

Six Exercises for a Dialectics Practicum

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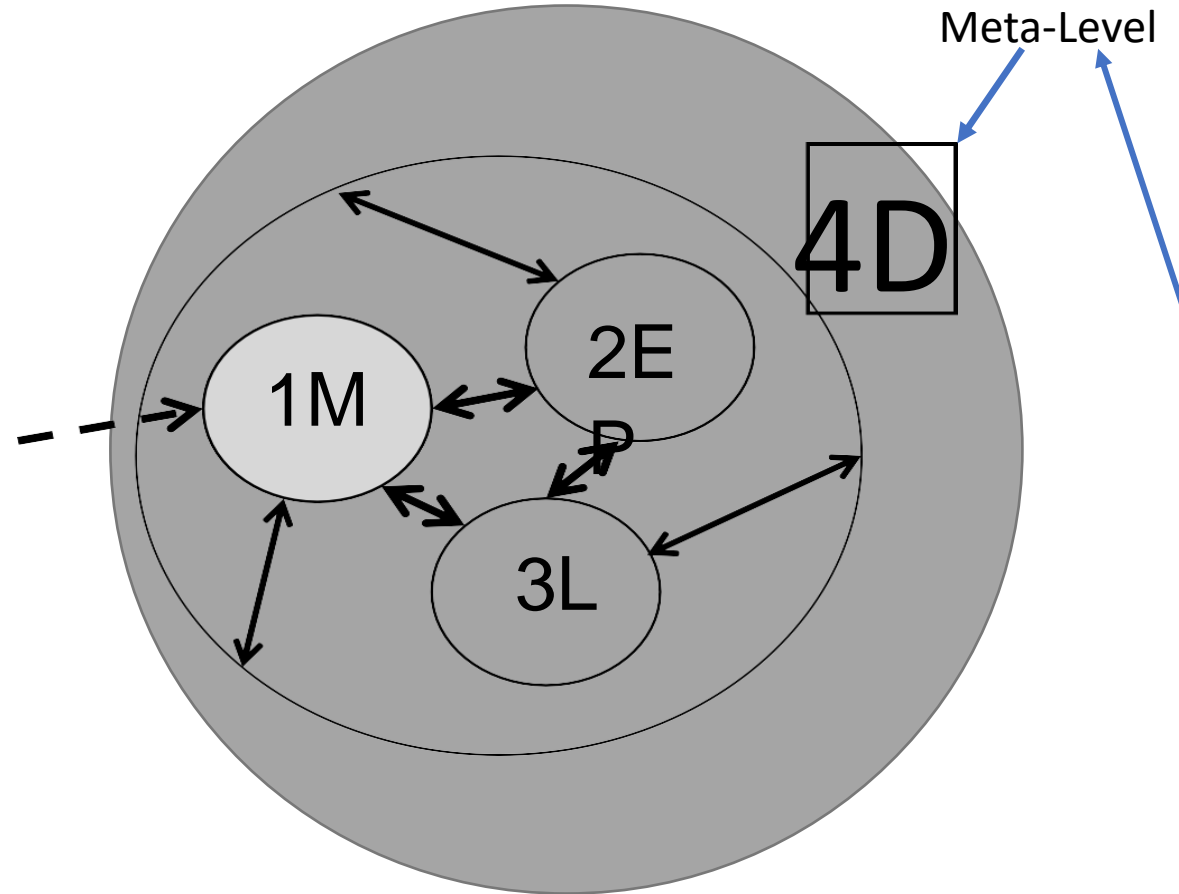
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Interdevelopmental Institute (IDM)

Moments of Dialectic Entertain Relationships Within and Between Themselves

All Three Levels of Reality are pervaded by Four interrelated Moments of Dialectic:

- Generative Mechanisms
- Actuality
- Empirical Experience



There is no 'priority ranking' among the Moments, only a precedence relation: $1M > 2E > 3L > 4D$. In Bhaskarian dialectic, the Moments are not seen as explicitly interrelated, only as implicit in each other.

Foci of Attention in Description, Analysis, Interviewing, Coaching, and Facilitation

Focus of attention in 1M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Mechanisms and tendencies that fuel emergence of new realities (2) Stratification of potentially incommensurate layers (3) High degrees of differentiation within and between layers (4) Error: simplification by way of <i>de-stratification</i>
Focus of attention in 2E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) What is no longer there (presence of the past) (2) What is not yet there (emerging trends, unforeseen developments) (3) What is in conflict and could feed reversal; interpenetration of opposites (4) Error: reduction of complexity by way of <i>positivization</i> (suppressing absences such as ills, pains, conflicts, clashes, incongruences)
Focus of attention in 3L	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Emergence from the void (2) Non-linear (holistic) causality (3) Internal relatedness and intra-activity, illicit fission and fusion (4) Error: simplification on account of <i>de-totalization</i> (reduction to single elements)
Focus of attention in 4D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Lack of inherent conjunction of events (despite 'laws' claiming their existence) (2) Unceasing reshaping of formed existences and experiences (3) Causal power of intentional causality [including its absence] (as part of human agency) (4) Error: Fixation of actualities on account of <i>de-agentification</i>

Preparing Exercise 1

To describe a social situation ‘ontologically’, in terms of MELD, we need to understand “how the world shows up” under each of the Moments considered perspectives on social reality.

