

Preface (2017)

In the life of the mind, 10 years is a long time. This is particularly true of a text that is situated in the context of a huge literature on leadership and organization design. In this new Preface, I want to clarify what for me has gained better defined contours as to what my book is about and what is pioneering about its approach, both in terms of substance and procedure.

While the original text of volume 2 of *Measuring Hidden Dimensions* (MHD; 2008) comprised a substantial appendix consisting of the *Manual of Dialectical Thought Forms* (DTFM), the latter text is no longer included in this publication. It is now available as a separate, stand-alone publication in its own right. It is, to this day, the only such manual in the world (www.interdevelopmentals.org under Publications).

Since the book's first publication, a lot of work has been done on the text as a whole, in all regards, semantically and visually. We owe this work to my incredibly persistent and thorough colleague and friend Alan Snow, Sydney. Without his tireless work on the text, this new edition would not exist.

What the book is about

A succinct but narrow description of this book would be that it formulates a *decision theory for managing human resources* following E. Jaques' *Requisite Organization* (1998) and that it does so based on research on cognitive development by the Kohlberg School at Harvard University. This formulation is, however, wedded to the orthodox and now anachronistic conception of HR as separate from other organizational components of an organization such as IT. The book puts forward such a decision theory in an evidence-based way, by showing how to assess the cognitive profile of organization members and teams empirically, and create accountability hierarchies matching, above all, the capability so ascertained.

More broadly, the book's topic is **the nature of work** in a comprehensive sense of work as an expression of Mind. The book is based on methods and practices for better understanding the mental processes of *work delivery* that originate in each contributor's way of operating in the world at different points along the life span. In contrast to Jacques' notion of capability as well as Kohlberg School convention, the book introduces a sharp distinction between contributors' social-emotional meaning-making and their sense-making ("thinking") profile. The book does so, not in order to keep these profiles separate permanently, but rather in order to be able to ask the important question of how they relate to each other (since they are intrinsically related).

In this way, the book broadens Jaques' notion of *capability* to the broader notion of *internal workplace*. Internal workplace describes, not narrow "competences" but rather how available competences are actually *engaged with and used by* a person on account of his/her overall developmental profile in the sense of adult-developmental research over the lifespan. Grounding work delivery in the internal workplace makes it possible to specify what is the effectiveness of a person's work delivery relative to individuals of a lower or higher adult-developmental level (not just cognitive profile, as in Jaques).

The book's topic is thus broad, and is based on a broader base of developmental research that Jaques had access to, or chose to consider. It is also broader than Kohlberg School musings about organizations (see, e.g., Kegan and Lahey 2016) since it puts developmental levels into the context of requisite organization and team dynamics. The book delivers the theoretical foundation for requisite

organizations not only in their orthodox, hierarchical, form (known by Jaques) but also under circumstances of shared leadership and other holacratic organization designs.

Unusual also is the book's procedure, in that its insights are all grounded in semi-structured dialogs called "cognitive interviews". What interviews show is that people construct for themselves a "real world" through dialog with themselves or others, and that through dialog they come to think as they do. Dialogs are also the optimal way to "understand people", in contrast to putting them in colored boxes strictly separate from each other.

This "dialogical" concept of thinking, knowledge, and work (Linell 2010) stands in stark contrast to a "monological" conception of these issues in which work and thought are a matter of monadic individuals communicating their cognitions via a bridge called "language" in such a way that dialog has no effect on how and what they are communicating.

What is the importance of this view for the notion of cognition and knowledge the reader will ask.

When we proceed from the vantage point of the dialogical nature of mind and communication, entirely different potentials for thinking complexly and measuring the complexity of thinking come into view. We can then ask very new questions such as:

- What is the complexity of a person's present thinking?
- What is the conceptual fluidity of a person's thinking that grounds that fluidity?
- How holistic is a person's thinking?
- How critical and realistic – relative to the existence of a real world – is a person thinking?
- What is a person's current and future potential for complex thinking?
- To what extend is the person's current potential actually applied in his/her work?
- What scaffolding processes (such as coaching or mentoring) may the person need to assist him or her in realizing a bigger part of available future potential?
- Etc.

