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From AQAL to AQAT: Dialog in an Integral Perspective

Bruno Frischherz

Abstract

The background of this paper is a longitudinal study in adult development that is based on the structured interviewing required for using Laske's Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF). In what follows, I will compare the CDF methodology with methodological tools offered by Integral Theory.

Integral theory provides a helpful starting point for the analysis of themes and perspectives. But I will argue that integral theory is unable to fully account for the category of YOU that is fundamental in every dialog. Dialog is crucial not only for private communication but equally for scientific research, both in and between disciplines, as well as for professional practice.

Given the limitations of Integral Theory, I am proposing a dialectical extension for AQAL which I call AQAT, meaning All Quadrants – All (dialectical) thought forms (context, process, relation, transformation).

From this characterization of Integral Theory, viewed from CDF, the following topics derive:

- The CDF Longitudinal Study in Adult Development
- Dialog as Scientific Method and Professional Practice
- Dialog in Integral Theory: the Missing YOU
- Integral Dialectics: From AQAL to AQAT
- Toward an Integral Dialectical Research Agenda

The CDF Longitudinal Study in Adult Development

At the Lucerne School of Business, I have started a longitudinal study in adult development comprising 10 students. In this study, I am assessing students' present social-emotional and cognitive development in terms of Otto Laske's Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF). I will repeat the assessment in three to four years' time. I am interested in the following research questions:

- In what way does the meaning making and thinking of the students change over time?
- To what degree can their development be measured in terms of social-emotional stages and cognitive phases of dialectical thinking in the sense of CDF?
- How can the connection between the social emotional and the cognitive development of students be described and understood?

What Is CDF? CDF is a new, comprehensive instrument for assessing social-emotional and cognitive adult development and its impact on an individual's psychological dimension (Laske 2006; Laske 2009). CDF raises the issue of what is the relationship between social-emotional and cognitive development, and their influence on each other, and how both of these developmental dimensions inform an individual's psychology.

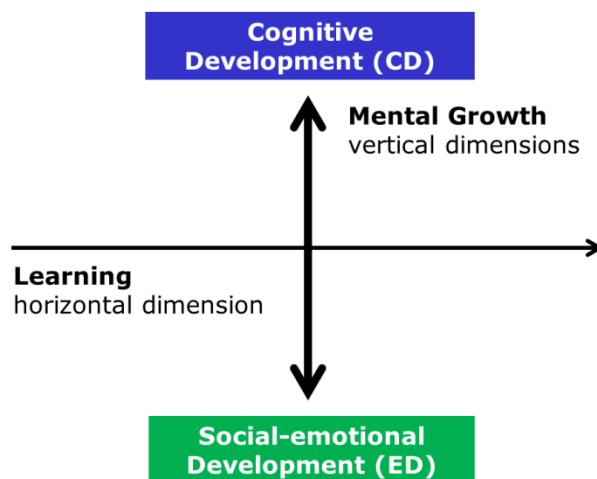


Figure 1: Dimensions of Developmental Assessment (Laske 2006: 23)

Practically, CDF is an instrument for obtaining comprehensive empirical insight into an individual's present developmental position relative to his/her psychological profile, and for giving practical feedback to an individual based on inter-rater consensus.

CDF is focused on adult development over the life span, thus is a tool for longitudinal research. In my study, I collect empirical data by means of two structured 1-hour interviews and a feedback session that is also recorded and analysed. Interviews, feedback and coaching sessions are opportunities to provide three different perspectives on a person:

- the 1st person perspective: a person as she appears in the mind of herself
- the 2nd person perspective: a person as she appears in the mind of a dialog partner
- the 3rd person perspective: a person as she appears in objectified CDF profiles

Dialog as Scientific Method and Professional Practice

In an interview or a feedback or coaching session a person is mentally reconstructed by a dialog partner. The coach will model a person's developmental potential with the help of dialog with the client. Interviewing, giving feedback and coaching are all dialectic processes, in these sense that they language-suffused procedures for getting to know the reality of an individual. As the art of dialog, dialectic is a discovery procedure dealing with absences, i.e., what is not initially apparent, for whatever reason. In the interview and feedback process, dialectical thought forms are used as mind openers and mind expanders. In this broad sense, dialectic is a method for

discovering, acquiring, refining, and assessing knowledge through dialog, as first practiced by Socrates.

