

Otto Laske Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM)

An International Think Tank for Re-Engineering “Human Capital” and Stimulating Leadership Development

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A Developmental Agenda of Concrete Utopianism: Culture Transformation in the Anthropocene

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Executive Summary

Our agenda is based on the following topics:

1. The need for a new concept of *human being* and of *work*
2. Handling complexity in the anthropocene is not “business as usual”
3. Moving from systems thinking to transformational (dialectical) thinking has become a societal necessity
4. Human development needs social support in the zone of proximal development
5. Innovation requires collaborative intelligence and maturity in teams

These topics are discussed below based on the methodology called CDF – *Constructive Developmental Framework* – with an emphasis on cognitive development (see . https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_developmental_framework). Individuals’ and teams’ level of cognitive development is centrally addressed through the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework* (DTF).

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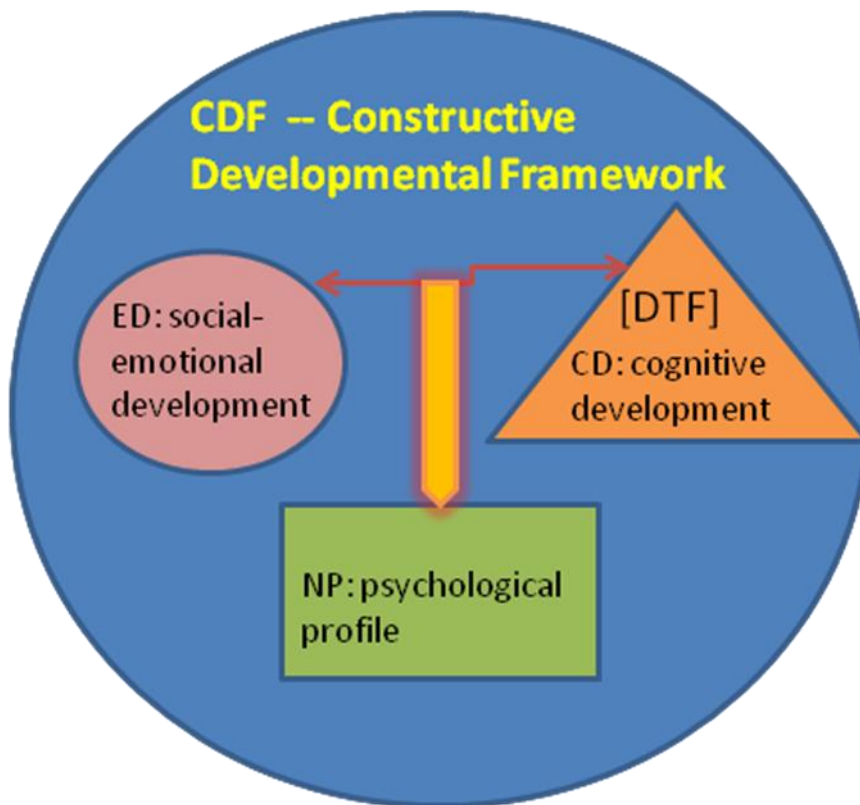


Fig. 1 Components of CDF

1. A new concept of “human being” (and of “work”)

It has taken humanity thousands of years to develop an empirically validated concept of *human being*. This concept has reached great clarity in the developmental sciences since 1975. Among the foremost insights are these:

- Emotional and cognitive development is life-long.
- Both dimensions of development are intrinsically connected but follow different, often divergent, paths.
- Both developmental dimensions are socially mediated and, while they have a different appearance in different cultures, are found in all cultures.
- Level of development determines learning potential; “vertical” development determines “horizontal” (behavioral) learning.
- Self-authored meaning making and complex thinking together can be considered preconditions of good citizenship in democratic societies.
- As long as we neglect developmental research findings, our social practices (consulting, coaching, mentoring, therapy, management, and teaching) remain anachronistic and ineffective if not counter-productive.