To answer these novel questions the book puts in place an overarching theory of cognitive development over the lifespan as one toward complex or "dialectical" thinking. Based on the hypothesis that cognitive development consists of moving to consecutively more complex "inquiring systems", **the book formulates a new theory of adult cognitive development over the lifespan centered on the transition from logical to dialectical thinking in the context of work.**

For this reason, a sample interview about a contributor's inquiring system is discussed in depth in section III of the book. The section is centered on Donald, an employee whose interview shows how an internal workplace gets constructed, how its complexity can be measured, and in what way the cognitive *fluidity index* cognitive assessments yield can serve as a guideline for hiring, firing, and scaffolding work delivery for a specific individuals.

What the book foreshadows

Corrections and text improvements apart, over the last 9 years since its first publication, the book's uniqueness has become much clearer. The book's framework is sufficiently broad to influence the

discussion of new topics such as deliberately developmental organization, holacracy, and the digitization of human capital now upon us.

Two perspectives entertained in the book stand out:

1. A demonstration that the English term “development” has two different meanings: that of development “by nature” (ontic, from the inside out) and “by human scaffolding” (agentic, from the outside in), and that mixing up these two meanings of the term leads to confusion
2. A central focus on the notions of “internal workplace” and “cognitive profile” of human resources.
3. A second focus on the relationship between Capability Architecture and Accountability Architecture as to how its requisiteness can be assessed based on empirical data on contributors’ internal workplace.

Point (1) is important since most discussions of “development” follow the behavioral (agentic) path and thus disregard the truly developmental (ontic) one and its assessment, exercised in this book. This leads to many mix-ups, such as that between learning and development, competences and their use in real time, action logic and capability, and others.

Point (2) is important since a discussion of presently “hot” topics such as DDO and holacracy are largely unrealistic without attention paid to these distinctions.

Point (3) is important since it is ultimately what matters for an organization as a whole, and the organizational design it requires to function optimally.

How to Use the Stand-Alone Manual

The webinar-based pedagogical program designed between 2004 and 2009 for teaching dialectical thinking to coaches and consultants based on this book ended in 2015. This was due to the fact that shallower and less costly teachings began to dominate the market (and people’s thinking), with predictable results. The program has been replaced by one-on-one mentoring, especially of CEOs and Board Members who have learned the hard way that they need a different model of mind to cope with the digital transformation and other global risks to their business.

It is now a timely task to design diverse teaching programs for dialectical thinking. These programs need to address different constituents depending on their cognitive-developmental level. Since people at different accountability levels think differently, even in holacratic organizations, teaching them complex thinking means different things in each case and at each level.

The author has described different types of teaching programs for dialectical thinking in his Introduction to DTFM, the only existing manual of dialectical thought forms, which is available at www.interdevelopmentals.org under Publications. The introduction is entitled: “A new approach to dialog: Teaching the dialectical thought form framework”, which is to appear in print in ILR in May of 2017.

Main contributions of the book to new thinking on work and mind

As is true for the first edition of this book, the second edition of MHD (referred to as MHD2) pioneers a large number of concepts without which discussing new organization designs and other global issues seems futile to the author. All of these novel concepts have to do with the nature of human work and its management in organizations, whether the latter comprise a pre-defined managerial hierarchy or not.

