Social Character and the Life Cycle

Why Personality Should Matter to Leaders

Excerpted from

The Leaders We Need:
And What Makes Us Follow

By

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For those readers seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the social character shift, I’ll zoom in on the differences between the bureaucratic and interactive social characters and how each develops through the life cycle.

I’ve used Erik H. Erikson’s theory of personality formation through eight stages of life to contrast how the bureaucratic and interactive social characters are formed. Erikson, like Fromm, is among the rare breed of psychoanalysts who have tried to revise Freud’s theory of personality by factoring in cultural influences. Erikson based his stages on the idea that people had to respond to the challenges of both their maturing bodies and their culture’s expectations of them at different ages. How they met these challenges formed their competencies, values, emotional attitudes, and identity. Table A-1 illustrates positive life-cycle development of bureaucratic and interactive social characters, where those challenges are successfully met. Table A-2 lays out the negative implications of these life stages.

But what Erikson first wrote in 1950 and revised in 1963 was in a context that has changed almost beyond recognition, a culture that formed the bureaucratic social character. If you were born in the 1970s or ’80s, it’s hard to imagine a culture where two-thirds of families were headed by
a single wage earner, the father; where few women in this pre-pill era of *The Feminine Mystique* aspired to leadership roles in business and government, and most of those who did identified with their fathers. At that time, even the most educated women were repeatedly told their role was to create the warm culture of the home, a haven from the rough and tumble of the corporate battlefield. That’s what Adlai Stevenson, the Democratic presidential candidate, advised the graduating class of Smith, the elite women’s college, in 1955. Of course, all that has changed. The twenty-first-century emphasis at Smith is strengthening the department of engineering so women can gain management jobs in technology companies.

At the present time, when most couples are both in the workforce and there are as many families headed by single women as there are traditional families of the 1950s, it’s much harder to describe a typical experience for a child growing up. Clearly, these different types of families also differ in

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**TABLE A-1**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive life-cycle development: Bureaucratic and interactive social characters</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bureaucratic</strong></td>
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<td>Basic trust</td>
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wealth and opportunities for children to succeed, and, as I’ll note, richer parents get involved early on in their children’s careers. Yet, with universal access to current events through TV, radio, movies, and the Internet, few children are unaware of what they have to do to succeed in a world of fierce competition and global business where capability for knowledge work is the key to success.

As we contrast the eight stages of life of bureaucratic and interactive social characters, what it takes to prosper in this new world will become clearer.

Do national cultures make a difference? What I’ve concluded after interviewing managers in Europe and Asia is that while national differences exist, the common culture of global business is pulling the most educated young people toward a common interactive social character.

TABLE A-2

Typical developmental problems: Bureaucratic and interactive social characters

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bureaucratic</th>
<th>Interactive</th>
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<tr>
<td>Basic trust versus basic mistrust</td>
<td>Dependency on mother; hot-house environment</td>
<td>Feeling abandoned; detachment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy versus shame and doubt</td>
<td>Obsessive conformity</td>
<td>Lack of boundaries; impulsiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative versus guilt and anxiety</td>
<td>Oedipal struggle and over-identification with parents</td>
<td>Anxiety about group acceptance causing over-conformity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Industry versus inferiority</td>
<td>Loss of self-confidence—poor grades, performance</td>
<td>Overestimation of self as defense against loss of self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity versus role confusion</td>
<td>Compulsive conformity to parental role model or peer group</td>
<td>Self-marketing and lack of a center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy versus isolation</td>
<td>Tribalistic relatedness</td>
<td>Superficial coupling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity versus stagnation</td>
<td>Becomes a narrow role</td>
<td>Nothing to teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego integrity versus despair</td>
<td>Tolstoy’s <em>Death of Ivan Illich</em>—the lost self</td>
<td>Burnout; anomie</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Erikson’s stages were a speculative framework, and in building on it, I’ve made use of studies from developmental psychology and sociology that were made after Erikson’s time, combined with my own observations and those of colleagues. The eight stages with approximate ages are:

- **Trust versus mistrust:** From birth to age 1
- **Autonomy versus shame and doubt:** From 1 to 3 years
- **Initiative versus guilt:** From 3 to 6 years
- **Industry versus inferiority:** From 6 to 12 years
- **Identity versus role confusion:** From 12 to 20 years
- **Intimacy versus isolation:** From 20 to 40 years
- **Generativity versus stagnation:** From 40 to 65 years
- **Ego integrity versus despair:** From 65 on

These stages should not be thought of mechanically, as though we moved through life on a track, stopping at fixed stations to wrestle with psychosocial challenges. Although our success in mastering the challenge of each stage increases greatly the chances of our success at the next level, failure at a particular stage doesn’t mean we are forever blocked in developing ourselves. Despite early setbacks, some people, often with help, can recover and find their way back on the path.

