

A Leadership Opportunity

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Holonics, A Different Perspective on the Relationship Between Spiral Dynamics and the Integral, Draft 1.0

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I offer the following with a huge mantle of humility. I do not know if these ideas are useful or whether I simply have not studied hard enough. For me, the questions are worth asking and exploring. They will, no doubt, lead to more study and more questions. I hope that by sharing these thoughts you will find the ideas interesting, too.

Ken Wilber's work continues to inspire my thinking and my work as an executive coach. I have a big interest in the idea of leadership and I have spent several years trying to see how holons, holarchies, streams, etc. can help us to understand leadership, particularly leadership in business, more effectively. I have used a number of media to further this work, including an ebook, a web site, an e-journal, moderating an online group, several articles and presentations.

Recently I had the wonderful opportunity to spend a few hours with Dr. Don Beck and his introduction to Spiral Dynamics. There he shared with us the 4Q/8L integration of Spiral Dynamics and the holon. I was struck by the fact that the levels in UR were not differentiated by stages, while in each of the other quadrants they were. No doubt there is a good reason for this. One might be that UR is described as

“Visible Biological Features” including organic states, genes, chemistry, nutrition, and health.

The quadrants are labeled:

UL: “I” – self and consciousness

UR: “It” – brain and organism

LL: “We” – culture and worldview

LR: “Its” – social system and environment

There is, no doubt, a perfectly reasonable explanation for this construction of the relationship between Spiral Dynamics and Integral. Yet, it gnawed at me because it seemed to be so different from the way I have been thinking about the holon and holarchy as applied to leadership.

Integral Leadership

There are numerous documents available at www.leadcoach.com that articulate the approach to integral leadership that I have been evolving. Suffice it to say here that one of the key factors that differentiate this approach from more traditional models of business leadership is that it recognizes the requirement for integrity of individual and collective aspects of leadership in business. This is represented by a holarchy that is in no sense all level, but is all quadrant. Rather, the holarchy maps four levels of leadership in business and correlates individual and collective aspects. The result is a holarchic map (Figure 1).

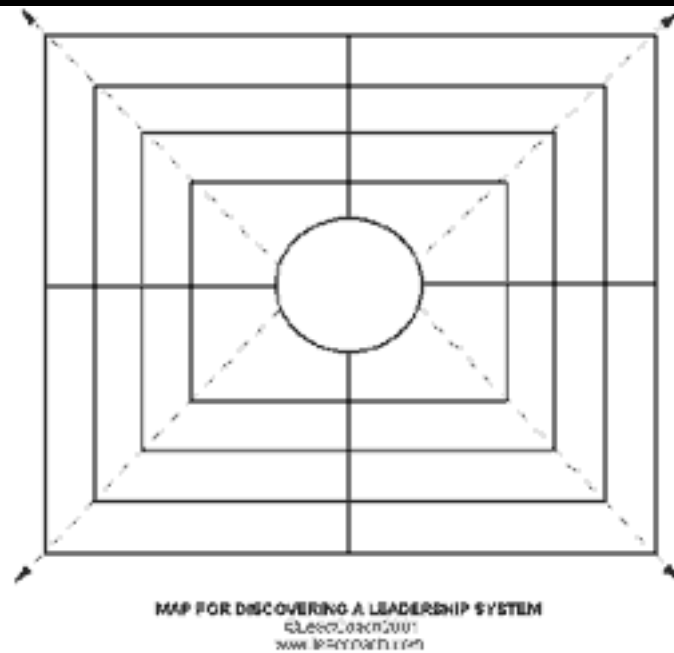


Figure 1: Holarchic Map

This map represents business objectives (circle), four levels of business leadership divided into four quadrants each (rectangles) and arrows which were placed to suggest a developmental holarchy. Again, for those who are interested in the detail, refer to the url above.

There is one other element of the leadership model that is not represented on this map. And it is that element that begins my wonderment about the holon. There are boundaries in the holon. Each quadrant has boundaries that separate it from each other quadrant. Ken Wilber's **No Boundary** is a fascinating exploration to the implications of boundaries for us psychologically and spiritually. At the risk of oversimplification I am going to extract two ideas from that work that I will apply here.