To orient ourselves within social reality, we can adopt Bhaskar’s notion of “four-planar social being” which distinguished four planes (levels) of social reality.

Each of these levels has a privileged relationship to one of the Four Moments.

Plane 1: material relations with nature and society [4D]

Plane 2: interpersonal relationships [3L]

Plane 3: enduring social structures [1M]

Plane 4: Person (Self) [2E]

The Four Moments as Criteria of Comprehensiveness of ‘Thinking’ in Social Science

Moments of Dialectic	Planes or Levels of Social Reality
First Moment (1M)	Plane 3: Enduring Social Structures (e.g., organizational Position/Practice Systems)
Second Edge (2E)	Plane 4: Person/Self
Third Level (3L)	Plane 2: Interpersonal Relationships
Fourth Dimension (4D)	Plane 1: Material Relationships with Nature and Society

Plane 1: material relations with nature and society [4D]

Plane 2: interpersonal relationships [3L]

Plane 3: enduring social structures [1M]

Plane 4: Person (Self) [2E]

One way to learn to think in terms of the four Moments of Dialectic is to inquire into the specific plane of Social Being that each of them has a *privileged relationship* with.

Every dimension of Social Being intrinsically links to all Four Moments so that starting with one of them will naturally lead to the others.

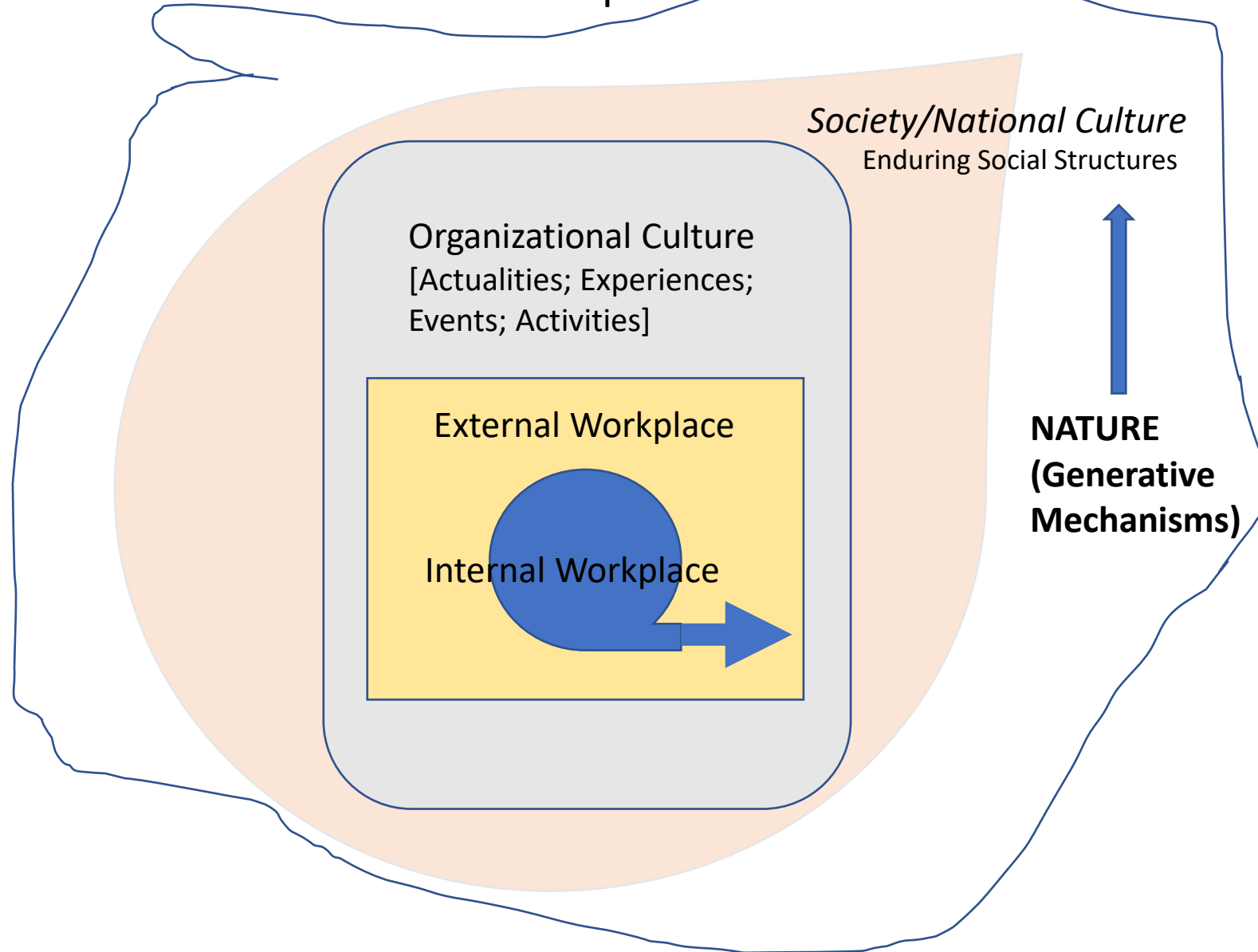
Work is the Fulcrum of Human Agency

[and of the external and internal workplace]

- At its core, ‘human agency’ manifests as ‘work’.
- **Work activities are based on the interrelationship of all planes of social being.**
- Work is developmentally determined by various strata of mind, as well as situated ecologically in specific ways.
- Work delivery cannot be understood separate from individuals’ *conception* of their work *role* as associated with work *practices* (which together form an enduring social structure).
- Conception of role/practices is subject to an *epistemic as well as adult-developmental dialectic* both per individual or team, which determines quality of collaboration.
- **Adult development is the glue linking the four planes of social being**, which thus is differentiated in manifold ways social-emotionally, cognitively, psychologically, and spiritually.
- Levels of development of a worker show up in his or her conception of work role and associated practices, **decodable from epistemic findings in his/her internal workplace.**

Work Takes Place in Two Workplaces: External and Internal

The way Work is conceived of and executed is a function of a person's way of managing his/her internal workplace.



Plane 1: material relations with nature and society [4D]

Plane 2: interpersonal relationships [3L]

Plane 3: enduring social structures [1M]

Plane 4: Person (Self) [2E]

How the Real (Physical and Social) World Shows Up Under Each of the Four Moments

Under 1M, the world is seen as built from highly differentiated layers (dimensions) that are non-identical with and irreducible to each other; it is a world of 'alterity' (sheer otherness) requiring a distinction between the human, 'transitive', and the natural/social, 'intransitive', domains. The dialectics of 1M are those between stratification and ground (the many and the one), of inversion (of one stratum into another) and virtualization (removing of strata into absence where they remain unrealized).