- The first theory of organizational work together with the notion of “human capability” was created by Elliott Jaques in “Requisite Organization” (1989; 1994).
- The nature of work is changing under the impact of algorithms: work needs to be seen as a crucial medium of adult development; therefore, “deliberately developmental organizations” (DDO) need to be created.
- We live in a time in which work delivery is reshaped by intelligent software and stifled by a fixation on “competence” and “excellence” rather than “play” through which the working individual can bring him- or herself fully into delivering work.
- It is presently difficult to design collaborative work environments (e.g., shared leadership) which enable individuals at all levels of responsibility to realize their developmental potential.
- CONCLUSION: In order to practice a new concept of “human being”, we need new thinking about the nature of work using developmental tools. A first attempt to provide such tools is made by the *Constructive Developmental Framework* (CDF) that has a strong focus on boosting transformational thinking based on dialectic.

2. Handling complexity in the anthropocene is not “business as usual”

Individually and as a society, we practice many epistemic and ontological fallacies and therefore do not come even close to understanding nature’s generative mechanisms (natural necessity). This makes the real world seem complex, and human thinking unable to grasp it in depth.

At the same time, due to human technology grounded in formal logic, through our actions on the environment we are now are closely tied to the mechanisms that we don’t deeply understand, which reduces health and well-being. In global warming we are being shown that our actions have an impact on natural necessity that is potentially life-threatening.

Through the epistemic fallacies we practice (e.g., reducing the world to what we know about it and painting it in a single color, without negativity), we also put our society at political risks such as extremism, fundamentalism, traditionalism, anti-scientific ideologies, which lead to bad citizenship.

In the social world, especially the world of individual and team work, we come up against the following problems:

- As rational agents (courtesy Jan De Visch, 2015):
 - we feel we need to be “logical”, but the real world is not logical
 - we are likely to see only data that support what we already believe in or do what we have already decided to do

- we think in terms of systems, but they are not transformational systems (which are more like living beings)
 - we are not fully aware of the presence of the past and the future in the present
 - our thinking about the future is often an extension of what we think we know about the past, but the future is not the past
 - we follow expectations that cannot be satisfied in a world that is in constant transformation and includes sudden reversals, breakdown, unforeseen developments, not only “obstacles”.
- To move out of this *irrealist* position, both as a society and as individuals, we need to become transformational agents who acknowledge that commerce is constellated within nature, and thinking within being.
 - This entails four main ways of “re-thinking how we think” and shifting attention from WHAT we think to HOW we think:
 - Objects are forms in transformation
 - The meaning of “things” depends on the context in which they are seen, and this context is layered, not flat
 - Everything is intrinsically related to everything else and otherwise could not even “be”
 - The social world we create is in unceasing transformation, following a rhythmic that we as agents have an increasingly direct impact on (“anthropocene”).
 - Dialectical thinking can help us to distinguish the kinds of exploration we have been educated to do in predictable situations from what we need to cope with when dealing with possibilities, thus the future.
 - Dialectical thinking is a dead or dying tradition which has been clarified and tooled in the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework* based on Bhaskar’s “Four Moments of Dialectic” 1993).

3. Moving from systems thinking to transformational (dialectical) thinking has become a societal necessity

Thinking is a process comprising “content” and “structure”. Focusing on content however “complex”, is projecting a static world. Thinking is structured in terms of classes of thought forms that only gradually acquired by adults over their life time.

Depending on the thought forms individuals are using in speech and writing, they engage three different kinds of thinking:

