

A Methodology for Creating a Developmentally Aware Society

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Abstract

Until quite recently, the notion that adults develop over their entire lifetime has been a well kept academic secret. It still is. Attempts at establishing “deliberately developmental organizations” (DDO’s; Kegan & Lahey 2016), based on 40 years of research in adult development, are quite recent.

This article introduces to the *Constructive Developmental Framework* (CDF), a synthesis of adult-developmental research since 1975 that has been taught as well as practiced at the Interdevelopmental Institute since 2000

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructive_developmental_framework).

CDF is a new tool for understanding how people experience life and work, mostly without full consciousness. This qualitative understanding emerges from semi-structured 1-hour interviews which shed new light on how people construct their workplace internally, both individually and in teams.

CDFs main strength in business lies in providing new tools for boosting, through dialog, two human capabilities: *making meaning* of experiences (called “social-emotional”) and *making sense* of the real world conceptually (referred to as “cognitive”), as further explained below.

Viewed more broadly, CDF comprises a political dimension as well. It is a framework for *coaching for society*, in the sense of developing self-authoring citizens who can think independently, rather than in dependence on internalized or external others. At the present time, where algorithms and robots increasingly dominate work and life, this political dimension is of critical importance for everyone’s quality of life.

The article comprises six sections:

1. Introduction
2. The social-emotional component of CDF (ED)
3. The cognitive component of CDF (CD)
4. The psychological (egoic) component of CDF (NP)
5. Bringing all CDF components together
6. Conclusion

Introduction

Twenty years ago, I brought together, for the first time, insights into the two main strands of adult development with insight into individuals' psychological profile. I conceived of the latter in terms of H. Murray's theory of personality (<https://www.verywell.com/murrays-theory-of-psycho-genic-needs-2795952>). Based on this fusion of three empirical dimensions, my notion of "leadership", "thinking", "work capability", "team work", etc., all changed substantially.

The empirical finding that human beings are unceasingly *under development* and remain so until the end of their life is a scientific achievement of the first order for which we have had to wait thousands of years.

This notion is visually represented in Fig. 1:

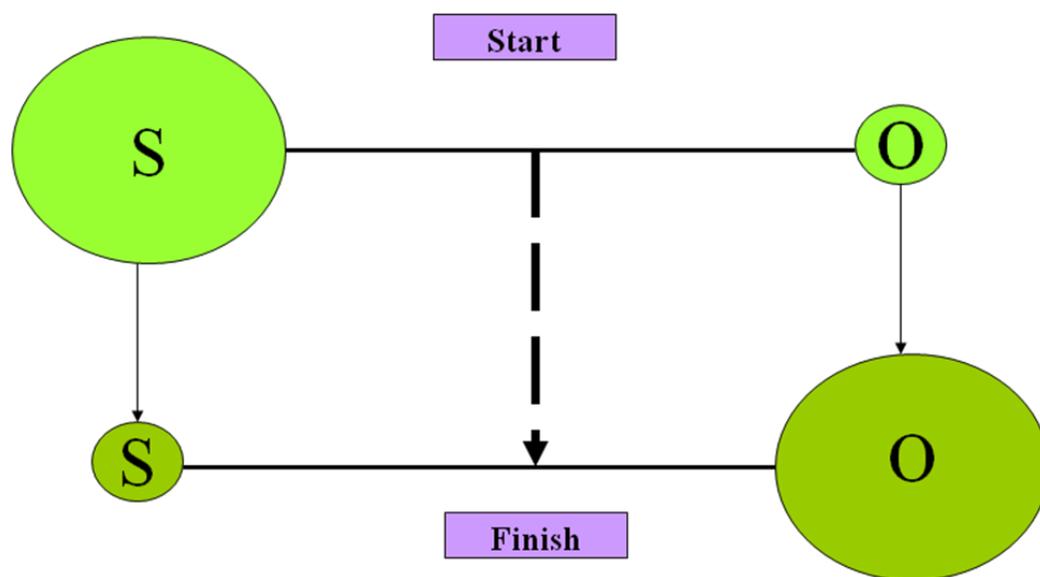


Fig. 1 Adult development originates in loss of ego-centrism (Piaget)

Human beings are born as a very big *subject* (S) associated with a non-existent or very small object outside or inside of them (o), and they die with the opposite stance: as a very small subject (s) associated with a huge object (O; the cosmos) that continues after and without them. For me, this circumscribes the HUMAN CONDITION both emotionally (ED), cognitively (CD), and psychologically (NP).

The core issue in this condition is *unpredictable transformation* (not just change). It becomes most clearly visible in the fact that a person's world view (*Frame of Reference*; FoR) is unceasingly transforming itself from the beginning to the end of life (see further details below).

We can say, thus, that CDF, the *Constructive Developmental Framework*, is a theory of the human condition based on insight into how individuals' experience the real world with increasing maturity over their life time. CDF is a very practical theory also, in that it provides

tools for describing, as well as acting upon, how the world shows up differently for individuals at different developmental levels, something invisible to the eye but not the schooled ear.

In the commercial world, CDF serves as an assessment tool for helping understand better “where a client presently is developmentally” (in terms of maturity level).