**Basic trust versus mistrust**

We’re all born with a rudimentary sense of identity, me versus not-me, but up to two to three months of age, “me” includes mother. Then we begin to recognize ourselves in the mirror and even recognize other babies. In the bureaucratic family, the infant is focused almost exclusively on the mother. The attitude of basic trust and love of life grows from connection with a loving mother and expectation that she’ll satisfy basic
needs. Ideally, the bond between mother and child includes a deep sense of knowing each other, sensing and responding to each other.

The typical developmental problems at this stage have to do with overdependency—failure to break the umbilical cord—sometimes because a mother is so intensely attached to her children. Of course, problems with basic trust also stem from a cold, frightened, inadequate mother or a rejecting or ambivalent mother who resents the mothering role that keeps her trapped at home.

In the interactive family, mother usually starts out as the main infant caretaker, continuing the physical symbiosis of childbearing. But early on, when she returns to her paid work, others share this role. (Over 60 percent of women with children under age six work outside the home.) Increasingly, the father also participates in caring for the baby, and babies may also be put in day-care centers or in the care of hired nannies.

On the positive side, as infants receive care from others, trust is expanded beyond the mother. On the negative side, children may lack the security of deep maternal attachment. Feeling insecure and abandoned, they become more distrustful, anxious, and self-protectively avoidant. Later in life, this makes it harder for them to develop intimate relationships and accept the deep feelings of need for others that they’ve repressed. While the quality of day care also makes a difference for the infant’s trust and sense of well-being, studies show that “a mother’s sensitivity to her infant had a lot more to do with attachment security than whether or not an infant was in alternative care. Moreover, under some circumstances, high-quality day care appeared to counteract the negative effects of parenting.”

There is still debate about day care, and some conservatives blame absent and working parents and day care for belligerent and aggressive children, juvenile obesity, psychoactive drug use, and teenage sex, among other problems of the young in our time. However, the psychologist Diane F. Halpern, in her presidential address to the American Psychological Association in 2005 wrote that “there is an emerging consensus that effects are more likely to be negative when the work schedules of the caretaking parents (usually the mother) [are] erratic and unpredictable; the
hours are long and she faces other significant stressors, such as poor health, poverty, and little control over work-related events. In other words, children, families, and work suffer when the parent has few sources of support and stress is high.” Professor Halpern believes that it’s time to end the “mommy wars” and “games of mother blame” and focus on basing policy on the best evidence of what benefits children and families.

I fully agree.

AUTONOMY VERSUS SHAME AND DOUBT

About the age of two, children want to act on their own, and they show a rebelliousness to adult authority, the start to achieving a sense of autonomy. Kids want to do things for themselves, express themselves without losing loving support from parents. By this self-expression, children try to avoid the shame of being seen as babies who can’t control their bodily functions, dress themselves, or handle a fork and spoon. They want to be able to feel good about themselves. Parents should treat this rebelliousness by setting limits and giving reasons why.

But not all parents respond this way. In the bureaucratic family, some parents impose overly strict demands, such as too-early toilet training. The danger is that the child will avoid humiliating shame by obsessive compliance, the uptight, superclean, and humorless anal character described by Freud. Alternatively, the child is plagued by doubt and needs constant reassurance that he or she is doing the right thing. But all sham ing isn’t bad. Although extreme shaming of a child at this age can cause deep hurt and anger, which may be repressed, without some homeopathic shaming, children don’t learn to conform to social expectations and are vulnerable to more serious humiliations later in life.

The child in the interactive family may have to deal with various parenting figures, less consistency, and less certainty. Sensing their parents’ insecurity about standards and their guilt about not being around when needed, two-year-old children begin to negotiate with parents for more freedom, playthings, or a later bedtime.
Many interactive children seem to have responded to parental indecision with a loss of respect for adults. According to an Associated Press-Ipsos poll in the fall of 2005, “nearly 70 percent of Americans said they believed that people are ruder now than they were 20 or 30 years ago and that children are among the worst offenders.” In 2002, according to surveys by Public Agenda, only 9 percent of adults saw children as “respectful toward adults.”