Under 2E, the world is seen as pervaded by absences (by what is not yet actualized or de-actualized), requiring for its understanding the categories of negativity (x intrinsically linked to its other, y), contradiction, and critique. 2E thematizes the presence of the past and existentially constitutive (geo-historic) processes [thus deep embeddedness in process]. The dialectics of 2E are those of process, transition, frontier (area near or beyond a boundary) and node (basic unit linked into a network), but also of opposition including reversal.

Under 3L, the world is seen as a totality as itself a *structure* that gives rise to holistic causality (irreducible to single factors as attempted through 'experiments'), thus an organism defined by internal relationality and intra-activity of components. As a result, reality actualizes itself in the form of emergence based on splitting (fission) and fusion, a movement reaching from center to periphery, both physically and mentally. In the social domain, it appears as reflexivity, generative separation and de-alienation, striving for creating a unity-in-diversity (based on reasons and conceptions), as well as critique of the reduction of totality to single factors and causes that disregards intrinsic relationships.

- **Under 4D**, the world is seen as both giving rise to human action empowered by reason and desire (mind) and as being (potentially) complicit with human agency directed to 'absenting' social ills and insufficiencies, in affinity with 2E. This plays out on four [intrinsically related] planes of social being [1M: enduring social structures; 2E: Person, 3L: interpersonal relationships; 4D: interactions with nature]. Social being itself is seen as based on mind as it emerges from matter over the adult lifespan (embedded in cultures), oriented to an open future, determined by ideological and material struggles in society viewed as embedded in and impacting on nature. Society as part of nature.

Four Managers' Internal Workplace: Each Manager Follows a Single Moment to Describe an Organizational Merger

We cannot equate the truth of a description with the structure of epistemic sense making.

In contrast to a 'thought form analysis' in the sense of DTF (where we would ask "what TFs did each manager use?"), in the examples that follow we ask: "to what degree can this manager think in terms of the single Moment of Dialectic s(he) has chosen as a privileged perspective on social reality?" By so doing, we put 'reality' before 'thought' rather than reducing reality to thought. Doing so will enable us in the future to critically examine with what degree of adequacy social reality is made sense of, i.e., the adequacy of the sense making by itself rather than simply its epistemic thought form structure. We thereby do justice to the real-world referent to which the sense making refers.