To comprehend the complexity of how people view the world differently as a function of their maturity level, a clear understanding of three interrelated aspects of personality is required. During a person’s lifetime, these aspects enter into different relationships which are still far from being empirically understood.

| Component | Description |
|--|--|
| Social-emotional (ED): researched by semi-structured interview (Kegan; Laske)) | How people internally position themselves toward others and themselves over the life span, thus “making meaning” of life and work. |
| Cognitive (CD): researched by semi-structured interview (Basseches, Laske; Bhaskar) | How people move beyond formal logic, using <i>dialectical</i> thought forms that expand logical ones, thus “making sense” of life and work. |
| Psychological (NP): researched by Need-Press Questionnaire (Aderman, Murray) | How people’s behavioral <u>needs</u> differ from their super-ego ideals (ideal <u>press</u>), and how their ideals relate to their actual experiences in life and at work (actual <u>press</u>). |

Table 1 The three CDF components

In visual terms, one might picture the interrelationship between these aspects as shown below.

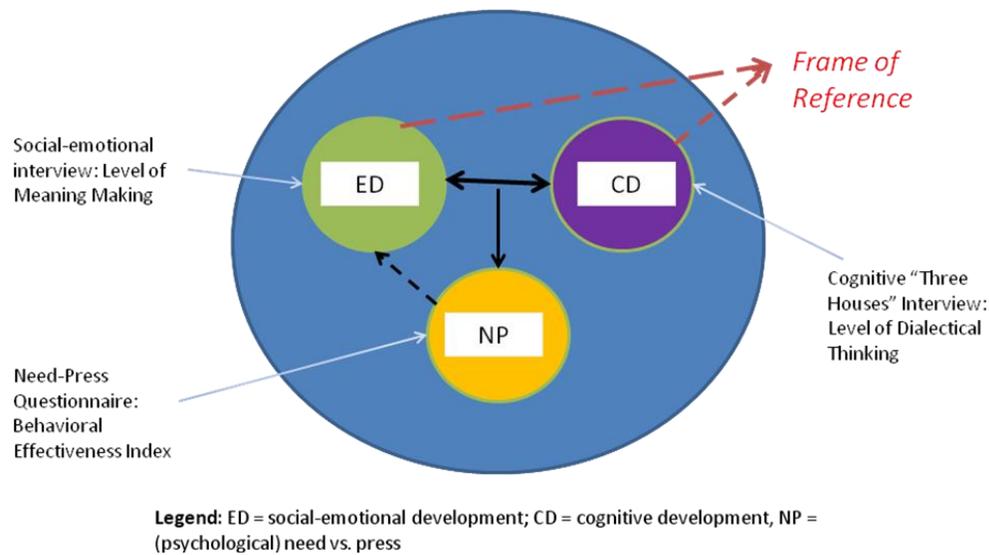


Fig. 2 Links between the three CDF dimensions and ways to obtain empirical data for each

Evidently, data about a person's Frame of Reference is of great value for human resources management as well as talent management and leadership development. This holds true especially in the context of what is now called *deliberately developmental organizations* (DDO's) in which supporting individuals in their quest to mature becomes a major organizational concern, not something relegated to "Human Resources".

It is a central idea in DDOs, to rectify misalignment between team members by using behavioral and cognitive tools that support members' self-authoring. (Social-emotional maturation is closed to behavioral interventions: one is who one is at a particular moment in time.)

In providing developmental supports for scaffolding adult development in the workplace, it is crucial for the company's leadership to understand that issues of work effectiveness fall into two different dimensions: a horizontal and a vertical one.

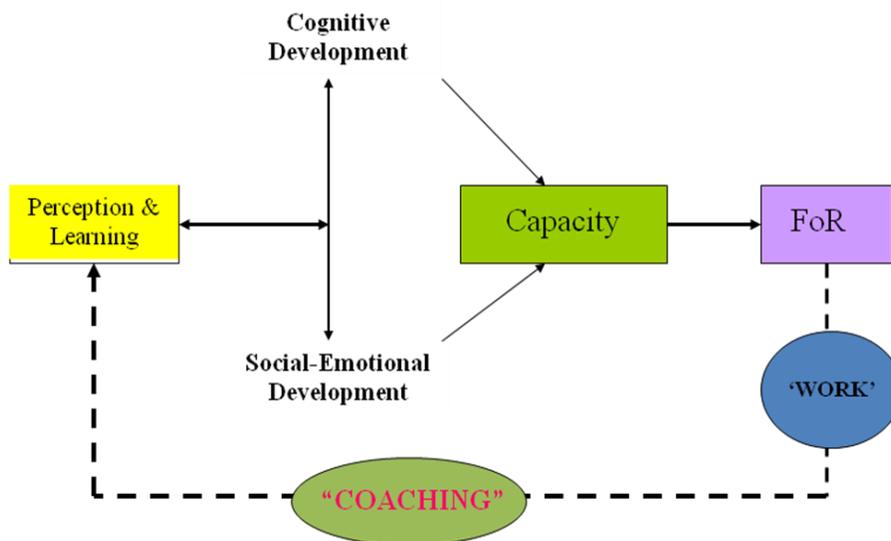


Fig. 3 Coaching and Consulting happen at the intersection of horizontal learning and vertical development

While learning and perception happen on a “horizontal” plane, as shown above, cognitive and social-emotional development happens on a “vertical” plane that intersects it. Both planes are inseparable. However, CDF makes it possible to separate them conceptually and act on them separately in practice. All modes of coaching, mentoring, training and consulting that are unaware of the differences between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of work delivery risk remaining ineffective.

