

## Speech at Summit for the Future, Amsterdam, May 3-5 2006

Peter Merry

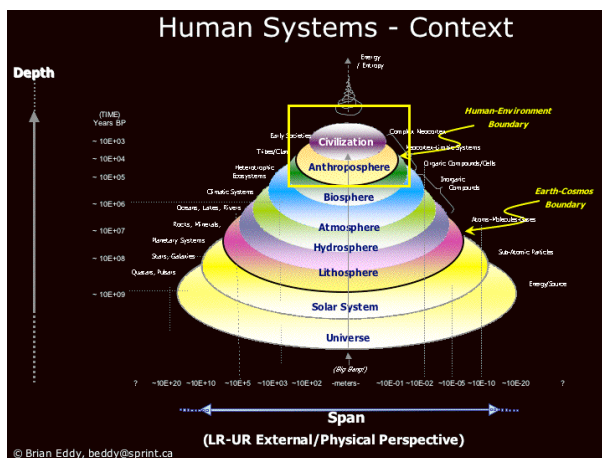
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm an 'Evolutionary change facilitator', that's my current job title. I'm a Brit, but I have been living in the Netherlands for about seven years now, and work primarily in three areas, organizational transformation, societal transformation and teaching and training in these fields. I was asked to do this presentation, and the title was given to me as 'creative leadership'. I've been working along the theme of evolutionary leadership and so I was asking myself – now, what's the relationship between creative leadership and evolutionary leadership?

In fact that what does it actually mean, creative leadership and evolutionary leadership? From my perspective, they are pretty similar. The most fundamental energy of the universe is that of creativity. Ever since the big bang, we've been pretty creative to develop into multi-cellular organisms so we can sit here having conversations like this. Creativity seems to be the primary impulse of the universe. The general directionality is one of creativity. Essentially, it comes down to how do we align ourselves with that most fundamental of impulses? If this is the most primary impulse in us, and the world around us, then how do we align ourselves with it. This seems to be the pull of the future, if this was about future, and creative leadership. And there's a perspective and a consciousness arising at

the moment which is encouraging us to think of ourselves as this evolving creative pull.

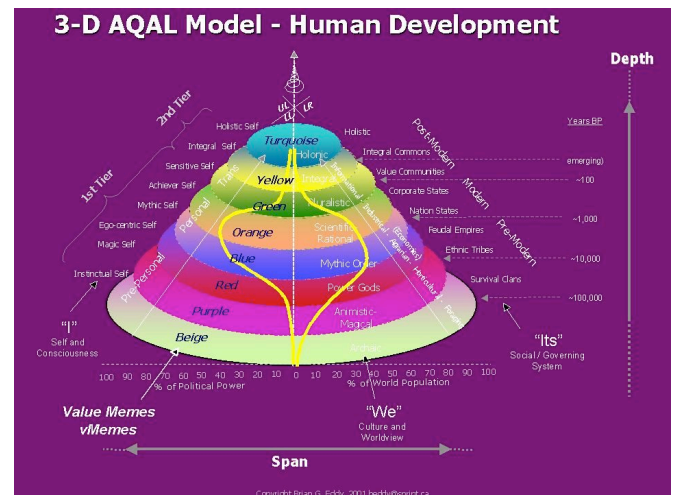
Yet what does that mean, to become aware of that? This kind of big picture first, our collective story, our collective history in 13.7 billion years of co-evolving together, since the big bang, through various different levels of complexity and the human story starts kind of unfolding around there... and this is a breakdown



of that human story based on some work originally by Clare W. Graves, translated into something called 'spiral dynamics'. This is the story of our collective creative evolution over time (if you're familiar with Laszlo you're going to recognize some of this), which is that we