First Moment (1M): Manager 1 [privileged focus: enduring social structures]

We used to make quite a good profit by selling our product line, but when the pandemic [4D: interaction with nature ...] came along, we felt compelled to consider buying, and merging with, a service company aligned with our products called Acme. Our first thought went to structural concerns, how we would manage to unite two very different role/practice systems we now were settled with. Each of them, one aligned with services, the other with production, had a very different teamwork structure in that the first (Acme) had nothing to do with actual product invention and improvement, while the second was absolutely focused on it. According, role and performance expectations were completely different in the two role/practice systems the former companies comprised and so were what was expected from managers operating in the two different role systems. Managerial issues primarily showed up in how activity streams now had to be managed differently since we had not yet developed mind sets which combined products and services, not to speak mindsets for building products around services and vice versa. As a result, our work levels, both in production and service development, became much more differentiated than they had been previously, in addition to requiring very different forms of alignment. We found out the hard way that even functions that remained outwardly identical had internally different hooks that linked them together so that we had to refine our notion of them in the merger environment in which we were working. And while we had previously done well assuming a somewhat top-down approach to production, when we integrated Acme services, we had to move toward a much more horizontal, agile orientation and reconstruct our teams from top to bottom so that many of the social structures in place simply fell away.

Second Edge (2E): Manager 2 [privileged focus: Person]

We used to make quite a good profit by selling our product line, but when the pandemic came along, we felt compelled to consider buying and merging with a service company aligned with our products called Acme. Our activities were now overshadowed by our past, our ingrained habits and tested solutions which we now needed to view highly critically. Since production by itself tends to follow validated, largely top-down, directives, customer orientation issues -- so essential to services -- had us rethink not only our products but our team structures, and the interpersonal relationships that went with them. In the broader field of customer and supply chain relationships, we found many contradictions that had to be located and critiqued in team dialogues as well as at the executive level, and so the dialogical structure of both production and services got considerably strengthened. We were forced to have a much closer look at our contributors as persons than we had become used to. Specifically, we began focusing on the process of teaming, how a network of agile teams required more highly complex role definitions beyond simple notions of team leader vs. team member. This complication of team formation also led us to becoming increasingly aware of the causal power of team members' personal potential, moving our understanding of human resources from a focus on competences to the broader view of human potential that we called 'capability'. This, in turn, led us to seeing that our contributors were really doing two jobs at once, *job 1* as what the work directly and logistically required of them, and *job 2* as what the work required of them as individuals on a developmental journey, and as naturally emerging toward higher levels of personal meaning making and sense making. In short, we had to throw out the (neo-) tayloristic reduction of persons to "human resources".

Third Level (3L): Manager 3 [privileged focus: interpersonal relationships]

We used to make quite a good profit by selling our product line, but when the pandemic came along, we felt compelled to consider buying and merging with a service company aligned with our products called Acme. As a result, we began to see our operations in a different light, namely as a totality, almost an organism whose structure was defined by how work levels and functions within them interrelated and interacted. It struck us that the company as a whole was less something given (as we had previously viewed it), but rather something that was emerging into an open future on account of how well we were able to understand how production and service functions were literally undefinable one without the other. This entailed, on the one hand, that we needed to analytically *separate* what previously we had seen as a unit (as for instance product development and production proper), while on the other hand we needed to *fuse* functions we had always separated (such as production and sales). On the customer side, we realized we would have to understand and manage the new perceptions which customers would develop of our company now offering both products and services. Inside the company we felt we needed to update our notion of interpersonal relationships, especially by more clearly distinguishing work levels (levels of work complexity), from continuous improvement to value stream management to business modeling. It seemed to us that our previous top-down structure had blinded us to how work streams intersected with each other, and this had diminished our sense of the embedding of one in the other. We also became more sensitive to adult-developmental issues having to do with developing our workforce in a more deliberate manner, relying less on trainings than on working to improve the quality of dialogue in and between teams to strengthen interpersonal relationships. In short, we became much more aware of different types of interpersonal relationships as something that differed as a function of work level differences (that we referred to as differences in 'dialogue spaces').

Fourth Dimension (4D): Manager 4 [privileged focus: interaction with nature]

We used to make quite a good profit by selling our product line, but when the pandemic came along, we felt compelled to consider buying and merging with a service company aligned with our products called Acme. Given that our product line (respirators) now became one of central social necessity, we not only had to modify and increase production but had to view ourselves as operating at a different place in the economy. More specifically, it was no longer enough to pay attention to the internal social structures in place in our company (e.g., the position/practice system we had adopted). We had to pay more attention to our contributors as persons that were *physically at risk* as well as interacting with each other in an increasingly de-socialized, virtual way, and this changed our notion of how we operated as a company and showed us heretofore never noticed limitations of our business model. In a way, we became part of the ideological and material struggles of society caused by the pandemic which heretofore we thought to be aloof from. We now had to put in place a new role system optimally adapted to our new crew and rethink the day-to-day as well as long-term practices and profit structures associated with it. For one thing, the nature of 'work' which already had been dramatically changing before the pandemic now needed our primary attention. Parameters such as the physical health of our contributors as well as consumption defined by customer groups' health status became crucial parts of our business model since we were no longer immune from the natural disaster that had struck our society. In short, the way we viewed our position in the market of health products, and how we conceived of work delivery in-house and customer demand outside of us changed fundamentally.

