

# Articles from Integral Leadership Review

## 8/15 — From “Developmental Theory” to a Dialogical and Dialectical Epistemology: Introducing Three Modes of Structured Dialog with Clients

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In this text, I focus on the central relevance of interviewing skills in being able to lead a dialog in the structured way made possible by the *Constructive Developmental Framework* (CDF), whether it be social-emotional or cognitive. I do so in the context of showing that the certification as a Master Developmental Consultant/Coach at the Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM) is not based on “developmental theory”, but rather on a discipline derived from it by me, namely, a dialogical and dialectical epistemology. Developmental theory per se is taught in applied courses which serve as a basis for learning CDF epistemology, and in this sense are mere teasers for learning to think and listen developmentally, dialogically, and dialectically.

Abbreviations:

CDF = Constructive Developmental Framework (Laske);

DCR = Dialectical Critical Realism (Bhaskar);

DSF = Dialectical Schema Framework (Basseches);

DTF = Dialectical Thought Form Framework (Laske);

IDM = Interdevelopmental Institute (Laske).

*Social analysis can learn incomparably more from individual experience than Hegel conceded, while conversely the large historical categories, after all that has meanwhile been perpetrated with their help, are no longer above suspicion of fraud. ...The individual has gained as much in richness, differentiation, and vigour as, on the other hand, the socialization of society has enfeebled and undermined him. In the period of his decay, the individual's experience of himself and what he encounters contributes once more to knowledge, which he had merely obscured as*

*long as he continued unshaken to construe himself positively as the dominant category.*

*Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia*

When I started writing my two books on *Measuring Hidden Dimensions* in 2005, it was clear to me that the most progressive part of Kegan's and Basseches' theories is found in the empirical interviewing methodology they based their theories on (and have remained very silent about ever since). Rather than engaging primarily with the abstract concepts these theorists put forward, what interested me primarily was how through an *interviewing dialog* evidence could be gathered about individuals' and groups' present way of meaning and sense making.

What I saw as the gold of developmental theory, namely the interviewing required to obtain developmental evidence by listening to individuals, laid buried until CDF came into being in the year 2000, and still remains buried for the majority of developmental practitioners after 15 years, because of the huge amounts of "theory" and ideology that have been heaped upon Kegan's and Basseches' conceptual interpretations of their interview-based empirical findings.

The unique reading of mine of both theorists (who were my teachers) derived from several different sources: my being a composer and musician; my schooling in dialectical philosophy in the 1960's and in psychological protocol analysis (H. Simon) in the 1970's, the organizational interviewing I practiced as member of a big US consulting firm (ADL) in the 1980's, as well as my training as a clinical psychologist (Boston Medical Center) in the 1990's.

As a result of my training in these various modes of dialog with clients and patients, in my two books I moved, I would say today, from developmental theory to a new kind of epistemology (theory of knowledge), one that is based on dialog and thus has the potential of becoming a broader social practice, in contrast to argument-based dialectical epistemologies such as Adorno's and Bhaskar's which put themselves at risk of remaining elitist.

In this short paper, I want to highlight some of the outstanding features of this transition from "developmental theory" to dialogical epistemology. Eventually, this transition allowed me to bring together the main tenets of the Kohlberg and the Frankfurt Schools, something nobody had attempted, or stumbled on, before.

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While others read especially Kegan's, but also Basseches' work, for the sake of constructing either abstract or applied theories of adult development (most of all Wilber who designed a hermeneutic philosophy based on Kegan's non-empirical work), I was most impressed by the qualitative research they had done on individuals, for the sake of explaining how adult consciousness develops over the life span, and also, why the movement they discerned has

a huge impact on how people deliver work in the sense of E. Jaques. I found myself aiming for a new theory of human work (capability) that would go beyond Marx (who never thought about the internal workplace from which work is delivered (Laske, 2009)).

In focusing on interviewing and the scoring of recorded interviews (which I always saw as a unity), I implicitly took to heart what is conveyed in my teacher Adorno's quote, above, in which he basically says that rather than be guided by abstract concepts about development (such as "stages" and "phases"), deeper insight can be gained by delving into the frames of mind of individuals. Given my psychological training, I thought that the main issue in teaching CDF-interviewing as a dialog method would lie in making clear the separation between the focus on "how am I doing" (psychologically) and either "what should I do and for whom?" (social-emotionally) or "what can I know about my options in the world?" (cognitively). This triad of questions for me encapsulates the mental space from within which people deliver work, without ever quite knowing how to separate them in order to reach a synthesis of self insight.

