

## Balancing Dialogue and Text Analysis in Teaching Dialectical Thinking: A Review of Work with DTF at IDM

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### Introduction

Given the pernicious fallout of limitations of purely logical thinking -- even of conventional systems thinking -- for planet Earth and the quality of people's life, an urgent need for teaching kinds of thinking that capture *transformation* -- not just change -- has arisen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Primary among candidates for achieving a new 'Copernican Revolution' in people's way of thinking is *dialectical* thinking, a way of constructing the world as an organism in unceasing transformation that comprises unknown potentials complicit with human agency. Such an organism is *pervaded by absences* (Bhaskar), elements, or dimensions, that are either no longer visible or not yet revealed, but no less real than what is presently 'there' or 'fact(um)'.

Transformational thinking has recently been impressively renewed by Roy Bhaskar in his study *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom* (1993). This work has become the cornerstone of DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework*, on which the following deliberations and reflections are based.

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How to teach transformational thinking effectively to many people, however, is presently unclear. Different ways of doing so are still emerging. As a practitioner of dialectical thinking, I have, undeniably, formed definite views on this subject, based on my experience. This text is a commentary on that experience.

In my present view, some attempts to teach dialectical thinking miss the *dialogical turn* (even Bhaskar), by not seeing in real-time dialogue a decisive ingredient of the teaching, as first evidenced by Plato's Socrates. Such approaches expect textbooks or games to suffice for beginning to think dialectically. Other approaches favor dialogue over text analysis, thereby missing the reflective 'going over the words' that Plato saw as crucial in dialectic. Still others hope to smuggle dialectical thinking, without naming it, into everyday problem solving, especially in organizations, expecting it to transfer to other issues than first exercised on (Jan De Visch & Laske, 2018), while still others hope to build dialogue-savvy Apps in which transformational thinking plays a dominant role using various natural language models.

As is well known, the approach I have taken is one of balancing two opposite, but mutually enhancing, ways of teaching dialectical thinking: various forms of dialogue interleaved with text analysis, carried out in a cohesive learning cohort. I see the strength of that approach in its ability to balance 'on-line' (real-time) with 'off-line' mental work, combining the playfulness of real-time dialogue with the stringency of off-line interview text analysis and written evaluation plus justification. I have found that it is this method brings about a 'Copernican Revolution' of thinking in professionals whom Jan De Visch refers to as Critical Facilitators (<https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6775>).

Such a facilitator is a reflective practitioner who has absorbed developmental theory in both its social-emotional and cognitive dimension and has begun to develop intuitions about their intrinsic interrelationship. In the purely cognitive domain, s(he) is a professional who models epistemic holism

and thought fluidity for others in operationally critical situations, both in organizations and elsewhere. S(he) engages clients for the sake of making transparent the way in which they presently construct the real world for themselves and the limitations of their construction. Of course, this is of mutual benefit not only for a client or client group, but for an organizational culture in its entirety.

The vital importance of balancing internal and external dialogue with text analysis

The IDM Cohort Method is grounded in DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework* which, in my view, would better be called the **Dialogical Thought Form Framework**. The reason is that advanced uses of it are based on intense listening, both in cognitive interviews and silently, in their systematic evaluation with justification.

Two kinds of listening are involved: one in real time, either when administering an interview or leading cohort discussions of how to score an specific interview; the other off-line, when going over the words of a transcribed interview text by oneself in order to find a 'scoring' evaluation that most closely renders 'what the interviewee really meant to say'). Answering this question in DTF is done systematically and holistically by building an empirical thought-form theory of the speaker emitting a specific interview fragment.

The Cohort Method focuses on two goals at once: inter-rater reliability in scoring an interview (or other) text, and, indirectly, the strengthening of cohort members' insight into the structure of their thinking (which is an important element of adult development). As I have found over many years, a group of learners, while focused on establishing a client's present cognitive profile, simultaneously and indirectly gets to know the cognitive structure of its own thinking.

This 'thinking' is an internal dialogue every cohort member holds with him- or herself regarding how to do optimal justice to what a speaker has said in an interview. Becoming aware of the limitations of one's own thinking in this quest comes about by linking and balancing two kinds of mental work: the cognitive prompting of a client in the interview dialogue itself, on one hand, and the on- as well as off-line (text) analysis of an interview transcript. The reason for this is that both kinds of effort lead to an exploration of one's own internal (mental) workplace.

