

Book Notes

for

Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership, and Change

Don Beck & Christopher Cowan, 1996

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The purpose of these notes is to provide an in-depth overview of the contents of this groundbreaking book. *Spiral Dynamics* can be purchased online from [Chapters](http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/) <<http://www.chapters.indigo.ca/>> or [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com/) <<http://www.amazon.com/>>.

Note that there is much more to this book than the areas covered in this set of book notes.

Toward Integral Leadership

^MEMEs: Mapping the Evolution of Human Development

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Toward Integral Leadership

As human consciousness moves toward a more worldcentric perspective, there is an ever-growing push for leaders to move from traditional hierarchical leadership approaches to more holistic leadership approaches. What is often missing in this shift of paradigms is an understanding of the stages of human development and the corresponding type of leadership and kind of learning required at each stage. The following outline of ^MEME dynamics taken from *Spiral Dynamics* is designed to fill this gap and provide a clearer picture of the emerging role of leadership.

∇ MEMEs: Mapping the Evolution of Human Development

∇MEME dynamics, based on the work of Clare Graves, was developed as a framework for understanding the influences at work in human systems. It maps out why people see the world so differently, yet are not necessarily locked into those views.

As man solves the problems of existence at a level, new brain systems may be activated and when activated, change his perceptions so as to cause him to see new problems of existence. Clare Graves

∇MEMEs: are value MEMEs that function as psycho-cultural DNA that contain behavioral instructions for creating social systems and binding them together.

A ∇MEME is the basis for a world *view*, a value *system*, a *level* of psychological existence, a belief *structure*, organizing *principle*, a *way* of thinking, and a *mode* of living.

∇MEME QUALITIES

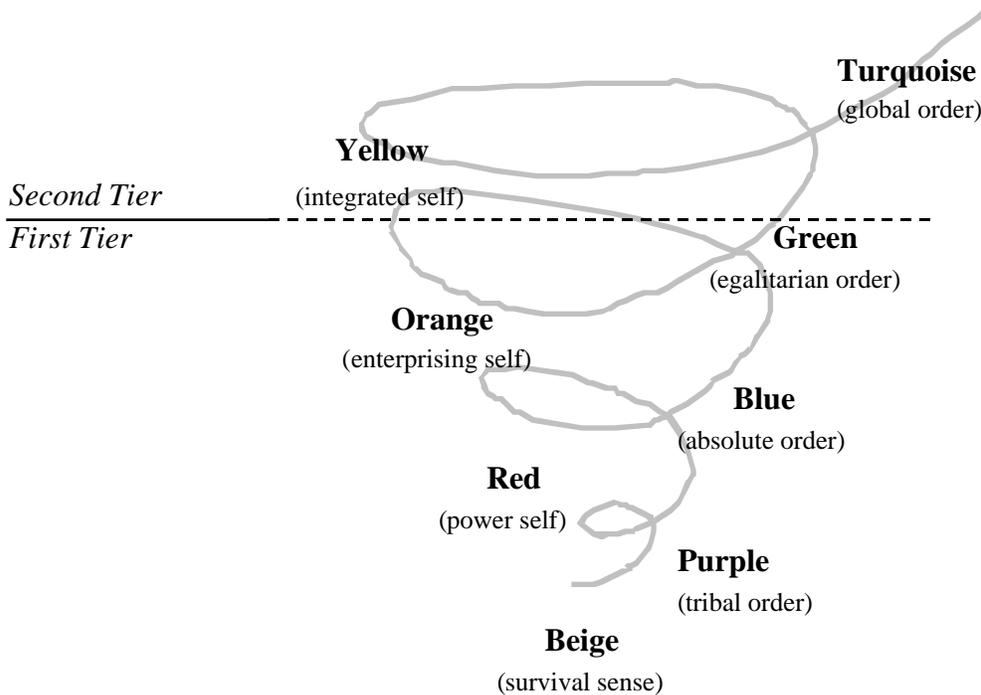
- ∇MEMEs manifest the core intelligences that form systems and impact human behavior.
- ∇MEMEs impact all of life's choices.
- ∇MEMEs express both healthy (for-better) and unhealthy (for-worse) qualities.
- ∇MEMEs are structures of thinking.
- ∇MEMEs can brighten and dim as Life Conditions change.
- ∇MEMEs follow several trajectories:
 - from less complex to more complex.*
 - from surviving in the bush to surfing beyond the internet.*
 - from a small piece of land to the global village and cyberspace.*