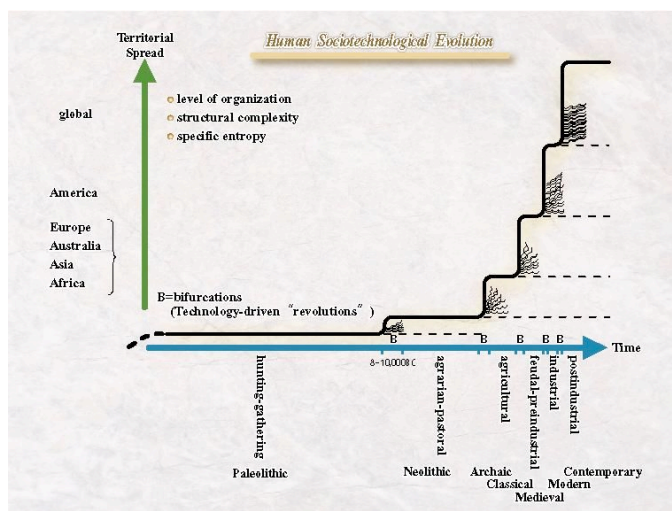
move through mere survival into bonding into power and the emergence of the sense of self into a sense of bigger order and higher truth into a sense of opportunities and possibilities out there in the world, into wanting to reconnect with each other and talk more about who we are as human beings.

Let's not just go into detail about this now, but just to get this context of ourselves as part of the evolutionary story. We reach a little interesting edge around here, which is particularly where countries like the Netherlands and some of the Nordic countries seem to be at at the moment. These six are what Clare Graves called 'first tier systems'. Those systems can only see their own perspective, they find it very hard to see the bigger context which they are part of - what begins to emerge here at the emergence of the integral (second tier) perspective is a desire to reintegrate, to see the relationships between everything and to see ourselves as part of a whole and not just interconnected in a kind of flatland whole but interconnected in an evolving whole, in constant dynamic balance.



This is the perspective I want to speak about, this emerging consciousness and the emerging

thinking that is out there. What does it begin to look like? This slide is from Ervin Laszlo's work, he traces the evolution of society over time and sees societies as complex adaptive systems, fairly flat for a while and then you get these break-through moments, where evolution goes in leaps, in sudden leaps of emergence; and at each moment you get this rapid surge as we experiment with new ways, and then at some point we hit that tipping point and it crystallizes.



So here we are again, we're in one of those spaces again - I see it a lot in organisations, and now in particular in the Dutch society: one of these moments of the old system not working any more and the new one not being in place. We don't know what to do - which is just the right place to be. It doesn't necessarily feel very comfortable the whole time, but it is the right place to be and we're right here, in one of these leaps which we're looking to make.

Yet there is never a guarantee that we're going to make it through - so you can either break through to a higher level of complexity, or break down, into the constituent parts. This is another way of looking at it, that we emerge into a way of being which works for a while, and then it seems to run out of steam. In fact what happens is that the solutions we created initially have sowed seeds for the next set of problems. The old way of thinking is no longer adequate to deal with those problems, because that's the thinking which created them in the first place. So the old system starts to run out of steam and people then here begin to get a sense that there is something new trying to emerge but we don't know what it is. It's a place which feels pretty chaotic, pretty stressful, because the old system has to keep running the show, things have to keep working, but at the same time we have to be nurturing the new down here. And that's what we call 'facilitating or nurturing emergence', we're working for the emergence of the new.



From here we never know what the new system is going to look like. It's like if you look at atoms of oxygen and hydrogen, and then you try to work out what water is going to look like - you would never get it until they begin to interact with each other and something emerges, which is water, with emerging properties you can't see from the previous stage of development. We're in the same space, like Einstein's saying that you can't solve a set of problems from the same level of thinking that created them. We can't work out what the world is going to look like and therefore we cannot make a big five-year strategic plan on how we're going to get there because we don't know what it's going to look like. If we do that, then we'll start creating solutions and plans from the old thinking and we'll just create more and more problems.

So what we're looking for is: how do we facilitate the emergence of this? What we do know how to do is to put in place conditions for that emergence; we don't know what it's going to look like but we do know how to put in place those conditions, and that is the essence of creativity. How do we put in place the conditions for the creative impulse to come through so that we can break through and go beyond the old system, and explore what it is that is trying to emerge in the new. Then, what is it that's being asked of us at this time? Even more so given the specific time that we're in, which is a time of great stress but also of great

creativity - as Ervin Lazlo says, we're the first generation to be conscious of the fact that we may be the last generation. Where James Lovelock, author of the 'Gaia principle' of earth as a self-organizing system said 'we're past it, guys, we're history, we're part of the sixth



extinction' Laszlo said 'well the one thing that he's forgotten is the human element', which is the fact that humans so far over time - as the stress grows- have had the capacity to be able to rapidly self-organize, to achieve break-through. So he says there is still hope. But we're very conscious, even if we don't talk about it with everybody, that somewhere in our selves and our being we're conscious of the fact that we're living in a period where there is no guarantee that we'll be here in 20 or 30 years time. I'm not attached to our collective survival but it would be a real shame if we didn't make it - we survived 13.7 billion years, so we do have the capacity and the potential.