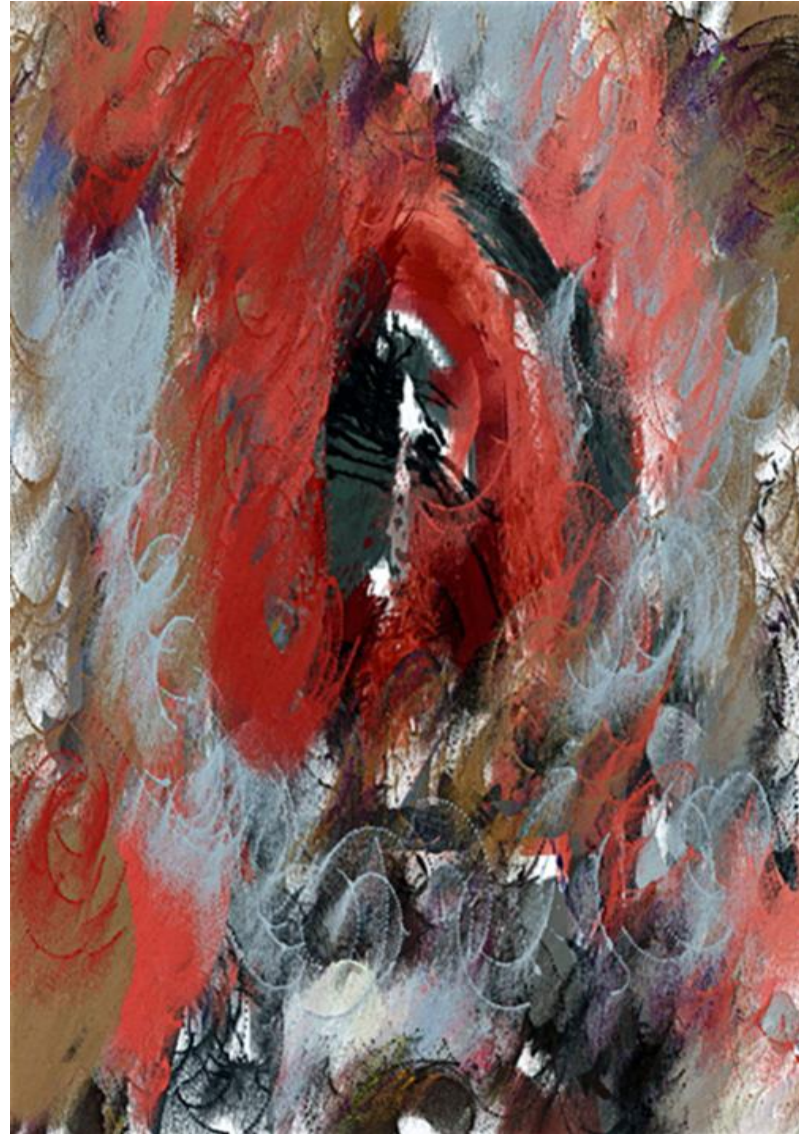
Dialectics Exercise 1: Verbal Description Instantiating Each Moment

- Remember or reconstruct a social or political situation that exemplifies **one** of the Moments of Dialectic.
- Keep in mind the central error that occurs when neglecting a specific Moment's characteristics (de-stratification, positivity, de-totalization, de-agentification).
- Point out what other Moments of Dialectic might be implied in your description (1M, 2E, 3L, 4D) and explain in what way that is the case.
- Reflect on how to change your description to include an additional Moment to correct the central error or initial incompleteness of your description.
- How many of the four Moments do you need to engage to arrive at a (truthful) description of the situation?

CONSULT THE IMAGES FOLLOWING THIS SLIDE TO GET AN IMPRESSION OF EACH MOMENT

- (1) Mechanisms and tendencies that fuel emergence of new realities
- (2) Stratification of potentially incommensurate layers; alterity, non-identity
- (3) High degrees of differentiation within and between layers
- (4) **Error:** Simplification by way of *de-stratification*

1M



- (1) What is no longer there
(presence of the past)
- (2) What is not yet there
(emerging trends,
unforeseen develop-
ments, absences)
- (3) What is in conflict and
could feed reversal;
interpenetration of
opposites
- (4) **Error:** reduction of
complexity by way of
positivization
(suppressing absences
such as ills, pains,
conflicts, clashes,
incongruences)