First is the implication of having boundaries:

“...unity consciousness or supreme identity, is the nature and condition of all sentient beings; but that we progressively limit our world and turn from our true nature in order to embrace boundaries.” [p. 4]

It isn't that boundaries are inherently good or bad or even that they are unnecessary. Rather, by drawing boundaries we change the way we make meaning.

Second is a consequence of drawing boundaries:

“But a *boundary line*, as any military expert will tell you, is also a potential battle line, for a boundary line marks off the territory of two opposed and potentially warring camps.” [p. 10]

Whether the boundary be between aspects of self or distinctions that separate self from other, the potential for conflict is introduced. Wilber goes on to argue for development that can transcend and include these boundaries. I am not going that far – yet – because my work is still focused on accessibility to business leaders and there are some important opportunities to be explored before going there – I think.

When I look at a holon I see boundaries: distinctions between variables. And this raises a question for me: What mediates the relationships among the quadrants?

Holonics: Working the Relationships

I don't know if holonics is a new term or not. I use it to draw attention to the fact that the quadrants in the holon are in dynamic relationship with each other. Holonics is about the nature of these dynamic relationships.

In the 4Q/8L model, tucked subtly into the heart of the diagram is a small spiral. It is located where the circle is in Figure 1, only smaller, finer lined. Why is it there? I would guess that it suggests that developmental processes are a result of spiraling through the four quadrants. Perhaps there is an alternative explanation. Nevertheless, this small innocent graphic represents the question of holonics to me. How can we begin to understand – both developmentally and anomicly – the relationships among the quadrants? How can we begin to understand the movement in streams in the relationships among the quadrants?

In presenting the leadership holarchy I suggest there are four dynamics that are about these relationships. They are:

- €UL-UR: self-management
- €UL-LL: alignment
- €UR-LR: engagement
- €LL-LR: system evolution

A way to think about this is that the relationship between internal individual and external individual is self-management. This works when UR is thought of as behavior, rather than biological features. If UR is only about biological features, then self and consciousness would be expressed only through biology and not behavior. That makes it very difficult to use the holon/holarchy to address human behavior, for example in understanding and developing business leadership.

So I am departing from Wilber/Beck for the moment, at least until I learn why I should not. It seems to me that the use of the integral perspective without addressing human behavior is a wasteland of its own sort. It is all structure and no function.

Also, the notion of spiral development among the quadrants is difficult for me to imagine. I don't see a pattern that resonates with experience. I am more attracted to the application of the spiral idea in the form of the DNA model (double helix) as applied by Charles Hampden-Turner in **Radical Man**. His model of psycho-social development is so powerful and rich with insight that I do not understand why it does not continue to have currency in so much of our thinking and dialogue about development.

I have not yet been able to find the same quality of insight from the Wilber/Beck application of the spiral in 4Q/8L. Therefore, in the meanwhile, I suggest a holonic alternative: working the boundaries.

Self-Management

There is nothing new here – and yet this is what we all seem to be focused on, integral or otherwise. It is about development, learning, transcendence, being. And it is about what Argyris and Schoen talked about decades ago as

“espoused theory” and “theory in use.” And it is key to integral, because it is about integrity.

Integrity here is about the relationship between espoused theory and theory in use. It is about the correspondence between what is operative in UL, conscious or unconscious, and UR, what is manifest. Every New Year’s resolution, every struggle with change engages what Kegan and Lahey [**How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way we Work**] have pointed out as competing commitments based on Big Assumptions. Pick your developmental methodology, psychological or spiritual and it involves this relationship between UR and UL.

Self-management seems like a pretty straightforward non-jargonistic way of talking about this development with business leaders. Maybe it cuts through a lot of fuzz for others, as well.