To CDF’s credit, the methodology not only teaches developmental thinking but, based on it, *developmental listening* as well, -- a vital tool for refining how managers, consultants, and coaches communicate with themselves and their clients.

In a more global perspective, CDF empirical findings suggest what a society has to provide for, for its members to realize their potential fully. This can only be done by changing the *generalized master-slave relationships* that have so far characterized human societies (Bhaskar 1993), where privileged groups have been able to develop themselves further than others at the cost of those excluded. In a time as ours, where rigid managerial hierarchies in organizations are losing their effectiveness, society’s master-slave relationships are beginning to change under our gaze. This situation poses entirely new challenges for organization design and consulting which so far have been barely sighted.

The Social-Emotional Component of CDF

Human emotions are a social outcome; they differ from society to society, and are therefore also a product of culture. However, despite the many different cultures we know of, or know from experience, there is one thing emotions in different cultures have in common: their adult development follows “levels” (Kegan 1982) that can be recognized by listening closely to individuals’ speech, evaluating recorded interviews, and giving feedback to them in writing or conversation.

What are these levels?

Fig. 4, below, a refinement of Fig.1, spells out the different levels of meaning making measured in terms of the weighting of two opposite strivings in human life: focus on self and on others. As shown, adults place themselves emotionally according to five main positions indicating an increasingly more mature view of themselves in relationship to others.

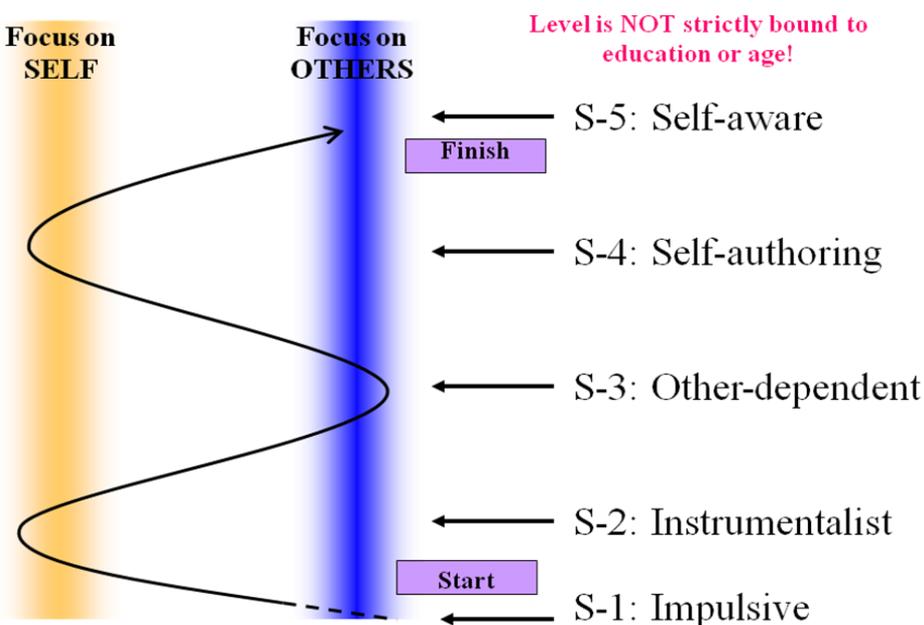


Fig. 4 Kegan’s levels of social-emotional development

Scope of maturation reaches from the *instrumentalist* adult who uses others as her instrument (S-2) to the *self-aware* adult who no longer defines herself by origin, education, profession, or social rank, but simply as “human being” (S-5). Between each main “level”, one can analytically discern 4 intermediate levels (Lahey et al., 1988) which to be able to assess is of priceless advantage for a coach, mentor, consultant, or teacher since it facilitates reaching deeply into a client’s present experience.

The diagram indicates that as humans mature (i.e., increasingly lose ego-centrism), they are caught in the dialectic of self and others. How this dialectic is managed by them determines their level of meaning making (a point of transitory equilibrium, not a fixed position).

The never-ending back-and-forth between the two poles of meaning making occurs “across time” (vertically), not “in time” (horizontally). To move from S-3 to S-4 may take a decade to complete. Therefore, CDF also accounts for partial movements, called *intermediate level* (see Table 2 below).

One might think that going from one intermediate stage to another is a kind of learning. It is rather a *transformation* of the entire self and its world view, not just a “change”. As a result, there exists, e.g., “level 3 anger” (about surrendering to internalized others) which is very different from “level 4 anger” (about not having lived up to one’s own values). Equally, there are “level 3 marriages” in which partners are co-dependent and “level 4 marriages” where they are self-authoring. Clearly, in terms of such levels we are dealing with very different individuals.