In a *New York Times* interview by Judith Warner, Dan Kindlon, a Harvard University child psychologist, said that while most parents today would like their children to be polite, considerate, and well-behaved, they’re too tired, worn down by work, and personally needy to demand proper behavior. “‘We use kids like Prozac,’ he said. ‘People don’t necessarily feel great about their spouse or their job but the kids are the bright spot in their day . . . They don’t want to feel bad. They want to get satisfaction from their kids. They’re so precious to us. What gets thrown out the window is limits. It’s a lot easier to pick their towel up off the floor than to get them away from the PlayStation to do it.’”

So, as on the TV show *Nanny 911*, unbridled nagging children run family dictatorships where mom and dad are there to serve them at all times. Parents have become so disempowered that they need help from experts like Brian Orr, a pediatrician and author, who runs workshops north of Boston on how to say “no” to children. Think of the future transference to bosses when these kids get to the workplace. They won’t idealize bosses and they may shy away from becoming a parental-type boss. Who wants to deal with a bunch of demanding kids?

However, while parents of Interactives let their kids disempower them about everything else, they do teach children to compete for success, whatever it takes. When it’s about achievement, parents get serious and take charge. According to Kindlon, “‘We’re insane about achievement . . . Schoolwork is up 50 percent since 1981, and we’re so obsessed with our kids getting into the right school, getting the right grades, we let a lot of things slide.’”

And that brings us to the next two stages.
This is the age where kids take the initiative and start to play together. Traditionally, preschool boys and girls play separately, boys being more aggressive and girls focused more on creating group harmony. This is the age at which kids also start comparing themselves, forming an identity based on being smarter, cuter, a better athlete, and so on.

In the traditional family, children up to ages five or six are still essentially egocentric and see things only from their own point of view. Although they may rebel against adult commands, the grown-ups rule and other kids are rivals for the authority’s love and approval.

When this pattern is reproduced in bureaucracies, it causes childlike emotions in employees who compete for the boss’s favor. In the traditional family, rebellion against authority is resolved by boys identifying with father and his outlook on life (what Freud called the resolution of the Oedipus complex) while girls identify with mother and take on her values. Going against these internalized parents (the superego) causes guilty feelings. In bureaucracies, when subordinates identify with the CEO, even copying his dress and mannerisms, they no longer feel childlike with the boss; rather, they feel just like the boss, especially when dealing with their own subordinates.

Children of interactive families, less emotionally dependent on adults, are quicker to forge ties with other kids. While the psychological pitfall for the bureaucratic character was fear of parents’ disapproval, which becomes internalized as crippling guilt, for the interactive character it’s anxiety about not being in with the group.

This anxiety can drive kids into overconformity in their urgency to be accepted. Alternatively, children may totally reject the group and form alliances with other “outcasts” whose resentment curdles into fantasies of revenge. These feelings may return with a vengeance in adolescence as was the case in Littleton, Colorado, in the spring of 1999, when kids like these went on a murderous and suicidal rampage. Part of the guilt belongs to teachers, administrators, and parents who didn’t step in when these kids were being ostracized and bullied.
Of course, most kids do learn to fit in. But while normal bureaucratic conformity results from identification with older role models, the interactive child becomes increasingly alert and responsive to changing fads and fashions among peers. In his 1950 book, *The Lonely Crowd*, David Riesman was the first sociologist to see that the traditional obsessive and inner-directed American whose internal gyroscope determined right and wrong was being challenged by a new type who was other-directed and whose interpersonal radar signaled the appropriate way to act. By the 1990s, other-direction combined with peer transferences was becoming the dominant form of social control for the interactive social character.

By the end of this stage, bureaucratic children were cooperating at play to work out conflicts with authority in central person games like hide-and-seek and Red Rover, where the group bands together to escape “It,” the oppressive authority. In contrast, the interactive child is much further along in forming relationships at play and on the Internet, more concerned with getting grown-ups to serve him or her than to escape from authority.

**INDUSTRY VERSUS INFERIORITY**

When children reach the age of six or seven, they are ready to become workers. But their first work depends on the mode of production in their culture. In peasant villages, boys follow their fathers to the fields and girls help their mothers with cows, pigs, and chickens; caring for younger siblings; cooking; washing; and cleaning.