I will show in what follows how these two ingredients of learning dialectical thinking complement and support each other. By implication, I show that where one of these ingredients is absent, the mental work that results lacks the off-line reflection through which, in my experience, **the transfer from a specific task to another** (such as assessing a client to increasing the quality of dialogue in a team) is reliably accomplished. In my view, this **lack of transferability of TFs learned in a specific task** is due to the lack of off-line, 'inner mental work' through which DTF thought forms (TFs) become reliably internalized, rather than being merely 'learned'.

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While working dialogically in real time is largely intuitive, working off-line to reflect on the structure of thinking represented by an interview text is highly conscious and methodical. In addition, the latter is a process of trial-and-error repetition lasting until a result satisfactory to the entire cohort is obtained (which guarantees interrater-reliability but also deep absorption of thought forms by participants). The

beneficial tradeoff of including text analysis in the teaching of dialectical thinking is that, over time, the rigorous effort expended in understanding a client's mental world, having become second nature for the scorer, eventually translates into spontaneous and playful dialogue, which is quite different from the play associated with thought games. Such spontaneity is, of course, even further removed from the mere reading of a textbook on dialectical thinking, even if it encompasses exercises.

By this time, the reader will want to know what are 'thought forms'? After a few more thoughts about critical facilitation based on DTF, I introduce the *moments of dialectic*, their associated *thought forms* (TFs), 7 functions TFs serve, and the *PEL strategy* for building empirical theories of an individual speaker (which is extendable to teams). The interview protocol underlying such work, called the *Three Houses Protocol*, is described in more detail at <https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6819>.

### Teaching Critical Facilitators

The outline of teaching dialectical thinking here presented aims to educate DTF experts who can function in organizations as **Critical Facilitators**. These are professionals who strive to accomplish an all-around 'Copernican' revolution of own their thinking (to speak with Kant), moving, so to speak, from a geocentric to a heliocentric – reductionist to holistic – world view. The best way I have found to assist such professionals is to give them the opportunity to build empirical mini-theories (based on dialectical thought forms) of what clients say in cognitive interviews. In following this path, facilitators come to not only understand clients better (in the sense of process consultation), but at the same time reach greater clarity regarding their own mental process.

An additional element comes into play in DTF, namely the intrinsic relationship of 'thinking' to verbal language. Verbal language is the medium in which thoughts are formulated that otherwise would not find expression. Since language is 'heard' and 'listened to', one cannot revolutionize thinking without revolutionizing listening to others, and ultimately, oneself, as well.

This linkage of thinking and listening is based on listening to speech (or else music). We can say that speech is much more than communicating with others or describing something. Rather, speech creates World to the extent that through speech a speaker constructs World both emotionally and conceptually. S(he) does so in a way in harmony with a peculiar (idiosyncratic) 'world view' incomparable to others.

As a result, the World referred to by a speaker is never just 'out there' but equally 'in here', and it is the finding-out about that 'in here' that is accomplished in DTF-based work. We can thus say that verbal language, as an expression of the internal dialogue of thinking, does not so much describe but CREATE World. Importantly, this is not a solipsistic, but a social, undertaking. 'World' originates in speaking to others about what is seemingly 'out there', even when it happens empirically in one's silent internal dialogue with oneself. **I create World by telling you about my World, inviting you to share it.**

To summarize: DTF accomplishes two revolutions: one of thinking and one of listening, and they are interdependent. The thinking revolution brought about by using DTF is based on listening to others in interviews or real time dialogue, while the listening revolution is based on DTF thought forms permitting one to listen analytically. In the IDM Cohort Method, both revolutions happen in parallel, with listening

happening in two ways: the external listening to others which is based on the internal listening to oneself.

What is the benefit of this twofold revolution?

