some grace – to the group or community I am working with.

## **Alchemist**

As Alchemist, I stand a step back and look on. I see us – organizations, communities, families, societies, ecosystems - in this moment of struggle, real pain, real effort and real potential. I see us somewhere on the arc of history, which, as Martin Luther King says, is long and bends towards justice – but also looks a lot like a collection of spirals in its non-linearity. While I walk the path of transformative justice shoulder to shoulder with passionate colleagues, I feel less certain about our prospects and less attached to specific outcomes. Perhaps it is important that we win this election battle, pass this new policy, create this new practice, re-build the house so that the walls are not made of oppression, bring some light into the darkness. But also perhaps this is *not* what is important. Perhaps this is a time when we need to go into the darkness fully, perhaps the order needs to fall apart completely, perhaps our organization, our civilization is ready to die, and it is not for us to control or even envision what the next wave of existence might look like. I am so aware that sometimes when it looks like we’ve won, we have actually lost, and other times when it feels like we have fell on our faces, we have actually succeeded.

I feel sad for where the world is, and simultaneously touched by its beauty. I feel somewhat detached from the world-remaking effort, and at the same time very much in touch with its moment to moment struggle. I feel resigned to what there is and simultaneously committed to acting towards change with integrity each step of the way. Often I seek out intimate conversations with just one or two others, speaking my vulnerabilities, asking about their deepest truths, feeling the shakiness of the ground underneath us as we find no answers. Even more often I sit under a tree by myself, feeling these feelings, holding these contradictions inside me with tenderness, listening into the dark, wondering into the mystery of what is unfolding.

When I think about justice, I think about inter-species justice and the possibility of human societies [re-]discovering relationships of reciprocity with other beings as well as each other (Kimmerer, 2015). My sphere of care extends far and wide. I love all the children or all species for all time (McDonough, 2002). When I think about myself, I am far more aware of my privilege than my victimhood. I feel so privileged to be getting such enjoyment out of the warm cup of tea in my hands right now.

In all honesty, I am no longer that invested in organizational life. I find it lonely, and it might be time for me to step off. But while I am here, I am here with an existential awareness and attendance to the present moment. I spend time preparing for collapse of organizations and societies, putting away valuables in a time capsule for future days, and attending to the grieving process of those around me. My role is really fluid and my time is structured by a clear sense of priorities that aren’t spelled out in my job description or work plan (did I even remember to make one of those this year?) Many people seek my council, and an equal number have written me off

as the half-mad fixture of the organization. I am equally happy to name the elephant in the room, play the peace-maker, break into tears in the middle of a meeting, or be the person everyone needs to blame to feel better. I show up the next day and see what is required then. And if I am fired, it doesn't matter all that much. I am Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Redefining, Transforming. I am Nelson Mandela in prison, seeking out and talking to the young radical prisoners, learning from them and drawing inspiration from their energy, not getting triggered by their militancy. I tease them and nudge them towards more inclusive visions of justice while they sharpen my own thinking (Raffanti & Gregory, 2012). I take delight in our mutuality: the significance of their impact on me and my impact on them.

## Implications for Practice

The exploration of the action-logics and their differential capacities for engagement with the complexity of JEDI issues highlights, first of all, the difficulties of working in this space – but that's not exactly a revelation. The question is “so what?” What does this exploration tell us in terms of what there is to do, or, how those of us who care about JEDI could become more effective actors in the middle of this space or on its peripheries? Here I articulate some observations that occur to me, particularly as I think about later action-logic actors (Redefining, Transforming, Alchemist) in organizational settings.

*Redefining at center stage* – What strikes me most, as I write this paper in early 2021, is that the Redefining action-logic is the most central character in the dramas of the JEDI movement in this moment in history. The power of Redefining comes from its access to fresh, highly relevant truths and a closeness to the reality of those who are suffering. Society is hungry to see the world anew, to reframe everything, to challenge the status-quo – evidenced by the fact that “everything you knew about X is wrong” is a most effective clickbait on social media. Drawing on decades of critical writing, community organizing and artistic practice, and with the help of the internet, Redefining has the means at their fingertips to create and grow social movements in unprecedented ways. Redefining energy can mobilize, in particular the survivalist instinct of Opportunist (thus the militancy and potential for violence), the tribal mentality of Diplomat (thus the enormous pressure to conform within the JEDI movement), and the need for precision of Expert (thus all the rules about right and wrong)– which is to say that the JEDI movement is also full of early action-logic actors. The status quo against which they stand up is characteristic of Achiever mentality. Achievers are for the most part pretty perplexed by the JEDI movement (“why are they so angry?”) and will try to co-opt its Redefining energy into their own lucrative fold (“here, have part of the throne”). Meanwhile, Transforming finds it hard to have patience for the purism of Redefining (“why can't they grow up already?”) and is likely to dismiss it out of hand (“they are just playing identity politics”).

If this paper has done one thing, I hope that it has created some understanding and affection for the Redefining action-logic as it shows up in the JEDI space. Too often in organizations and communities, I see Redefining villainized, dismissed and disrespected. I am under no illusion that Redefining is perfect, and have hinted through this paper at its shortcomings: a propensity for righteousness, a dogmatic over-emphasis on inclusion, a counter-productive purism, a harshness



in dealing with anyone seen to be faltering, or not “woke enough.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the vilification and straight-up dismissal makes me sad because Redefining is the carrier of uncomfortable truths we need to hear in organization – truths we are currently mostly shutting out. It also scares me because the more these truths are denied, the more extremist the Redefining among us will become, and that path is leading us to the edge of violence within JEDI spaces, and throughout our organizations and communities.