In the bureaucratic world, the main work is schoolwork, and the tools kids must master are tools for reading and understanding, writing clearly, and solving abstract problems. The peasant child sharpens physical skills, and develops a keen observation of nature and people, common sense; the bureaucratic child learns internal discipline, to sit still for long periods and concentrate, and to memorize concepts and formulas, construct arguments, and take tests.

In the bureaucratic world, boys begin to play team sports where they develop a capacity for reciprocity—the ability not only to understand and
follow fair rules, but also design them. In games like baseball, kids learn not only to play by the rules but also to put themselves in another person’s role, not only to play but also to execute plays that require cooperation (like the double play). Reciprocity expressed as fairness tempers both egocentric competition and authoritarian hierarchy.

But bureaucratic managers don’t make use of reciprocity. They divide to conquer and provoke egocentric rivalry. Even in the most cooperative organizations, there will still be conflict about being a team player versus individual achievement. In professional sports, this tension is resolved by evaluating individuals on both individual statistics and contribution to the team.

To succeed in the interactive world, a child’s industry is essential, but so are her talents. As factory jobs and, increasingly, knowledge work moves offshore, and transactional jobs—operators, bank clerks, salespeople—are automated, the jobs that remain are either low-paying service jobs—cleaning, fast-food counters—or high-salaried knowledge work. Unlike jobs that require formulaic intelligence, manual dexterity, or muscle power, the jobs that have increased during the past ten years call for analytic reasoning, imagination and creativity, people skills, and emotional intelligence. Of course, construction workers, truck drivers, garbage collectors, and baggage handlers will remain on these shores, as well as well-paying work for skilled electricians, carpenters, and plumbers, but the difference in wages and wealth between knowledge work and other types of jobs has been increasing.

A troubling finding from social psychologists is that while upper-middle-class parents have become career directors for children this age and younger, working-class parents are much less involved in their children’s lives—and their success. These richer parents know what’s coming for their children, and their anxiety about their kids’ future ability to maintain their status drives the kids on—from supervised learning experiences to little league games. Sociologist Annette Lareau, who has been observing parents and children for over twenty years, finds that the upper-middle-class kids are prepared to succeed in the world of knowledge work by parents who are more facilitators and coaches than authorities, who allow kids to talk back, express their negative feelings (as long as they do the homework), shine on the stage, and
show they can make a good impression at an interview to get accepted into a program.\textsuperscript{19}

While working-class parents are more likely to give orders and demand respect, they also let their kids play freely. There is less anxiety, less manipulation, more autonomy. But Lareau shows the anxious, driven kids become successful professionals, while the working-class kids don’t.\textsuperscript{20}

The knowledge mode of production demands continual learning and collaboration, and traditional forms of schooling that may have served for the bureaucratic era have now been found wanting. There’s been a lot of debate about the best way to prepare children to succeed in the knowledge economy, much too much for me to try and summarize here. However, I believe the debate between proponents of rigorous teaching to tests versus “learning to learn” falsely opposes the need for kids to memorize and practice basic arithmetic, languages, scientific facts, historical events, and so on, to the need to develop critical thinking, communication skills, and the motivation to learn. Some of the progressive educators seem like piano teachers who ask pupils to express emotion in their playing before they’ve mastered the keys and learned the scales, while the conservative educators seem like piano teachers who never inspire their pupils to put their heart into their art.

Kids today benefit from teachers who combine discipline with challenge, rigor with fun, respect for precision with love of life, and this is especially true for disadvantaged children in the inner cities whose future opportunities depend on good schooling. I describe in chapter 8 how the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) is providing this kind of education to mostly African American and Hispanic kids in about fifty charter schools in the inner cities.

For the affluent, some schools are taking the lead in preparing children for what they believe will gain them success in the interactive economy. One such school is St John’s School and Community College in Marlborough, Wiltshire, England. Patrick Hazlewood, the headmaster, says, “The national curriculum kills learning stone dead by compartmentalizing subjects as if they have no relation to each other.”\textsuperscript{21} The school bases teaching around five competences for business proposed by the Royal Society for
Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures—learning, citizenship (ethics and society), relating to other people, managing situations, and managing information (critical thinking and finding things out).