How does CDF elicit empirical evidence about the development of an individual? We live in a “language suffused” world in which language and thinking are inseparable. Adult development is “invisible”; once we are dealing with adults, all physical signs of development having vanished, we can only ascertain it through analysing and interpreting language. This we do through interviews, social-emotional as well as cognitive. In order to highlight the features of DTF, the Dialectical Thought Form Framework that is part of CDF, here, we focus exclusively on the cognitive interview.

Cognitive Interviewing is a structured dialogical process engaged in by two parties within a particular universe of discourse. In this interview it is the interviewer who, by analyzing what s(he) understands through listening, infers base concepts that he can ask the interviewee to elaborate further. The conversation is thus “Socratic” in the sense that the interviewer wants to know what is the “sense” given to a concept (and related concepts) by the interviewee.

In cognitive interviews some kind of “prompt” is needed in order to structure the movement of thought that occurs. It is the interviewer’s task to lead the cognitive interview. This is approached in three steps in order to detail a person’s mental space of work (in contradistinction to the external workspace). This internal work place is thought to be structured in three separate but related dimensions called the “Self House”, the “Task House”, and the “Organisational House”.

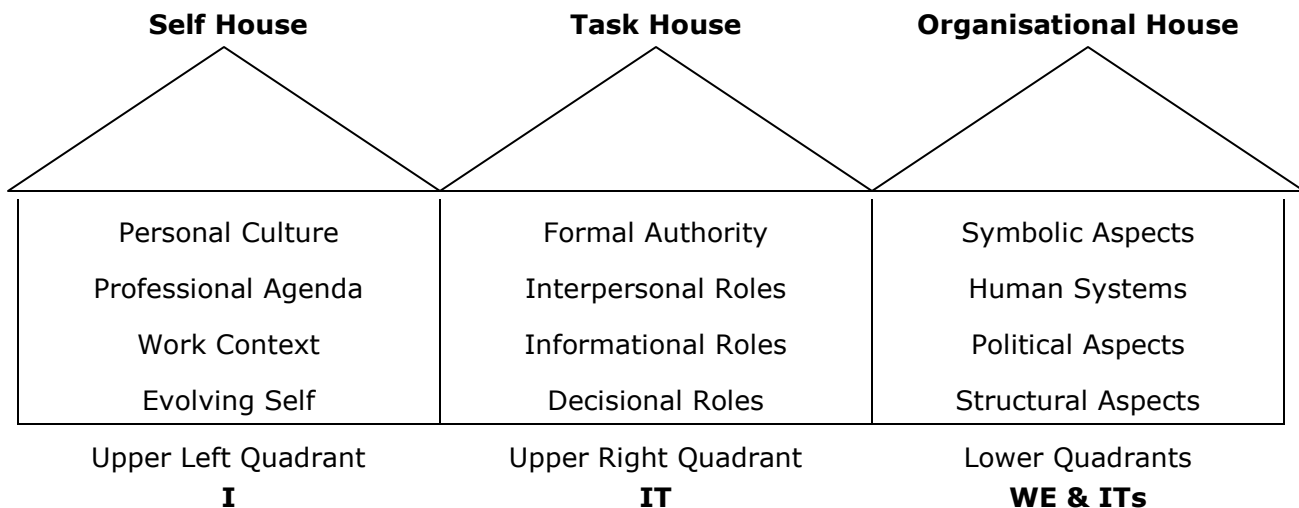


Figure 2: Cognitive Interviewing in CDF: Three Houses (Laske 2009: 276)

In addition to the conceptual prompts shown in the diagram, the interviewer makes use of concepts provided by the interviewee. The Three Houses of the CDF cognitive interview map perfectly to the four integral quadrants.

Thinking leaves its traces in speech or text. As a listener, the interviewer “parses” what s(he) hears from the interviewee in terms of the four moments of dialectic. These four classes of dialectical thought forms represent the epistemological aspect of Bhaskar’s dialectic moments in his MELD-Scheme (Bhaskar 1993: 392; Bhaskar 2002: 186).

