

# Core Elements of Evolutionary Leadership

## *Blending Evolutionary Enlightenment, Integral Change and Spiral Dynamics*

Change is the only constant. The nature of change that we are an inherent part of is governed by universal evolutionary principles. If we align ourselves with those principles, we become freer and more whole as individuals, as well as more effective and coherent as communities and organisations.

*Evolutionary Enlightenment* outlines the qualities and practices that are necessary on an individual level for evolutionary leaders. *Integral Change* outlines the dynamics of systems change from an evolutionary perspective and enables us to design more effective change projects and management systems. *Spiral Dynamics* gives us a more detailed map of the different levels of value systems at play in people and the world, to help us understand the essential question "how should who lead whom to do what?".

## **Evolutionary Enlightenment**

The Five Tenets<sup>1</sup> of Andrew Cohen's Evolutionary Enlightenment and their implications for Evolutionary Leaders:

### *Clarity of Intention*

Our intention must be to be free more than anything else. If we do not want it strongly enough, then our ego's sense of separate self and self-pity will find all sorts of ways to keep us bound. This intention is the key first step to setting ourselves free, giving us clarity and strength in the face of the world.

### *Law of Volitionality*

We always have a free choice. We are not victims. We are responsible for the relationship that we choose to have with our experience. We can choose now to be free. This realisation stops us slipping back into narcissism and self-interest, and continually reminds that it is our choice to feel miserable or liberated - moment after moment after moment. It releases our inherent creative energy.

### *Face Everything, Avoid Nothing*

When we understand and feel ourselves to be a part of the whole, there is no fear to face whatever emerges. In facing everything openly, fearlessly and with curiosity, we open ourselves to learn the most from our world. The more feedback we are able to pick up from the world around us, the more adaptable we become to emerging conditions.

### *The Truth of Impersonality*

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<sup>1</sup> What is a Tenet?

When one accepts that we are part of an evolving universe, we understand that everything that happens to us is the universe unfolding through us. This transcends and includes our ego's separate sense of self, opening us up to the emerging needs of the whole. As a result, we do not boast of our achievements and insights, nor put ourselves or others on a pedestal, but rather use our insights to inform our actions as effectively as possible for the good of the whole.

### *For the Good of the Whole*

When our intentions and actions are aligned with a greater purpose, our personal issues and limitations drop away. We find ourselves energised behind a greater goal, and feel our personal purpose fitting with the needs of the world around us. Our guidelines and criteria for action take on deeper rootedness, making our choices clearer, more coherent and consequential.

## **Integral Change**

Key Tenets of Integral Change<sup>2</sup> include:

### *Everything is interconnected as a whole and a part (a holon)*

We are whole individuals, with our unique identity and purpose. At the same time, we belong as a part to various levels of community. This means that we must:

- nurture wholeness and identity (e.g. of the individual, the department, the community, the organisation)
- facilitate the relationships between parts (e.g. between the individuals, between departments, between different stakeholders)
- facilitate the relationships between different parts and wholes (e.g. between individuals and their department / organisations, between and organisation and the society / world it operates in)

### *Evolution emerges out of what is, one step at a time*

Before we start any change process, we have to find out where the system<sup>3</sup> we are working with is at. For only then can we help the next step to be taken. It does not work to create a plan from outside the system telling the system where it should be and how to get there. The parts of a system (e.g. people in an organisation) have the information themselves about what is emerging in the system as a whole - the space simply needs to be created for them to self-organise in response to that information. That can make for a truly responsive learning organisation.

### *Systems can breakthrough or breakdown*

When a system reaches a point for change (i.e. when it is feeling dissonance with the way things currently are), it can either transcend and refine the old way of doing things, moving to greater complexity and effectiveness, or it can break down into its constituent parts. Which of those happens depends on how the change process is

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<sup>2</sup> Inspired to a large extent by the work of Ken Wilber

<sup>3</sup> What is a system? A system here could be an individual, department, organisation or society

facilitated. This is why facilitating change from an evolutionary perspective is so essential (versus an old-style command-control, or disabling consensus change process).

*Everything has an interior sensation and an exterior manifestation*

The way people feel about their experience, and the judgements they make about it, are as important as their visible behaviours and the structures around them. It is essential to create space to explore both interior sensations and exterior manifestations, and to compare how they are interacting. Interior sensation without exterior manifestation leads to navel-gazing and burn-out. Exterior manifestation without interior sensation leads to inhuman coldness and disaffection.

*Evolution builds on past patterns*

Evolution transcends and builds on the past. This means that if there are unhealthy patterns in the past, they will be carried forward in some form into the future until they are resolved. If they are not dealt with in time, they will often manifest unconsciously, and it will be hard for people to see them. Processes such as Organisational Constellations<sup>4</sup> help to deal with those patterns.

*We are sensing the future now*

As we engage with our current lives in the manifest world, we have thoughts and insights that point the way to the future. By connecting to these insights, we can better inform ourselves of the next step to take before we start sensing again. This is far more effective than long-term planning, for every step we take has an impact on the world around us, which we cannot always predict.

*Energy goes where we direct our attention*

The things we choose to focus our attention on, are the things that are most likely to manifest in our lives. There is now plenty of scientific research to back up this sensation. If we focus on our limitations, they will be ours. If we focus on our potential and positive practice, we can transcend our problems and create the future now. Appreciative Inquiry is one approach which facilitates this kind of emergence.

*Fundamentally, all is very well*

At a more profound level, everything is the way it is, and there is no point in resisting it. Stress happens when the mind resists what is. This realisation can release large amounts of stress, and help us to focus on what is actually present, rather than on some desired present which is not actually there. Our insight becomes clearer, which helps us to act more effectively.

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<sup>4</sup> based on Bert Hellinger's work

## **Spiral Dynamics<sup>5</sup>**

An evolutionary perspective includes an inherent understanding that we go from somewhere to somewhere. The general directionality of evolution is one of increasing complexity and compassion. Spiral Dynamics provides a map of the evolving landscape of human, cultural, organisational and societal development.

It clarifies in particular the nature of the existential problems we currently face as individuals, organisations, societies and humanity as a whole. It enables us to see clearly the dynamics of diversity at work, and the evolutionary relationships at play.

With this level of clarity, we can act laser-like to transcend current blocks, creating systems and life conditions that best serve people and planet from where they are at, gently inviting them to further development.

*Peter Merry*

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<sup>5</sup> based on the work of Dr Don Beck in particular