Industrious future bureaucrats risked becoming narrowly focused and unimaginative. Industrious interactive children risk becoming glib and shallow, and under the illusion of knowing more than they do because knowledge seems the click of a mouse away. In the bureaucratic classroom, the unsuccessful child would lose self-confidence and self-esteem, triggering a vicious cycle of poor performance. While this might also happen to the interactive child, denial of failure is supported by the antibureaucratic popular culture and pop psychology, which inflates the self and puts down authorities. Defending against the loss of self-esteem, these children overestimate their capabilities and become impervious to coaching. Caring teachers who help these children understand that the discipline required for learning and self-expression makes a huge difference in their future ability to learn and play a productive role in the interactive society.

Of course, a profound influence in shaping the interactive social character is the Internet, facilitating interaction (combined with cell phones) as well as finding things out. The first thing the typical eleven- or twelve-year-old does after school is connect with correspondents all over the world and play video games. For these kids, global networking comes naturally. We’re also learning how video game playing shapes attitudes to leaders.

There has been concern about the effects of game playing on kids. Some games are extremely violent. Are they making kids aggressive? Do games detach kids from reality? Can they train kids to kill? So far, according to a report in the Economist, the evidence is inconclusive. Kids who tend toward violence may be pushed over the edge by violent games like Grand Theft Auto. However, these games do require players to learn a great deal. They must construct hypotheses about the intra-game world and test them. They learn the game rules through trial and error, solve problems and puzzles, develop strategies, and get help from other players via the Internet when they’re stuck. They also learn to share leadership roles.

Of course, the bureaucratic child played at different roles and identities, being a grown-up or a policeman, fireman, model, nurse, or doctor.
But the interactive gamester moves in alternative realities and takes on alternative personalities. That can be a strength, but only as long as game players know the difference between the game and a reality that doesn't end when the game is over, where it's not so easy to change identities. And that takes us to the next developmental stage.

**Identity versus role diffusion**

Youth begins. Individuals should have gained basic skills for work and relationships. But in puberty and adolescence, rapid body growth and genital maturity cause confusion about identity. Youths struggle with the physiological revolution inside them and the grown-up tasks ahead of them. Who are they becoming? How do others view them? How to connect the roles and skills they have practiced with the occupational prototypes that appeal to them? How to discover a vocation?

Youth is a time of exuberance and experimentation, sometimes grandiose fantasies and ambitions, daredevil risk taking—what I've called a "narcissistic moment."\(^{24}\) This is a time of freedom, when children feel the whole world is open to them and they can do anything they put their minds to. They are invulnerable. For the bureaucratic personality, it may mean rejecting their father's or mother's plans for them—their parents' ideas of what they should do for a living—or rebelling against the tyranny of the peer group. When bureaucratic teenagers imagine adult life, they often think in narcissistic terms, turning jobs that require years of rote study and training, such as doctor or lawyer, into heroic, high-wire acts: They'll become a world-famous surgeon, or a lawyer who overwhelms the Supreme Court with brilliant arguments.

For interactive youth, fantasies often include getting rich, but they are also more likely to envision being part of a great team: a new Google or The Dust Brothers or Dreamworks.\(^{25}\) Ultimately, however, the inner discipline and real-world skills formed in earlier stages make the difference between fantasy and reality, success and failure. Few people ride the narcissistic moment into a lifetime adventure, creating a world-class career or a great company that does change the world.
A challenge of youth is to integrate all the pieces of identity that make up a self. We all have attachments—to family, nation, religious groups, even teams—with which we identify. But for adolescents, the roles and identities of the child at home and the youth outside can clash. Erikson wrote that the main psychological danger of this stage was role confusion, not only between home and the peer group, but also possibly confusion about sexual identity. It could also be confusion about settling on an occupational identity. He saw falling in love at this stage as an attempt to gain a sense of identity by being defined and affirmed in a passionate relationship.

He wrote that “young people can also be remarkably clannish, and cruel in their exclusion of all those who are ‘different,’ in skin color or cultural background, in tastes and gifts, and often in such petty aspects of dress and gesture as have been temporarily selected as the sign of an in-grouper or out-grouper.”26 He saw this intolerance as the dark side of defense against identity confusion and as a way of testing loyalty and trust.

Erikson also described youth as a time of idealism, of committing oneself to an ideology or religion. Soon after he wrote this, in the 1960s, the enlarged cohort of baby-boomer youth began to undermine the bureaucratic social character. They attacked “dehumanizing” bureaucratic rules, roles, and technology with an ideology of libertarianism. The youth that survived this self-indulgent orgy were somehow able to combine pleasure seeking with pragmatism. The losers were the ideological extremists, revolutionaries who became disillusioned cynics, tribalistic cultists, and drug addicts.