1. The *instrumentalist* individual (S-2) uses others as tools for satisfying own needs and desires. S(he) lives in the world of Thomas Hobbes -- a jungle in which the stronger eats the weaker (10% of people).
2. The *other-dependent* individual defines herself by the expectations of physical and/or internalized others who are needed to safeguard her own self image (55% of people).
3. The *self-authoring* individual is identified with her own value system, respecting others but not subordinating herself to them when making decisions, even if thereby risking rejection or death (25% of people).
4. The *self-aware* individual no longer defines herself by her origin, education, social rank, etc., but is focused on moving away from former selves, aware of her own limitations and thus capable of ceding privileges to the realization of the common good (<10% of people).

Shown in a more fine-grained fashion (where each subsequent step stands for greater loss of ego-centrism), and disregarding the instrumental stage, S-2, the spectrum described looks as follows:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| L-3 | Made up of others’ expectations; ‘our world’ hypothesis |
| L-3(4) | In need of ‘handholding’ by physical other to act on own behalf |
| L-3 /4 | <i>Conflicted over, and unsure about, own values, direction, worth, capability</i> |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| L-4/3 | <i>Conflicted, but with more detachment from internalized viewpoints, resolving to level 4 self-authoring</i> |
| L-4(3) | Nearing self-authoring, but remaining at risk for regression to others' expectations |
| L-4 | Fully self-authoring decision maker respecting others; 'my world' hypothesis, secure self-generated value system |
| L-4(5) | Begins to question scope and infallibility of own value system; aware of own history |
| L-4/5 | Conflicted over relinquishing control and taking risk of critical exposure of own view |
| L-5/4 | Conflicted, but increasingly succeeding in 'deconstructing' self; committed to flow |
| L-5(4) | Fully committed to deconstructing own values, benefiting from divergent others |
| L-5 | No longer attached to any particular aspect of the self, focused on unceasing flow, transformation, not formation |

Table 2 Change of social-emotional stance over the life span
(a refinement of Fig. 1)

The Cognitive Component of CDF

In contrast to popular notions, according to CDF emotions separate us, while thinking links us. (Nobody can have my emotions but others can think as I do.). If that is the case, any over-emphasis on emotion, emotional intelligence, etc., is mistaken simply because, in contrast to mere feeling, human emotions are strongly mediated by thought.

This insight is also relevant in organizations, where the task is to create collaborative intelligence in teams. Since people at different levels of accountability live in different universes of discourse, and thus "think" differently (see Fig. 5), establishing collaborative intelligence in teams is a difficult task if cognition is left out of the picture.

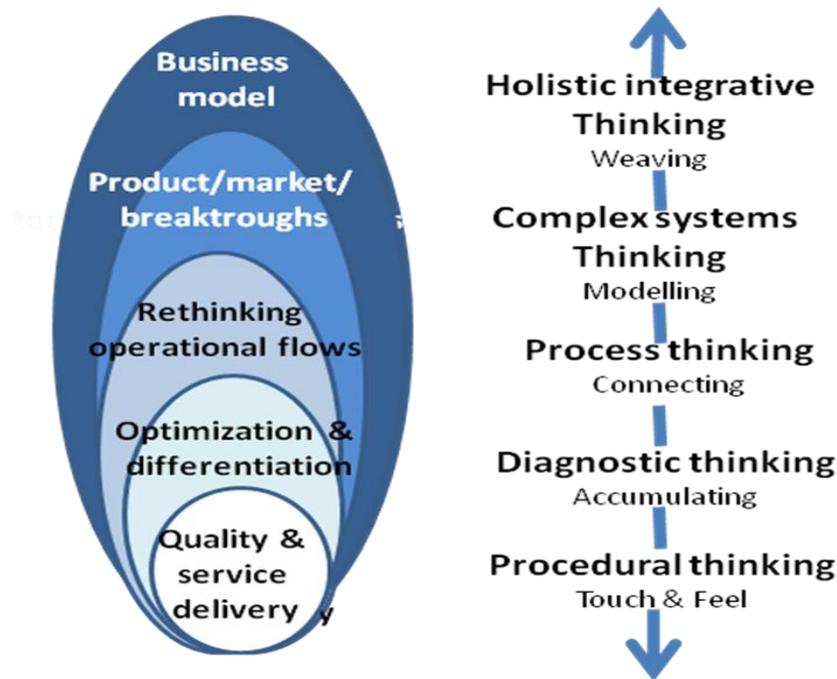


Fig. 5 Five different levels of role accountability in organizations characterized by levels of complexity of thinking
(Courtesy Jan De Visch, 2010, 2014)

In conflict with the fact that members of an organization are largely paid according to the complexity of their thinking (which determines their level of accountability), the cognitive-developmental dimension has so far been vastly misconstrued as well as neglected in talent acquisition, professional development, training, and coaching. In part, this is the case because new tools of complex thinking called “dialectical” are still largely unknown, as is the progress of cognitive maturation over the lifespan itself.

As empirical research shows (Basseches 1984; Laske 2015; 2008; Stewart 2016, https://www.amazon.com/Dialectical-Thinking-Integral-Leaders-2015-06-16/dp/B01MT311NJ/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8), adults develop complex thinking in four phases, each definable by a *fluidity index* that characterizes levels of complexity and critical realism as to “how reality works” (rather than how people think). This increase in thought complexity has to do with using “thought forms” (TFs), about which more detailed information is found below.

