A Problem-Driven Mentoring and Teaching Program for Learning Complexity Thinking

Otto Laske, May 2017

As the daily challenges in life and at work increase together with uncertainty, the need to take on complexity also increases. Complexity has little to do with "being complicated" which implies a static systems view of the world. Complexity is entirely dynamic and transformative. It takes many variable forms, both "in" the mind and in the form of "problems" seemingly outside of it. The old notion of "better thinking" takes on new urgency. At IDM, help is at hand.

It's little understood that complexity is not just "there" but is a product of the complexity, or lack of it, of one's own present thinking. It is here that IDM's experience with DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework*, comes into play which has helped clients since the year 2000.

The crux of taking on complexity lies in acknowledging that the real world is in unceasing transformation, a fact that purely logical thinking is not at all equipped to handle.

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There is now much talk of "agile" and "lean" thinking, even "hyper-thinking". This is all welcome but much of it misses the point.

Why?

You can't change mental habits by remaining fixated on outcomes external to yourself. You need to start with yourself and, staying with it, inquire why you may have been following limiting beliefs reigning in your mind. "Agile" and "lean" thinking become traps if they let you stay where you are since they are both restricted to purely logical thinking.

To deepen your purposes, what you really need to transcend is purely logical thinking. It is simply the most potent source of limiting beliefs. However useful such thinking is when you need to distinguish between a green and a red light at intersections, logical thinking makes the bizarre (!) assumption that "A is always A, and non-A (anything in the past of, or outside of, A) is *false*". And "false" suggests "don't bother thinking about it".

Wow!

What kind of a world would humans have to live in for this assumption to be, or become, true! (For one thing, there would be no death since non-A is false). So we can say that purely logical thinking is a utopia adopted by minds unaware of their own death, and certainly unaware of the unceasing transformations of the real world. Logical thinking is also one of society's most powerful social control systems for keeping people in line.

Actually, there is nothing logical in the world, except that your mind has adopted certain mental habits, among them the thought that "A is always A." Now, A may have been A five seconds ago, but no more, because everything is in motion. By now, A has morphed in non-A while it is still believed to be A.

An old device to come to grips with that is either theology or philosophy, or perhaps some kind of "spirituality". Let's choose ontological philosophy.

The truth that *non-A is real* was brought home to the post-modern world very forcefully by the recently deceased philosopher Roy Bhaskar. (His death is real.) In 1993, just before reaching 50, he wrote a stupendous – though difficult – book called "Dialectic: The pulse of freedom" (https://www.amazon.com/Dialectic-Freedom-Classical-Critical-Routledge/dp/0415454913). The truth is: the book is very difficult to "get" for non-initiates for whom it may remain arcane. But even if not, dialectic cannot be learned by reading texts. (Images are more helpful).

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Having realized this some time ago, Otto Laske is putting together a progressive training sequence for learning complex thinking in the sense of Bhaskar's *Critical Realism*. He uses images (his own paintings at https://www.saatchiart.com/account/collection/888704) to convey the essence of the four moments of dialectic as a first step into dialectic. Otto believes that taking on "non-A" as REAL requires more than taking another perspective. It rather requires a different existential stance, not merely a purely intellectual one. In any case, esthetics is most helpful.

The new course will help you acquire increasingly fluid ways of complex thinking based on empirically validated tools comprised by Laske's DTF Framework (see the DTF Manual at http://bit.ly/2oEYbca or http://www.interdevelopmentals.org/?page_id=1974). You will acquire complexity thinking by better understanding the structure of your own present thinking from which what you are "thinking about" derives.

This "meta-thinking" course has a twofold objective:

(1) Becoming aware that identity thinking (A=A; non-A is false) is both indispensable and simultaneously severely restricts your movements-in-thought;

(2) Transcending identity thinking by unfolding an event, topic or picture "A" with DTF thought forms, in order to gain insight into its associated "non-A" (e.g., the past and outside of A), achieving thereby a higher level of complex thinking that synthesizes A and non-A;

Following the program will have the effect that you can diminish the gap between your thinking and the ceaselessly transforming, essentially unpredictable, real world. The course is customized for use by average to good logical thinkers in all professions, especially those based in the social sciences.

Some further comments for why this course is a liberator follow.