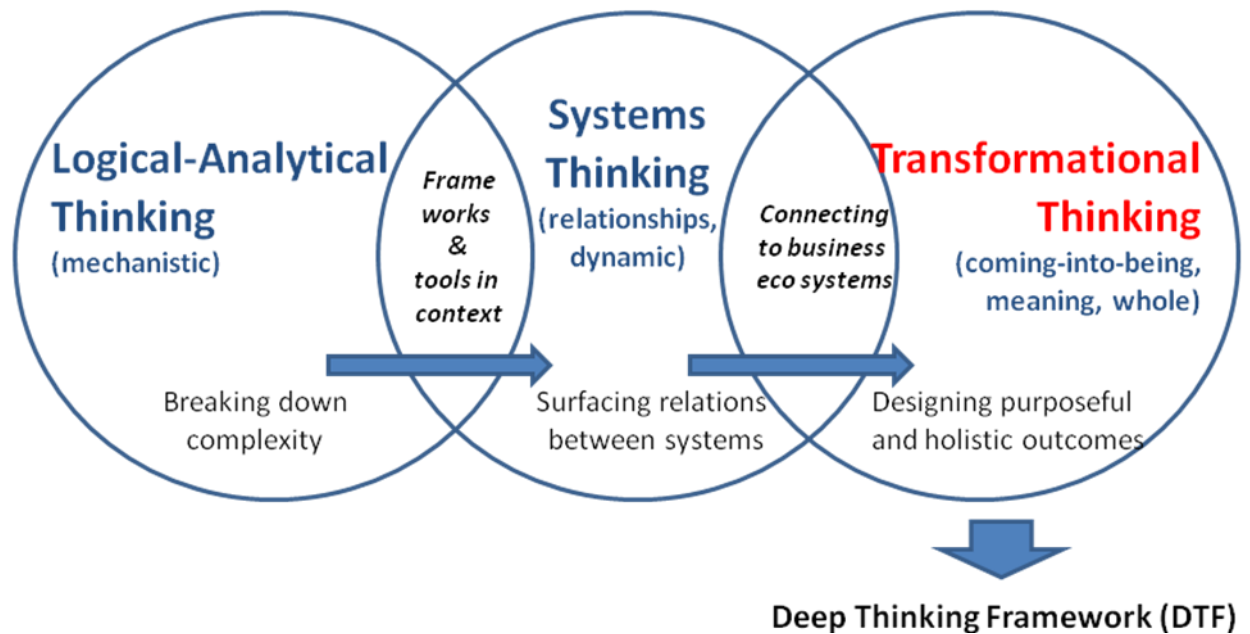


Fig. 2 Developmental Sequence of Ways of Thinking

- Logical thinking is helpful in a predictable world
- Systems thinking is helpful for seeing the “whole picture”
- Transformational thinking is needed to be “realistic” about the transformations that unceasingly and naturally occur, thus for moving into the future

Consulting based on DTF leads from logic-analytical to transformational thinking by way of using conventional systems thinking as a bridge. By *coordinating* individual thought forms (see the table below), higher and higher levels of systems thinking can be realized (e.g., Cp+Re).

In this way dialectical thinking begins to take on many different forms, being descriptive, expository, explanatory, exploratory, heuristic, critical, collaborative, or disruptive, as well as consensus-building and a form of action inquiry.