I tend to think that the likelihood of the JEDI movement succeeding in liberating us may depend on our collective finesse in working with the Redefining energy, both in ourselves and in others. Transforming and Alchemist: this is on us. First we need to pay attention to how much time we spend acting from Redefining, and how much of that is in fallback or out of a need for easy belonging. We need to exercise the responsibility of our developmental rank, which is to be patient with and respectful of people at other stages of development. We need to be alert to the hubris that can come with the latest action-logics. When we are attacked by Redefining, we need to put aside the fact that it feels harsh and unfair, and should instead look at it with honesty and ask ourselves: where is the grain of truth? We need to validate Redefining colleagues when they are correct, and be courageous in articulating why they are incorrect when that is in order. We could bring Redefining colleagues into the rooms where we grapple with the complexities of what we are facing and have them engage with us in figuring out how to manage various polarities responsibly – instead of locking them out of the room which sets them up for opposing whatever pragmatic solution we come up with. The most productive path out of the stand-off with Redefining is, ultimately, a developmental path in which our Redefining colleagues grow, and with any luck we do as well.

*Potential for JEDI conversations as sites of development* – One of the most useful things that leaders at the later action-logics could do is to do some horizontal development around JEDI issues. So far in this paper I have focused a lot on late action-logic actors who are already in the JEDI movement, but my observation is that most highly developed organizational leaders are pretty illiterate when it comes to JEDI. Make no mistake: just because you are a late-action logic leader that doesn't mean you can be effective in interactions across difference at a time of such polarization. We cannot be effective in the JEDI space – and I would argue we cannot be effective as organizational or societal leaders at a time when these issues are front and center – if we don't take an interest in the history of Asian Canadians (which is entirely different from the lived experience of Black or Indigenous folks), if we don't make an attempt to understand the lived experience of colleagues with disabilities, if we don't learn the current language for talking about trans folks or practice referring to non-binary friends with they/them pronouns. Sometimes I hear colleagues say: “but there is no way I am going to learn everything about everybody – that's just postmodern foolishness.” I agree with the first part of this statement, but to make no attempt to learn because there is so much to learn seems even more foolish to me. Learning about the concerns

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<sup>9</sup> There is a significant and powerful literature from within the social justice movement(s), by queer and racialized activists and writers that question the ways that the orthodoxies characteristic of a less mature Redefining culture are playing out, and propose transformative and alchemical alternatives. Of note among these texts are Frances Lee's essay (2017) *Excommunicate me from the church of social justice*, Kai Cheng Thom's book (2019) *I Hope We Choose Love*, and adrienne maree brown's book (2021) *We Will Not Cancel Us*. These texts are essential reading for anyone concerned with the ethics and practicalities of supporting the maturation of JEDI efforts at this time in history.

of those around us is not unreasonable. We could add it to the list of impossible things we already strive do, without putting expectations of perfection on ourselves and others.

In a different vein, one of the best gifts of learning about JEDI issues may be that it acts as a kind of Trojan horse for vertical development. I think it is possible for us to start thinking of and designing our JEDI conversations, trainings, dialogues and conflict engagements as developmental opportunities – by which I don't mean that we start talking about action-logics, but rather that we think of what we're doing not only as teaching skills or concepts, but as enabling new and expansive mindsets – pursuing vertical development goals as we do horizontal development. The centrality of *difference* to the JEDI conversation, and its invitation to be self-reflective on our own complicity in injustice, could make it a potent space in which people can be compelled to grow. If the three conditions necessary for vertical growth are colliding perspectives, elevated sense-making, and heat experiences (Petrie, 2015), I can hardly think of a space where those three conditions are more present than in any good JEDI conversation. Ideally, our JEDI learning interventions would meet people where they are at (for example, the Experts would get PowerPoint slide start with) and then stretch them into future action-logics (for example, the Expert will then get a second set of information in tension with the first, plus a small peer group and a polarity mapping tool that would enable them to start making sense of the contradictions together). It excites me to think of the innovative designs this reframe of JEDI learning as vertical development can make possible.

*Implications for the question of motivation* – The exploration in this paper has made visible to me that there are multiple starting points in terms of *why* organizations and people within organizations are signing on and creating departments or initiatives to do JEDI work. For Diplomat and Expert, the motivation is to comply with regulations. For Achiever, it is the business advantage. For Redefining, the motivation is ethical and JEDI is a good in itself. For Transforming, JEDI is the instrument towards a goal of love and mutuality. I can say that in my workplaces all of these motives have existed at the same time and part of the battle around JEDI issues (what wording we should use, what initiatives we should prioritize, what story should we tell) is actually a conflict over which motivation should guide the effort. So often I witness people – who are all committed to JEDI – feel either perplexed or betrayed by each other because of their differences in how they understand “the cause.” But is it really such a game-stopper if we don't all want what we want for the exact same reason? Could we see the strategic advantage in agreeing on the destination and the basic path to get there, even if we're travelling for a variety of reasons? If we want expediency in JEDI initiatives, perhaps there are opportunities for alliances across the action-logics. Perhaps we need to make the conversation about motivation more explicit more often, and see if the clarity about the multiplicity of our purposes gives us the ability to consciously build these alliances.

When the JEDI movement looks in the mirror, it sees many faces reflected back. I can only hope that giving names and definitions to some of these faces enables all of us who see ourselves a part of this movement to take our next steps with more awareness and mutual responsibility to one another.

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