In contrast to Europeans, whose identities are more tightly tied to social class and place of birth, Americans have had more freedom in shaping identities. I think of two American icons: Robert Frost, born in San Francisco and educated at Dartmouth and Harvard, failed as a farmer in New Hampshire and went to England, where he made himself into the craggy prototype of the rural New Hampshire farmer-poet. And Robert Allen Zimmerman, the middle-class Jewish boy from Duluth and Hibbing, Minnesota, became Bob Dylan, the folk-rock balladeer and figurehead of the 1960s.27

The Interactives go even further than a single change of identity in their protean ability to take on and shed identities that serve their needs, just like
the characters in video games. Madonna is a prototype, constantly reinventing herself to fit the fashions of the times. Furthermore, their idealism often gets mixed with self-interest as they join identity groups based on occupation, politics, business, race, religion, disabilities, or sexual orientation.

While the challenge for bureaucratic social character was constructing an individual identity and not just putting on the identity laid out by parents and other authorities, the challenge for Interactives is to find meaning. In large part, this has to do with finding a vocation, work that engages talents and values. However, many Interactives feel a need for more than a vocation to provide a sense of meaning. The UCLA Higher Education Research Institute reports that three-quarters of the 112,000 students surveyed, from a sample of 236 colleges in 2004, indicate that they are “searching for meaning and purpose in life.” That’s why they seek help from therapists, Eastern spiritual disciplines like Yoga, or religions. That’s why Rick Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* has sold millions of copies.

Finding a meaningful purpose, a center to anchor changing identities and protean role taking can become a platform for the next stage.

**INTIMACY VERSUS ISOLATION**

The challenge for younger adults, from ages twenty to forty years, is to achieve an intimate, trusting relationship; to do this they have to be able to trust themselves as much as they trust the other person. This is not just a matter of faithfulness. Without a firm identity, intimacy is threatening: people can be taken over by an other, losing their identity as well as their freedom. However, to become a mature person, an essential task is to establish a loving relationship, overcome loneliness, and create a family.

Ideally, a family supports the positive development of all its members, and by development I mean the increased capability to both determine and satisfy those needs that strengthen us—needs to know and understand, to create, and to love. In contrast, compulsive or addictive needs enslave us, making us dependent not only on drugs or sex but also on constant
reassurance, protection, applause—whatever limits free choice. Achieving maturity means becoming more aware of our needs, able to reinforce those that are developmental and frustrate those that are addictive.29

In the bureaucratic era, the goal of this stage was forming a unit for mutual care and success, with clearly differentiated male and female roles. The danger was that this intimate family might isolate itself, become a tribalistic haven, held together by narcissistic self-inflation ("We’re better than everyone else").

The interactive family at its best avoids this pitfall and builds a network that reaches beyond blood ties to connect with others who share its developmental values. But there are two kinds of pitfalls for Interactives. One is the inability to fully commit, to fully trust. Perhaps this is caused by lack of identity integration; however, a deeper cause may go back to early attachment issues. Detached, avoidant adults repress strong needs for mothering, but are driven into relationships and then repelled by infantile yearnings and behavior, either their own or the other person’s. This attraction and repulsion can cause superficial coupling and frequent break-ups.

The second pitfall has to do with the pressure two careers put on a relationship. A major cause of divorce for Interactives is that women who are economically independent won’t stay in a bad relationship. In the past, their need for a breadwinner might have kept them from leaving. Not now. So if both partners are economically independent, mature understanding and compromise are urgently needed to sustain their relationship, especially when they both feel career pressures.

Freud once described psychological health as lieben und arbeiten, to love and to work. This is a formula that fits any social character, but it seems to me essential for Interactive well-being. Interactives want to love their work and many of them need to work at love. As Erich Fromm wrote in The Art of Loving, there is little education or understanding about the kind of love that strengthens self and other and deepens trust.31 Relationships built on narcissistic love, the projection of one’s ideal onto the other, collapse when the mutual illusion fades, and then the prince and princess become frogs in each other’s eyes. It’s the difference between infatuation and agapé: deep knowledge and caring about what’s best for the other person.
Trust is strengthened not only by affirmation but also by the kind of love that refuses to collude or ignore the danger when the other person strays from the path that both believe is best for his or her well-being.