In each of the phases visualized below, adult thinking tends to privilege one specific class of TFs over another, rather than coordinating TFs from different classes:

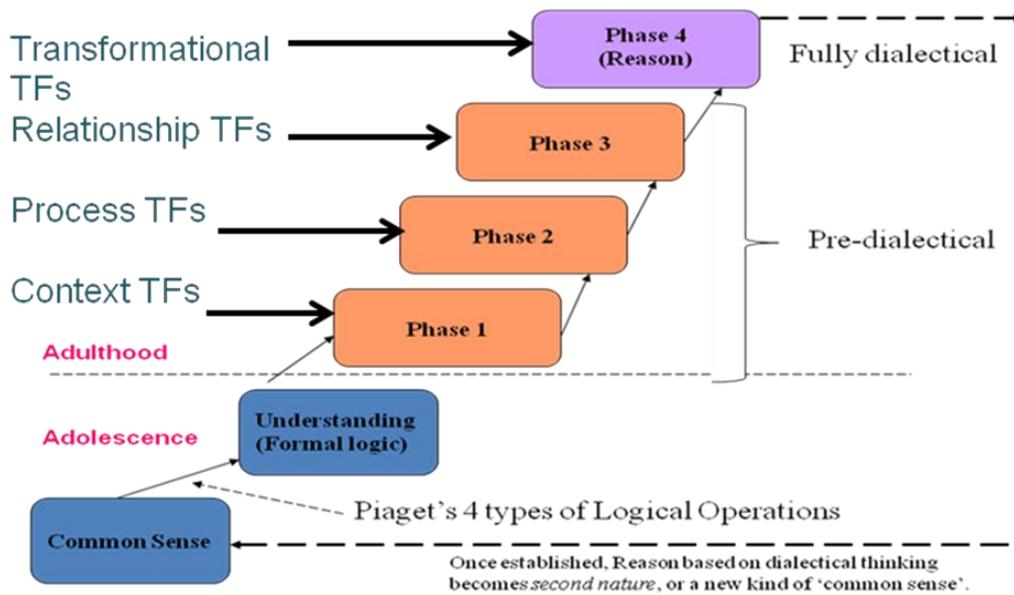


Fig. 6 Four phases of developing complex thinking over the life span

While purely logical thinking, because of its analytic ruthlessness, is well suited to disrupting business models and legacy conventions, the transition of start-ups to mature organizations requires much more complex and realistic thinking that is not available in pure systems thinking that disregards Process and Relationship thought forms.

What is the peak of adult cognitive development?

Thinking is often treated ideologically rather than based on empirical data, considered unwelcome. At this time “hyperthinking” (<https://www.slideshare.net/pcweiss/hyperthinking-presentation-for-brain-yard-webinar>) which is behaviorally adaptive, tends to mask dialectical thinking which is *constructive*. This error is a result of failing to distinguish two different dimensions, that of learning (horizontal) and that of mental growth (vertical).

To understand this better, consider Fig. 7.

The English term “development” has two entirely different meanings:

- *Agentic*: development refers to what human agency accomplishes when intervening pedagogically, through training or long-term education
- *Ontic* development refers to the mental growth that naturally happens in human beings as they lose ego-centricity over the lifespan (as a function of their developmental potential)

Importantly, it is ontic development that determines limits of learning (agentic development), not the other way around:

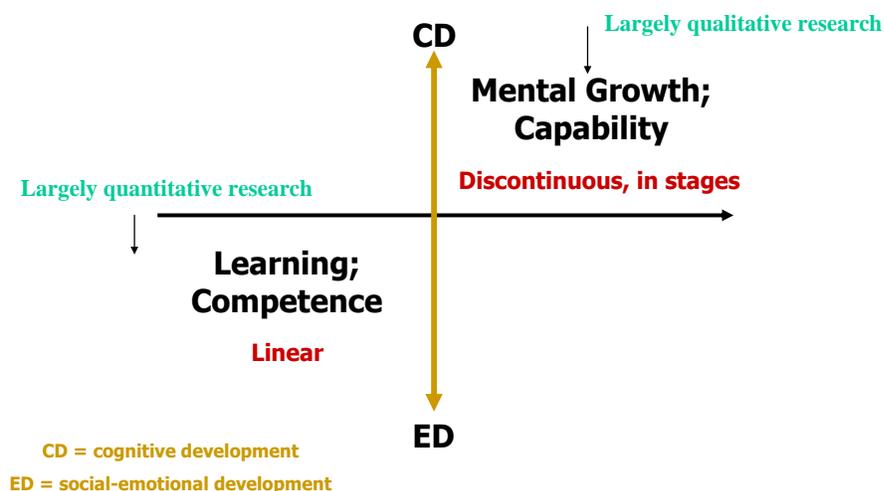


Fig. 7 Vertical *development* in contrast to horizontal *learning*

In the vertical dimension shown above, one cannot change one's (social-emotional) meaning making (ED) without also changing one's level of conceptual thinking (CD) or the other way around. For the same reason, thinking development has an impact on meaning making (emotion) and vice versa, -- relationships in need of much further research.