∇MEME PRINCIPLES

1. Humans possess the capacity to create new ∇MEMEs.
2. Life Conditions awaken ∇MEMEs that may emerge, surge, regress, or fade in response.

- **Historic Times:** Location along the overall line of human development, the particular culture's stage of emergence, and phases in the individual's life passages.
 - **Geographic Place:** The physical conditions, both natural and man-made ecology, within the perception of the individual or group.
 - **Human Problems:** Priorities, needs, concerns, and requirements for existence facing a particular individual or group, some of which are common to all humans and others unique to a culture, community, or personality.
 - **Social Circumstance:** Individual, group, and cultural placement within hierarchies of power, status, and influence.
3. ^vMEMEs zig-zag between Express-self and Sacrifice-self themes.
 4. ^vMEMEs emerge along the Spiral in a wave-like fashion.
(Entering, Peak, Exiting)
 5. ^vMEMEs spiral up and down through levels of complexity.
 6. ^vMEMEs coexist within our 'onion'-like profiles.
 7. ^vMEMEs cluster in Tiers of Six along the Spiral.

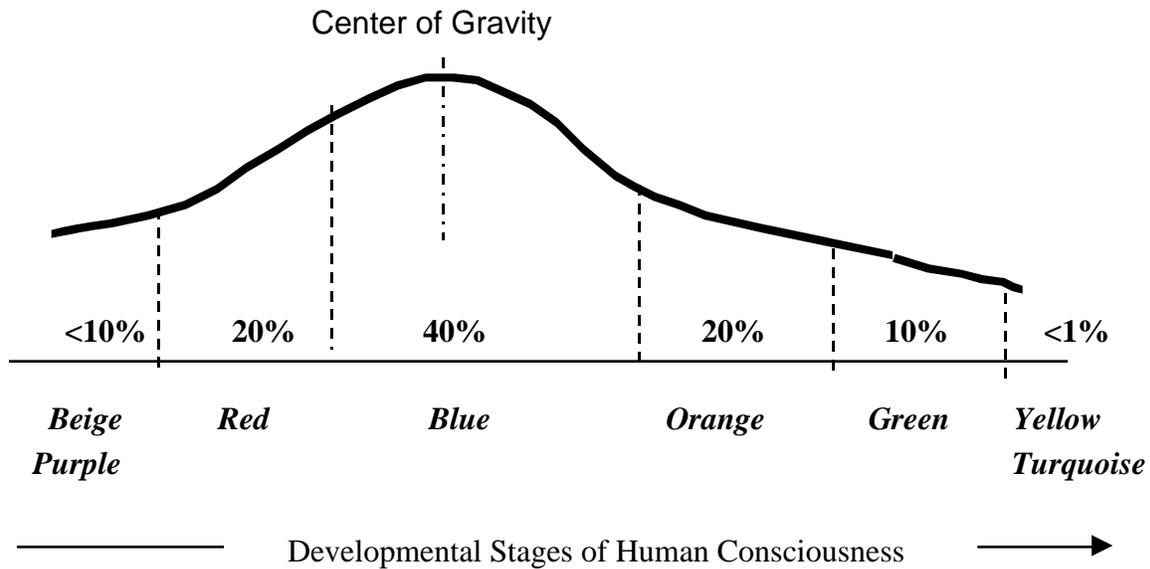
The Emerging ^vMEME "DNA" Spiral



Emerging ^vMEMEs transcend and include previous ^vMEMEs.