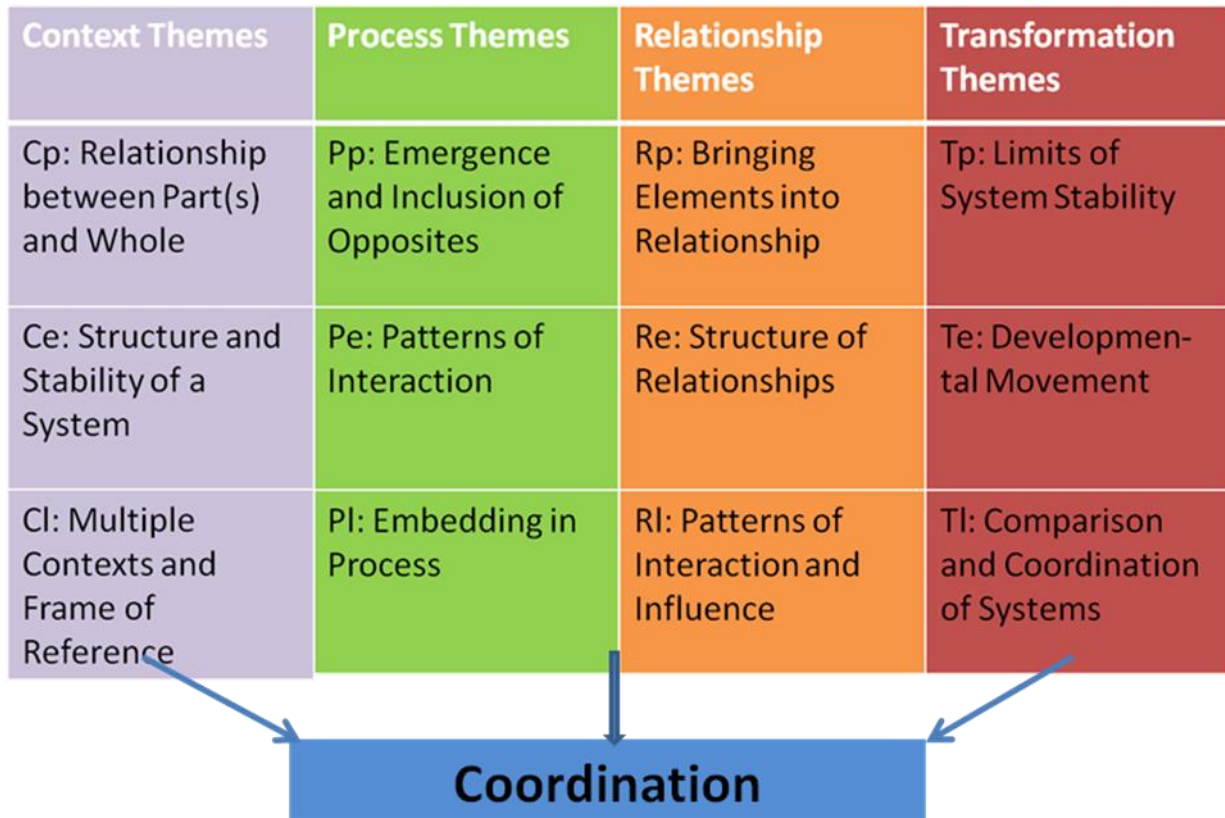


Fig. 3 Short Table of Dialectical Thought Forms

4. Human development needs social support in zones of proximal development

Logically based systems thinking represents only a limited deepening of analytical thinking overall. Higher levels of systems thinking can, however, be attained by using transformational thinking based on the coordination of thought forms. This is not only a matter of learning new skills, but of level of cognitive development of the learner.

Research has found that adults' journey to dialectical thinking takes place in four phases, starting from adolescent Understanding (Laske 2008, 2015). Where somebody resides at any time in terms of cognitive development can be determined through a *Fluidity Index* in DTF (Laske 2008):

- Step 1: fluidity <10
- Step 2: fluidity >10 <30
- Step 3: fluidity >30 <50
- Step 4: fluidity >50