Alignment

A presumption is that we are always out of alignment with our human environment. Or, perhaps, it is that the greater the level of detail, the greater the nonalignment. What matters is that developmentally we are engaged in processes in our relationships that bring about varying degrees of alignment of values, beliefs, assumptions, memes and vmemes, mental models, etc.

In the relationship between the individual and the collective challenges to alignment continually arise as context changes, as learning takes place, as interpretations vary. How that is dealt with is the issue of alignment (and nonalignment). Just as in how we self-manage may be viewed developmentally, so can how we address alignment.

Engagement

Development and relationships aren’t just about what we believe and value, what we share and do not share. They are also about action. They are about what we do individually and how that engages with others collectively. This is about

everything from coordination and cooperation to creating synergies.

Learning how to engage more effectively the activities of the individual and the collective is a core business issue. I would also suggest that is a core life on this planet issue that we haven't learned much about yet: engagement that is developmental and supports life on this planet.

System Evolution

To the degree that self-management, alignment and engagement are being addressed, system evolution is impacted. System evolution is the “system-management” of culture and systems. It is the development of the relationships between what we collectively hold to be dear and the actions we take together. It is also the arena in which our differences get played out.

In our darkest moments we are little more than hypocrites. For example, some decry the separation of church and state in seeking public money and support for religious institutions in their society and sneer at other cultures with governments dominated by religious satraps. In a more developmental vein we may hold values about supporting human life and find ways to assure that poverty is reduced or that impoverished individuals have access to opportunities for learning and economic development.

Rethinking 4Q/8L

If, indeed, these boundaries can be usefully thought of as our developmental paths through self-management, alignment, engagement and system evolution, then why not apply spiral dynamics to them. The result would be a map that might look like Figure 2.



Figure 2: 4Q/8L Heresy

What if the developmental levels of Spiral Dynamics were applied to the boundary spanning processes of the holarchy? What might that look like and what would it mean. Well, there is a whole lot of thinking that I need to do about this to develop it further, but I offer it as an idea and will try one example of what it might look like.

Drawing on Beck and Cowan [**Spiral Dynamics**] we can consider the descriptors of the levels and how they might apply, say, to self-management. They are:

8. Whole View: synergize and macromanage
7. Flex Flow: integrate and align systems
6. Human Bond: explore inner self, equalize others
5. Strive Drive: analyze and strategize to prosper
4. Truth Force: find purpose, bring order, insure future
3. Power Gods: express impulsively, break free, be strong
2. Kin Spirits: seek harmony and safety in a mysterious world
1. Survival Sense: sharpen instincts and innate senses

I am struck by how a lot of this language shows up in business. When your job or the company is under the gun, sharpen your instincts and kill the enemy. When that fails, try and find safety under the wing of a mentor. If all is truly

lost, break free, be strong, jump ship. To develop your future or the future of your company it is critical to be on purpose and take an orderly approach to building your business. Use analysis and strategic planning/management to best the competition. Don't forget that people are important, too. They feed the systems that need to be integrated and aligned so that we can create synergies and thrive.

So what about self-management? Here is a quick take. In reverse order:

1. Trust your gut; go with what feels right.
2. Get religion, follow God's word.
3. Be yourself, have fortitude and courage. Be selfish.
4. Define your purpose, your vision, your core values and focus your work on those.
5. Think about it. Get real. Develop your strategic intention.
6. Get in touch with your feelings, your heart; serve others.
7. Recognize that you are part of one universe and all that is within it.
8. Transcend and include.

Obviously, this needs more thought, but it suggests the idea that the levels of the spiral apply to self-management and the other boundary-spanning dynamics of the relationships among quadrants in the holon.

End Piece

It isn't a conclusion. There is much still to do. There may be no end to this, but I will have mercy on the reader and suggest that there are several ideas that I need to explore in here. I sense that I am being somewhat heretical in the world of the integral. However, there is something that feels will be useful here. I just need to give it more thought, more study and decide what is really important. I hope I have the courage and integrity to admit when I am confused. It would be great to find an integrating path to bring it all together.

What do you think?

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Even everyday people succeed
with **everyday**
wealth

