

The Intervention Design Question

How should Who manage (lead, coach, teach ...) Whom to do What When?
Paul King of the Beyond Partnership gives an overview of Spiral Dynamics.

In this short article I offer a brief introduction to the Value Systems work of Clare Graves and the branded version of his work, Spiral Dynamics® that was later developed by Chris Cowan and Don Beck.

The framework created by Clare Graves sits very well alongside NLP. Gravesian Theory and Spiral Dynamics offer a wonderfully rich map of the complex human landscape we now inhabit. It presents an embracing framework for understanding and working with the different value systems that influence and drive human behaviour and the dynamics by which these value systems change. NLP for its part offers practical and effective tools, techniques and attitudes for skilfully moving oneself and others through this landscape.

The point to emphasise at the very beginning is that the focus of Graves and Spiral Dynamics is value systems not values. It is not what we are thinking about (content) but how we are thinking about that content that is key to this model. In this regard it presents a meta-level framework of the deep structure thinking patterns, belief and value systems upon which we are making choices and decisions.

Graves asked – “is there a pattern to human nature?” Thirty years of research led him to a model that, for most people, intuitively makes sense when they see it. A model that applies at the individual, interpersonal, group, organisational and cultural level and across a wide range of contexts including coaching, leadership and management practices, strategy and policy design, change initiatives, education, marketing and branding.

The following table offers a much abbreviated description of the Gravesian levels. The levels are created by the dynamic interplay between the Life Conditions (context/environment) and what Graves called the Mind Capacities (thinking patterns). Graves gave these levels letter pairings to reflect the dynamic, the first letter of the pairing representing the Life Conditions and the second letter the Mind Capacities; Spiral Dynamics collapses this interaction within the colours metaphor. In reality people are more usually at a transition point on the continuum and while one colour will tend to shine most brightly within a human system, the system, (individual, group, culture), will act from a range of colours depending on the context (life conditions). For an individual this may change between work and home, for example.

Each level focuses on particular problems of existence and has a particular way of thinking and behaving to solve those problems. Each values system emphasises and rewards certain ways of thinking and behaving, has a preferred learning style, responds best to a certain management system and has particular motivational hot buttons. A new level emerges as the problems of existence being experienced are no longer satisfactorily answered by the associated coping systems.

Life Conditions - Worldview		Mind Capacities - People
The world is a state of nature	Beige AN 'I'	People behave instinctively much like other animals according to biological urges and drives
The world is mysterious and frightening and full of spirits	Purple BO 'We'	People placate spirits and join together for safety; follow tribal traditions, ancestors ways
The world is tough and hard like a jungle; it's eat or be eaten	Red CP 'I'	People must fight to survive and dominate others without guilt and so as to avoid shame. Egocentric. Raw power.
The world is guided by a Higher Power, with a distinct right and wrong according to a plan	Blue DQ 'We'	People obey rightful higher authority and find meaning and purpose in sacrifice for later reward. Absolutistic, guilt.
The world is full of viable options and plenty of choices to make things better and bring prosperity	Orange ER 'I'	People tend to test options for greater autonomy and compete for success and influence. Pragmatic to achieve results.
The world is the habitat for all humanity to share together and find common purpose	Green FS 'We'	People join in communication to experience growth for self and others for collective benefits. Relativistic, consensual, situational
The world is at some risk of collapse because of human excess, chaotic, uncertainty is an acceptable state of being	Yellow GT 'I'	People seek to learn and discover what it is to be human without doing harm to others or the environment. Systemic, functional, integrative, questioning, accepting
The world is a delicately balanced system of interlocking forces and in jeopardy.	Turquoise HU 'We'	People concerned with the holistic, transpersonal, collective consciousness, collaboration, interconnections

The Spiral oscillates between the individual “I” (with a focus on expressing self in the world) and the collective “we” (with a focus on working within a greater system, however that may be perceived). Please note; the levels represent systems in people not types of people. Turning Spiral Dynamics into a typology misses the point. People can and do move down as well as up the Spiral, depending on how life conditions alter. Large-scale examples might be the events in the Balkans or Iraq, smaller scale examples might be found at a football match. It is of course not inevitable that an individual, organisation or culture will shift its coping systems in response to changing life conditions.

When the thinking patterns of an individual (or a society) are appropriate for the life conditions there is a sense of balance. However



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if the problems of existence outpace that individual there will be high stress; similarly if the individual is ahead of the problems of existence then they will be stressed, bored, frustrated. The vision of new solutions and the dissonance with current thinking patterns and value systems create the dynamic for change. Those who do not experience that dissonance do not experience a need for change.

“ It presents an embracing framework for understanding and working with the different value systems ”

towards best fit of other theories, practices and processes to the situation at hand, providing a structure to answer the question, "How is it best for who to manage (coach or teach or lead) whom, to do what, when?"

The answer is dependent on where the individual, team, organisation is currently sitting within the Spiral and what their next step is. Somebody may be great at managing from a DQ frame and struggle with an ER frame or be great at facilitating a DQ to ER transition but not an ER to FS transition reflecting of course their own profile and also their behavioural flexibility.

As a coach, consultant or leader, are our interventions at the appropriate level? What are our preferences? Where is our best fit? If necessary can we be flexible and shift our thinking and coping systems to fit different life conditions or perhaps in such circumstances we need to recruit someone else who is a better fit.

Different organisations occupy different positions on the Spiral and need to develop managerial/governance strategies that match their people, their visions of the future, and the jobs they perform today. For example, Green/FS level solutions do not work well in a Red/CP context.

When designing strategy, does it fit a limited set of circumstances or is it adaptable to the positional changes on the Spiral, which may occur? Has it taken into consideration that certain thinking styles might be better suited to certain problems in a particular space/time; appropriately tailored to the organisation?

At the individual, team and organizational level the mirror of Spiral Dynamics is held up in such a way that people learn to value what they are not and the thinking patterns with which they have most difficulty. Using this model with boards and senior management teams we profile the individual team members, their relation to each other

fundamental patterns being played out by our clients to help them identify what is really going on so as to better define what they want, where they are now and how to get from here to there. Spiral Dynamics helps us with that.

Spiral Dynamics has been likened to scaffolding within which many other theories and approaches can fit. It provides the high level map that points



and the team as a whole. These may then be mapped against the profile of other stakeholders and the organisation. This information then points the way to how they can best match-pace-lead others and the organisation. Here, as in all examples of Spiral Dynamics in practice, accurate identification of the levels at play is vital in selecting the appropriate models and approaches. It is in the diagnosis that mistakes are often made.

Many people need to be managed quite differently today because they have moved on the Spiral even further and faster than most of their bosses, teachers, and parents.

Business and marketing strategies often fail because the designers use their "own mirrors" and assume the people they are attempting to reach share the same values systems they do. What value systems are you knowingly or unknowingly marketing to?

The question is not "how do you motivate people?" but how do you relate what you are doing to their natural motivational flows. ■

Spiral Dynamics is an open ended, dynamic and widely applicable framework to add around your existing knowledge and skill base and in our opinion is something worth knowing both professionally and personally. There is much more that could be said of course. Our certification programme with Chris Cowan in Spiral Dynamics and the work of Clare Graves takes 7 days and qualifies participants to use the profiling questionnaires. More than ten years on and we are still learning.