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Serendipitously, I got to know Bhaskar's work just at the right time, in 2006, when I was in the midst of writing volume 1 of MHD and preparing for volume 2. Reading his "Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom" (1993) challenged me to reflect on the DTF-dialectic I had been teaching, but also to reflect on its relationship to my teacher Adorno's work. Although a declared enemy of ontology which he accused of sealing the oppressive status quo of capitalist society, Adorno had viewed social reality, as well as the human mind, as intrinsically dialectical. He demonstrated that view in the analysis of musical works, but also through philosophical text analysis in both of which he was a master.

I noticed right away that Bhaskar's MELD, the four moments of dialectic, were not only a step beyond Hegel and Adorno, but also equivalent to Basseches' empirically derived and validated four classes of thought forms, and that Bhaskar's ontology was only feebly developmental and epistemological, especially in his theory of eras of cognition and types of epistemic fallacies.

I began to see that, from Bhaskar's vantage point, the CDF-based cognitive interviewer was centrally dealing with "epistemic fallacies" and "category errors" committed by people in organizations, and that the interviewer's task was therefore to "reproduce" these errors, that is, show them to be fallacies by interpreting what was said by the interviewee and then enacting DTF, the *Dialectical Thought Form Framework*.

Cognitive interviewing constantly encountered THE epistemic fallacy according to which the world is reduced to what is presently known about it, with the benign neglect of pervasive absences. Taking further into account Bhaskar's distinction between the real, actual, and empirical worlds, I began to see that individuals who could not rise beyond this fallacy, and thus could not

transcend the actual world – what the real world appears to be, rather than what it is – were surely stuck. In the CDF framework that also meant that they were not as effective at work as they could be as social-emotionally aware dialectical thinkers.

Bhaskar's ontological postulate of four moments of dialectic, once it was viewed in terms of Basseches' Dialectical Schema Framework (DSF; 1984) meant that a trained CDF-user could through empirical inquiry (interviewing and scoring) help such individuals move from the actual world –the world of TV and of downloading – to the real world in which problems like organizational survival and global warming have to be solved.

So, while Bhaskar really had no good tools for dealing with the language-suffused world of organizations and with global issues requiring action in a concrete and effective manner, I more and more came to see CDF not only as an epistemology, but also as a set of dialogical tools – whether social-emotional prompts or dialectical thought forms — ready-made for intervention in organizations and institutions for the sake of culture transformation and related strategic goals. This was an obvious realization since the interviewees in IDM case studies were mostly executives representing organizations of various sizes.

For this reason, in a conference presentation devoted to Bhaskar's work in London this year, I proposed that his "dialectical critical realism" (DCR) could (or even needed to be) enhanced and concretized by CDF/DTF, as shown below:

