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*CultureViews™: the Origin  
Story*

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# *CultureViews™: the Origin Story*

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## *Preface*

CultureViews™ has been about two years in the making, but decades in the thinking. In this short paper we tell the origin story.

## *What is CultureViews™?*

Intended for use in coaching, and with teams and groups, CultureViews™ helps consultants and users to decode organizational culture and generate new insights and action.

Created by GLA, based on an original idea by Richard Izard, it's a collection of tools in card format, including:

**a). Culture Insight Cards** - exploring 12 different cultural attributes through the lens of the vertical development framework of action-logics. These attributes are: action, adaptability, collaboration & boundaries, conflict, decision-making, information-flow, innovation & creativity, leadership style, power, social responsibility, time, and wellbeing.

**b). Change** - using the action-logic framework to take a deep-dive into a key attribute of organization development and leadership - change.

**c). CultureOverviews** - summary cards that help users describe the overall action-logic culture of their organization.

**d). GlobalViews** - exploring how the perspectives of our multiple identities (e.g. education, nationality, gender etc) may influence our thought and action.

**e). QR code** - to access a growing digital library of resources and exercises to support the use of CultureViews™.

The CultureViews™ tools have been in development since late 2023 and draw on a long arc of work in the fields of adult and organization development. Reading about the origin story is important in establishing credibility and relevance to both consultants and users.



## *Underpinned by Adult (Vertical) Development*

Underpinning the design of CultureViews™ is adult (vertical) development theory. This theory explores the mental frameworks people use to make sense of how they are experiencing the world – their worldviews or action-logics.

GLA is a globally renowned authority in vertical development, and Prof Bill Torbert, a GLA co-founder, is regarded as one of the principal pioneers in the field. One of Bill's key contributions to vertical development was to apply it to leadership. His influential 2005 Harvard Business Review article, *The Seven Transformations of Leadership*, is regarded by HBR as one of their must-read articles of all time. This article brought Bill's work to the attention of a wider audience, and to many was their first introduction to his seven-stage developmental framework of action-logics<sup>1</sup>: **Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Redefining, Transforming and Alchemical**. Crucially, these were described in language pertaining to leadership and an organizational context.

Bill further developed this thinking about adult development theory and practice in his long-time collaboration with Elaine Herdman-Barker, another GLA co-founder. They took care to ensure their vertical approach had leadership and organizational resonance. This is particularly seen in the creation of the **Global Leadership Profile (GLP)**, and later, with **MyWorldView®**. The GLP is a vertical development psychometric that invites users to complete 30 sentence stems in any way they see fit. For example, the assessment begins one sentence with "When I am criticized..." and the user completes it. Using sentence stems for a vertical assessment built on the work of another leading developmentalist, Prof Jane Loevinger (see her WUSCT), and an earlier assessment created by Bill, the LDP. Critically, however, the GLP marked a significant change in that Bill and Elaine replaced some of the existing stems with ones that had specific leadership and organizational resonance, e.g. power and time. But it wasn't just language and carefully chosen assessment topics that gave the GLP organizational relevance.

Whilst the GLP is applied individually, its scope is broad. It helps a leader explore beyond themselves to the wider context they are in. For example, a coach using the GLP with a leader might explore their notion of power. How is the leader thinking about power? How is power used or thought about on the leader's team or in their organization? What tensions does this create or possibilities might it offer? Consequently, what action might be taken? And so on.

This approach was carried forward with the creation of *Transformations™*, a tool GLA developed in partnership with CCL in 2019.

Instead of being a sentence-stem assessment, *Transformations™* uses cards to enable insightful conversations about human development at the individual and collective levels. Created by Elaine, Bill, Chuck Palus Bruce Flye, and supported by a wider team, these cards combine powerful graphics and short phrases that appeal to a wide variety of audiences. It includes 84 Life Logic cards that illustrate key ways people make sense of the world, including application within an organizational context. These cards are underpinned by the same developmental framework of action-logics as the GLP.

It is also from this time that GLA gained considerable experience from working with cards as a vertical development learning resource; something that we'd return to in the creation of CultureViews™.

The GLP and *Transformations™* cards remain popular coaching instruments; however, what's less well-known is that GLA's approach to the theory has also long had an organization-wide application.

## *Focusing on the Organizational System*

Bill's theory went way beyond individual leader development to being a way of understanding organizations and systems. He described his approach as "a way of understanding organization development as a sequence of transforming action-logics, analogous to personal development. As with individual persons, a given action-logic may characterize a given meeting or project, or a whole organization over many years. Within the overall organization, particular projects or divisions may represent leading or lagging developmental choices," (pg.124, Action Inquiry, 2004, Berrett-Koehler Publishers).

Bill and Elaine recognized that one of the insights the GLP provided is that a leader's center of gravity (i.e. how they most naturally see the world every day) would have implications beyond the individual and would in various ways affect others and the organizational system.

This notion was enhanced further as GLA began working with large organizations, and the fact that GLA's other co-founder, Richard Izard, was particularly interested in organizational application, and how action-logics affected culture.



<sup>1</sup> The latest version of this framework was created by Bill and Elaine Herdman-Barker.

Richard started with what he experienced in organizations and then characterized what he saw back into the action-logic framework. From here we began to talk about 'action-logic cultures' and began identifying the differences between, for example a Diplomat culture vs an Expert culture.

With our clients we began noticing not just the impact of one leader's thinking, but also what happens when multiple leaders share patterns of thought and action. We were indeed finding evidence of Bill's theory that an action-logic may characterize a given meeting, project, division, or organization. For example, we discovered leaders and consultants finding it helpful to describe an organization as Expert or Achiever, and implications relating to this. In other words, we were observing culture and how it was created.