Obtaining clarity about the conceptual structure of one's own thinking is difficult for humans since they need to 'reflect' on things **after** they have been said and done. This is because one's own thinking is largely buried in an unconscious (and unceasing) dialogue with oneself. Since what a person expresses in their speech or text is their worldview, *understanding* others essentially has to do with grasping, not only the content of what they say, but also their embedded (intrinsic) world view, thus their *construction* of the real world which is an *interpretation* of reality. **A person's world view, however, is strongly shaped by the conceptual structure of his or her thinking, and this structure, in turn, is a result of cognitive development over one's lifespan.**

Teaching dialectic after Bhaskar: Dissolving the logical VUCA World

DTF dialectic, while shaped by the teachings of the Frankfurt School, is largely the result of revamping those teachings under the reading Roy Bhaskar. In my view, Bhaskar's teaching transcends the accomplishments of Frankfurt School 'Hauptseminar' teaching (<https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6763>). In Bhaskar's work, meant to 're-totalize the moments of dialectic', *reality* is put in a (dialectical) contrast with *actuality*, which is what we momentarily perceive or intellectually take as given in the form of empirical data. From his vantage point, the actual world is a mere abstraction from the real world from to whose generative mechanism it owes its empirical lawfulness. For this reason, Bhaskar sees the actual world as *pervaded by absences* (what is not yet or no longer 'there') that point to the real world constantly emerging and transforming.

For Bhaskar, these absences can be captured in terms of four interrelated thought dimensions called *moments of dialectic*. Under the influence of research in cognitive development over the lifespan, in DTF these dialectical moments can be made analytically transparent by way of 'thought forms' (TFs) associated with each of the moments. TFs explicate moments of dialectic at different levels of complexity, both by themselves and by the constellations they form with each other in real-time thinking or writing. When lifted out of interview texts, *thought form constellations* shed light on how a speaker conceptually constructs his or her 'world', making transparent the speakers' sense-making intention, or 'world view', that underlies everything he sees or does.

Today, it is for many people an easy matter to realize that the real world is complex, not just complicated. They are shown this by living in what has been called a 'VUCA' world which is none other than the age-old real world viewed from a narrowly logical point of view by which it turns actual. In terms of DTF dialectic, following Bhaskar one can shed light on VUCA complexity by making a distinction between just four dimensions in which the real world unfolds for human minds:

1. C: the Context dimension in which seemingly stable scenarios and configurations appear to us.
2. P: the Process dimension in which emergent realities, with or without an end point, evolve, often embedded in each other.
3. R: the Relationship dimension in which things reveal themselves as intrinsically related to other things and ideas without which they would not even exist.

4. T: the Transformation dimension in which the mentioned three dimensions (C, P, R) are systemically fused, on account of which fusion T sheds light on the (frequently miniscule) re- and trans-formation things and ideas undergo that could not have been predicted based on how they appeared under their context, process, or relationship aspects alone.

#### Reconceptualizing 'speaking' based on moments of dialectic

I would venture the hypothesis that when a person opens his/her mouth to speak, s(he) has already placed herself in one of the four dimensions outlined above. Which dimension that is depends on a person's world view, i.e., on whether they see the world as a context, a process, a set of relationships, or an organism in unceasing transformation.

Evidently, most people will position themselves, at least initially, in the context dimension which gives them most security and, they may think, predictability, however illusory it may be. It is for this reason that most of us assume that it is easy to understand others, especially in familiar circumstances which is, of course, a self-serving fallacy. (It is especially easy to fall victim to this fallacy if one believes -- as do many Millennials -- that one can have others' emotions, instead of being aware that emotions separate us while thought, pervading emotions, unites us.)

The fixation on context does not last long, however. Soon people discover the limits of thinking in terms of contexts alone. Even if something seems simple enough to construct it based on Context TFs, such contexts are as instantaneous as they are fleeting, even if they become rigidified by one of the many fashionable 'models' (pop-theories) organizations work with. This is so since all models arrest thinking more than they promote it, and as fashions of actual-world provenance are always on their way to change (take 'holacracy' ...). In addition, contexts most often depend upon each other, say, as layers of a larger whole. They are therefore related, often not just externally but intrinsically, such as when we speak of a 'roof' we imply an intrinsic relationship to 'house' without which the notion of 'roof' makes no sense (and could be the roof of the mouth).

I think you are getting the point that the four moments of dialectic, or dimensions of reality, are all interconnected, so that when we start out in one of them, our minds naturally move freely from one to the other to explicate what we mean to say. In short, it is not VUCA that is in motion but our own minds.