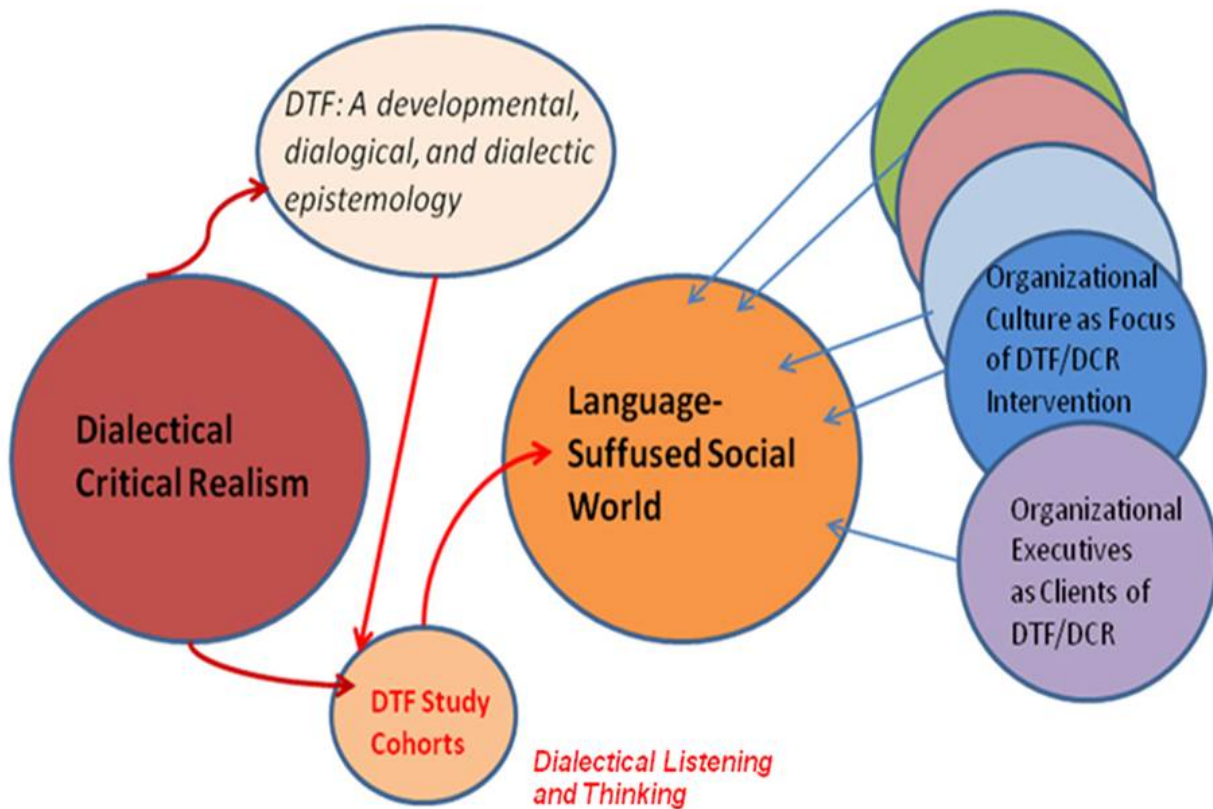


Figure 1.

As shown, I see IDM study cohorts whose members graduate with 3 case studies (and in the future also with a team project) as engaging with epistemic fallacies and category errors committed by executives and their teams, and suffering accordingly. By way of their interviewing and scoring skills such graduates know (“can hear”) what in the language-suffused world of organizations needs to be transformed, for these organizations to survive or thrive in an ecologically reasonable way.

Following Brendan Cartmel’s work in CDF-based socio-drama, I began to refer to CDF users as *inter-developmental interlocutors*. By this I mean that they are educated as developmental and dialectical thinkers simultaneously, and thus are able not only to spot how client are presently making meaning and sense of their world, but also are able to assist them in moving from the actual world they are submerged in into the real world which they only dimly seeing.

My definition of inter-developmental interlocutor is that s(he) is one:

Learning from the later Basseches, now speaking as a theorist of psychotherapy in its diverse modes (Basseches and Mascolo, 2010), I began to understand that what I was teaching my students, and was myself doing better and better in my own coaching and work with teams, was based on consciously separating three dialog modes, shown below:

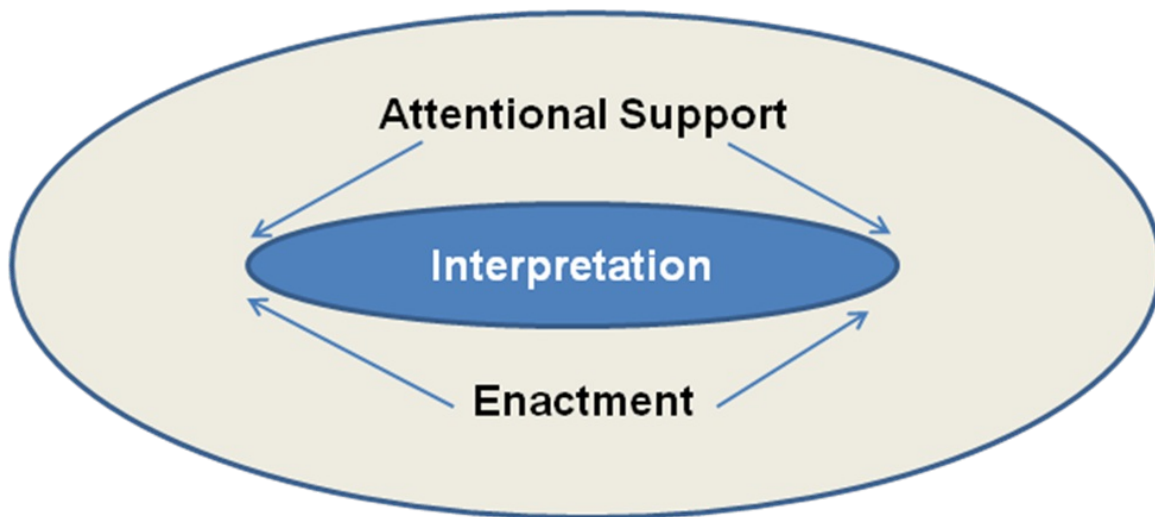


Figure 2

Basseches and his co-author show in their 2010 “Psychotherapy as a Developmental Process” that all psychotherapies are based on the selective privileging and coordination of three distinct dialog modes, and that psychotherapies differ in their emphasis on one or the other mode.