In his 1993 book on dialectic, Bhaskar conceives of Mind as a part of the real world. For him, Mind is ruled, as all generative mechanisms, by ontological principles he calls the *four moments of dialectic*. They are usually summarized as MELD (1M, 2E, 3L, 4D).

Let's call MELD *as it appears in the mind* **MELD-in-the-mind** (MELDitm). Since MELDitm actively configures your movements-in-thought in real time (without your conscious awareness of it), you are given a chance to take control of these movements when you embrace DTF dialectical thought forms (TFs). This is shown diagrammatically below:

Complexity Thinking
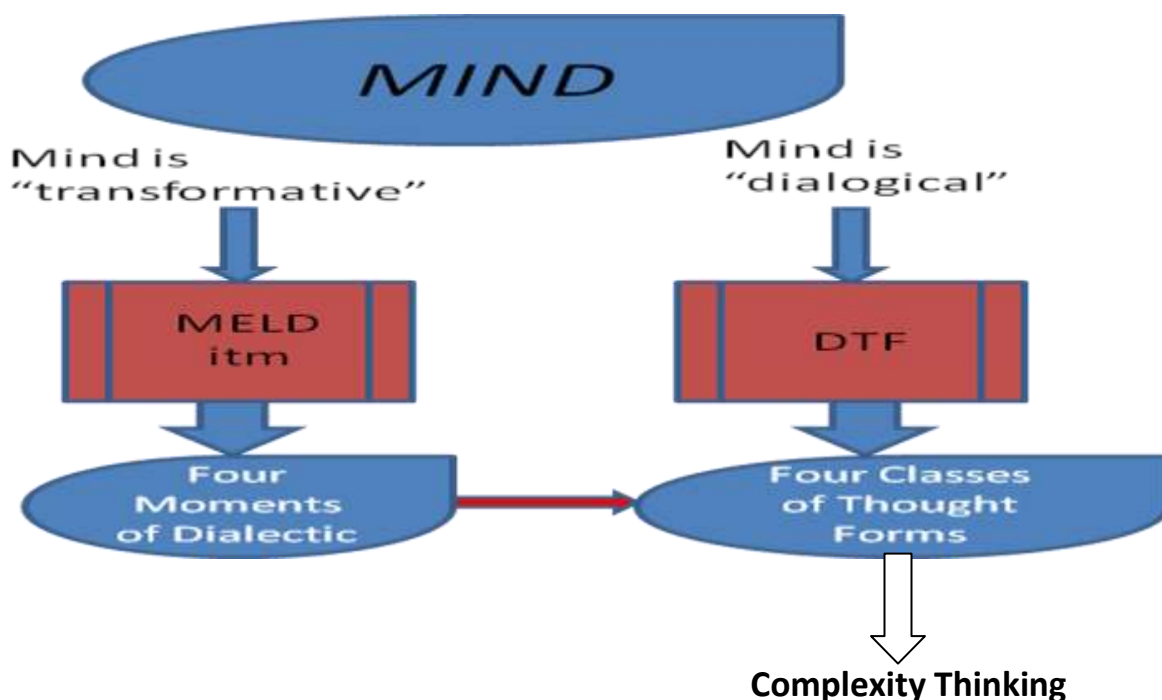
As shown above, being transformative the mind is also *dialogical* (in dialog with the world including with yourself), rather than making an object of it monologically. By nature, the mind sees the world in four separate but inseparable *dimensions*, those of MELD, and is therefore *dialectical* (in the sense of MELD).

The four different dimensions through which the world opens up for dialectical and dialogical thinking are these:

- M: reality at rest, static (and opaque)

- E: reality in conflict and opposition with itself

- L: reality as a network of relationships sharing a common ground

- D: reality binding M & E & L, and thereby itself transformed

When we adopt an *open stance* toward these dimensions of the real world, we leave identity thinking behind. The identity clause (A is always A) is not even true in M, where the world is at rest. Since the world as system is always highly structured, the mere presence of layers in the world (A1, A2, … An) makes the identity clause false! We can say that seeing the complexity of the world in M is the beginning of transcending purely logical thinking, and thus leaving behind the identity clause and its pernicious consequences.

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At IDM, complexity thinking, born of organizational problems, has more than a decade-long tradition (2000-2016). In contrast to how it was previously taught to an international student body, the new program has been divided into the 5 separate modules shown below. All of them lead from simple "identifying (moments or TFs)" ➔ "reflecting on (how TFs are expressed)" ➔ "consciously using a particular TF or constellation of TFs)".