For a critical facilitator, the main question will be: how to learn to build *empirical thought form theories* of what clients think when they see a VUCA world (or think strictly logically). Conventionally, facilitators do this by listening only to the content of what clients say; they do not penetrate deeper into the structure of clients' thinking from which specific contents arise, and thus get stuck in clients' VUCA world themselves.

If you think only in Context TFs, your world will forever be static like a doormat, while if you only think in Process TFs, everything will be fleeting and 'already gone' when you get there, while if you think only in Relationship TFs, there is nothing absolute on which to base yourself, and you are drowning in relativism. In short, it is only in their togetherness, in thought form constellations that comprise more than a single moment, that insight into the real world is created and the VUCA world literally vanishes like a fantasy.

How should the facilitator proceed as the destroyer of VUCA worlds?

The facilitator must learn to think both top down and bottom up *simultaneously*, meaning that he must learn to be mentally suspended between Moments and their TFs. His journey begins with a chosen concept that emerges in a real-time dialogue such as an interview or team discourse (or else a text). For a listener as well as reader, this concept becomes the origin of a flow of TFs by which one can explicate the original concept.

Whatever concept the facilitator (as listener) chooses, he now needs the client's co-operation in building TF-constellations that enrich the concept started from, taking the clue from the client, thereby challenging the client beyond his or her present cognitive maturity level. Both staying with and transcending the client's formulations, the facilitator must enter the client's flow of thought by dwelling on it for all the TF-implications it may yield that can broaden the client's present universe of discourse, and thus the dialogue between himself and the client. In this process, the client is led to having 'aha' experiences about the VUCA world (to the extent of his/her cognitive resources), most forcefully in the domain of expertise the client is most rooted in. These experiences then lead the client to 'reflect' on what s(he) has expressed in her speech, of which over time the limitations gradually come into view.

How does the facilitator begin to learn to do this?

Starting from a visceral understanding of *moments of dialectic* (C, P, R; T) acquired through interviewing, the budding facilitator must build TF-constellations, first within and around a specific moment, and then between moments TFs. The facilitator is helped in this by the fact that the TFs associated with a specific moment increasingly explicate that moment, up to a point where the subsequent moment in the sense of the sequence  $C \rightarrow P \rightarrow R \rightarrow T$  shows up.

However, following this sequence is obligatory neither in dialogue nor text analysis. The client's subject matter may demand that the facilitator make a leap from C to R, rather than to P. Instead of jumping into T (which usually fails), the facilitator is better off exploring the P- and R- domains around the context in question before making such a jump. In text analysis, the facilitator is guided by puzzling out what TFs a client has had 'in mind' when articulating a specific interview fragment. He is, further, challenged to 'weigh' the TFs appearing in a fragment (speech utterance) in order of emphasis, and then 'score it', say in the form of "TF2[weight 1.0] & TF13[weight 0.5]".

While in real-time discourse a facilitator builds TF-constellations by following up client's thinking expressed through speech, in puzzling out the TF-structure of an interview fragment in text analysis, the hypotheses formulated by the facilitator are focused on rendering the client's thinking in terms of the question: "what has the client **really and comprehensively** meant to say?" In my view, this focus, learned in off-line text analysis, paves the way for reliably transferring one's mastery of thought forms from one domain of discourse to another (where one's specific area of 'competence' is transcended and thinking proper begins). And that is exactly the reason **why in teaching dialectical thinking text analysis should be balanced with engagement in real-time dialogue which brings to fruition what can only be learned through engaging with text analysis.**

## Moving between moments of dialectic and their TFs

I have spoken of DTF-based thinking in terms of thinking in terms of moments as a ‘top down’, and of thinking in terms of TFs as a ‘bottom up’ process. Complex thinking is always operating in both directions. But the way this happens in complex thinking is different in real-time discourse and text analysis. In text analysis, the facilitator works ‘off-line’ attempting to do full justice to what the interviewee ‘meant to say’ to the best of his/her present understanding of DTF thought forms. Focused on establishing an empirical theory (cognitive profile) of a client, the facilitator weighs the best scoring options that render the client’s real-time thinking most comprehensively and truthfully.