Yet the question is how do we get a new understanding, how can we facilitate the emergence of that next phase, what ever it might look like? What is being asked of us as individuals at this time? One of the key things is the capacity to be adaptive - as the new comes in we're being challenged in our old ways and asked to be open and flexible and fit to the new demands out there, but at the same time we have to maintain and uphold integrity. That's the nature of a healthy living system, it maintains its boundaries, but at the same time it is able to be flexible and responsive to the world around it. Do we know who we are? Can we hold that identity but at the same time can we be flexible and responsive to what's happening around us? In that point of the centre where the old is breaking down and the new is yet to emerge, can we sit in that chaos, let the



old go and open up to the new that is trying to come in? That's a capacity we need to develop in ourselves.

I've been describing it to people as sitting in the centre of a vortex which is swirling around you, chaos swirling around, but if you try to grab on to any of it to control it, you get pulled off, swept off your feet and your whole system crunches up with massive



stress, and we become completely paralysed. We try to actually control what it is that is going on at the moment, the speed of change, the rate of complexity - so how do we develop the capacity to sit in the centre of that and be aware of this chaos swirling around, and in that space begin to notice some subtle order in that chaos? Ervin Laszlo said chaos can be a misleading word since it really is about subtle order and that capacity to be able to see and sense what is beginning to emerge, in that this enables us to be active, which has an impact on a larger number of more surface issues. And we have a huge to-do list, where do we begin to see that there is a pattern behind it and we can act on that and in that form have a broader impact. This is a huge issue, particularly in organizations today - can we accept that from where we are now, we don't know the solution? You're going to be walking into a boardroom, say, as a consultant or whoever, saying 'the truth is that I don't know and you don't know. Can you accept that, and can you enter a space of not knowing, of letting go of all the things which you thought you knew? Enter a space which enables us to discover something which is trying to get through but which our old thinking and our old patterns are not allowing space for?' That's very big for people who were being trained to know, as most of us have been, to know everything and to guide your companies - trying to see a problem and fix it immediately. Often the reason they come to us with this kind of thinking is 'we've tried everything and it's not working, our organizational climate, our culture, is still plummeting, we don't manage to get the creativity and innovation we're preaching to everybody about... Why is it not working?' They're still trying the old thinking to generate something new. Part of what we're being asked to do is to be able to see the pattern that's in the future and begin to provide some sense of clarity for people about what it is that is actually going on.



It's about simplicity, the other side of complexity. As all this complexity begins to emerge we see those patterns, and we actually see that within those patterns there is something which is really fairly simple. If you hear people talking about stories that seem immensely complex, I always find that there is something missing. Something very simple, very calm, which somehow really describes what it is that is going on. Can we see that simplicity beyond complexity? And can we begin to communicate

that? Often that will require new language, as the old language was designed to describe the old thinking, so a new language, maybe even new words.

Yesterday I walked out of the door - the weather forecast predicted it was going to be good, and it smelt different. You know yesterday, for those of you who have been around for a while it smelt different. The first day of summer, it felt like the summer was really actually happening now, when you can smell the blossoms in the air, and every year I have that. This is what that is about, as we're looking to develop the capacity to be able to pay attention to the signs which are coming at us from the future, these signals of what the future might look like. And paying attention to those who may be



coming in, so first of all being able to see them, means creating space in ourselves. Un-programming a lot of the old thinking and opening up space so that we can actually notice what it is as it begins to emerge, and then when it comes in, being present enough to be able to direct attention to it, because that's where it begins to form, to crystallize. That's the next step, as it were, as we begin to open up space to paying attention to those signals. It may be very weak at some point but you've got the space and you begin to recognize it - there are maybe a couple of people in the organization or the system who are trying something new, but are being ignored by the masses. If we notice that there is something innovative in that, how do we give these people space to be able to start to play and experiment and make mistakes? Another big issue in organizations today, are we allowed to make mistakes and not be judged negatively for doing it, as long as we learn? Picking up those signals, giving them attention, giving them space, nurturing that U-curve underneath.