^vMEMEs are developmental constructs not moral judgements.

Cross Section of the ^vMEME Profile for the World's Population



Since ^vMEMEs are types of thinking nested *in* us rather than types *of* us, and since we think about many things - religion, family, work, sports, politics, education, health care - it follows that we can also host several ways of thinking which may mix-and-match to the subject areas. Thus, ^vMEME profiles impact the way we filter, interpret, and respond to the entire gestalt of issues.

Like chords on a guitar which are combinations of individual notes, ^vMEME profiles are mixtures. Nobody (individuals, organizations, or societies) lives a pure tone of a single ^vMEME. We are all blends and combinations that swirl around a 'center of gravity' or dominant ^vMEME.

In stable situations, 50% of our energy is relegated to one strongly dominant ^vMEME while the remaining energy is divided among two or three secondary ^vMEMEs.

In times of transition, energy oscillates between an internally controlled Self-Expressing ^vMEME and an externally focused Self-Sacrificing ^vMEME.

Regardless of our dominant ^vMEME, we are all capable of temporary peak experiences into more complex ^vMEMEs or relapses to simpler ones.

Each of us thinks about 'MEME development through the 'MEMEs that are presently active in our own minds and produces the metaphors and perspectives that are consistent with those 'MEMEs.

First Tier 'Subsistence' 'MEMEs

BEIGE 'Survival' Instinctive 'MEME (Self-Expressing)

First emerged approx. 100,000 years ago - to be humans, not just animals

Thinking is automatic; structures are loose bands; the processes are survivalistic.

Basic Theme: Do what you must just to stay alive - *The world is as it is.*

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- Uses instincts and habits just to survive.
- Distinct self is barely awakened or sustained.
- Food, water, warmth, sex, and safety have priority.
- Forms into survival bands to perpetuate life.

Where seen: newborn infants, senile elderly, mentally ill street people, starving masses, bad drug trips.

Life Conditions¹: 'My existence centers on survival. Energy is devoted to staying alive and meeting the needs of my physical being so I am not hungry or thirsty. I must reproduce my kind so I respond to sexual urges as they occur. I do not know what you mean by 'future,' laying plans, saving for a rainy day, or 'self.' My body tells me what to do and I am driven by senses talking to my brain, not so much a conscious mind.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People require subsistence needs to be met in order to remain alive.
- Workers need immediate compensation in the form of basic needs.

PURPLE 'Magical' Safety 'MEME (Self-Sacrificing)

First emerged approx. 50, 000 years ago - tribes, magic, art, spirits

Thinking is animistic; structures are tribal; the processes are circular.

Basic Theme: Keep the spirits happy and the 'tribe's' nest warm and safe.

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- Obey the desires of spirit beings and mystical signs.
- Magical spirits determine events.
- The world is composed of good and evil - rules are black and white.
- Show allegiance to chief, elders, custom and the clan.
- Forms into ethnic (kinship) tribes.
- Preserve sacred objects, places, events, and memories.
- Observe rites of passage, seasonal cycles, and tribal customs.

Where seen: Belief in Voodoo-like curses, blood oaths, ancient grudges, chanting and trance dancing, good luck charms, family rituals, and mystical ethnic beliefs and superstitions. Third-World settings, gangs, athletic teams.

Life Conditions²: 'We seek safety and security for our kind through trust in blood relationships, extended to family bonds, and magical powers which reach into the spirit world. We honor our ancestors' ways as sacred for they are ever with us. Our path is full of seasonal rituals, rites of passage, traditional music and dance. We seek to live in harmony with nature and her ways through our ceremonies.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People are 'married' to their group - nepotism is a way to take care of our own.
- Workers owe their lives and souls to the parent-like organization.
- People follow their leaders willingly to honor their ancestors and the spirits.
- Anyone will sacrifice self without question if the group needs it to survive.
- Change requires the support of accepted 'elders.'
- Change rituals should be emotional and full of symbols.
- This 'MEME' exists deep within each of us and tends to surface in times of uncertainty.
- People are nurtured through observing seasonal rituals, honoring individual's rites of passage (weddings, graduations, funerals) and expressing a sense of enchantment and magic in life's mystery.