Dialectical Thought Form Classes according to CDF are (Laske 2009: 224):

- Process [P] – unceasing change in how things emerge into being and vanish into non-being (Bhaskar’s 2E).
- Context [C] – stable configurations that appear as a stratified “big picture” momentarily able to withstand unceasing change. (Bhaskar’s 1M)
- Relationship [R] – unity in diversity that shows how what is different is different only relative to a shared commonality that includes all differences; (Bhaskar’s 3L)
- Transformation [T] – equilibrium created in thought and action by integrating different, even opposing, systems, as a hallmark of human agency (Bhaskar’s 4D)

Using Bhaskar’s theory of Dialectical Critical Realism (DCR), we can see human thinking as a discovery function that opens new vistas and dimensions of the real world and enhances human capability to handle real-world complexity. Viewed in this way, a CDF cognitive interview is a conversation meant to probe the use of Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic (MELD) associated with DTF dialectical thought forms as an indicator of the fluidity of the interviewee’s present thinking.

The interviewer uses the Three Houses shown above, to elicit empirical evidence about the interviewee’s thinking. Once transcribed, structurally relevant segments of the interview are selected and evaluated as a text, such that the evaluation of the interviewee’s thought form structure issues in or a score or index indicating the dialectical thought form fluidity of a thinker/speaker. Once computed the fluidity index then make possible giving clients feedback on their present thinking. More specifically, the evaluation of interview segments leads to three kinds of indicators: fluidity index, cognitive score, and discrepancy index, all developed from Basseches (1984), and together describing the cognitive profile of an individual.

The analysis shows how far the interviewee can use dialectic as a discovery procedure. The procedure is modelled by the interviewer when responding to what is said by the interviewee. A CDF analysis of human thought yields insight into three aspects of an individual’s thinking, whereby balance is important since it guarantees completeness in handling complexity:

- balance or imbalance of using thought forms of all four moments of dialectic [or classes of thought forms] (P, C, R, T)
- size of the systems thinking index as a measure of a thinker’s potential for developing dialectical thinking (T)
- the balance or imbalance of the speaker’s/thinker’s use of critical and constructive thought forms (P+R) vs. (C+T).

Dialog in Integral Theory: the Missing YOU

For a scientific theory, communication in a broader sense, and more specifically dialog, is pragmatically crucial and theoretically fundamental (Marková 2005, Linell 2009, Hermans & Gieser eds. 2012). In addition, dialog is fundamental for practical applications such as coaching and consulting.

The characteristics of dialog are the presence of two partners, a common theme, and an interactive process of mutual understanding (Frischherz et al 2012: 27). The most basic model of communication is Bühler's triadic organon model.

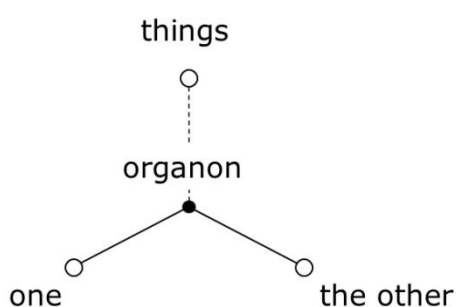


Figure 3: Bühler's triadic organon model of communication (Frischherz et al 2011: 30)

Dialog is a process between two partners trying to establish a mutual understanding, and through that understanding insight into the "truth" about the real world. In real dialogs, there is a tension between incomprehension and comprehension. Misunderstanding, partial understanding and repairing sequences are normal phenomena of this process.

How can a dialog be reconstructed in terms of integral theory and its AQAL model? Dialog is a process that touches all of Wilber's quadrants. But in what quadrant would we find YOU, the individual interior of the dialog partner? It is not in the upper left quadrant (I), because I is not YOU. YOU is a subject, but not the same as I. There is an inside of another subject (the interlocutor), and this "other" is not represented by the integral quadrants. Nor can the YOU be found in the lower left quadrant (WE), because WE is not YOU. Intersubjectivity is the result of a dialogic process between I and YOU, and there is always otherness that does not belong to the common WE. This otherness or negativity is not rendered by Wilber's AQAL, and in this sense AQAL lacks dialectical depth.