The new thinking found in the book manifests differently in different sections:

- In Section II (chapters 4-7), the novelty lies in postulating a trajectory of human thinking from logic to dialectic as a natural expansion of consciousness over individuals' lifespan. The crucial concept introduced is *Inquiring System*, a term that encapsulates an individual's present cognitive stance toward the world. The book argues that if one does not understand the developmental peak of human inquiring systems in the form of dialectical thinking, one has no way of evaluating complexity of thinking nor complexity of work delivery.
- In Section III (chapters 9-11), the following concepts stand out:
 1. *Internal workplace* linked to *cognitive profile*
 2. *Three Houses* (as dimensions of the internal workplace)Not only are these concepts new, they are also shown to be empirically measurable through interviews. They describe the dimensions of consciousness through which individuals construct their workplace as something that defines them at a particular developmental point in time, and which they consequently "take with them" to whatever external workplace they may proceed.
- In Section V (chapters 14-15), the central concepts are:
 1. *Accountability Architecture*
 2. *Capability Architecture*. The concepts of E. Jacques' are deepened and broadened by the inclusion of social-emotional meaning-making whereby measuring both architectures becomes both more difficult and sophisticated, without losing access to empirical evidence.

Importantly, the perspectives and associated concepts introduced in the book do not, for their relevance, depend on how at any historical moment organizations define themselves in terms of their accountability architecture. Rather, these perspectives offer a theoretical framework in which changing organization designs can be discussed concisely and empirically.

Philosophical foundations of the book

This book was written based on the assumption that in order to understand organizations one must first understand the real world in which they are embedded.

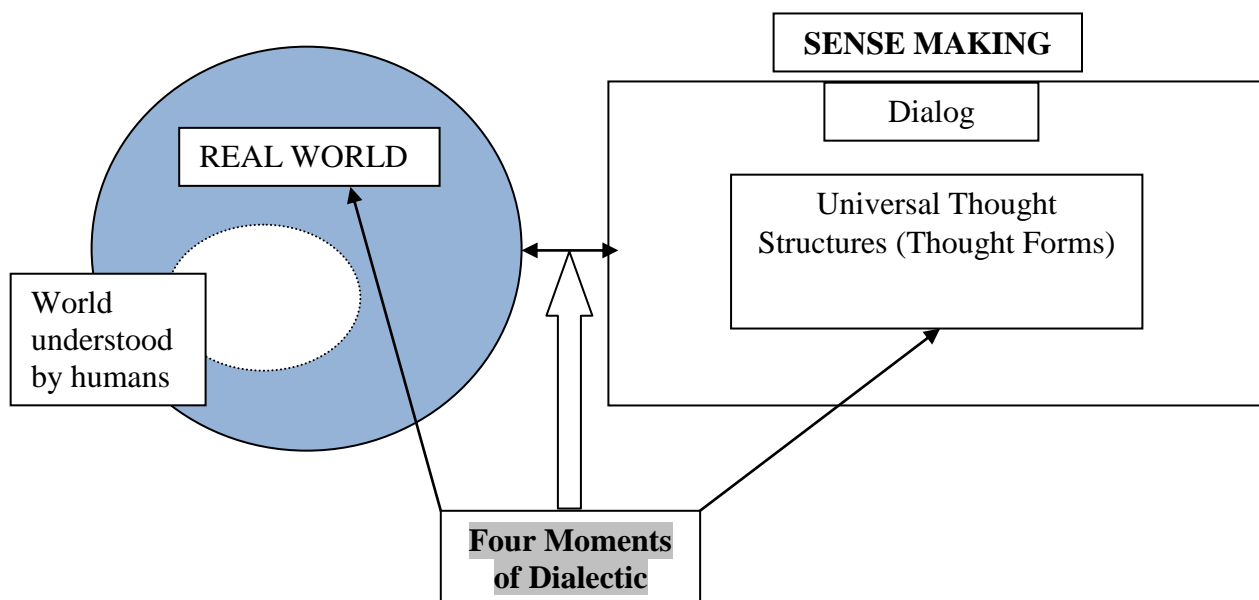


Fig. P1 The dialectical structure of dialog between the mind and the real world

In the model suggested above, the *four moments of dialectic* inform both the real world and human thinking about it. They are both ontological components and epistemic principles. This implies that human sense-making (“thinking”) is from the start directed toward understanding the real world, and any thinking that is divorced from the real world is neither thinking nor cognition. DTFM, then, delivers tools for complex thinking about oneself and the world.