RED 'Impulsive' Power 'MEME

(*Self-Expressing*)

First emerged approx. 10,000 years ago - warlords, conquest, discovery

Thinking is egocentric; structures are empires; the process is exploitative.

Basic Theme: Be what you are and do what you want, regardless.

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- The world is a jungle full of threats and predators.
- In a world of haves and have-nots, it's good to be a have.
- Breaks free from any domination or constraint to please self as self desires.
- Avoids shame and defends reputation.
- Stands tall, expects attention, demands respect, and calls the shots.
- Enjoys self to the fullest right now without guilt or remorse.
- Gratify impulses and senses immediately.
- Conquers, out-foxes, and dominates other aggressive characters.

Where seen: The 'terrible twos,' rebellious youth, frontier mentalities, feudal kingdoms, James Bond villains, epic heroes, soldiers of fortune, wild rock stars, TV wrestling.

*Life Conditions*³: 'Life is a jungle. It's survival of the fittest. I'm tough and expect those around me to be tough or else. I take charge of people and can win over nature, bending her to my will. Respect and reputation matter more than life itself, so you do what it takes to avoid being shamed or put down. You don't take anything off anybody, not if you're worth anything. You always get them back. Whatever you need to do, you do without guilt. Nothing and nobody can stand in your way. Right now is all there is, so I'll do what makes me feel good. You can't worry about what hasn't happened yet. I'm all I've got, and I'll make it or die trying.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People need to be dominated by stronger force that gives rewards and keeps their lusts in check.
- Workers will put up with a lot if their basic needs are met regularly.
- The haves are owed their status and perks just because of who they are.
- Have-nots probably deserve their status and have no right to complain.
- Payoffs get results, nobody can be trusted, and everyone has their price.
- People need to hear firm change mandates from the powerful ones in straight, tough talk.
- Workers need to know 'what's in it for them' in order to accept change.
- People are nurtured by preserving the stories of company heroes, or by celebrating the great feats of conquest when the company, figuratively at least, 'slayed the dragon.'

- Provide positive outlets for energy.

BLUE 'Purposeful' Truth 'MEME

(*Self-Sacrificing*)

First emerged approx. 5,000 yrs. ago - literature, monotheism, purpose

Thinking is absolutistic; structures are pyramidal; the processes are authoritarian.

Basic Theme: Life has meaning, direction, and purpose with predetermined outcomes -
*The world is as **Authority** says it is.*

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- Life events determined by an all-powerful external power or order.
- One sacrifices self to the transcendent Cause, Truth, or righteous Pathway.
- The Order enforces a code of conduct based on eternal, absolute principles.
- Relates strongly with group values.
- Mythic Membership - "my country right or wrong."
- Righteous living produces stability now and guarantees future reward.
- Laws, regulations, and discipline build character and moral fiber.
- Rigid social hierarchies.
- Meaning of symbols inseparable from symbol itself.
- In emergencies provides power drives; in chaos provides order.

Where seen: Puritan America, Confucian China, Hassidic Judaism, codes of chivalry and honor, charitable good deeds, the Salvation Army, religious fundamentalism, Boy and Girl scouts, patriotism.

*Life Conditions*⁴: ' A single guiding force controls the world and determines our destiny. Its abiding Truth provides structure and order for all aspects of living here on Earth and rules the heavens, as well. My life has meaning because the fires of redemption burn in my heart. I follow the appointed Pathway which ties me with something much greater than myself [a cause, belief, tradition, organization, or movement]. I stand fast for what is right, proper, and good, always subjecting myself to the directives of proper authority. I willingly sacrifice my desires in the present in the sure knowledge that I look forward to something wonderful in the future.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- It is mankind's lot to work for the glory of the one True Way and keep a job.