During this period, young people are also establishing themselves at work. In the bureaucratic era, the ideal was to move up corporate or government hierarchies, make partner in law or accounting firms, or establish a professional practice. Interactives still want status and power, but they are now more likely to view corporations and government as postgraduate training for more freewheeling careers. Like professional athletes, they see themselves as assets that can be bought but not owned by companies, and their commitment is to meaningful projects, not powerful organizations.

**GENERATIVITY VERSUS STAGNATION**

The next period is when, with the achievement of a productive role at work and sustainable intimate relationships, individuals face the challenge of bringing along the next generation, as parents, teachers, coaches, or institution builders who articulate and defend good values—possibly as the kind of leader we need.

Erikson first thought this period lasted from about ages forty to sixty-five, but that was when he was in his forties. In his eighties and still active, he realized that people can now stay generative for a longer time. However, the generative role was clearer in the bureaucratic era, especially for men who could move up the hierarchy and mentor promising younger men who in turn were attracted to them as father figures. The productive bureaucrat who identified with father figures took pride in being an expert who could teach the younger generation. Mentor and mentee enjoyed the transferential relationship and helped each other succeed. When women first took management roles, the ones able to create father-daughter relationships were best able to find mentors.

The traditional bureaucracies allowed, even encouraged, middle managers to be mentors, both at work and in voluntary organizations. There was less pressure, more time for bonding. In contrast, in companies today, there is little time and even less energy for these forms of sociability. But
even when there is time, the new social character is uneasy in the role of mentor or protective authority. Other than success, Interactives’ highest value is tolerance in terms of race, religion, and ideology. Their moral code: “Judge not that you be not judged.” And they’ve told me they don’t think they should have to defend organizational values they didn’t have a say in framing, saying, “Those are not my values and I’m not the police.” But on a team or task force, they aren’t tolerant about poor performance. One value everyone shares is results.

The most generative of the Interactives may take leadership roles as facilitators or bridge-builders, preferably for a project. They want it to be clear they are adding value for others, not trying to dominate them. They don’t want to seem power hungry.

Ultimately, both Bureaucratics and Interactives who fail the test of generativity stagnate. The bureaucrat becomes his narrow role, like a character in one of Franz Kafka’s novels or Max Weber’s “specialists without spirit.” Interactives never deepen their knowledge or commit themselves to others. They have nothing to teach and no one wants anything from them. Keep in mind that we all need to feel needed, and a person who feels needed by no one will feel like a total failure.

And this is more than a personal failure. The more Interactives fail the test of generativity, the more our society suffers. We need generative leaders who defend the values that support a free, productive, and environmentally sustainable society. The well-being of the next generation depends on whether Interactives understand and accept the challenge of generativity.

EGO INTEGRITY VERSUS DESPAIR

Erikson first wrote about the final stage of life in his forties and revised it first in his eighties, and again finally before he died in his early nineties, when he wrote, “Lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole life.” He thought that elders in our society (now called seniors) are no longer seen as bearers of wisdom, but as embodiments of shame.
But, writing this at age 73, I can testify that that’s not always the case. Erikson himself contradicted the statement by his continued generativity. Another example was W. Edwards Deming, the statistician who brought total quality management first to Japan and then to the United States; he was still teaching at age 90. At that time, he invited me to discuss leadership with him. We met periodically over a three-year period, and each time, he took notes (as did I); he was still learning. And John Gielgud, the great English director and actor, was still acting in films at age 95. Peter Drucker was active when he died at age 96. At age 93, his wife Doris is still running the company she started at age 80. Sidney Harman was running Harman International at age 88. Surely, these people had the luck of good genes, but I believe staying engaged kept them from the collapse common to old age that begins in the 80s.

It’s too early to see how the Interactives will deal with old age. However, populations in the advanced economies are aging, and people who used to retire at age 65 or earlier may remain in the workforce up until and beyond age 70. In 2005 28 percent of retirement age adults, ages 65 to 69 were either still working or looking for work. Furthermore, companies are offering part-time projects to valuable employees this old and even older. And, of course, a number of people in their 60s, 70s, and 80s do volunteer work for charities and nonprofits, demonstrating that generativity doesn’t necessarily stop with retirement from paid work. Programs like Civic Ventures’ Experience Corps, which has placed eighteen hundred tutors and mentors to children, connect seniors with “good work” where they’re needed.

