

the MEMES: worldviews and realities



TURQUOISE MEME
An elegantly balanced
system of interlocking
forces



YELLOW MEME
A chaotic organism
forged by differences
and change



GREEN MEME
A human habitat in
which we share life's
experiences



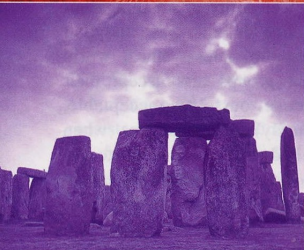
ORANGE MEME
A marketplace full
of possibilities and
opportunities



BLUE MEME
An ordered existence
under the control of
the ultimate truth



RED MEME
A jungle where the
strongest and most
cunning survive



PURPLE MEME
A magical place alive
with spirit beings
and mystical signs



BEIGE MEME
A natural milieu where
humans rely on
instincts to stay alive

COVER STORY

Spiral Dynamics, a revolutionary model of the development of consciousness and human value systems, could provide the key to ending friction, ranging from office arguments to solving major conflicts and global wars, says
ROSEMARY WILKIE

Life's dynamic SPIRAL

The problems of the modern world are so overwhelming, the pace of change so frenetic, that even highly intelligent people struggle to understand what is going on around them. There are plenty of well-meaning people seeking solutions through diplomacy, charity, international institutions, environmental awareness, education, religion and even by resorting to war! Yet they often disagree and undermine each other's work.

How wonderful it would be if there was a comprehensive integrated approach, that recognised how everything is connected to everything else and could align and channel energy into appropriate solutions. Solutions that work for individuals, organisations, races, countries, businesses and for humanity as a whole.

Impossible? No, it can be done! With Spiral Dynamics, a revolutionary model of the development of consciousness and human value systems. Understanding the progressive stages through which individuals, organisations and cultures evolve provides the key to disentangling major conflicts and global problems, most of which stem from clashes between different ways of thinking.

I have recently three mind-blowing and highly enjoyable days at an introductory

seminar with Dr Don Beck, who has worked with Spiral Dynamics for three decades, and Christopher Cooke, who runs the UK organisation.

How did it begin? Fifty years ago Dr Clare Graves, a professor of psychology, was totally frustrated by all the conflicting theories on offer. He resolved to get to the root of what differentiates people, why they see the world so differently, why some change and others don't, and why they react in varying ways to physical, emotional and social challenges.

Decades of research followed. Academic toes were trodden on as social and neurological research was included, as was, later, Richard Dawkins' theory of The Selfish Gene and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's The Evolving Self. The result is Spiral Dynamics, which is both a mindset through which to observe one's own thinking and that of others, and a set of methods for building more functional families, organisations, and social systems. It offers invaluable tools to leaders, and probably saved South Africa from civil war by replacing racial stereotypes with an understanding of the different value systems involved.

According to Spiral Dynamics, human nature is not fixed. It changes as the conditions of existence change.

COVER STORY

We have the in-built capacity, when our life circumstances change, to develop more complex thinking, to handle new problems. Hence CQ – complexity quotient – the ability to adapt to changing complexity, both increasing and decreasing. The old ways of thinking do not disappear. We carry them within us and call on them when necessary.

Each level of coping (Graves called them existential states) is a vMEME (Value MEME) This is a Meta MEME (below the waterline on the iceberg) to the meme (above the water line) that Richard Dawkins described. A vMEME is like a container within which our values and beliefs form and fit, and which attracts and repels others. See the graphic on previous page.

Each meme is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual code that underlies every aspect of our lifestyle and culture and holds it together. Every form of cultural expression is a manifestation of it - our forms of government, architecture, creative arts, amusements, sports and sense of identity.

Each meme builds on the one below. We cannot leapfrog to one we like better. Or impose our way of life on countries that have not lived through the stages of development that we have. For instance, Singapore was criticised for its draconian rules for citizens, but the temporary experience was essential to prepare their society to move to the stage at which the U.S. and UK are now.

These memes become progressively more expansive and complex – but here is an introductory breakdown.

BEIGE

The first stage is BEIGE. This is the unemotional survival level of primitive man, an intelligent animal with finely developed instincts that have atrophied in us. Beige is also the level of a newborn child, street people, an elderly person with Alzheimer's. Anyone can regress to this level when faced with catastrophe or illness.

PURPLE

As survival needs are met, new brain connections form, allowing individuals to become aware of the distinct self. Danger is recognised and people begin to band together for safety. Attention is paid to cause and effect. The shift is made into emotional PURPLE. We find our safety in kinship, obey the chieftain, and share our food. Magical powers are attributed to the natural phenomena over which we have no control –

sun, moon, fire and water – and we rely on the shaman to intervene for us. Storytellers keep inherited wisdom alive. We live in a fearful and superstitious world, where the lines between reality and fantasy are blurred. This is the end of infancy. The magic word 'Mama' brings what you need. Scream if she disappears, don't walk on the cracks and hang on to your teddy bear. This stage of parental bonding is crucial to the healthy development and self esteem of children.