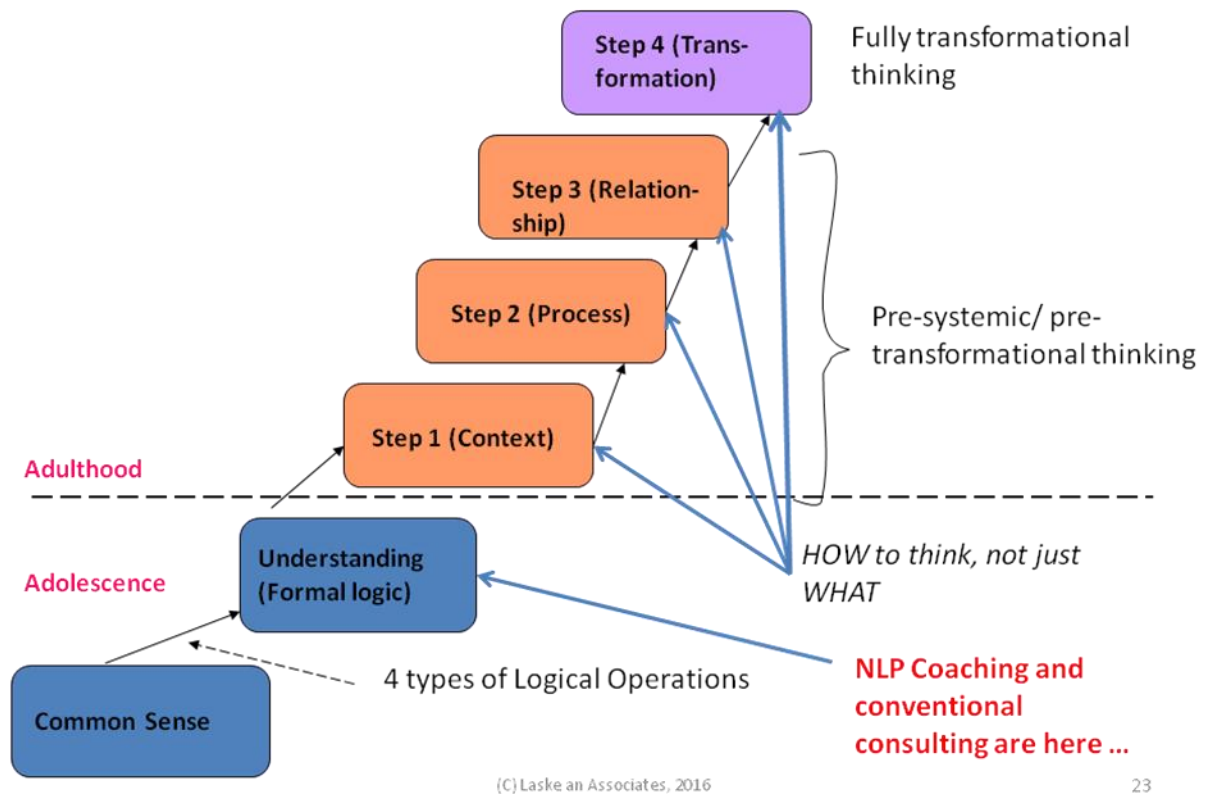


Fig. 4 Developmental Sequence of Phases of Dialectical Thinking

Pragmatically, we can look at each of these phases in terms of Vygotsky's 4 *zones of proximal development*:

- Zone 1: the competences / insights that a person already “has”
- Zone 2: pending cognitive-developmental steps that are easy enough for the person to master by him-or herself
- Zone 3: cognitive-developmental steps that are within reach but can be accomplished only with the help of others – consultants, coaches, mentors, teachers, more highly developed peers ...
- Zone 4: cognitive-developmental states that can be grasped intellectually but are out of reach under given circumstances (including present level of social-emotional meaning making) even with the massive help of others.

Strategic Choices

1. In Zone 1, CDF has value if the presently available human capital is deemed insufficient for the organization's mission and strategy to succeed.
2. In Zone 2, cognitive boosting based on DTF in the form of mentoring is the strategy of choice.

3. Most work with CDF takes place in Zone 3, with inclusion of the social-emotional (ED), cognitive (CD), and psychological components (Need/Press; NP). Since higher levels of meaning making (ED) cannot be forced upon an individual, and since psychologically oriented, “behavioral”, coaching (NP) has limited value at higher levels of organizational accountability, the pedagogical and consulting tool of choice for increasing individual and team maturity is DTF.
4. In Zone 4 CDF is of value as an assessment tool with whose help high-level recruitment, re-staffing, and restructuring of shared leadership can be brought about.