This is quite different from what happens in real-time dialogue with others.

Where the ‘others’ are IDM-cohort members (scorers), each participant formulates his/her own hypothesis as to how to best render a client’s recorded thought flow captured in ‘structurally relevant’ (i.e., non-anecdotal) interview fragments. The task of the cohort is then to reach the most convincing compromise among different hypotheses, and this compromise is sealed by the facilitator who, as everybody else, justifies his/her own scoring to resolve scoring conflicts and reach inter-rater reliability. The shared scoring process increasingly helps cohort participants to teach coaches, managers, or consultants dialectical thinking, or leading an action learning group where the goal is clarifying, or even ‘solving’, an organizational problem.

The two ways of working in a cohort of budding facilitators – interviewing and scoring -- is again different from the real-time dialogue that occurs in a team. Here the facilitator is not focused on teaching but intuitively responds to contents important to stakeholders, with the goal of promoting their understanding of themselves and each other. In this context, DTF is present only indirectly, in the facilitator’s mind, and provides guidelines for his/her commenting or questioning of participants. Depending on the facilitator’s maturity and expertise, he is conveying the meaning of dialectical TFs indirectly, in terms of contents and goals of importance to participants.

As the foregoing shows, “teaching dialectical thinking” ranges from “specifically geared to moments and TFs” to being entirely indirect, following clients’ focus and concerns. This is a wide range indeed in which many compromises between the two points of emphasis become possible. In working with teams, the facilitator has no intention to create cognitive profiles of participants, except perhaps to elaborate for himself an overall impression of the cognitive maturity of the participant group he is working with that can guide him or her in further process consultations.

These situational differences in teaching dialectical thinking are important to consider; they make designing a rigid methodology impossible. The main issue seems to be: to what extent text analysis is included in the teaching for the sake of strengthening the transfer of what is learned, so that learners can become self-generative in using dialectic. The main distinction seems to be that between teaching future facilitators and everybody else. Of course, from “everybody else”, future facilitators may well emerge over time. Only the future will tell.

## Seven functions of TFs for taking on the VUCA World

Those not knowing DTF often over-focus on thought forms as if they formed the essence of DTF. To me, this indicates a predominantly logical way of thinking which tends to focus straightforwardly on abstractions rather than the quality of wholes that TFs form. The essence of DTF as a medium of re-

totalizing the four moments of dialectic consists of the **totality** formed by the moments as elements, thus the constellations TFs form in real-time speaking and writing.

For the dialectical thinker focused on absences, **the moments together make up “the House of Wisdom”**. Being aware of them – *or being in the House of Wisdom* – means to be aware of the real world as in unceasing transformation, both in and by itself and in our relationship to it. In fact, TFs make sense only once one can associate them with the correct moment of dialectic. Many TFs, while seemingly close to each other in meaning, explicate the state of the world differently in each of the moments they are associated with.

In practical terms, using TFs always presupposes an intuition as to which of the four real-world dimensions needs elucidation in a specific situation. Such intuitions are a matter of *listening* (external or internal), whether during interviews or in dialogue with individuals and teams. In all cases, what needs elucidation is pointed to by others, only in rare cases by the thinker himself, as in writing, and even in writing, the facilitator anticipates what others may think about a specific subject matter.

Whether in text analysis or real-time dialogue, learning TFs triggers a revolution of one’s own thinking since they ease one into thinking in terms of transformations in progress. The seemingly pernicious disrupters of the VUCA imagination become constructors (not simply descriptors) of reality.

The most relevant functions DTF thought forms serve are the following:

- a. **Question generators** – each TF can generate a multitude of questions about what is absent in a scenario or situation, differently for each moment (thus 28 ways of looking at the same thing);
- b. **Cognitive challenge generators** (other than questions) – each TF can be made the core of critical comments an interlocutor may benefit from, as in ‘Critical Theory’;
- c. **Tools for broadening a conceptual field** – each TF broadens a universe of discourse by introducing implications, contradictions, critique of reductions of whole to parts, etc.
- d. **Tools for finding/imagining alternatives and new possibilities** – each TF opens within each moment a new way of ‘looking at things’ and helps with obtaining a ‘big picture’ of a situation not previously surmised;
- e. **Tools for understanding situations, scenarios, event, and goals systemically** – each TF potentially contributes an element of systems thinking an interlocutor may be curtailing for lack of holism to please his inner, inner logical, competence;
- f. **Holistic causality analysis tools** – each TF contributes to analyzing the holistic causality a specific situation, scenario, or event may be the result of;
- g. **Tools for building new TF-constellations relative to a specific topic** that make it increasingly transparent (by expanding it from  $C \rightarrow P \rightarrow R \rightarrow T$ ) – each TF can become the origin of a constellation of TFs associated with their own or another, related, moment of dialectic.

