



Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change

Don Edward Beck , Christopher C. Cowan

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Spiral Dynamics introduces a new model for plotting the enormous economic and commercial shifts that are making contemporary business practice so complex and apparently fragmented. Focusing on cutting-edge leadership, management systems, processes, procedures, and techniques, the authors synthesize changes such as:

Increasing cultural diversity.

Powerful new social responsibility initiatives.

The arrival of a truly global marketplace.

This is an inspiring book for managers, consultants, strategists, and leaders planning for success in the business world in the 21st century.

Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change Details

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From Reader Review Spiral Dynamics: Mastering Values, Leadership and Change for online ebook

Elizabeth Schwartz says

Although written in a business context, it holds a philosophy about the parallels of human socio-evolution and individual growth which are mind-blowing.

It is a controversial stipulation because critics say it creates a euro-centric process and assumes all cultures will follow the same process. However the theory relies so much on the nature of human beings to stick with what works until it doesn't any more and to start something new that better meets the essential needs, especially of individuality or of communalism (thus the redirected focus from democracy to capitalism and then back to green environmentalism).

It points to exactly why you can't go into a third world country or city projects and try to use the same techniques that help people already thriving in a consumer-based society. Motives are too different.

I think this book is brilliant and wish Don Beck would write some more in ways that draw in a wider readership.

Alexandr Blokhin says

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Stephen James says

important but , in my humble opinion, very poorly written book - the work of Graves did not deserve to be buried in such a shambling text - it made an extremely useful and creative model of human development into something obscure and elitist (for really smarty people who have university education) - the KEY to these ideas can be found in 'A Theory of Everything' by Wilbur - who managed to make the theory much more accessible to everyone.

Natasa Tovornik says

I love the priciple fo Spiral Dynamics, find it a powerful tool and a great model to understand different

dynamics and needs for change.

The book itself is quite complex, written in a complex language. It can take a while to read it. As well, I would appreciate an update, as the book was written in 1995 and many things that are described as future, actually lay in the past.

Willa says

another one that's really hard to rate. The content is fantastic, and very useful for anyone wanting to really understand Spiral Dynamics. But if you're not over 50 and Texan, you can hardly read it - because it's not written in English but in Texan! That is a great set back and hopefully something more up to date will be written soon (it is hard to see a writer rave about GM or the banking sector, or the moral excellence of the US military, with no awareness of 9/11 or the massive corporate scandals to come... but then that wasn't his fault because it was published in 1996!).

Eugene Pustoshkin says

SPIRAL DYNAMICS is a truly unique book. I mean you won't find similar books around. Specifically, I mean that it is written in a style which belongs to this book only, as far as I am aware. It doesn't look like anything else, I assure you.

(One good advice that some readers give is to start reading with chapter 3 or 4 and then come back to the beginning chapters.)

Spiral Dynamics (SD) tracks down the evolutionary spiral of human consciousness and its value systems in a very pragmatic (atheoretizing) sense. In SD those are called vMEMEs—value meta-memes which attract numerous memes (self-replicating patterns of thinking, doing, feeling, being). I personally prefer to call them value matrices. These vMEMEs are basically structures of consciousness as applied to the values sphere (the things we value the most about life and which we strive to enact). They determine not what we value, but how we think and go on about our values.

A Russian physiologist Aleksei Ukhtomsky coined the term “dominanta,” and these vMEMEs, these value matrices, could be seen as these kinds of “dominants” in individuals, organizations, and societies at large. vMEMEs are seen by SD ontologically, as kinds of matrices of values enactment that create a multilayered societal cake.

Spiral Dynamics is a very pragmatic framework. It has been applied to organizational and international development, but it has also found its use in the fields of psychology and psychotherapy (both individual and group). It has become a kind of worldview template to make sense of the varieties of thinking/values that permeate our global societies. It clearly shows that we really need to recognize the vertical developmental dimension of human lives which consists of 7-8 or more levels of consciousness.

The SD awareness has been popularized thanks to the efforts of numerous individuals and groups, including scholars-practitioners who work in the field of Integral Theory & Practice, as evidenced by the works of the famous internationally-acclaimed thinker Ken Wilber. Being more a practical framework for socially proactive people rather than a philosophical or theoretical treatise, SD brings forth a bubbling sense of

optimism about our human condition and provides some tools of how to address complex situations—both in personal realms as well as cultural, organizational, and even geopolitical realms.

