

Integral Leadership Review

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Notes from the Field

Don Beck – Integral Community in a Global Era

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Northbrae Community Church, Berkeley California

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Introduction



This event began with a lecture on Friday evening and continued with an all-day workshop on Saturday. It was jointly sponsored by Bay Area Integral and the Center for Human Emergence – California and served to publically launch CHE –California’s activities. Roger Wetzel, a co-founder of the Center for Human Emergence-California, kicked-off the event with a one hour introduction to Spiral Dynamics, assisted by Darrell Gooden, also a co-founder of CHE-California. Terry Patten, a leader of Bay Area Integral, introduced Don Beck. Over the course of the workshop, Don delivered a feast of insights into the Spiral Dynamics model and its application.

The subject of Spiral Dynamics has appeared often in *Integral Leadership Review*, so I am going to assume that most readers have a basic familiarity. I should also disclose that although I am not new to the subject, I am more spiral weekend warrior than spiral wizard. Rather than attempt to recapitulate all that Don shared, I’ll just highlight a few of the ideas I found most interesting. I hope others may find this useful.

The Workshop in a Nutshell

Given that the stated goal of the workshop was to share yellow techniques and strategies for fostering a thriving global community, what is the vision for how Spiral Dynamics can serve this purpose?

One part of the vision is command centers for spiral intelligence like the newly established Center for Human Emergence-California. In the ideal case, these command centers would track data for their regions in real time. Imagine wall-sized video screens showing maps of California and the capability to superimpose features of the Spiral Dynamics model. One key view would show the density of human population and the relative concentrations of the various memes. Other views could represent the flow of essential functions and services through populations, organizations, and geography. The command centers would monitor vital signs and indentify spots where key flows were becoming blocked or restricted. In many cases, blockages would indicate underlying meme clashes. The command center would work to build relationships with local

leaders, to share the insights of Spiral Dynamics, and to empower them to use the Spiral Dynamics toolbox to address their issues and restore healthy function.

In applying Spiral Dynamics to a specific situation, a key step is identifying the critical functionality that needs to be provided by the systems involved. Don emphasized repeatedly the importance of shifting from an orientation around what we as individuals want to do to an orientation around the functionality required by the relevant systems and the structure inherent in the contexts surrounding them. For instance, when designing an education system, we need to ask questions like: What are the current life conditions for the people that the system will serve and what do we expect the conditions to be like in twelve years when the students graduate? What are the key skills that the students will need to be effective in those conditions?

Once the essential functionality has been identified, we need to identify the groups involved and their memes. Proposed solutions need to be communicated in multiple ways to connect with the values of multiple memes. Orange parents will resonate with the need for educational reform if they understand how it relates to improving the material well-being of their children. Blue students can be engaged by directing their need for a purpose toward anticipating the skills they will need to navigate a rapidly changing world. We can appeal the red sense of honor with a statement like, “A real man would build an educational system for his children.”

Don also emphasized the importance of horizontal health over vertical transformation. Solutions should meet people at any level of the spiral. The goal of Spiral Dynamics is not to accelerate transformation through the memes but to allow all the memes to coexist in a healthy way. Pragmatic love is creating systems that allow people to thrive from any meme.

Barcodes

Don shared the idea of using visual barcodes to describe the meme character of individuals and groups (<http://www.spiraldynamics.net/barcode/>). In my experience, it's common in conversations applying Spiral Dynamics to describe people and organizations using single colors. Fundamentalists are blue. Scientists and stock brokers are orange. Cultural creatives are green. In articles and more formal discussions, a few disclaimers are usually appended to describe the complexities and hazards involved in generalizing about levels of development. Nonetheless, the way in which the colors are commonly used tends to reinforce simple labeling. Barcodes are a way of representing that people and organizations function as combinations of multiple memes. In a barcode, memes are represented as vertical lines of the appropriate color, and the thickness of the lines represents their relative strengths. Barcodes bundle a lot of information into an at-a-glance description and also help to discourage simple labeling. People and groups can be characterized in more complex and fruitful ways. Barcodes convey that human development is more like a musical chord progression than a simple ascending melody. Each new meme introduces a new note. The previous notes remain and are dynamically remixed into a new, hopefully harmonious, whole.