I propose you ask yourself which of these uses of TFs resonate most deeply with you in the following situation:

You are facilitating work in a team engaged in a dialogue about the role(s) each member of the team should play in working together. You are focusing on the different dimensions of a specific role, including on how ‘big’ the role is relative to the *size of the person* ‘in’ the role (i.e., the person’s social-



emotional and cognitive maturity level). You are prompting people to ask themselves: “what are the dimensions of my role in this team (assuming I have only one), and what might be my personal limitations in executing it?”, as you would do in a performance review. Group members will then also be asking *themselves*: “what do my colleagues think about my role and myself in the role; what dimensions do they see as central, and how does my role fit together with everybody’s else’s role in the team, both in my view and theirs?”

Clearly, each of these performance review questions is a complex one. Approaching the review from context thought forms alone will not do since roles tend to change and are, in addition, under constant development. Roles are moreover always related to other roles and make up a whole with them called ‘team’ (R). And finally, roles are rarely static; they not only change but transform over time in natural ways (P; T), due to many reasons (such as a person leaving the team or a new person entering it, or else because the team’s focus and goal are changing, or its members are readying themselves for a different sprint). In short, roles are in motion even if a person understands him- or herself as serving only in a single role.

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A practical example of dialectical dialogue analysis

‘Listening’ is a relative concept. Through experience of analyzing interview texts, listening changes to a more fine-grained endeavor. One becomes used to taking speech utterances very seriously and parses them by ‘going over the words’ as Plato defined dialectic. Being versed in text analysis, a Critical Facilitator, hearing/reading the following statement, might pose the three questions below that follow the quote:

*In my understanding of my role, I am charged with the logistics of moving forward from our initial task of selling this product to customers, to increasingly involving customers in helping us improve what we are selling, as well as getting your input as to how best to do that given our combined sales expertise.*

- (1)** What is the speaker’s foremost intention in saying this? **(2)** Into what moment of dialectic has s(he) placed herself, and what set of TFs has s(he) thus privileged? **(3)** Which of the 7 thought form functions listed above should be employed to understand the speaker?

To answer these questions, the critical facilitator – rather than responding to the *content* of the speaker’s statement -- would begin **building an empirical mini-theory of the utterance heard**. He does so by evaluating what was said in terms of the predominant moment(s) of dialectic in which a speech fragment is embedded and the TFs that ‘spring out’ for him.

[1] In the three-part sentence above, the speaker is expressing her intention to be perceived as a leader. She places herself less in Context than in Process, but without fully grasping the implications of doing so. She is future oriented and therefore begins to relate her understanding of her role not only to team members, but to clients as well.

[2] In terms of what moment of dialectic is in focus, the sentence is ambiguous. On the one hand, the speaker places herself into a static scenario (C) in which she feels in charge of supervising the

selling a new product in such a way that customers can enhance it by giving feedback; in so projecting herself into the role, she wants to count on team members' broader expertise to do the job right. At the same time, she is viewing the work as 'moving forward' from her and the team's beginning sales task (seen only as an entry point), thus positioning herself in (P), the process moment of dialectic. S(he) is also signaling an awareness of relationship (R), if only in the form of personal relationship, since she speaks of 'getting your input', and more abstractly, by emphasizing that the team's work will require the involvement of clients. The only moment of dialectic not directly addressed by her is T, the transformation she is very weakly pointing to as a possibility when speaking of 'increasingly involving' clients as well as team members.