For using the manual effectively readers need to revise their understanding of communication in its relationship to both language and cognition. A transfer model of communication in terms of which “cognitions are passed to individual others via language” will not suffice for making the best use of the manual. This is because what is communicated to others is actually CONSTRUCTED together with them in real time. The medium in which this happens are *movements-in-thought*, and these are based on learnable *thought forms*. Thought forms are “dialectical” in the sense that they call for each other and function in a network of related thought forms without which they remain ineffective.

Construction by way of languaging thoughts is a dialogical process is demonstrated in Donald’s interview in chapter 11. Donald uses concepts to describe his own internal workspace and thereby constructs it as a piece of the real world in which he is embedded. When we understand Donald’s internal workspace, we not only understand how he conceives of, and delivers, work. We also understand how he constructs the real world in which his work delivery and his life are embedded.

New take on the book

The insights into the book just formulated are partly new even for the author. In formulating the concept of “deliberately developmental organization” (DDO), my teacher R. Kegan has made the essence of my books more evident to me. However, the meaning of DDO for me, based on this book, is quite different and much broader than Kegan’s. Here is why.

The book takes “deliberately” to mean “by way of empirical assessment through interviews”. But more than assessment is involved. Assessment findings become the basis of developmental processes by which contributors’ work delivery can be scaffolded to various degrees, depending on what zone of proximal development they are presently in (i.e., how much coaching and other helps they presently need).

In light of this, this book provides a set of tools for creating new thinking as well as scaffolding contributors’ critical realism in delivering work. The book clarifies what exactly are the “deliberately developmental processes” that are needed for scaffolding capability in DDOs. In my view, such processes do not primarily apply to individuals but to teams, as is outlined in my Primer on dialectical thinking for integral leaders (Laske 2015). This perspective indicates another difference relative to Kegan’s work on DDOs.

DTFM, now separate, sheds light on the book

If we include in our reflection on the book, for a moment, the *Manual of Dialectical Thought Forms* (DTFM) originally found in its appendix and now published separately (see www.interdevelopmentals.org under Publications), the novelty of the book becomes even more striking.

Based on Bhaskar's work on epistemic fallacies that hinder humans to understand the real world, both this book and the associated manual introduce universal thought structures (or paradigms) called *thought forms*, by joining Bhaskar's *four moments of dialectic* and M. Basseches' and my own empirical research on the cognitive development of adults. In conjoining a philosophical and empirical tradition, DTFM as well as the new stand-alone volume 2 of MHD open new vistas on the nature of work in organizations.

To explain.

Based on my experience with semi-structured cognitive interviews (discussed in Section III), what comes into view in this book is a *dialogical*, rather than a *monological*, approach to management science and human capital in particular.

By this I mean that since the cognitive structure of organizations is based on dialog between stakeholders, making sense of the world within organizations is always, and intrinsically, linked to issues of "how the real world works". It is the gap between how humans in organizations think and how the real world works that gets organizations into difficulties (J. Stewart 2016).

However, real-world transformations are beyond the reach of purely logical thinking as well as systems thinking. As a result, the crucial tool set for maintaining and boosting organizations is one of thought forms that function as *mind openers* within organizational dialogs. The interview with Donald presented and discussed in chapter 11 of this book is a template for dialogical processes that are constitutive of all organizational functioning.

The movement-in-thought process manifesting in the interview is, moreover, not that of a single individual. They indirectly speak as well to "how an organization is thinking" at a particular moment in time. Since individual contributors construct their workplace within a particular culture, a cognitive interview not only speaks to the interviewee's present inquiring system and its level of complexity. The interview also reflects the culture within which the interviewee is situated (called the Organizational House).