In my opinion, for any integrative thinker-activist Spiral Dynamics is a wonderful tool which is best complemented with the AQAL Integral Framework developed by Ken Wilber (and in Don Beck's more recent work on Spiral Dynamics Integral Wilber's four-quadrant view has been included as well—but there is much more to Integral Meta-Theory than just four-quadrants: Integral has a powerful understanding of states of consciousness dynamics, as well as shadow dysfunctions, and transpersonal states and stages of consciousness, and much more, including such topics as developmental psychology, post-metaphysics, Integral Methodological Pluralism, etc.).

Also, I think that it is great to treat SD as a practical template/model/language which has been tested in the field of pragmatic activities (especially in organizations), and at the same time work on expanding one's own knowledge and awareness by diving into the amazing field of adult development theories (so-called vertical growth models), such as Susanne Cook-Greuter's elaboration of Loevinger's Ego Development Theory, Robert Kegan's orders of consciousness, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and so on. Adding here some mindfulness/contemplative practices could generate powerful results.

The diversity of perspectives that arises from bringing in all these different frameworks and paradigms offers a safety net of triangulation which helps in pattern recognition which is so necessary to any "spiral wizard" (the term used by Spiral Dynamics to designate a person who is able to grasp and activate flexible flows of the entire evolutionary spiral or its specific clusters whenever it is necessary) or integral evolutionary.

Jeff says

Fantastic book! Although it seems the author sees more business applications to its content than anything else, I found that there are some profound implications for fostering understanding between people. We live in such a polarizing society it's nice to be reminded that people and issues are complicated and can rarely be divided into black and white or left and right. If you've ever found yourself desperately trying to figure out how someone could believe a certain thing and genuinely want to understand where they are coming from, this book is a great start!

Quang says

If you don't want to get lost in the streets, you will need Google maps like almost every other homo sapiens :)

If you don't want to get lost in your journey of psychological development, this book is written for you

Krzysztof Herdzik says

Great theory to be applied for individuals, teams, groups, societies and countries. Helps to understand not only what happened in society and individual development but also helps to predict where human development goes.

Helps to understand changes in organisations, development of people based on their values. Helps finally to design leadership of XXI century.

One minus star for the language used - Texan, low quality literature style...

Ivan says

Well, I finally read this one, after 6 month, as it's not a book to be read in absence of tangible proof and real-life examples. Overall, it could be summarized as recommendations for management, which, like any other recommendation shouldn't be taken to the letter, and certainly shouldn't be implemented completely.

I have previously mentioned the book downside - excessive use of clichée literary embellishments and thesaurus, peppered by very informal speech - it hurts the overall credibility of the book. It is almost as if the author, instead of writing something in a simple fashion proudly runs up to the reader and says , waving his arms - "Look, I know how to use big words! And I'm really good at that" and then - in a gesture to please a less-educated audience started to curse and throw sticks around , meaning that he is also a simple man.

If Edward Beck planned to write an academic book, he should have stuck to a formal language and eliminated the pseudo scientific aggrandizement of daily events compounded by colorful, yet purposeless descriptions of the mundane things; if it was supposed to be a management book, why use a great amount of general public marketing lingo, if he wrote it for the general public, why refer to academic studies, by inserting a lot of references to those.

I was disappointed that I haven't found much new material, and the presentation of the memes, as well as an influence of parenting remained arguably unexplained, in contrast to the Linda Pollock and Lloyd de Mause research on the influence of early childhood developmental psychology and parenting styles upon the makeup and fates of societies.

Conrad Zero says

While the creator of Spiral Dynamics is no longer with us, this reworked and updated version presents a theory of human "progression" through various stages of value systems. Each stage of the system is represented by colors. It reminds me of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, only with more layers and technicolor.

This book is essential reading for many reasons. One is diversity training. Different people have different values and filters on the world. SD not only simplifies and explains those values but shows the life conditions which perpetuate them. If you ever wondered why someone got gunned down over a pair of Nike Air Jordans, this book will help you to understand the "Red" mindset AND the life conditions of the people living there. If you wonder why that weird uncle of yours is all into God and Government, SD will teach you all about the "Blue" mindset and the life conditions which would lend themselves toward a Blue solution.

Once you understand the value system of a person in this way, it becomes much easier for you to work with them. Or work for them. Or manage them. Or simply tolerate them at the holiday dinner. You'll understand why they would respond better to discipline (for Blue/Red), or incentives (Orange), or recognition (Green), etc. While it's not exactly the superpower the authors present (You'll become a SPIRAL WIZARD!) it's

definitely powerful knowledge about the humans you share the planet with. Since reading this book, I've been able to identify the different colored thoughts and patterns in both conversations and headlines, and even in my own life. Self Knowledge - always a good thing.