[3] Every team facilitator has, of course, his own intentions. Based on his own internal dialogue, which is not always transparent even to him, he has the power to direct others' thoughts and bend them into a direction seen as promising by him. This is a cognitive challenge, since taking on a broad agenda initially should, in DTF-interview terms, be constrained by the principle of 'never throwing a speaker off her train of thought' (but rather joining her on that train). The assumption in this is that a speaker has good reasons for formulating the way she does because the words used by her correspond to an over-riding intention, and thus are not haphazardly chosen.

In the present case, the facilitator seems to have the following options:

- to ask the speaker to clarify some of the concepts used (which by might be a challenge for the speaker), such as 'what logistics do you have in mind?' (which points to C); this is the securest way of proceeding;
- to ask which among the issues mentioned is presently foremost on the speaker's mind (in order to continue the dialogue), which risks expanding the universe of discourse based on shaky foundations, thus prematurely, and may throw the speaker off her train of thought;
- to ask, e.g., what specific customers the speaker has in mind, which risks falling into context thinking rather than paving the way for focusing on the structure of the speaker's thinking.

Only when basic concepts have been clarified and a specific concept has emerged as promising to make the speaker (and the team) think further, would a good facilitator try to expand the speaker's universe of discourse by using other functions of TFs than the simplest ones.

The overriding concern of a good facilitator will always be to give the speaker a chance to 'shine', that is, to show her best thinking regarding the topic in question. However, this objective tends to conflict with wanting to 'nail' concepts and issues for the sake of some 'solution' the facilitator hypothesizes as being on a speaker's or team's mind. It is out of this tension between conflicting interests in himself that the facilitator does his best or worst work.

In going with the flow of a speaker's train of thought, a strategy which avoids throwing the speaker off her train of thought, is to use what I call the *PEL sequence*. This sequence is a DTF-induced mediator of conflicts in the facilitator. According to this sequence, the facilitator proceeds from 'pointing' to an issue (concept) to 'exploring' und, and finally, to 'linking' the concept to other relevant concepts that constitute the broader topic of a dialogue. In short, the facilitator builds TF-constellations around a specific concept (subject matter).

While during a cognitive interview the focus lies on the moments and the TFs that emerge in what a speaker says, in dialogue meant to enhance dynamic team collaboration, e.g., the focus shifts to what the facilitator hypothesizes is conceptually 'absent' from the present dialogue, not, however, in terms of speech content, but of the ways in which content is generated (conceptualized) in terms of the TFs the facilitator has access to.

*LEARNING TRANSFER MAXIM:*

*One might say that text analysis is indispensable in learning dialectical thinking since it sets a standard for how far a facilitator can stray from the speaker's train of thought. While in text analysis, the facilitator remains focused on specific concepts the interviewee puts forth in her train of thought, in dialogue other than teaching dialogue in a cohort, the facilitator takes different degrees of liberty as to how closely to 'stick to' a concept put forth by a speaker; this distance 'defines' a facilitator's 'style' of process consultation which is inseparable from the strength and weakness of the facilitator's professionalism in terms of DTF.*

*The farther the facilitator moves away from the concept(s) announced by the speaker, the higher is the risk that the speaker's internal dialogue is flattened or erased, and thought form transfer to dealing with other tasks is diminished, and with it the speaker's learning of dialectical thinking as evidenced by her ability to generate such thinking by herself in the future (without a facilitator).*

Summary

Above, I have outlined some of the essentials of building thought form theories of a speaker or team by carefully 'going over the words' of her speech, essentially to undo the illusory VUCA world of the speaker and to introduce a revolution from reductionistic to holistic (geo- to heliocentric) thinking.

I have emphasized that interviewing experience makes it easy 'not to jump the gun' but patiently follow a speaker's present train of thought, to show her the limitations of its thought form structure both off-line, in text analysis, and in dialogue with her. I have also pointed out how, through experience with text analysis, one is building up an intimate understanding of one's own thinking, by immersing oneself in the thought flow of others for the purpose of giving them feedback based on one's own internal dialogue. I do not know a more productive way of learning to think complexly than by having to give clients feedback on what is absent from their present thinking in terms of one's own mastery of DTF.