2E

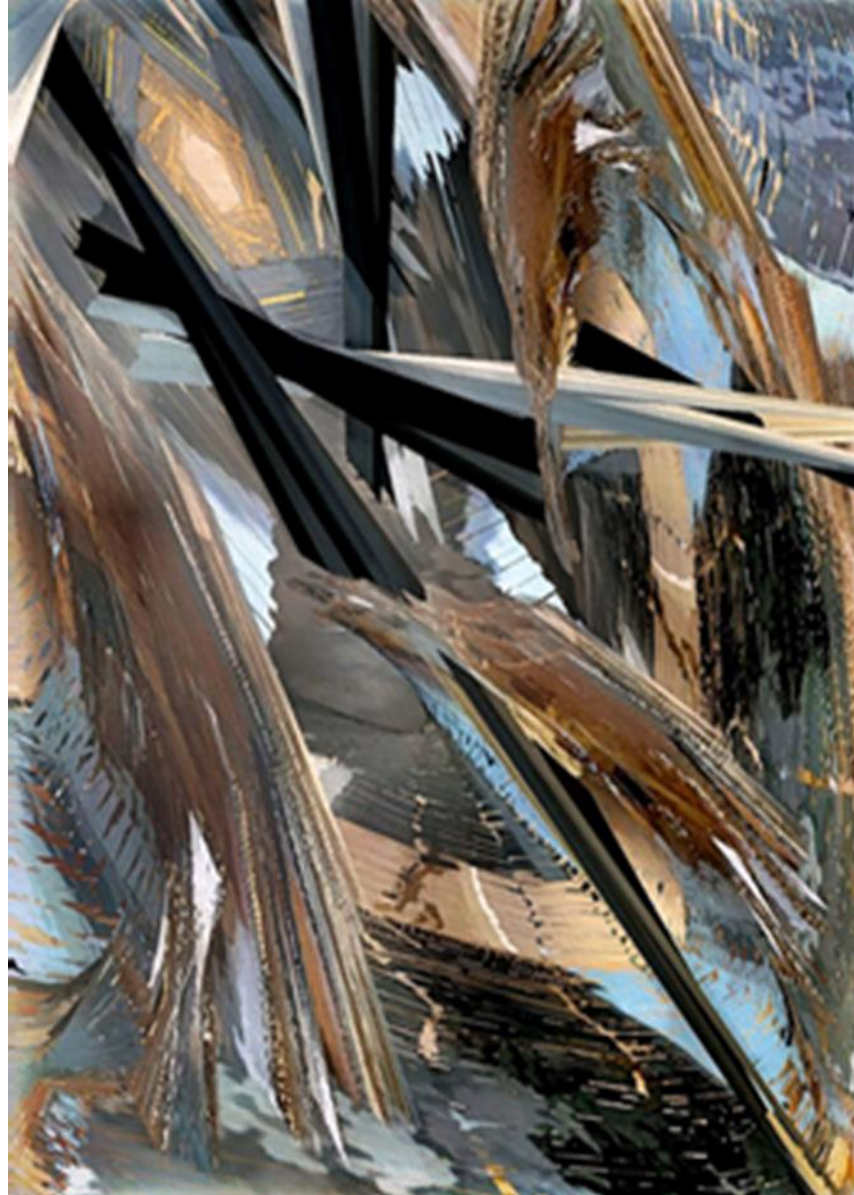


Axioms of 2L

- (1) Emergence from the void
- (2) Non-linear (holistic) causality
- (3) Internal relatedness and intra-activity, illicit fission and fusion
- (4) **Error:** simplification on account of *de-totalization* (reduction to single elements)

Axioms of 3L

3L



- (1) Lack of inherent conjunction of events (despite 'laws' claiming their existence)
- (2) Unceasing reshaping of formed existences and experiences
- (3) Causal power of intentional causality [including its absence] (as part of human agency)
- (4) **Error:** Fixation of actualities on account of *de-agentification*

Axioms of 4D

4D



Dialectics Exercise 2: Compose a Descriptive Text or Construct an Argument

Write 150 words describing a particular issue you are currently facing (either work or life related):

- Share your description with the cohort, stating in a text what Moments of Dialectic are implied by your description (ask for feedback from the cohort).
- Referring to the characteristics of the Moments, reflect on what Moment (or what configuration of Moments) might be centrally involved in your description.
- Reflect upon how your thinking about the problem changes when referring to different Moments of Dialectic (and the contribution each Moment makes to the fullness and accuracy of your description).