For a long time this work can be below the radar screen, in fact it has to be because the old system has an immune system built into it which will attack anything which it feels may



be threatening. But at some point we have to start standing up, beginning to put your head above the meadow and stand up like a tall poppy and actually begin to express what it is that you think this next step is about. This causes a huge amount of fear around us as people are afraid they're going to lose friends lose colleagues, people will think they are a loony. But what seems to happen when we do actually step up

and are really authentic about what it is that it's all about, is that this begins to resonate in others. And suddenly you find a whole lot of new people, a whole new community around you. This state of sensing is not a passive state or position to take up in any way, it's actually a very active position. Andrew Cohen talks about being 'being deeply relaxed and profoundly aware at the same time'. It's the capacity to be able to create this space, to see very sharply and clearly and distinctly what it is that is actually happening around us. And if we don't develop these capacities in leadership, then we're going to be in a lot of trouble.

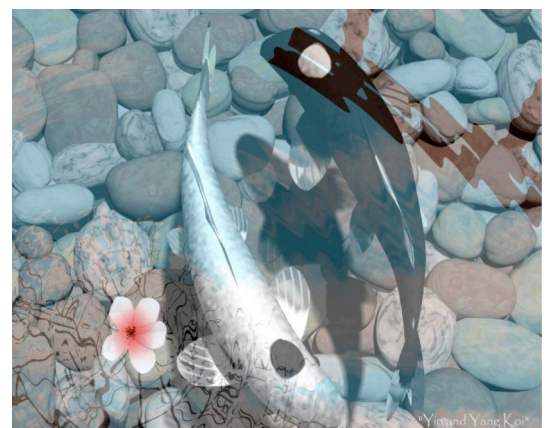
At the same time, because we don't know what the future is going to be like, this whole space is an experimental space, it's a space of trying things out, of making mistakes, of



being playful, of releasing the creative spirit. The era of the radical campaigner on the street, that's not going to help this time. Why? Because the more attached we get to a vision of the future, the less present we are for what it is that is actually trying to emerge. I've been part of protest movements on the street, and it's very much anti-this and pro-that, and you've divided the world up again which makes it

very hard for you to see the thing as a whole system. So how can we be able to develop the capacity to be able to hold what we do lightly, but at the same time have a very clear intention about why we are doing the work that we are doing? That's an interesting balance to look into. What is your purpose, is that really integrated into yourself? And on the other hand, how can we let the new emerge?

Part of that is going beyond the old, stepping into the space between what have traditionally been polarized pictures. For example, release and responsibility is this dance between letting go and not holding on to everything, and at the same time stepping in to take responsibility where necessary. If you let go too much then it becomes a very apathetic position, like 'that's just the way it is,' but if you take responsibility too much then you don't give space for other people to take care of their responsibilities. So it's a dance between your own responsibility and letting go. Sensing and acting, that dance between being aware of what is trying to emerge, and when you feel the timing is right, acting fully in the moment to do what it is that needs to be done. That five year plan process is history now. In a



workshop a while ago Margaret Wheatley said that we know from the new science that when ever we do anything it impacts on everything else, so you make a five-year plan and take the first step and you've changed the world. The world which your plan was based on no longer exists. Bye bye plan! And the longer you try to actually hold on to your plan the more stressful it gets. We need to develop a new way of thinking about management and leadership and all of these things, it's fairly fundamental.

And then diverge and converge is this dance between allowing in all the diversity that's there, and at the same time realizing that we have to make sense, that we have to get clarity at certain points to be able to act, to make decisions. It's like breath – you breathe in and you diverge, and then if you hold it too much you have to eventually breathe out and you have to converge in again. A lot of process work I see today often allows anything to be there but if you don't put a boundary on it somewhere then it just disappears into the ether, and nothing actually emerges out of it. A dance between allowing in diversity and then looking for patterns in some way of bringing it together so you can start up again at the balance between chaos and order. It's in that space that the creativity emerges. Yet when you step into this space with your own idea, we'll never co-create something together, if you're too attached to your own idea. If you allow everybody else to step in and do their thing then also nothing emerges. But it's the moment when you step in and you begin to explore something together, when you're not attached to your own way of thinking. What you're interested in is what is trying to emerge at the centre, out of the interaction between the people in the space. Things begin to emerge that no individual could have created on their own.