Modules	Action → Approach↓	Identify [others' TFs]	Reflect [on own TFs]	Use [in speech and/or texts]
Preparatory Module	Foundational	Moments of Dialectic *Begin to build an internal model of dialectic by understanding the nature and relationship of Bhaskar's four moments of dialectic (M1 2E, 3L, 4D) and their unfolding in the mind as dialectical thought forms.*		
Module 1	**Simple** (**4** classes of TFs, CPRT	*Analyze/classify* pictures/texts	*Reflect* on a problem	*Ask* questions, describe and illuminate
Module 2	**Medium** (12 TFs, p,e,l)	*Compare* texts [on same topic]	*Reflect* on a personal goal	*Rethink* a problem
Module 3	**Complex** (**28** TFs)	*Analyze* a structured interview	*Reflect* on values; *evaluate*	*Coach* a process
Module 4	**Expert**	*Analyze* the TF structure of speech flow in real time	*Reflect* on TF constellations heard or self-formulated in real time	*Model* TF constellations for others in real time

IDM Teaching Program for Meta-Thinking

In progressing through these five modules, the DTF framework itself remains in the background because the teaching is based on concrete problems proposed by students and clients, either individually or as a team. The instructor points out based on TFs as "mind openers" in dialog how the problem encountered or posed can be seen in a different light shed by MELD components, or what is *absent* from the problem formulation (*presentation problem*) and thus "not seen".

1. Module 1: *Acquiring an intuitive 'feel' for Bhaskar's four moments of dialectic (MELD) defining ontological dimensions*. Learners pose a, for them, relevant problem; they refine their problem formulation after having analyzed images in terms of MELD constellations, based on Laske's paintings seen at https://www.saatchiart.com/account/collection/888704) [identify intuitively; reflect].

2. Module 2 (Simple): *Learners begin to understand MELD analytically* in terms of four classes of thought forms, and apply them to verbal or written problem formulations [identify and reflect].

3. Module 3 (Medium): *Learners begin to use 4x3=12 specific thought forms* when approaching a real-world problem, thus becoming more highly differentiated in their insights and communications [speaking and listening: identify, reflect, use]

4. Module 4 (Complex): Learners expand the number of thought forms to 4x7=28 in order to differentiate problem elements further, but importantly also bringing them together into a higher level synthesis [speaking and listening: reflect, use]

5. Module 5 (Expert): Learners listen to, and guide, others based on deep MELD- and TF-based focusing, in a group, circle, pod, or team.

Right now, the new course is being tested for effectiveness in intensive one-to-one mentoring. When felt to be solid, based on feedback from mentees, it will be opened up to larger groups. My prediction is that by teaching it in 5 separate steps, its effectiveness will increase and its required duration decrease.

Course certification

Each module has its own duration and is associated with a specific exit exam.

- Certification I (Modules 1-3): Learners obtain certification by passing a written test asking them to identify the dominant moment(s) of dialectic (M-E-L-D) and their/its TF-representation (1-12) in an image and/or text, and justify their interpretation.

- Certification II (Module 4): Learners obtain an advanced certification if they are able to expand from 12 to 28 thought forms, thereby increasing the fluidity and depth of their thinking and that of their client/interviewee. This certification is based on administering and analyzing a short *cognitive interview* (professional conversation focusing on a client's use of concepts).

- Certification III (Module 5): A final, "expert", certification requires a short written exam as well as an interview with Otto Laske about a topic of the learner's choice or, alternatively, the

submission of recorded 30 minute *cognitive coaching session* with an individual or team about which verbal feedback is given by the instructor.

Course materials consist of sets of slides and additional learning aids, in part taken from blogs published on the IDM site, and books found at http://amzn.to/2oSPwns.

In personal mentoring mode (in 2017), each module can be purchased separately by writing to otto@interdevelopmentals.org. We then discuss the course of study in detail, to make sure it corresponds to the learner's professional or private goals.

Those paying up-front for the first *four* modules of the course receive a 12% discount; those paying for the first *three* modules receive a 10% discount.

WELCOME THOSE WHO DO NOT FALL FOR BUZZWORDS BUT WANT TO START THEIR OWN TRANSFORMATION.