Compared to logical thinking, dialectical thinking is *paradoxical*. It takes very seriously “what is not there”, or *absent* (Roy Bhaskar, 1993), thereby including and transcending logical thinking. The absences meant here are those that define the past and the outside of everything that exists, including oneself, and thus warn the thinker of reducing a whole to one of its elements as logical thinking is prone to do.

Absences force the thinker to transcend what is immediately *there* (given), so as to reflect upon the fact that isolated things, situations, events, or processes are embedded in dense relationships which make them possible.

This sounds forbidding but is so only when untutored.

A simple way of learning dialectical thinking is, first, to map out a piece of the real world in terms of four *quadrants* (Wilber 2000) and, second, to view each of the quadrants as being inherently structured in terms of *four moments of dialectic* (Bhaskar 1993; Laske 2008, 2015), as shown below:

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---------------------------|---|
| I -- Intention | | It -- Behavior | |
| P | R | P | R |
| C | T | C | T |
| We -- Culture | | Its -- Environment | |
| P | R | P | R |
| C | T | C | T |

Fig. 8 Quadrants are composed of Moments

The moments of dialectic are *perspectives* taken on reality.

According to Fig. 8, in reflecting on the world critically and realistically, we can choose to begin thinking about a topic in terms of one of the four quadrants.

1. *The "I" world*: my personal perspective on the world
2. *The "We" world*: my perspective as an integral part of a social community
3. *The "It" world*: the real world described objectively, in terms of empirical research
4. *The "Its" world*: the real world seen as composed of different parts (sub-totalities), each with its own generative mechanisms.

Having initially disregarded the notion that all quadrants are intrinsically linked, we realize that to understand anything at all, we need to adopt multiple perspectives in terms of whether our thought object is (a) at rest, (b) in motion, (c) related or, consequently, (d) undergoing unceasing transformation. It is at this point that the *four moments of dialectic* come into play.

These moments provide us with four different ways of making sense of any thought object whatsoever, acting as *mind openers*:

- As a static constellation of "things" (C)
- As undergoing unceasing change (P)
- As consisting of intrinsically related elements (R)
- As being in constant transformation (T) based on conjoining C, P, and R.

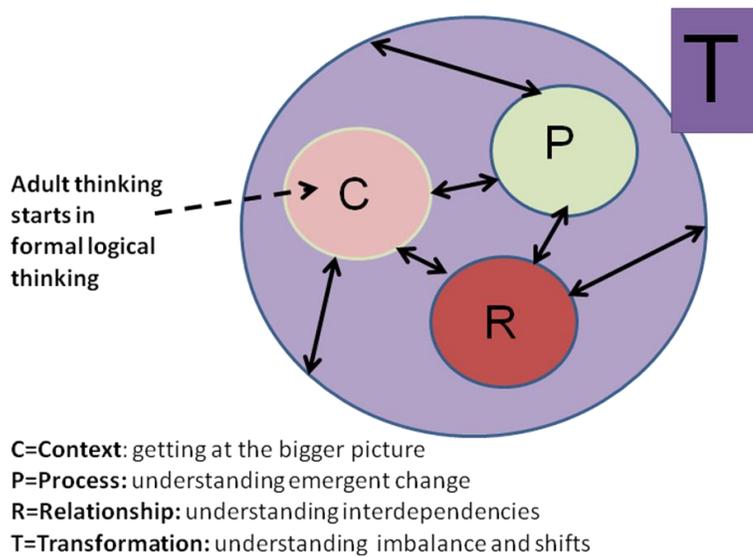


Fig. 9 Three moments of dialectic (CPR) give rise to the fourth, all-comprising, one of Transformation (T)

Moments of dialectic are best understood as perspectives on the world. In logical terms, we can think of them as classes of *mind openers* which comprise a number of concepts promoting complex thinking.

In contrast to logical thinking and systems thinking (which are restricted to the Context perspective, C), dialectical mind openers help thinkers address that which in the thought object is unceasingly changing (P), densely interrelated (R), and consequently under constant transformation (T).

For example.

As long as thought about in terms of Context alone (C), a **beehive** is just a wooden box with wax-coated frames inside, or in terms of systems thinking, a network of nodes forming interrelated subsystems. But the hive's life is not found in a box or system.

Rather, the living beehive comprises the seasonal processes the bees are experiencing, and the relationships they entertain with each other and their queen over different seasons during the year. Only when we put thought forms of class C, P, and R *together* can we also “think” the beehive as being in constant transformation (T). And this transformation is its reality.

Only in a world dominated by formal logical thinking is this “difficult” to follow. Such thinking is firmly ensconced in C – Context --, and therefore cannot easily take a P (process) and R (relationship) perspective on reality. It is only when thought forms representing these three perspectives are *coordinated* in a thinker's or team's mental process that truly transformational

thinking becomes possible. If left unschooled, such thinking never develops, to the detriment not only of the individual but of society at large.

To get an inkling of the need for transformational, “dialectical”, thinking, imagine an executive team deliberating how to change its present business model to beat the competition, increasingly consisting of small, lean, and agile organizations. Such small organizations are without much of a legacy structure, and therefore able to change their perspective on the real world, and thus their business model, quickly. Where would the team be without complex thinking?