The combination of our theory and our growing validation with clients led us to overtly explore this notion of describing organizational culture by an action-logic. In late 2023, GLA released MyWorldView®, a scalable sibling to the GLP, that included a digital debrief. In this debrief, we created a whole section that asks users to identify the action-logic that best describes their organization. This organizational perspective was based on Richard's work and developed with Danny Morris (a partner at GLA), who brought a lot of field insight from describing culture in this way in client contexts. This section of MyWorldView® was created through a carousel of digital "cards" that feature cultural characteristics pertaining to each action-logic (other than Alchemical). Users are then invited to reflect on possible implications of any differences between their own profiling and their perception of their organization. We continue to find that this is a rich exploration in coaching and facilitated sessions.

### *Zooming-in on cultural nuances*

Whilst we were finding resonance in describing an overall culture by an action-logic, we were also discovering nuances in culture. The GLP revealed that there are also powerful cultural

insights to be gained at a stem-completion level. To understand this, we must first briefly explain a technical point.

When a person completes their GLP sentence stems, their responses are then analyzed and processed through a complex scoring system. The output of this is the person's center-of-gravity action-logic (e.g. Redefining); however, this doesn't mean that all of the person's responses were scored at Redefining. For example, a person may be responding to Stem1 from a Redefining frame and to Stem2 from a Diplomat frame, and so on. (Our scoring system then uses formulas for calculating a person's overall profile.) In other words, the way a person sees, for example, "a good leader" (one of the sentence stems), may be more or less sophisticated than how they profile overall. This is an example of the developmental concept of fluidity that Elaine and Nancy Wallis introduced to vertical theory in their article, *Imperfect Beauty*.<sup>2</sup>

As such, Elaine and Richard suspected that aggregated GLP patterns might reveal much about organizational culture if significant numbers or members of a leadership population were profiled. This led to them creating a "Themes Report" for corporate clients. Since 2019, Danny has developed this product extensively and has led the team of theorists, OD practitioners and statisticians that create these comprehensive reports. This has also added to our learning and practical understanding of the theory as Danny worked with numerous large-scale organizations in delivering these reports. Available only to corporate clients, Themes Reports provide profound anonymized insights and have also given GLA a vast aggregated/anonymized dataset - our Large Corporate Index - that continues to be instructive about nuances in organizational systems.

The learning here also has important implications beyond GLP sentence stems: a person's perspective on *any* topic may vary by action-logic. Furthermore, when others also share that perspective, it's likely to have significant ramifications regarding creating and sustaining organizational culture.

### *The Birth of CultureViews™*

The insights we were generating were profound, but we were aware that GLA's offer on organizational culture wasn't widely available. This challenge was the seed that became CultureViews™.

It was shortly after releasing MyWorldView that Richard had the idea to take the

organizational descriptions used in this digital debrief and to turn them into a set of six cards (Alchemical was deemed too complex to use for org culture). Users were invited to pick one of the six cards, based on reading their descriptions, which best described the culture of an organization they knew well.



<sup>2</sup> *Imperfect Beauty: Hierarchy and Fluidity in Leadership Development*, by Elaine Herdman-Barker and Nancy Wallis (*Challenging Organizations and Society: Reflective Hybrids*; Vol 6, Issue 1, 2016)

These cards were first piloted in a live program in Maryland, USA, in April 2024. Since then, they have been used with hundreds of participants in all our MyWorldView® programs up to October 2025.

We learnt two key points from this pilot phase:

(1) participants expressed that they really liked using them and could see their value, and

(2) many noted that organizational culture is also more nuanced than those cards allowed for.

Based on this learning, Richard and Danny then developed the idea further and formed three inquiries:

(1) Zooming out on organizational culture was useful but insufficient. Could a card tool be created that considers lots of organizational cultural topics from a vertical perspective?

(2) If so, what topics should be included and what shouldn't?

(3) Was this just one tool or, intriguingly, was it a collection of tools?

To explore these inquiries, they conducted interviews with 17 individuals. Each interviewee was either a vertical development theorist, an experienced OD practitioner, a culture expert, or a senior organizational leader. (In many cases, an interviewee fell into more than one category.)

What came from there was confirmation that a collection of resources would be most useful, and that they included:

- using the action-logic lens to help quickly summarize organizational culture at a zoomed-out level, rather like the tool that was originally piloted. (This became CultureOverviews.)

- taking a more nuanced look at organizational culture; again, using the action-logic lens. (This became Culture Insight cards.)

- specifically looking at change because so much work is given to changing culture and therefore it's helpful to understand how change is seen from the perspective of action-logics. (This became Change cards.)

- encompassing the different perspectives people may form from other influences on their identity (e.g. demographics, nation, gender, education etc). (This became GlobalViews.)

- equipping users to turn into action their insights from these other resources.

Together, the above resources became elements of CultureViews™.

Two of the interviewees, both members of our Authorized Practitioner community, also then took a different role in the process:

Sytske Casimir, then Head of OD at Energy Australia, and a highly experienced OD leader and vertical development practitioner, joined Richard and Danny as a co-creator of CultureViews™.

Shireen Chua, who completed her PhD in Leadership Agency: Unlocking the complexity of diversity management in organizations. Shireen helped develop GlobalViews, which focuses on identity perspectives.

The creation of CultureViews™ then took shape, led by Richard, Danny and Sytske, and including significant support from Elaine, Shireen, the wider GLA team, and longtime GLA friend, Chuck Palus.

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