- People work the best when they are told how to do things the right way.
- Workers are cogs in a system, fulfilling roles they are destined to.
- Higher authority rules by rightful compliance, not by might or fear.
- Doing duty and being punished when failing to do so gives meaning to life.
- Workers owe the organization loyalty as it provides their well-being.
- In times of change workers need a new system to embrace, a new cause to espouse, and a refreshed purpose.
- Change must be orderly, consistent with principles, sanctioned by those 'in authority' and honouring of the past.
- Attacks on the old order trigger resistance.
- People are reinforced through appeals to traditions, by respecting the past, by honouring length of service and loyalty.
- Various forms of patriotic appeals and charitable sacrifice should accompany observances of national, religious, or secular holidays and commemorative events.

ORANGE 'Achievist' Strive 'MEME

(Self-Expressing)

First emerged approx. 1000 yrs. Ago - mobility, individualism, economics

Thinking is objective and rational; structures are delegative; the processes are strategic.

Basic Theme: Act in your own self-interest by playing the game to win.

*The world is as **We** know it from direct experience.*

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- Strive for autonomy and independence - Individual escapes herd mentality.
- Thinking involves reflecting on and questioning individual (group's) beliefs and values - Seeks truth and meaning in individualistic terms.
- Knowledge is obtained and communicated via objective procedures.
- Change and advancement are inherent within the scheme of things.
- Progress by learning nature's secrets and seeking out best solutions.
- Manipulating Earth's resources to create and spread the abundant good life.
- Achievement is oriented toward materialistic gains.
- Optimistic, risk-taking, and self-reliant people deserve their success.
- Societies prosper through strategy, technology, and competitiveness.
- Laws of science rule politics, economy, and human events as well as natural phenomena.
- In times of transition and change provides achievement drives.

Where seen: The Enlightenment, 'success' ministries, Wall Street, emerging middle classes, colonialism, TV infomercials, the Cold War, fashion and cosmetics industries.

*Life Conditions*⁵: 'I want to achieve, and win, and get somewhere in my life. The world is full of opportunities for those who'll seize the day and take some calculated risks. Nothing is certain, but if you're good, you play the odds and find the best choices among many. You've got to believe in yourself first, then everything else falls into place. You can't get bogged down in structure or rules if they hold back progress. Instead, by practical applications of tried-and-true experience, you can make things better and better for yourself. I'm confident in my own abilities and intend to make a difference in this world. Gather the data, build a strategic plan, then go for excellence.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People are motivated by the achievement of material rewards.
- Competition improves productivity and fosters growth through opposition.
- Tried-and-true is best, though it can always be improved upon.
- Workers want to get ahead and have more influence over others.
- Here-and-now success is evidence of rewards to come in the future.
- People are energized by displays of symbols of progress, success, growth, and accomplishment.
- Individuals or groups who excel should be recognized for their achievements.
- People like a piece-of-the-action but also enjoy getting good things done.

GREEN 'Communitarian' Humanistic 'MEME (Self-Sacrificing)

First emerged approx. 150 yrs. Ago - human rights, liberty, collectivism

Thinking is relativistic; structures are egalitarian; the processes are consensual.

Basic Theme: Seek peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community. *The world is known subjectively.*

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma, and divisiveness.
- Spread the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all.
- Refresh spirituality, bring harmony, and enrich human development.
- Feelings, sensitivity, and caring supersede cold rationality.