The authors repeatedly point out that that people aren't simply one color for all things, but they can have dominant color thinking for different areas of their life. They may be Green regarding their relationships, but Blue in their business dealings. These values are not necessarily a conscious choice, but rather a reaction to the Life Conditions in which people find themselves. When the zombie apocalypse happens, those trapped in the infected zone will quickly find their brains switching to a more Red mindset because of the prevailing Life Conditions. SD definitely implies nurture over nature in this case.

I'm not sure if I agree with the authors that there is an actual Progression through the color spectrum as they list it. On the surface it makes sense, but my own experience I seem to have skipped some colors, and they mention more than once that skipping colors is possible, which makes me wonder if there are other paths through the colors than the one listed here (Tree Dynamics?)

Furthermore, there is a Second Tier to the spiral, (starting with Yellow) in which one recognizes the different colors and is able to pick and choose the appropriate color for any particular situation. The problem should be obvious - how do I know whether my weird uncle is really Bright Blue, or enlightened, second tier Yellow, but choosing to value Blue around Religion and Politics? Nit picking, I suppose, but not really addressed in the book.

Overall, this is an extremely helpful book for managers, the diversity-challenged, or those wanting more insight into human nature.

Francis White says

Brilliant theory, check the Wikipedia entry and leave the Introduction until after you have read it!

Sergii Khlivnenko says

This is the most powerful book I have ever read. I have changed professional direction and lifestyle, after I first time I have heard about Spiral Dynamics in 2014,.

The book describes the idea is about the only way for development of systems: individuals, organizations and societies. There is no short way to the top, but constant vibrations between self expression and self sacrifice straight to new levels of consciousness. Life conditions need the most suitable mindset and values, not the most developed.

The book gives you new clear understanding of how the world works and explains reasons of actions, based on dominating value system. Definitely must read, especially for managers and thinkers!

Stefan Bruun says

Puts words to a concept that I would have loved to see described this clearly much earlier. The necessity of going through a particular developmental stage to go to the next is a concept that can be applied so much

more broadly in life to improve the understanding of individuals, communities, and societies.

Jeremy Garber says

A fascinating typological model for how individuals, groups, and societies react to pressures in their environment based on their primary mode of existing in the world. Based on the research of Dr. Clare Graves, a psychology professor at Union in New York, Don Beck and Christopher Cowan present a dynamic model of the progress of societies from the earliest days of survival to the present complex age. The Spiral Dynamics model offers a range of what they call "vMEMES" that persons use to react to times of stress and change. Almost half the book is devoted to these vMEMES, describing them using various colors, personality types, figures from literature, etc. The vMEMES are:

- Beige - Instinctive/Survival
- Purple - Tribal/Animistic
- Red - Egocentric/Exploitative
- Blue - Absolutist/Moralistic
- Orange - Materialist/Achiever
- Green - Sensitive/Communalist
- Yellow - Interrogative/Thriving
- Turquoise - Oneness

As both individuals and societies react to outside pressure, they survive by moving back and forth within the spiral. The authors are careful to note that one vMEME is not better than another - primal red rage might be more effective to surviving a particular situation than green communal peacefulness! The spiral also moves back and forth between individualism (beige, red, orange, yellow) and collectivism (purple, green, blue, turquoise), as the limits of each are reached. However, the spiral does indicate a progressive amount of complexity that helps humans deal with an ever increasing world. The most dramatic break comes between green and yellow - the movement from the first tier of values, based on fear, to a second tier of values, based on love and connectedness. The authors suggest that as we continue to develop in more complexity, we will develop even more vMEMES to deal with that complexity - or we will fail to survive.

Maybe because it's not my field, I found the leadership model for working groups through change the least helpful part of the book. I might come back to it if I ever find myself in a leadership position in which it would be useful, but I definitely skimmed that half of the book.

As sometimes New-Agey and theoretical as the model sounds, it is based on a great deal of empirical research and provides a useful tool for thinking about persons in times of stress on any level of existence. The authors have a tendency to wax excessively poetic about the model at times, and it is VERY important to remember that this is a way of thinking about the world, not an absolute metaphysics about the way the world actually is. But I have found this a useful tool in working with myself and with groups to work through conflict and how we can achieve the highest and best results so that everybody thrives.