To wrap up, I want to locate these issues in Ken Wilber's model of four quadrants. Down here, we've got the collective interior, which is what happens in the space between us, as individuals, and that's where the co-creating begins to happen. In the space where some form of collective intelligence can emerge where there is no individual ego involved in the sense of 'I'm attached to my own idea', but where in the interaction you're curious about

what it is that's trying to emerge. The point of these four quadrants is really that we need to be working in all four, we need to be looking at our relationships here. This one here is about the collective exterior, it's about the systems and the structures that we build around us - so here we're looking for what we might call 'natural design'. Which is a way of creating organizations which enable people to be who they are so that they can





naturally carry out the functions which need to be carried out. That's what something like Spiral Dynamics really helps to do, understand underlying value systems. These systems allow us to understand what people's fundamental motivations are. How do you get these natural alignments on the one hand, and on the other hand, how do we create designs which relate to the way the natural world naturally functions?

People have found ways of creating organizations where they actually contribute energy back to the system, rather than taking from it. Why do they do it? Because it's good for business. It saves them money, they get motivated employees and all those kinds of things, creating systems and structures which are aligned with people and with the natural processes of the planet.

That's on the collective level. Now, when we shift up to the individual level, this is the individual exterior, which is our physical organism. The key here is looking after our own vitality. If we are going to be fully present and available for what it is that's trying to emerge, on this planet right now, then we need to look after ourselves. It's so often forgotten by activists or people who are interested in changing the world - a burned out activist is no help to anyone. The reason Steiner started the organic farming system was because he said the food that we're currently eating is not going to support the development of a higher level of consciousness. Seeing the relationship between these two upper quadrants, you've got to have a physical organism to support your way of thinking. Are we eating well, are we drinking our 2 litres of water a day? Are we looking after ourselves energetically? All these very basic things which often we forget. If we don't look after our own vitality then we don't look after the vitality of the planet, right?



Key to all this (in the individual interior quadrant) are two concepts which underpin a lot of what I have said so far. The first one is non-attachment, which really means not being attached to anything, because the more you are attached to something, the less you are present to what is trying to emerge. Attached to old ideas of how it should be, attached to how things should be in the future, or even attached to being non-attached! It's the way you relate to your experience and the reality around us and to our thinking and our patterns and everything else, so the more attached we get the less available we are. Any time you feel irritation in yourself, ask yourself 'what is it I'm attached to?'. When you have water running through a river and you have a rock in the river, dropping a huge boulder into the river creates all sorts of

turbulence around the rock. It's the same thing when you're attached to something, it creates turbulence in the evolutionary flow and all this stress in you is projected on everybody around you. Irritation is a sign of that turbulence. So becoming aware of what it is that we're attached to enables us to become even more present to what it is that is actually trying to emerge. Yet if that's taken on its own and too far, then non-attachment shifts into detachment which means I just sit here and allow everything to happen. The trap of new age spirituality is that you lose your moral obligation because if everything is fine and the universe looks after us then what does it matter what I do with my life? This can become a very detached position - the counterpart of which is the sense of deep feeling and connection to people around us, and more broadly collective survival. A deep feeling about what is actually happening on the



planet right now. Because it is in this space that our caring emerges, this is the passion that enables us to actually step into the world and make a difference. But if you don't have emotional connection to what it is that's going on, then we can forget about our passion for change. If however, we become too attached to feelings, because the crisis we're facing is so massive, we become dysfunctional. So it's this balance between

really feeling and then seeing what it does to us, and then letting it go. Because if we wallow in the emotional, then we're no good to anybody else. There is work to be done, and that work needs to be connected to a deep understanding of why it is that we care.

So these are some of the qualities which I feel are important for us to be looking at developing if we're going to enable creativity in this time of heavy stress and pressure on the ecosystem as a whole on our social system and on ourselves. I don't think there's ever been more stressed out people in the industrialised world. So enabling ourselves to develop these capacities is essential for our own wellbeing and collective survival.