5. Innovation requires collaborative intelligence and maturity in teams

Since emotional development cannot be forced to move to a higher level, our consulting work is primarily cognitive. We teach groups and team members to become aware of their thinking in terms of Bhaskar’s *four moments of dialectic* for the sake of their *task process*, to improve their own epistemic dialectic. We also assist them in appreciating that the real world is ontologically configured in terms of the same moments of dialectic that gradually emerge in human thinking:

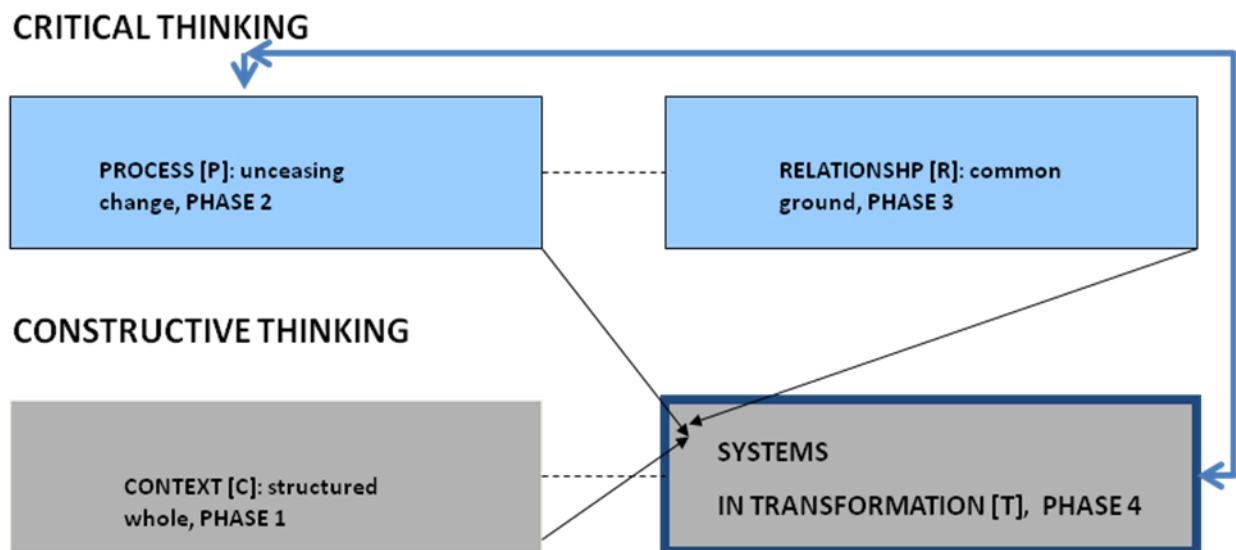


Fig. 5 Interconnection between the Four Moments of Dialectic

At the same time, as CDF-schooled observers we are focusing on groups’ and teams’ social-emotional level of maturity which strongly determines members’ *personal process* (bonding). We do so since we know that social-emotional maturity has a strong bearing on members’ capability to collaborate on tasks.

How specifically we work with a particular team is determined by the level of responsibility (work level) of team members sketched below:

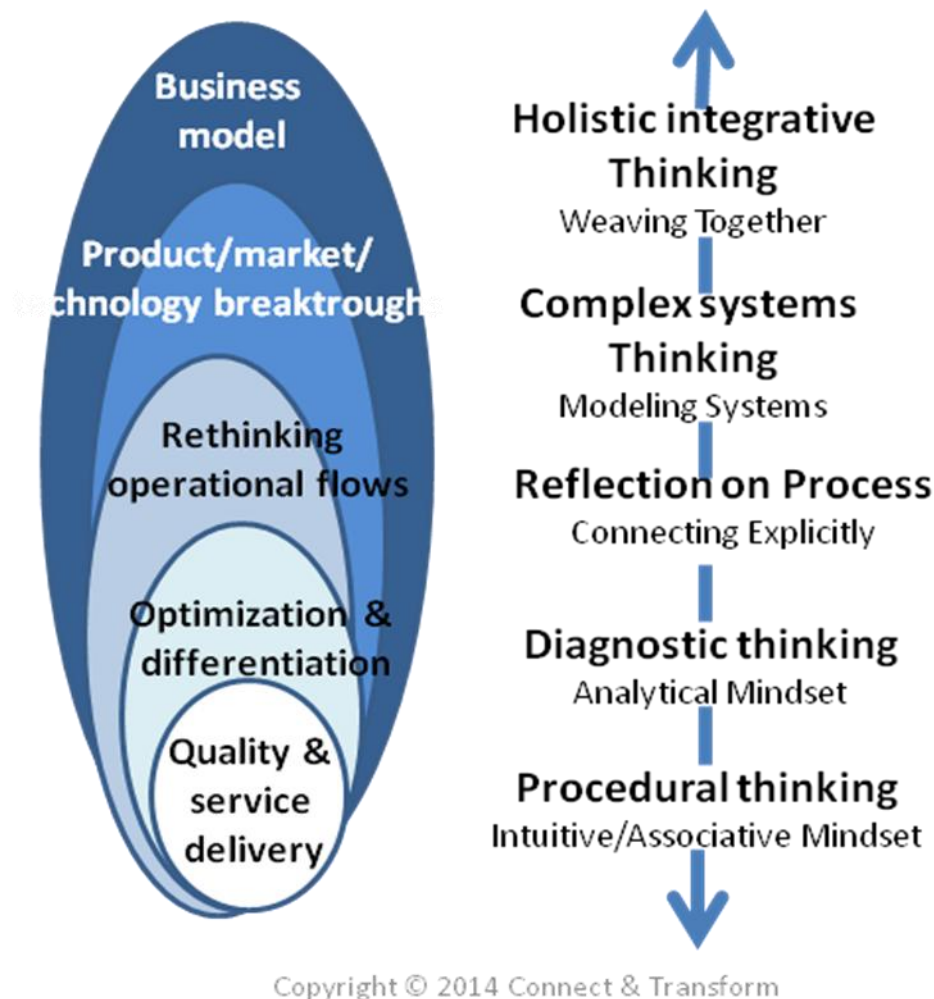


Fig. 6 Sequence of Thought Complexity Aligned with Size of Role (Work Level)

On being introduced to a team, we determine in real time (by hypothesis) what is the social-emotional type of the team we are working with. In doing so, we follow the empirically validated team typology sketched below:

Stratum 1	Stratum 2	Stratum 3	Stratum 4	Stratum 5	Stratum 6
UD2	DD3	UD3	DD4	UD4	DD5

Lower developed majority (L2) follows higher developed minority (L3)	Lower developed minority (L2) follows higher developed majority (L3)	Lower developed majority (L3) follows higher developed minority (L4)	Lower developed minority (L3) follows higher developed majority (L4)	Lower developed majority (L4) follows higher developed minority (L5)	Lower developed minority (L4) follows higher developed majority (L5)
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Fig. 7 Typology of Teams Based on Social-Emotional Maturity Levels

As the table shows, we see team work as crucially determined by how different developmental levels relate within a team:

- upwardly divided teams tend to *regress* to the lowest common developmental level.
- downwardly divided teams tend to *stagnate* at the level of the majority which is held back by the less-developed minority.

When working with teams in real time, we distinguish three phases of CDF intervention:

- *Problem de-construction* (distinguishing the “presentation problem” from the “real problem”)
- *Gathering of results* of achieved mind-opening through dialectic dialog
- *Problem reconstruction* (transformation) prior to taking action.

Following a hypothesis as to the type of team we encounter, we strongly focus on thinking-limitations relative to all four moments of dialectic. We add value by way of deep listening in the team’s domain of work, and in dialog with a “problem owner” and his/her “co-thinkers”, according to the following epistemic strategy:

1. What kind of thinking has created the problem in the first place and keeps it alive (presentation problem)?
2. What distinguishes the *real problem* from the *presentation problem* (the problem as initially presented)?
3. What might be the “irrealist”, ontologically unrealistic, assumptions made by the team and/or its sponsor that may hinder the team’s members from recognizing the structure of social and commercial reality they are part of?
4. What dialectical thought forms are not used (or used only at a very low level of explicitness) in making these assumptions?
5. How do these assumptions made shift when re-thinking them, based on mind-opening questions using dialectical thought forms?