In my view, the authors thereby also point, at least indirectly, to coaching and consulting, — other forms of dialog used in the language-suffused world. I would give the following brief definition of these modes of CDF-based dialog:

1. When giving **attentional support**, the CDF-interlocutor is focused on *listening* to the client, conveying deep interest in what is on his/her mind, and if need be reinforcing the client’s feeling and/or thinking. No CDF interview can be done without this support, nor can any feedback or any other consulting be engaged with. Attentional support is also, I would say, the primary mode an interlocutor uses in any social-emotionally grounded consulting activity. But clearly, this mode is supported, even in dealing with meaning-making only, by interpretation, and in coaching possibly by enactment (e.g., modeling a “higher” stage of meaning making).
2. **Interpretation** is a broad field, since one can interpret moods, feelings, thoughts, frames of reference, ideologies, category errors, epistemic fallacies, almost anything expressed through speech, as well as text. So what is meant? Clearly, social-emotional interpretation differs from psychological and cognitive interpretation, and these differences are exactly what students are learning at IDM.

In contrast to the social-emotional interview, the cognitive interview is focused on interpreting base concepts, not factual content or feelings. We can interpret clients’ concepts or lack thereof in terms of DTF, and use thought forms as mind openers and mind expanders, to broaden interpretations clients propose. We do so in order to deal with client’s category errors (e.g., switching them from context to process) and epistemic fallacies (e.g., pointing out that the world is not equivalent to what the client knows about it). In this endeavor, attentional support as well as enactment

support interpretation, the latter by leading clients from thought to action, “enacting a concept” (which could be a strategy) in the real world.

3. **Enactment** is the modeling of how a concept or interpretation, a higher social-emotional stage and a modified psychological disposition can be achieved by a client. The way enactment is used social-emotionally, psychologically and cognitively differs, of course. By pointing clients to the financial or other consequences of specific strategic alternatives, Jan DeVisch, whose focus often is on enactment, has demonstrated that enactment can easily become the central mode of a dialectically oriented consulting to executive teams, especially when it is skillfully supported by the other two modes (Jan DeVisch 2010, 2013; . [http://interdevelopmentals.org/publications-Jan\\_de\\_Visch.php](http://interdevelopmentals.org/publications-Jan_de_Visch.php)).

It seems to me that in terms of the distinction between these 3 modes, social-emotional and cognitive interviewing based on CDF have their own idiosyncratic structure. Social-emotional interviewing is largely focused on giving *attentional support* to the way the interviewee selects and interprets so-called prompts, while cognitive interviewing, when done well, is based on the *enactment* of Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic (extensible to individual dialectical thought forms). In both cases, the remaining two modes of interviewing dialog serve as obligatory supports for the privileged dialog mode.

If we think about what it means to use DTF in these three complementary modes, I think it would look as shown below:

Attentional Support	Interpretation	Enactment
1. You parse what is being said in terms of Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic, and their associated DTF thought forms, in “being with” the speaker(s).	1. You select “base concepts” to probe for absent dialectical thought structures.	1. You model for the client what it means to remedy a particular category error.
2. You subordinate yourself to your client in humble inquiry, to better understand his/her thinking.	2. You use DTF thought forms as mind openers, mind expanders, not just listening tools.	2. You also incite the client to re-think what s(he) said in light of dialectical absences you pointed out.
	3. You challenge MELD category errors and epistemic fallacies “head on” by questions and commentary.	3. You move from thought to action, modeling what actions might follow from a specific dialectical base concept or set of concepts.

Figure 3: (MELD is a reference to Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic, corresponding in CDF to CPRT).

Clearly, every CDF-interlocutor, when consulting to clients or coaching them,

uses these three modes in a different relationship with the other two: some interlocutors prefer attentional support as the primary mode (e.g., those who only use Kegan), while others will focus on interpretation (following DTF) or use enactment in psychological or strategic feedback.