The Psychological Component

From the perspective of personality theorist H. Murray and his student A. Aderman who created the “Need/Press Questionnaire” [part of CDF] (<https://www.verywell.com/murrays-theory-of-psycho-genic-needs-2795952>), one can assess an individual’s psychological profile quantitatively in terms of three components: *Id (Need)*, *Superego*, and *Social Reality*. The life task of a person then is to harmonize these three components of Ego. This task can be achieved only over the entire lifespan, under the influence of the social-emotional and cognitive selves in which a person’s ego is (thank god) embedded.

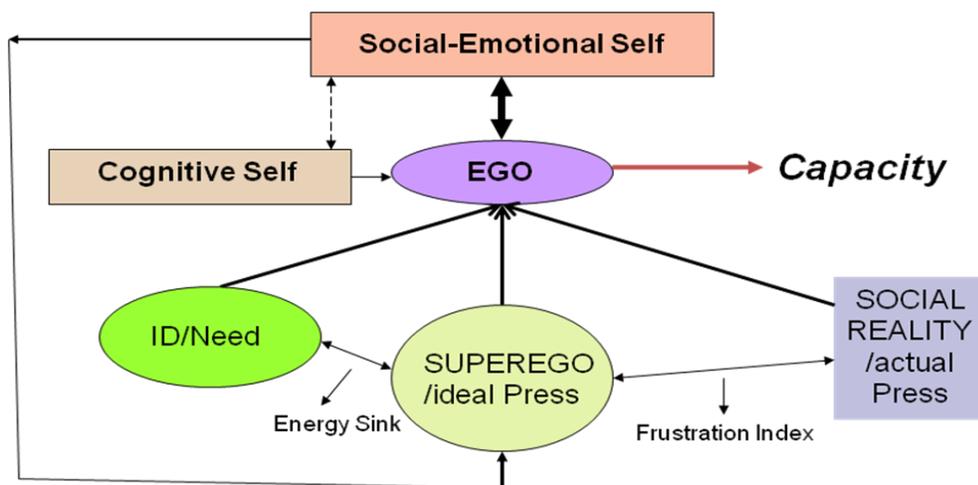


Fig. 10 Model of the Ego as embedded in a double developmental *placenta* in which it is able to *mature*

When we associate with a person’s triadic ego a set of psychometric variables about which simple (yes/no) answers can be elicited, her answers will show how her psychological “needs” (such as her self-concept, resilience, and others) relate to her superego ideals (*ideal press*), and

how the latter get into conflict with the person's actual experience of the social world (*actual press*).

Any gap between the person's psychological need and ideals will constitute an *energy sink* that diminishes her effectiveness at work, while any gap between her ideals and social reality will show up as degrees of *frustration*. When we quantify energy sink (loss of energy) and frustration (stress), we arrive at an *efficiency index* that tells us the psychological cost an individual is paying for doing the work s(he) does, and also where s(he) suffers most and needs most help.

Since -- as every clinician knows -- the ego never fully succeeds in bringing its three constituent components into harmony with each other, we can take some solace in the fact that, embedded in the two developmental selves acting as a *placenta* (ED; CD), the ego increasingly gets a chance to mature, thus losing ego-centricity. Maintaining one's inborn ego-centricity can be costly, since it may arrest, or stall, social-emotional and even cognitive development.

Bringing all CDF Dimensions Together

In order to understand human beings integrally and holistically -- in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of adult development -- we need to fuse the three CDF dimensions. Doing so facilitates our task as consultants and coaches working to reduce psychological suffering and remediate such suffering on both the social-emotional and cognitive levels. CDF stands out in such adult-developmental scaffolding work.

When as consultants to organizations we look for a *requisite* (natural) alignment of human *capabilities* with commensurate accountability levels, we are helped in thinking about such alignment by following Table 3 below.

| Thinking Fluidity of Clients | Levels of Responsibility * | Social-Emotional Maturity of Clients |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| >50 | VIII | 5 |
| | VII | 5/4 – 5(4) |
| >30 | VI | 4(5) – 4/5 |
| | V | 4 |
| >10<30 | IV | 4/3 – 4(3) |
| | III | 3(4) – 3/4 |
| <10 | II | 3 |
| | I | 2/3 – 3(2) |

* Typical organizational job titles, from top to bottom, are: **Board Member, CEO, EVP, VP, General Manager, Unit Manager, First Line Manager, Operator/Staff.**

Table 3 Requisite levels of cognitive capability and social-emotional maturity for each of 8 levels of organizational accountability

The table hypothesizes alignment between human capabilities and levels of accountability in organizations, following R. Kegan (1982), M. Basseches (1984), and E. Jaques (1998).

Although the hypothesis embodied in the table requires further empirical testing, it well demonstrates that every level of organizational accountability is associated with a specific *universe of discourse* (way of communication) that matches different levels of social-emotional and cognitive capability. Understanding a client’s specific universe of discourse is what consulting to his/her mental processes is all about.

It is the matching of the middle column of Table 3 -- of levels of accountability -- with the two outer columns representing human capability that Jaques has in mind when speaking of *Requisite Organization* (1998) as an important goal for organization design to achieve.