Dialectics Exercise 3: Explanatory Critique

- In explanatory critique (in the sense of dialectics), we not only analyze (A) what is the problem or dilemma, but also (B) what led to it in the first place and made it inescapable, as well as (C) what can be done to correct the epistemic stance that nurtured the problem for the practice in question in the future.
- *The senior management of your office fought a long, difficult battle to receive funding for an ambitious multi-million-dollar project. Several months into the project, you, as the project manager, have come to believe that the project is not feasible and should be terminated. The engineers working on the project are growing increasingly frustrated at having missed every single project milestone so far, and a group of them recently asked for a meeting in which they described what they considered to be insurmountable obstacles to project completion. You have reported these problems, yet your supervisor is saying, "We fought hard to get this opportunity—make it work." Your office receives a request from the funder for a status report on the project, and you are responsible for preparing the report.*
- A: What configuration of Moments of Dialectic is involved here?
- B: What are the antecedents of the problem (or ethical dilemma), i.e., the causal powers (generative mechanisms) that fostered the problem and the social structures grounding the actions taken or not taken by participants?
- More specifically: what type of organizational culture is likely to give rise to the problem, and what does a culture look like in which problems like the above either can be noticed early on or do not occur, and if noticed, how should they be handled and by whom (the project manager, the engineers, the supervisor, the funder?). Also, in terms of human agency, what are likely developmental factors (causal developmental structures) that nurture a problem like the one selected?
- C: What overall dialectics lessons can be drawn from the problem to avoid its re-occurrence?

Dialectics as the Core of Explanatory Critique, itself the Core of Emancipatory Social Science

- As social scientists, we have to understand ‘social being’ before ‘social knowledge.’
- We would be missing the boat if, upon entering social science, we failed to distinguish dialectical thinking (with or without DTF thought forms) from the dialectics of the social world which to understand we are employing dialectical thinking.
- **We therefore say that there are two dialectics: an ontological and an epistemic one, and that the former sets limits to, and “overreaches”, the latter.**
- Our agency as human agents is based on *reasons* that are shaped by social-emotional, cognitive, and psychological development over the life span.
- For us to deliver an explanatory critique of society (and thus ‘do’ social science), we first need to give an explanatory critique of how our reasons for acting upon the social and natural worlds are *developing* over the human lifespan.
- In short: the explanatory critique of adult development underlies the explanatory critique of human agency upon society, which makes the developmental sciences a core discipline of the social sciences.

The Three *Houses* of Human Agency as Focus in Developmental Interviewing and Coaching

- To become a causal power, a human agent needs to deliver **work**.
- Work, in whatever domain of society, including the self, is associated with both an “internal” and an “external” *workplace*.
- The external workplace is a cultural and social reality as is the internal workplace.
- The internal workplace is the place where work is conceived of (cognitively); we can view this workplace as comprising three different partitions or ***Houses***:
 - **Task House**: a task domain defined by a role and its associated practice
 - **Environmental House**: the external, social and cultural, task environment of work
 - **Self House**: an ‘inner’ workplace defined by the worker’s cognitive, social-emotional development and psychological profile that defines the professional (not the private) self.
- **The ‘causal power’ of the worker’s agency** -- as exerted on (1) relationships with others, (2) existing social structures, and (3) his/her own developmental status -- **is a function of the worker’s level of maturity.**

Dialectics Exercise 4(a,b): Interview a Cognitive Process in the Three Houses (that define an agent's internal workplace, perhaps bypassing the Self House where the agents motivations and values are found)*

- **Exercise (a)**: in an interviewee's **Task House**, focus on the person's *roles*, their associated practices and accountabilities, including his/her notion of professional identity, role ownership, and role integration.
- In the sense of the Four Moments, consider the Task House as stratified into (e.g.) [1] type of authority wielded, [2] diversity of roles played, [3] ways of proceeding relative to collaborators that are associated with the role or practice.
- **Exercise (b)**: in an interviewee's **Environmental House**, focus on the person perspectives on the social, organizational, or political environment s(he) delivers work into, and the way s(he) reacts to others' expectation of, and feedback to, his or her performance.
- In the sense of the Four Moments, consider the Environmental House as stratified into different perspectives on the organization or life world in question: e.g., [1] a structural, [2] political, and [3] symbolic perspective that determines how the person makes cognitive sense of his/her work and workplace.

* Interviewing in the Self House risks veering into a social-emotional interview where meaning making, not sense making, is the topic.

Guidelines for Interviewing a Cognitive Process (for comprehensiveness and complexity of interviewee thinking)

- **To bring dialectical thinking to bear on interviewing**, we focus attention on either [1] how social-emotional 'prompts' are responded to, or [2] how work roles and associated practices are made sense of **cognitively**.
- **Interviewing Strategy**: *adopting the Four Moments, we listen for the extent to which their ontological axioms are respected by an interviewee, as well as for the occurrence of dialectical errors of simplification in the form of de-stratification (1M), positivization (2E), de-totalization (3L), and de-agentification (4D).*
- Regardless of whether interviews are developmental, psychiatric, psychoanalytic, or in the form of process consultation work, we listen for what is missing in interviewees' verbal reports (*conceptual absences*) and for *dialectical errors* made for the sake of simplifications.
- For instance, in conducting a semi-structured cognitive interview focused on (one of the) Three Houses of human agency, we focus attention as listeners on which of the axioms of the Four Moments are made explicit or violated, and on what maybe the conceptual consequences of such a violation in terms of fostering false belief systems.
- **Exercise**: interview another cohort participant in one of the Houses as described above.
- *Follow instructions and suggestions on the following slide.*