More generally, I have introduced four dimensions of internal dialogue with oneself, or 'thinking', referred to as 'moments of dialectic', and their associated 'thought forms' (TFs). I have suggested the practice of detailing a moment of dialectic a speaker/interviewee is 'in' by adopting the PEL sequence, on account of which one moves in little steps from 'pointing to' to 'elaborating' and 'linking'. I have also hypothesized that TFs serve at least 7 different functions that are useful both in speaking with an awareness of complexity as well as in building texts whose complexity approaches the complexity of the subject matter they claim to elucidate.

Whether you want to look at building TF theories as an effort or as play, keep in mind that play is quick but remains on the surface and is unlikely to transfer to dissimilar tasks, whereas conceptual effort (such as made in text analysis) translates into play gradually over time, becoming second nature. The effort I have in mind is that of writing one or more cognitive case studies following IDM's cohort method, outlined at <https://interdevelopmentals.org/?p=6819>.

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**You may now ask: “in what way does building cognitive mini-theories of what others say or write by way of dialectical analysis leads me to understanding the structure of my own thinking?”**

I would put the answer this way:

Since logical thinking lets us over-focus on what, rather than how, we think, it is very difficult, at least outside of DTF, to grasp what is meant by “the structure of one’s own thinking”. This difficulty is heightened by the illusion that we already understand what others say, based on content alone. This illusion is also the origin of the VUCA world which is simply the real world as it always existed viewed from the vantage point of purely logical-thinking. ‘VUCA’ simply means the real world does not follow the rules of logic but is a transformational entity. This truth, which has been known for a very long time, led humans to turn ‘philosophical’ about the world thousands of years ago.

But the VUCA world is a trap that we can escape, by changing our notion of how verbal language works and how, on account of that, thinking works. Thinking is in evidence in every speech fragment we emit. By deciding to build DTF-theories of speech fragments from interviews, we can dismantle VUCA, which is what Plato called the world of DOXA (opinion).

Along came Socrates and challenged speakers to explain a single concept they had used in the Athens marketplace. In DTF interviews, we replicate that practice. Building empirical thought form theories of what people say (e.g., about their work), we slow them down and ourselves as well. We are demanding to know ‘what exactly did you mean when you said that’ in DTF terms, transforming their speech to text through recorded interviews, thus ‘taking them by the word’.

In this way, we dispense with the illusion that we already understand what people mean. We ask ourselves the innocuous question: “what really did the speaker intend to say?”. We are finding that what was said is, in DTF terms, totally ambiguous when considered in terms of moments of dialectic. In the next step, having hypothesized one of four moments as being predominantly referred to, we take a next step, asking: ‘what TF might be the dominant one in this utterance (transcribed speech fragment)’, thereby unravelling the speaker’s VUCA world further.

Doing this does not leave us unchanged. We now experience ambiguity not only in the world ‘out there’ but also ‘in here’, - in the client as well in what we say ourselves. In contrast to the client, on account of DTF we can rid ourselves of the inner ambiguity by asking the simple question above: ‘what, in DTF terms, did the client (or colleague) really mean to say’? By focusing on listening to others in terms of DTF moments and TFs, the meaning of ‘structure of one’s thinking’ becomes increasingly transparent.

**DTF delivers a set of moments and their TFs which constitute a holistic set of concepts for taking on VUCA.**

The first step lies in dismantling VUCA as Doxa (opinion), as did Plato (what Bhaskar refers to as ‘actuality’ in contrast to ‘reality’). We then have distinguished what was said from what is real. Having accomplished this, we can now ask: ‘what is real in what the speaker was saying’, which we put in the form of ‘what TF or TFs was the speaker actually using when creating his or her world’? Experience with this kind of text analysis brings within one’s reach an understanding of what is absent from a speaker’s thinking, since one experiences what a person *could have thought* but failed to think. This then easily

transfers to oneself, e.g., in the form of ‘what (in DTF terms) is absent from my formulation (of speech or text)?’

In a time where all-consuming attention is given to finding solutions to insufficiently researched, understood, and formulated problems (opinions in Plato’s terms), spending time on text analysis seems ‘academic’ and thus is hard to afford. However, to do so is exactly the challenge I want to leave those with who aim to become Critical Facilitators, these mighty destroyers of the VUCA world.

For further questions write to [otto@interdevelopmentals.org](mailto:otto@interdevelopmentals.org)