- Emphasis on dialogue and relationships.
- Focus on human bonding, ecology, and networking.
- Strongly egalitarian; anti-hierarchical; negates authoritarianism.
- Understands knowledge and truth as matters of context.
- Strives to grasp the depths of reality of other's experience.
- Accepts encounters with traditions other than own.
- Demonstrates vulnerability to another's truth without negating own truth.
- Shows a willingness to engage with others in arriving at new understandings.
- Supports pluralistic values, multiculturalism, relativistic value systems.
- Believes in social construction of reality, and subjective, nonlinear thinking.
- Uses a systems thinking approach to understanding problems.
- Poised for the "quantum leap" to the next level of consciousness.

Where seen: John Lennon's music, Rogerian counseling, liberation theology, Doctors without Borders, Canadian health care, World Council of Churches, GreenPeace, animal rights, deep ecology, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream Company.

*Life Conditions*⁶: 'Life is for experiencing each moment. We can all come to understand who we are and how wondrous it is to be human if we will only accept that everyone is equal and important. All must share in the joy of togetherness and fulfillment. Each spirit is connected to all others in our community; every soul travels together. We are interdependent beings in search of love and involvement. The community grows by synergizing life forces; artificial divisions take away from everyone. There is an abiding order in the universe for those who are open to it. Bad attitudes and negative beliefs dissolve once we look inside each person and uncover the richness within. Peace and love for all.

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People want to get along and feel accepted by their peers.
- Sharing and participating lead to better results than competing.
- Emotions need attention, but hard feelings should be avoided.
- All members of an organization should have their say and be included.
- The organization is responsible for its community's well-being.
- People are inspired by stressing the importance of human beings and the warmth that exudes from a feeling of a caring community.
- Socially responsible activities should become tastefully visible as everyone in the group contributes.

Second Tier 'Being' vMEMEs

The Integral (Worldcentric) Stages of Human Consciousness Development

The focus of second tier thinking is on competence and functionality and qualities of being within the context of flexible and open systems. In second tier thinking, the prevailing worldview is information-rich, and multidimensional, part of a complex interactive system.

One of the primary differences between first and second tier thinking is that each first tier vMEME sees itself as the end point, the most moral of perspectives, the knower of truth, the seer of reality - 'the buck stops here.' Second tier thinking comprehends the transformational importance of each developmental stage, and acknowledges the evolution of human consciousness as an ongoing and expanding process. The emergence of new, more complex vMEMEs is a given.

Second tier thinking realizes that the more congruent a form of being is with the realities of existence, the better it is at meeting the needs of living for those realities. Clare Graves suggests that:

For the overall welfare of total man's existence in this world, over the long run of time, higher levels are better than lower levels and that the prime good of any society's governing figures should be to promote human movement up the levels of human existence.

Second tier thinking leads to the understanding that change must be delivered through the level of existence of a given population, in the psycho-social language they understand, not that preferred by the change agent.

Second tier thinking is the basis of true integral leadership, the primary challenge of which is overcoming GREEN vMEME energy.

YELLOW 'Integrative' Systemic vMEME (Self-Expressing)

First emerged approx. 50 years ago - complexity, chaos, interconnections

Thinking is systemic; structures are interactive; the processes are integrative.

Basic Theme: Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become.

The world is not necessarily as We know it.

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- Life is a kaleidoscope of natural hierarchies, systems, and forms.
- The magnificence of existence is valued over material possessions.
- Find natural mix of conflicting 'truths' and 'uncertainties.'
- Includes the ability to accept paradox and hold contradictions.
- Flexibility, spontaneity, and functionality have the highest priority.
- Discovering personal freedom without harm to others or excesses of self-interest.
- Knowledge and competency should supersede rank, power, status.
- Differences can be integrated into interdependent, natural flows.
- Union of differences and pluralities.

Where seen: Carl Sagan's astronomy, Peter Senge's organizations, W. Edwards Deming's objectives, chaos theory, appropriate technology, eco-industrial parks (using each other's outflows as raw materials), Fred Alan Wolf's 'new physics,' Deepak Chopra's 'Ageless Body.'