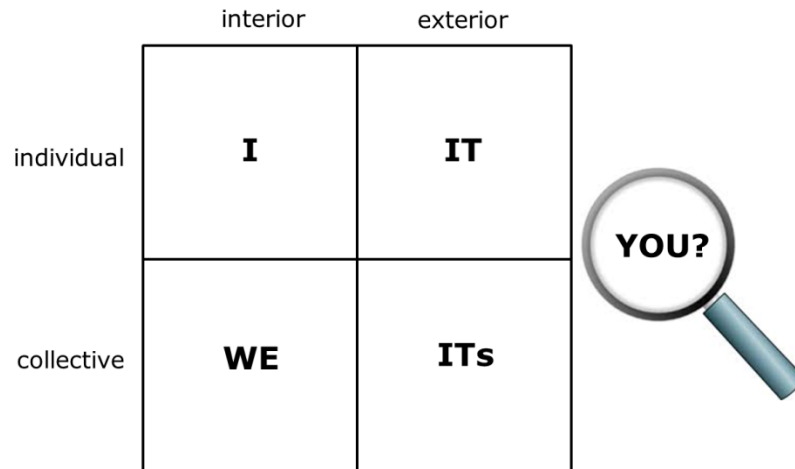


Figure 4: The Integral Quadrants and the Missing YOU

As a consequence, the AQAL model does not help us in analysing and reconstructing the process of mutual (mis-) understanding in dialog; neither do zones, levels, lines, states, and types. In short, AQAL cannot deal with otherness, absences, and transformations. AQAL also can't show how the quadrants are connected to each other, e.g. how I and YOU become WE, something that is absolutely crucial for understanding dialog. Last but not least, AQAL can't show how I becomes YOU in self-reflection seen as a dialogic process.

In my view, then, integral theory needs to be deepened by dialectical thinking, in a way suggested by CDF. Here is why. In regard to dialog, CDF comprises

- in its Context (C) component, a critique of “flat” conceptions of the real world (as well as of language), and a reduction of a stratified meaning,
- in its Process (P) component, a critique of a simplistic model of the communicative process and the disregard of otherness,
- in its Relationship (R) component, a critique of the reduction of common ground (language community) to isolated, individual speakers
- in its Transformation (T) component, a critique of the denial of human agency as a creative force in society.

Integral Dialectics: From AQAL to AQAT

When we compare Integral Theory's conception of epistemology with CDF on different levels, the respective advantages of CDF-dialectical thinking become clearer.

	Integral Theory	CDF
Ontology	no explicit ontology (non-realism, irrealism)	content: stratified world: real > actual > empirical
		form: four moments of dialectic (Bhaskar's MELD)
Epistemology	content: Wilber's four integral quadrants, any domain of discourse	content: three dimensions: self, task, environment embedded in the real world
	form: Wilber's eight primordial perspectives	form: Laske's four classes of dialectical thought forms: C > P > R > T, representing the four moments of dialectic
Methodology	methodological pluralism: eight major methodologies	dialogical discovery procedure: dialectical interviewing and listening

Figure 5: Integral Theory and CDF in Comparison

On the one hand, integral theory lacks an explicit ontology, but provides with the AQAL-model an epistemological rich scheme for the analysis of any domain of discourse (Wilber 2006: 30). In addition, integral methodological pluralism offers an elaborated scheme of eight major methodologies (Wilber 2006: 52). However, the epistemic structures offered, despite their outward richness, are not dialectical, or able to capture negativity or absence, as shown by the omission of the category of YOU.

On the other hand, CDF is referencing a stratified world that distinguishes the real (hidden generative structures) from the actual (facts, events) and the empirical (experiences, observations). On the epistemological level, the four classes of dialectical thought forms (Context > Process > Reality > Transformation) represent the four moments of dialectic of this real world, thus enabling an in-depth explanatory social science. For research on the social-emotional and cognitive development of adults within the social world, dialog in the form of dialectical interviewing and listening seems to be the most appropriate method. CDF provides a framework for assessing the fluidity of human thinking, thus the ability to handle real-world complexity. For social scaffolding in the form of coaching, mentoring, teaching, and consulting, one can compare the profiles of different individuals, as well as the profiles of the same individual at different times.