What dialog mode an individual prefers to use in his or her work, as well as in coaching or consulting, is both a psychological and developmental issue. An immature individual will be incapable of lending others attentional support, having nothing to go by than his or her ego-centrism or “competence”. Such a person will feast on a narrow set of ideological concepts, perhaps with religious fervor, and will indulge in a kind of enactment that is poorly supported by humble inquiry and attentional support. To experience the “tell and do” world in which most professionals live, you just need to listen to members of a start-up company.

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The three intervention modes outlined above also contribute to a meta-theory of coaching, whatever the approach of the coach may be, NLP, ontological, ICC or ICI. These modes help characterize “coaching schools” by the predominant dialog mode they teach. These modes are also central in *team coaching* and *group hosting*, which can be especially effective when based upon insight into the deep social-emotional structure of a particular team or cohort outlined by the CDF team typology ([http://interdevelopmentals.org/team\\_maturity.php](http://interdevelopmentals.org/team_maturity.php)).

For instance, in an upwardly divided level-2 team where most team members are at Kegan-level 2 and a minority is a Kegan-level 3, enactment is powerless without attentional support, and DTF interpretation is most likely fruitless. Whereas in a downwardly divided level-5 team, where the majority of team members acts from Kegan level 5 and a minority from Kegan level 4, both social-emotional and cognitive interpretation are powerful tools to which the other two modes can be subordinated. Here, the enactment will largely come from the team itself since its task process is no longer overwhelmed by the developmentally rooted assumptions structuring the interpersonal process, as in immature teams and cohorts where “relationship” is king and defenses abound.

Doing justice to **CDF as an epistemology based on dialog, not argument**, is grounded in knowing what dialog mode one is presently using, when to use which mode as well as when to switch from one mode to another in a real-time situation. Being conscious of what mode one is using at any time is actually the only way of skillfully subordinating the two remaining modes to the one presently employed, something that is best learned through social-emotional and cognitive interviewing (<http://interdevelopmentals.org/certification-module-a.php> and <http://interdevelopmentals.org/certification-module-b.php>).

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There is, of course, a risk to be aware of, namely that of slipping from dialog into argument, as the “tell and do” world in which we live constantly tempts us to do. By doing so, you change your epistemology. You are now the one who knows it all. But as you also know, you can’t change the world by way of arguments (which are always only right or wrong, omitting absences, and thus pinned to the present.) If you think about it, the three modes outlined above are the three pillars of any dialogical epistemology, in whatever discipline and for whatever purpose it may be used.

Clearly, you want to meet your client where your client is since other ways of meeting don’t exist. On the other hand, your client wants to be “understood” by you by way of dialog with him or her. To “understand” professionally, you need a dialogical epistemology putting asking over telling, and if this epistemology is going to be developmental and dialectical as well, you need to learn what Kegan stages and phases of dialectical thinking empirically “sound like”. And this, again, can best be learned from developmental interviewing as originated by Kegan and Basseches, and today taught at IDM.

The more mature the client you are dealing with is, whether it is an individual or a team, the less you will have to focus on the interpretation of meanings and feelings, but rather will have to deal with concepts, or lack thereof (in the client’s speech). That means you need to have an understanding of Bhaskar’s four moments of dialectic, in CDF concretized and extended by way of dialectical thought forms.

If you can embrace all that, as you begin to learn to do in an IDM case study, you have become what I call an *inter-developmental interlocutor*. To arrive at this destination, “sweat comes before virtue”, as Hesiod says. You need to want to sweat it out.

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## About the Author

**Otto Laske** is a developmental psychologist, coach, management consultant, and coaching researcher. As Director of Education at the Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM), he guides the oldest evidence based coach and teacher education program in North America. As Director of IDM Press, Otto has published two volumes on adult development, one in 2005 and one in 2008: *Measuring Hidden Dimensions: The art and science of fully engaging adults*, IDM Press, 2005 (2nd edition 2010), also available in German and shortly in French and Spanish and *Measuring Hidden Dimensions of Human Systems: Foundations of requisite organization*, IDM Press, 2008. Otto was educated at Goethe University, Frankfurt (studies with Th.W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer) and Harvard University, MA, USA. He can be reached at [otto@interdevelopmentals.org](mailto:otto@interdevelopmentals.org).

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