Life Conditions⁷: 'Viability must be restored to a disordered world endangered by the cumulative effects of the first six systems on the earth's environment and populations. The purpose of living is to be independent within reason; knowledgeable so much as possible; and caring, so much as realistic. Yet I am my own person, accountable to myself, an island in an archipelago of other people. Continuing to develop along a natural pathway is more highly valued than striving to have or do. I am concerned for the world's conditions because of the impact they have on me as a part of this living system.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- People enjoy doing things that fit who they are naturally.
- Workers need free access to information, tools, and materials.
- Organizations are only transitory states because change happens.
- Learning and understanding motivate people, not payoffs or punishments.
- People have different competencies and capacities, and most are OK.
- People are inspired through conveying a sense of personal freedom with emphasis on getting an important job done without specifying how it must be done.
- Flex-time, alternative working hours, remote working, and job interchange are ways to avoid over-managing.

TURQUOISE 'Holistic' Global 'MEME

(Self-Sacrificing)

First emerged approx. 30 yrs. ago - globalism, eco-consciousness

Thinking is holistic; structures are global; the processes are flowing and ecological.

Basic Theme: Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit.

Characteristic beliefs and actions:

- The world is a single, dynamic organism with its own collective mind.
- Blending and harmonizing a strong collective of individuals.
- Self is both distinct and a blended part of a larger, compassionate whole.
- Focus on the good of all living entities as integrated systems.
- Maintains an ecological awareness of the oneness of life.
- Energy and information permeate the Earth's total environment.
- Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions are to be expected.
- Global (and whole-Spiral) networking seen as routine.
- Acts for minimalist living so less actually is more.
- Sees the evolution of Spirit as one ongoing conscious system.

Where seen: McLuhan's 'global village,' Gandhi's ideas of pluralistic harmony, Ken Wilber's 'Spectrum of Consciousness,' James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's 'noosphere.'

Leadership Assumptions and Implications:

- Spiritual bonds pull people and organizations together.
- Work must be meaningful to the overall health of all life.
- The universe is a single entity of elegantly balanced, interlocking forces.
- Experiencing feelings and information together enhances both.

Integral Approach to Leadership

Yellow and Turquoise 'MEMEs provide the perspective required for integral leadership. They provide us with the right questions about people, motivation, communication, and learning:

- What is the nature of the people we are managing/serving?

- What makes their *Life Conditions* unique?
- What system(s) of managing, training, or motivating will be most congruent with them and the work to be done at this time?

Ken Wilber maintains that the "integral approach needs to be implemented with the utmost care, concern, and compassion." He contends that none of the stages of development "are meant in any sort of rigid, predetermined, judgmental fashion. The point of developmental research is not to pigeonhole people or judge them inferior or superior, but to act as *guidelines for possible potentials that are not being utilized*. The prime directive asks us to honor and appreciate the necessary, vital, and unique contribution provided by each and every wave of consciousness unfolding, and thus act *to protect and promote the health of the entire spiral* [of consciousness development], and not any one privileged domain."

Or as Clare Graves was fond of saying:

Damn it all, a person has a right to be. A person has a right to be what he is. He shouldn't have to change to get your work done. Be flexible enough to manage him in the way HE needs to be managed for him to perform the work, not you.

Integral Leaders

- Recognize the significance of all stages of development in the evolution of human consciousness.
- Acknowledge that development is not a moral judgement but about the process that all individuals, organizations, and cultures go through.
- Realize the need to understand the nature of human consciousness development in order to understand the nature of change.
- Understand that all developmental stages of consciousness from Literal through Integral are necessary for individual and organizational transformation.
- Facilitate the health and growth of the entire range of development without unduly privileging any particular stage.
- Refrain from forcing one stage of development on everybody.
- Use the topography of human consciousness as a guide for developing potentials that are not being realized.
- Invite people to grow and develop their full potentials to the best of their abilities.
- Emphasize unity as much as diversity.

- Foster a balance between technical growth and growth in thoughtful, careful, and compassionate use of technology.