Dialectics Exercise 5: Coach a Cognitive Process

- Cognitive Coaching based on the Four Moments of Dialectic is focused on ways in which a coachee's outlook, self-positioning, issues, behavioral and developmental obstacles and traps may be anchored in failures of comprehensive dialectical sense making.
- As in cognitive interviewing, use the Three Houses defining the interviewee's internal workplace to hone-in on what might be missing from the coachee's conceptualization of his or her external and internal workplace that accounts for his/her performance successes and/or failures.
- Proceed by separating the coachee's Three Houses ([1] Task, [2] Environment, [3] Professional Self), entering into them consecutively (1→2→3) over the coaching hour in order, at the end, to draw findings in all of the Three Houses together, -- perhaps closing with homework to reflect on the session and its outcomes.
- Exercise: coach a cohort participant about an issue of the latter's choosing. Observe that one of the major snafus the issue may be due to is the epistemic fallacy committed in formulating the issue.

Guidelines for Coaching a Cognitive Process in the Three Houses of Human Agency (i.e., of Work)

- Your coachee is unaware that s(he) is ‘thinking’ and thereby constructing his or her unique personal world *conceptually*, with direct consequences for how s(he) “feels” about his/her role, accountability, practice, options, decision-to-be-made, etc.
- As well, your coachee has never heard of the four moments of dialectic as a means to obtain a deeper understanding of what occurs in his or her work and life, and is thus unaware of the difference between the ‘sense’ s(he) making and the functioning of the ‘real world’ of social actualities and experiences s(he) is consistently referring to.
- Most likely, your coachee is a victim of committing the *epistemic fallacy* on account of which s(he) interprets propositional truths (of what s(he) communicates to you) as alethic truth (of ‘how things are’), and is thus in need of deeper conceptualizations of his or her experiences.
- She has engaged you as a helper who will analyze successes and predicaments in the form of an *explanatory critique*: (a) to understand the specific structure of situations, events, and activities at issue [on the level of Actuality], (b) help trace their developmental history, and (c) chart a path into the future leading beyond present limitations and absences.
- She will want to be emancipated from her self-constructed shackles; so your discourse is an emancipatory one meant to free up heretofore buried potentials for the coachee’s being and agency.

Dialectic Exercise 6: Facilitate a Team Process based on the Four Moments of Dialectic

- When working with teams, all four planes of Bhaskar's definition of social being powerfully come into play, predominantly the enduring social structures (#3) that shape interpersonal relationships (#2) and team members' professional and private self (#4).
- In organizational work, social structures appear in the form of culturally enduring **practices at different levels of work complexity** that shape team members' way of working together beyond their conscious awareness.
- For this reason, facilitating team processes poses challenges that go beyond those encountered when facilitating one-on-one processes such as coaching and consulting: there is a need to deeply understand the social structures (i.e., practices) that specific teams are either embedded in or in the process of creating.
- We refer to an expert in this kind of work (who, by definition, needs to master the three aspects of explanatory critique in dialectical fashion) as *critical facilitator*.
- A critical facilitator is a person able to increase a team's quality of discourse, and thus functioning, by questioning team members' way of thinking, by transcending presently entertained perspectives, and keeping differences and tensions 'on the table' productively for as long as possible, for the sake of guiding a team aiming for making more nuanced choices and decisions (De Visch & Laske, 2020).

Guidelines for the Critical Facilitation of Teams

- Team members are unaware of the quality of their thinking viewed in terms of dialectic; they have always identified 'thinking' with making logical inferences and arriving at logical conclusions. As a result, they are unaware of unceasingly committing the epistemic fallacy, of reducing reality to propositions (what is said), and thus have no understanding of the role verbal and written language play in their interactions.
- Then also, team members are focused on experiences (empirical level) and (secondarily) events, entities, and activities *at the level of Actuality*, rather than at the level of Reality (generative mechanisms). Their notion of causality is that of conjunctions of events, thus of closed systems, and excludes holistic causality in the sense of 3L as much as absence in the of 2E.
- Except for the highest level of work complexity involving the re-design of business models, team members are unaware of a 'real world' independent of human thinking that plays a role in their work, except in the form of existing practices they may find restrictive (existing social structures).
- **In short, the degree of critical realism team members practice is exceedingly low.**
- Evidently, your facilitatory interventions in terms of 1M, 2E, 3L, and 4D have to be situated at the level of "where they are in their present work", assisting them in becoming curious and inquisitive about what they are presently not seeing or noticing (their absences).
- For this reason, you need to work at a conceptual level they can understand or relate to, and gradually 'deepen' that level to include what is presently not thought about, seen, or considered relevant (including their own cognitive-developmental journey or Job 2).



IDM- Creating Collaborative Intelligence

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