Following Jaques, in CDF we speak of matching “size of person” (in the outer columns) with “size of role” (in the central column). When size of role is different from size of person, both the role and the person suffer, and so ultimately does the entire organization. In deliberately developmental organizations, this is one of the crucial issues that determines a company’s survival in the market, now more than ever.

It should be evident to the reader that in organization designs where a fixed managerial accountability hierarchy is replaced by a more flexible, “holacratic”, constellation of *shared leadership*, the developmental differences between people shown in Table 3, above, don’t simply go away.

In fact, paying attention to such differences is becoming a cornerstone of successful DDO’s. Such organizations utilize developmental processes through which these differences can come to awareness, and can be addressed and worked on through compassionate scaffolding of contributors who do not presently measure up to the level of accountability assigned to them. This undertaking defines a new chapter of *consulenza evolutiva* which is just opening up for consultants and organizations worldwide.

Conclusion

Although adult development over the lifespan is a personal as well a political reality, in its ontic rather than agentic form (see Fig. 7) it still remains largely unacknowledged today. Both in its social-emotional and cognitive forms, it is pervasively reduced to a set of behaviors which it causally determines. The result of this illicit reduction takes many forms -- from insufficient educational policies – e.g., lack of education in complex thinking – to ineffective training, coaching, and consulting in organizations.

The sobering statistic in Table 4, below -- a summary of empirical research (Cook-Greuter 2010) -- sheds light on this situation.

About 55% of western populations remain other-dependent for life (S-3) or, if they mature further toward self-authoring (S-4), do not actually reach it. Only about 25% of adults reach full self-authoring, meaning that they become able to take full responsibility for themselves and think independently.

Regarding leadership, which essentially requires a positioning between S-4 and S-5, less than 10% of individuals have the capability to lead. Although there are also “leaders” of a lesser kind at S-3 and between S-3 and S-4, in the literature on leadership and in programs for leadership development, such leaders are never differentiated from each other, making “leadership” an unremitting buzzword.

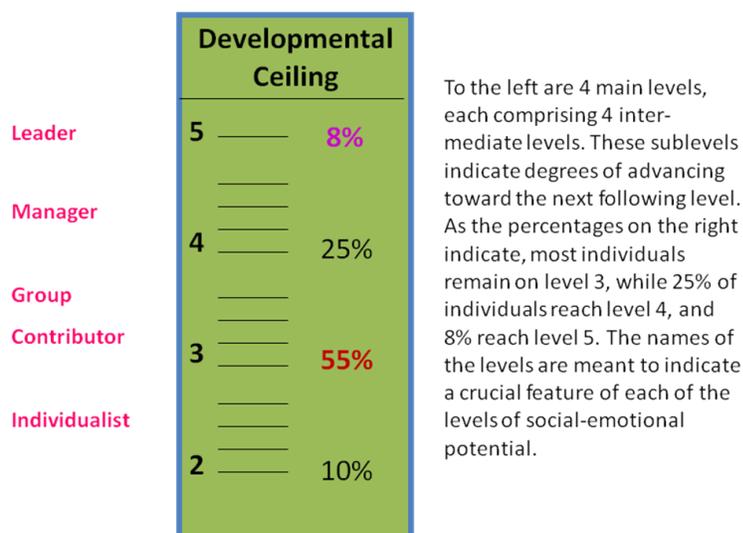


Table 4 Adult-developmental attainment levels in Western societies

With regard to society, Table 4 suggests that democracies need to make space for all levels of adult development while at the same time supporting the development of self-authoring individuals by way of professional education and developmental coaching. This task presents a major challenge especially in cultures where the upper few have strong, unshakable privileges which, in many cases, are out of sync with the capabilities of the privileged individuals concerned.

However, many societies have taken steps to alleviate such discrepancies. What is called “coaching” or “mentoring” in organizations, for example, can be seen as an attempt to move individuals from S-3 other-dependence to S-4 self-authoring, a task that often fails to achieve effective outcomes because of insufficiently mature coaches.

It is not difficult to envision a society in which more than 25% of people reach level 4 self-authoring accompanied by complex thinking. Outgrowing other-dependence is the hallmark of being a professional, more than ever in deliberately developmental organizations.

In this context, a methodology such as CDF is both a challenging and promising one.

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About the author:

Otto Laske is a multidisciplinary consultant, teacher, and scholar in the social sciences. His central idea as a consultant is that both organizations and the public sphere depend for their strength on supporting people in their life-long endeavor to construct the real world in ever more realistic ways, by challenging them to move away from simplistic emotional and cognitive models of what is "real" for them.

The focus of Laske's empirical and theoretical work is complex thinking in terms of both Critical Theory and Critical Realism. Laske studied with the founders of Critical Theory (M. Horkheimer and Th. W. Adorno [1956-1966]), as well as with H. Simon, M. Minsky, R. Kegan, E. Jaques,

and, most recently R. Bhaskar. He is internationally known today as the Founder and Director of the *Interdevelopmental Institute* (IDM) where since 2000 he has taught a generation of international students – consultants, coaches, and managers – new tools for creating *deliberately developmental* organizations (DDOs).