6. What new perspectives open up once the assumptions made and the contents deriving from them have been clarified by way of dialectical inquiry?
7. To what extent do these new perspectives enable a consensus among team members as to how to proceed in solving the problem posed?
8. If consensus is not forthcoming, what new kind of roles (accountability) needs to be included in the team in order to solve the problem in its re-defined form?

This co-evolving intervention engaging the entire team requires higher levels of thinking than conventional, logical systems thinking enables in team members.

Engaging with team members in “thinking along with them” (process consultation), we can help team members surface the **REAL PROBLEM** – in contrast to the presentation problem – in the terms shown below:

	Focus of Thinking	Logical & Analytical – What	Transformational -How
Context	Bigger picture	Seeing only part of the reality and viewing change as something to be neglected.	Seeing the ‘big(ger) picture(s)’ and structures in which change takes place.
Process	Emerging change	Focusing on stability and predictability.	Recognizing the flow(s) of on-going change(s).
Totality	Bringing into relationship	Isolating and focusing on separate elements in the change process.	Finding ‘common ground and interdependencies’ between seemingly unrelated elements.
Desequilibrium	Tension, conflict, breakdown, competing ideas	Seeing change as linear, predictable and planned.	Integrating Process, Context and Relationship in order to capture the complexity of transformation.

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Fig. 8 Differences in Focus of Thinking Depending on Moment of Dialectic, Emphasizing the Differences between Logical and Dialectical Thinking

CONCLUSION

There is a large number of conclusions that together circumscribe the concrete utopianism and philosophy of culture transformation that this introduction to CDF wants to stimulate ...

Ultimately, what cultures grow up around, and crystallize into, is the thinking of the people who identify with them. If thought pattern of individuals can be changed, those of entire cultures can equally, if gradually, be transformed.

In culture transformation work, what initially appears as a tool for boosting one's own (individual) thinking becomes an even more powerful tool for transforming organizational, political, and educational cultures when used with teams, whether in the executive suite, research projects, the work of deliberative political bodies, or "think tanks".

These benefits extend into the political arena of society. Empirical findings about the human potential for mental growth (that CDF is based on) also strongly suggest better ways of supporting individuals and groups as responsible citizens than have up to now been accepted and put to work. Developmental coaching, for instance, can be considered a beneficial societal movement that reinforces critical and self-aware citizenship.

In educational systems, from high school to university, developmental tools have not yet made the slightest impact, at a time where "getting a job" is held to be more important than "getting a life". The loss of the distinction between education – *educere* as leading out of ... -- and training could be mitigated by teaching children dialectical thinking at an early age.

Finally, organizational, political, and educational consultants who acquire an appreciation for findings of, and practical skills in, the applied developmental sciences could become responsible spokespersons for those less developed. They would thereby undergo a kind of self-development not otherwise open to them.

Seen in this light, then, DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework*, shows itself to be a culture transformation tool, not just a tool for "better thinking". Cultures are always a step behind cutting-edge thinking, and to break them up and open them with DTF tools is a great opportunity relative to the huge global challenges societies are presently facing.

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Acronyms

- CDF = Constructive Developmental Framework
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_developmental_framework)
- DTF = Dialectical Thought Form Framework (Measuring Hidden Dimensions of Human Systems, volume 2)
- ED = (social-) emotional development, in CDF
- CD = cognitive development, in CDF
- NP = Need-Press (psychological profile, in CDF)

Important links regarding the use of CDF:

- <http://interdevelopmentals.org/publications/books/>
- <http://www.integralpatterns.com/dialectical-thoughtforms.html>
- <http://watersfoundation.org/systems-thinking/habits-of-a-systems-thinker/>
- <http://www.connecttransform.be>

- <http://www.ilume.co.nz/>
- http://www.amazon.com/Dialectic-Freedom-Classical-Critical-Routledge/dp/0415454913/ref=sr_1_10?ie=UTF8&qid=1464704484&sr=8-10&keywords=roy+Bhaskar
- http://psychologyinrussia.com/volumes/index.php?article=2592&sphrase_id=41778
- http://psychologyinrussia.com/volumes/pdf/2010/11_2010_veraksa.pdf
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