The concept of a barcodes is also helpful when considering how to connect diverse groups within an organization. If we think of people as simply blue, or orange, or green it can seem as if memetic segregation is required to keep the peace. If we allow for a whole spectrum of meme combinations, there appears to be more space between memes in which to find common ground. We can link people and groups by matching similar barcodes. We can build bridges between dissimilar groups by choosing representatives with the smallest barcode gaps. We can facilitate flow within our organization by arranging its parts into a channel of smoothly varying barcodes.

Polarization

One hot topic was political polarization. How are we to move toward a more reasonable and nuanced discussion of our society's problems when the popular media tends to structure its presentation of so many issues in a way that presumes two parties in conflict? Don's answer, in short, was to question the categories being used to frame the discussion. Why, for instance, should we accept categories like Democrat vs Republican, Israeli vs Palestinian, industry vs ecology when Spiral Dynamics tells us that such categories aren't the ones that matter most?

Don suggests that on either side of any polarized issue is a multiplicity of perspectives. Furthermore, the multiplicity of perspectives arises, in part, from the multiplicity of memes. Parties on either side of an issue will tend to enter the public discourse in a manner that reflects their dominant meme. Don shared the table below which characterizes how various memes tend to express themselves and also makes clear that the same memes exist on both sides of any issue.

Beyond Polarization

Left Side	Description	Right Side	Meme
L1	Conciliators	R1	Orange/green
L2	Pragmatists	R2	Orange
L3	Moderates	R3	Blue/orange
L4	Ideologues	R4	Blue
L5	Zealots	R5	Blue/red
L6	Flame throwers	R6	Red

One strategy for addressing polarization is to encourage the conciliators, pragmatists, and moderates on both sides to rein in the rhetoric of their respective ideologues, zealots, and flame throwers. Radicals want to be in conflict. It's the zealots and flame throwers on both sides that tend to hijack the discourse and prevent a more nuanced and productive discussion. Once the conciliators and pragmatists realize the ways in which they are different from zealots and flame throwers with whom they ostensibly agree, they can appreciate what they have in common with other conciliators and pragmatists with whom they ostensibly disagree. This understanding creates a space for transpartisanship, for rallying around super-ordinate goals-- water, health, education, peace--rather than party lines.

Breakout Session on Sustainability

At one point, we split into groups. Each group focused on applying Spiral Dynamics to a particular area. I joined a group focusing on sustainability. At first we attempted to invent a hypothetical scenario to which we would frame a response. We touched on how one might language sustainability to resonate with particular memes, but overall, we struggled to get traction. When we shifted our focus to a couple of real-life situations with which members of our group were working, we made much more headway. Precisely because Spiral Dynamics seeks to tailor solutions to the specifics of a situation, it seems important to work with real-world data when applying the ideas. When our scenario was hypothetical, it was much more tempting to orient around what we wanted to do rather than what a specific situation required.

During our debrief, Don made the point that the word "sustainability" can be limiting. We don't really want to sustain everything about our current situation. He likes to bundle sustainability with resilience and emer-

gence. It makes explicit that while we want to sustain the positive aspects of our current conditions, we also want to enhance our capacity to deal with the unexpected and to allow for the emergence of goodness not yet imagined.

Feeling the Memes

The workshop ended with an exercise designed to give us an embodied sense of the memes from red through yellow. I hesitate somewhat to share this experience, because I fear that reading about it might lessen the impact of the exercise should any readers have the opportunity to try it in the future. Nonetheless, I can't help myself. I found it engaging, thought provoking and potent. It expanded our exploration of Spiral Dynamics beyond the predominately cognitive mode of the rest of the workshop. I'll do my best to describe the exercise, although I'm sure to omit, and perhaps distort, some of the subtleties. (Sorry Don).