Human learning including scientific inquiry is a mental movement from AQAL to AQAT – from “All Quadrants All Levels” to “All Quadrants All (dialectical) Thought forms”. In light of CDF,

the movement from AQAL to AQAT is not only a naturally occurring movement in human minds, but also a discovery procedure one can consciously adopt, by which a domain of discourse can be explored in greater, dialectical, depth.

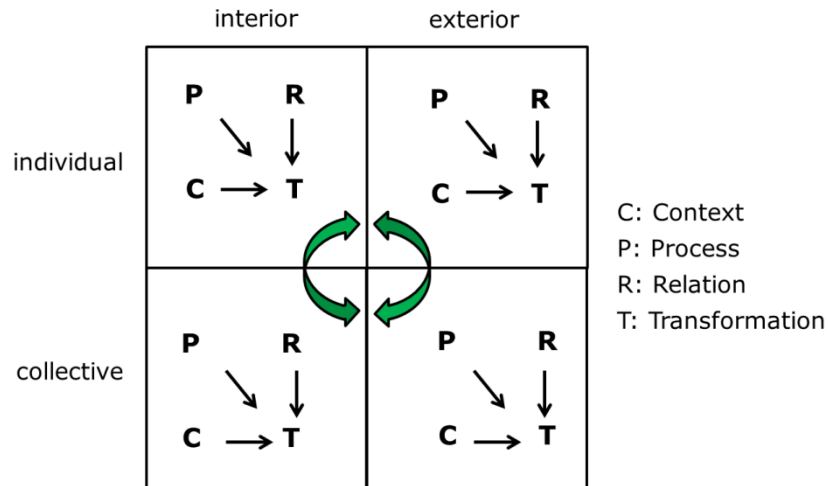


Figure 6: Integral Dialectics: From AQAL to AQAT

Dialectical thought forms associated with Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic deepen one’s understanding of the intrinsic connection between the four quadrants which otherwise remains merely espoused.

As this train of thought show, dialectical thought forms, originally employed for making cognitive-developmental assessments, have a variety of other uses that far surpass their “academic” usefulness. Just as Wilber’s integral quadrants guide holistic thinking, so do Laske’s epistemic equivalents of Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic, but in a deepened way that allows for doing justice to absences (negativity). While Wilber’s quadrants focus on content, the WHAT, the four moments of dialectic and their associated thought forms focus on structure of an individual’s thinking manifesting in speech or text. In other words, these thought forms focus on the HOW, rather than the WHAT of thinking. The fact that structural moments are “above content”, means that they can be used to elaborate all kinds of contents, and thus can be used as mind openers, tools for opening and focusing an individual’s mind. Consequently, dialectical thought forms are general conversational illuminative tools, not bound to a particular domain or form of discourse. They can equally be used in dialectical text analysis and text development (Frischherz 2013).

Toward an Integral Dialectical Research Agenda

The present integral research agenda, viewed from CDF, should be completed in the following ways:

- The social-emotional and cognitive dimensions of adult development should be clearly separated in terms of empirical measurement.
- A methodology for measuring cognitive development in terms of dialectical thinking should be used.
- The three best known dimensions of adult development: social-emotional, cognitive, and psychological, should be connected in an evidence-based way.

With my longitudinal study in adult development, I hope to shed more light on these issues, in order to do a further step in the direction of an integral dialectical research agenda.

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Biography

Bruno Frischherz, Dr phil, is professor of communication and business ethics at the Business School of the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (Switzerland). His special interests are discourse analysis, knowledge management, adult development, corporate social responsibility, and ethics of technology. See www.didanet.ch and www.hslu.ch/wirtschaft.htm

Contact

Bruno Frischherz, Prof. Dr.
bruno.frischherz@hslu.ch
+41 41 228 42 74
Hochschule Luzern - Wirtschaft
Institut für Kommunikation und Marketing IKM
Zentralstrasse 9
CH-6002 Luzern