This is all to the good. Research indicates that working during retirement together with exercise and diet can help us live longer and healthier. And there’s evidence that retirement without active engagement can cause the despair Erikson wrote about. A study of retired people by psychologist Ken Dychtwald emphasizes the benefits for old people of “reinventing” their lives after retirement. He writes, “Having a vision for the future and planning for that vision are as important as money in achieving a fulfilling retirement.”

Erikson focused on how people might view themselves at the end of life. A sense of integrity means one has not betrayed one’s ideal self, or if
so, has repented and found the path again. Despair means losing one’s way and, what is more devastating, any hope of regaining it. Those who have betrayed themselves live with self-disgust, and the rationalizations they devise don’t overcome their depression when they have lost their love of life.

In contrast, a sense of integrity is gained by mature realism, understanding what has been possible to do, given one’s opportunities and abilities, always taking luck into account. This includes remaining engaged and generative as long as physically possible, concerned and hopeful about the future, related to what is alive and needs protection—especially children and the environment that sustains us—as opposed to resigning from the present and retreating into the past.

The integrity of the bureaucrat meant playing his role with dignity and effectiveness, resisting illegitimate commands and corrupting pressures. After retirement, it meant continued learning, reading, traveling, and voluntary activities. For women, it meant providing care and emotional support while staying sharp in voluntary organizations and cultural activities.

The despairing bureaucrat was like Tolstoy’s Ivan Illich, who realizes only on his deathbed that he has never stood up for what he thought was right, never really been himself, only what others expected him to be. Tolstoy wrote:

*His mental sufferings were due to the fact that that night, as he looked at Gerásim’s sleepy, good natured face with its prominent cheek-bones, the question suddenly occurred to him: “What if my whole life has really been wrong?”*

*It occurred to him that what appeared perfectly impossible before, namely that he had not spent his life as he should have done, might after all be true. It occurred to him that his scarcely perceptible attempts to struggle against what was considered good by the most highly placed people, those scarcely noticeable impulses which he had immediately suppressed, might have been the real thing, and all the rest false. And his professional duties and the whole arrangement of his life and of his family, and all his social and official interests, might all have been false. He tried to defend all those things to himself and suddenly felt the weakness of what he was defending. There was nothing to defend.*
“But if that is so,” he said to himself, “and I am leaving this life with the consciousness that I have lost all that was given me and it is impossible to rectify it—what then?”

Perhaps the despairing interactive character will be more like Ibsen’s Peer Gynt, who confuses self-indulgence with self-actualization and self-marketing with intimacy, and ends up alone and burned out. Acting out all his greedy impulses, Peer Gynt mistakenly believes he’s being true to himself. In the end, “the button-maker” who comes for his soul tells Peer Gynt that he has no self. By never committing himself to anyone or anything and never responding with his heart, Peer Gynt has become a blank. His expressions of love and sorrow were never felt; his heart has never developed.

Maintaining integrity in the market-dominated world calls for principled pragmatism—continually testing one’s views and values in terms of results. For those who have been engaged in the complex market world, it means living with contradictions and uncertainty without losing hope. This requires a faith that gives meaning to creative engagement with one’s community, which in the interactive age may include people throughout the world who share a common purpose: to protect the environment, keep destructive extremists in check, and work to improve the quality of life for all.
Appendix


2. See Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1964); Margaret Henning and Anne Jardim found that those women who succeeded in management in the 1970s were almost invariably close to their fathers (Margaret Henning and Anne Jardim, *The Managerial Woman* [New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1978]). The father-daughter transference often went both ways, as father-fixated women became the protégés of paternalistic bosses.


6. Sigelman and Rider, *Life-Span Human Development*, 382. According to Department of Labor Statistics about 30 percent of infants of working mothers are cared for by their parents, 30 percent by a relative, 20 percent in family day-care homes (typically run by a woman in her own home), 10 percent in large day-care centers, and a small percentage with hired nannies.


10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
23. An example was Devon Moore of Fayette, Alabama, a teenage minor who killed three policemen in a way that seemed to mimic what he did in the game. After his capture, Moore reportedly told the police, “Life is like a video game. Everybody’s got to die sometimes.” However, Moore, who was brought up by various foster parents and was a poor student, had the risk factors that predict criminal behavior. 60 Minutes, March 6, 2005.
30. I have described these needs in *Why Work? Motivating the New Workforce*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Miles River Press, 1995).