This insight takes us closer to the very core of organizational functioning since "how people think" in an organization becomes part of their *action logic*, and no action logic is more complex than the logic people can be observed to display in a DTF cognitive interview.

The hidden philosophical dimension of the book

Readers with a philosophical bent of mind might detect another layer of the book that addresses *sophism*. By sophism I mean the age-old attempt to reduce the real world to the social world and put man into the center of the universe. This attempt was first countered by Plato when he criticized Protagoras for making man the measure of all things. Protagoras is among us today in many, many glittering, appealing forms.

In its social-science form, sophism has taken on the form of what is called "developmental theory" as well as "integral theory", with "cognitive science" as a helper. This theory practices anthropomorphism in the form of reducing cognition, or thinking about the world at large (cosmos), to social-emotional meaning making or abstract logical thinking. It also reduces the dialogical nature of the mind to a form in which it inheres monadic individuals that do nothing but "transfer"

meanings and insights from one to the other. What appears as a benevolent focus on human issues is, philosophically speaking, an age-old epistemic fallacy with severe political consequences.

The first victim of this reduction is thinking itself which, in western philosophy, was for 2,500 years considered as having to do with understanding the real – physical and social – world. Let's use the term “sense-making”, in contrast to meaning making, as I do in this book. While sense and meaning always go together, reducing the first to the second is strictly speaking a denial of, or at least amounts to erecting a barrier against, the need to school people in understanding the world at large, not just the social world and its many meanings.

The reduction of conceptual insight to meaning making under the cover of self-and-other positioning is especially pernicious if it occurs in a culture of predominantly formal logical thinking, as we increasingly live in. Logic, once a tool for scientific insight and ideology critique, has over the last 200 years, transformed itself into a comprehensive control system that censors anything outside of it as “false” or “negligible”, and what is worse, hinders complex dialectical thinking from being nurtured institutionally. This control system has, by now, been internalized by people to such a degree that they no longer notice their own subjugation to it but indeed volunteer in making themselves its victims.

It is this well-armed sophism, now appearing in the form of the internet of things, that this book critiques, singling out organizations and institutions as the place where it has become most glaring for political and profit-making reasons. The book levels this critique by demonstrating through an interview and its analysis that we need to pay attention to how people construct their internal workplace where thinking seen as “work” actually happens.

The failure to notice the historical transformation of logical thinking into an instrument of coercion, first noticed by the Frankfurt School in the 1940s, is one of the symptoms that speak to the weakening of complex thinking in our culture. Since most people locate the culprit in mere contents and happenings, they fail to pay attention to how these contents and happenings are constructed by themselves in a way that bereaves them of the chance for experiencing their own untrammelled thinking. In their “downloading”, they strike themselves from the list of “masters” (and leaders) and put themselves into the cohort of “slaves”, as Hegel would say.

Conclusions

I would state the book's “takeaways” briefly as follows:

1. In a social world increasingly foregrounding for us its complexity, in itself and in its relationship to the natural world, thinking about the nature of human work and organization design without reference to adult cognitive development toward dialectic is a no-starter.
2. Attempts at establishing deliberately developmental organizations cannot remain grounded in a purely social-emotional conception of DDO as proposed by Kegan and Lahey (2016), nor can they be undertaken without a cogent concept of group and team dynamics rooted in their members' cognitive profile and the dialog among them (Laske 2015).
3. Issues of shared leadership (holacracy and other forms) require a strong focus of attention on the differences in cognitive development between members of circles and teams, thus a stronger focus on team's *task process* (action logic) than the team's personal process which the present literature on teams one-sidedly focuses on.

4. Uncritical use of formal logic thinking, not only in the social sciences, but in organizations and institutions as well, promotes the enslavement of independent critical thinking by bereaving citizens of the experience of their own cognitive potential.

Keep in mind when reading the book that I never promised you new ideas were simple to grasp. Being new, they will require your conceptual effort.

All feedback is welcome.

Otto Laske
April 2017
Gloucester, MA, USA