Red

Don summoned the largest male to front of the room and informed us that he was now our chief. Don instructed the rest of us to get down on our knees and bow to his superior strength. We each put our hands together, as if holding an alms bowl. Reaching out in supplication, we asked our leader to help us meet our needs. The red in me recoiled at bowing down but went along for the sake of the exercise. In retrospect, I'm surprised that no one rose up to challenge the leader. It would have been a fittingly red response.

Blue

Don summoned the eldest among us and made him our leader. Don told our leader to look up, symbolizing that his power came through his connection to God in the heavens. We split into three groups. Each group lined up single file in order of seniority. The eldest were closest to our leader. Standing in trim formation, we bowed our heads and looked down at our hands. In our hands we imagined written orders passed down through our leader giving direction and purpose to our every move.

We considered how such a hierarchy would function. Don asked us to imagine what would happen if someone at the back of one of the lines needed to send a message to someone at the back of another line. The message would need to flow up the line person by person, risking distortion at each repetition. When it reached the front of the line, it might be withheld or manipulated for political gain. Even if the message reached the head of the appropriate line, it would still need to flow all the way back down through channels to reach the end. Information flows slowly in such a hierarchy. As an aside, Don commented on how technology has affected the typically hierarchical and seniority-based structures of the military. As Don said, "Email doesn't know how to salute."

Orange

Don left our leader in place, but he informed us that seniority was out and merit was in. Our group would now function as a meritocracy. In our hands we carried our personal goals and our ability to produce results. Immediately, the lines dissolved and the young upstarts near the back pressed forward. There was a good deal of friendly elbowing. By this point, I was getting into the playful spirit of the exercise, and I decided to stage a coup. I made my way to the front of the room and pushed the current leader aside. In retrospect, I suppose my action originated as much from red impulsive grasping as from orange strategic striving. The feel of the group became more youthful and energetic, as well as more chaotic, and perhaps less congenial. The scene reminded me of Wall Street traders vying to out bid each other on the floor of the stock exchange.

Green

We shifted our focus to feelings. We looked at our hands and imagined cradling our tender hearts. The group spontaneously rearranged itself into a circle. We embraced our neighbors. The circle began to sway. Some sang Kumbayah. I apologized to my neighbor, the former chieftain I'd elbowed aside. At this point Don pointed out that all of the energy of the group was directed inward. No one was paying any attention to things outside our circle.

Yellow

We imagined ourselves as an organization producing hydro-electric power. Our organization would require people in many different roles to deliver our product. We would need to operate the generators at the dams, maintain long distance transmissions lines, interface with municipal electric grids, and measure the usage of our customers. We would also need support systems for finance and accounting, for marketing, for managing our people, and for interacting with suppliers and partners. Don structured our makeshift organization using the X, Y, Z templates model discussed in the Spiral Dynamics book. Our X template dealt with the flow of electricity from dam to customer. Its members formed a meandering curve that stretched from one side of the room the other, representing the geographic path from dam to customer. The members angled their bodies to symbolize the direction of their focus. Operators nearest the dam faced the dam. Operators in the middle turned so they could see both of their neighbors in the production line. At the end, operators turned to face the customer. Our Y template provided support for the people and processes of the production line. They were placed strategically to the side of the main line and faced toward the part of the line they supported. Our Z template provided leadership and held the perspective of the whole. We imagined the executives above in a helicopter. We also had swat teams staged around the room, ready to swoop in and help respond to unexpected events in any part of our organization. Don discussed what kinds of memetic barcodes would be suited to the various parts of our organization, and how the parts might be arranged to keep similar barcodes near one another.

Links to Resources Don Mentioned

Cherie Beck, "Beautiful Noise: An Introduction to Spiral Dynamics", <http://www.youtube.com/user/CherieBeck#p/a/u/2/TwuSnP-CgTw>

Harm de Blij, *The Power of Place: Geography, Destiny, and Globalizations Rough Landscape*, <http://amazon.com/gp/product/0199754322>

Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, <http://amazon.com/gp/product/0942299329>

About the Author

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