RED

When safety and security are assured, people begin to question their leaders and reach for personal autonomy. The strongest battle for limited places at the top. Losers are expelled from the herd. Audacious spirits challenge the gods. We are into RED. Think of the terrible twos of childhood! Instant gratification, no sense of guilt, no worries about consequences. We do or grab what makes us feel good without regard for others. Anything that goes wrong is somebody else's fault. If we are thwarted our rage is excessive, our reactions violent. Our greatest fear is losing face, being shamed. This is a world of sports teams, sales teams and street gangs. Of warlords, Vikings, James Bond villains and our deprived inner cities. The majority of the world's population lives at this level – not because they choose to do so but because that is what their life conditions demand. All the memes have their positive and negative aspects. For example RED is also extremely creative. It gives us the strength to fight to defend ourselves. It gets things done, inspires heroic acts, breaks with limiting tradition and opens up new pathways.

BLUE

The move to BLUE occurs when people become desperate for two things: order to replace anarchy and a good reason for all their suffering. The movement that arises may be political, cultural, nationalistic or religious. It provides absolute rules and laws, severe punishment for transgression, an allotted place for everyone in the hierarchy, and inculcates guilt. Good versus evil. Faithful versus unbelievers. Crusades and causes. We obey. Everyone sacrifices for the common good. There is only one right way to think and the virtuous are rewarded (in this life or the next). This is the world of the Salvation Army, Billy Graham, guides and scouts. The child learns about fair and unfair,

right and wrong, and the consequences of disobedience. Also that other people have rights, that actions have consequences and that it sometimes pays to defer gratification.

Those who fit this orderly Newtonian world tend to be happy, healthy and stable, and there are plenty of them in our society.

ORANGE

Others begin to question the unquestionable, seek new and better ways of doing things, or simply rebel against the constraints. 'What about me?' they cry, echoing Red rebelling against Purple. We are moving into ORANGE, the predominant meme in the UK, the U.S. and Singapore. It is all about achievement, competitiveness, technology, new ways of doing things and the good life. Success is highly rewarded. We have developed the ability to keep track of multiple interests and shift attention between them. We are mobile, pragmatic, opportunistic, independent and in control of our own lives. We stand or fall by our own efforts and talents. If we are no longer useful, we are scrapped like out of date technology. Hence perhaps the appeal of media that 'spill the dirt' on the successful.

GREEN

We observe the downside of Orange, the numbers of have-nots, the disastrous effect of 'progress' on our planet. Material success and possessions do not bring happiness. There has to be more to life! And so we come to GREEN and the top of the first tier of memes. We cultivate our inner child and seek a purpose in life. We make peace with ourselves and endeavour to bring peace to society by resolving inequalities. This is the world of GreenPeace, academia, public education and anti-discrimination legislation. Egalitarian and humanitarian, we campaign for the rain forests and the disadvantaged, feel guilty about things our country has done in the past, boycott multinationals who abuse third world employees, join groups and accept their thinking to make ourselves acceptable, decide (eventually) by consensus when everyone has had their say, meditate for peace, care for each other and enthuse about the wonderful new age we are creating.

If our consciousness is in one of these first tier memes, it is quite impossible to understand the thinking of any of the others.

If there are people in your life you can never agree with, their consciousness is probably in a different meme. Red thinks Blue is repressive. Blue thinks Orange is pushy. Orange thinks Green is loopy. Many Greens who believe themselves highly spiritual are in fact regressing to the pre-rational comfort of Purple. Worse still, Green, thinking it has all the answers, excoriates Orange that has produced the wealth that Green generously wants to share out. Green can't see that the drive and expertise of Orange can be harnessed to resolve the problems that Green has identified. But what happens next?

YELLOW

The shift to second tier YELLOW is momentous (and only a minute percentage of the world population has made it so far). Our ability to cope with complexity becomes greater than the sum of all the earlier six stages put together. We no longer perceive the world only from the human scale. We see it from a total or universal perspective - a radically different viewpoint. We live fully, tread lightly on the earth, treasure the magnificence of life above material possessions, rate knowledge and competence above power and status, do more in less time. We can see the whole picture, how each meme builds on the preceding one and how everything fits together in one enormous never-ending spiral of life. We can see what each individual, organisation or country needs to help it evolve to the next level. Red needs to be channelled, not repressed. Blue structures need to be restored. In Yellow we are seized with the urgency of fostering the evolution of human consciousness so that solutions can be found before the cumulative effects of the first tier memes destroy the earth and humanity with it.

TURQUOISE

Beyond Yellow is TURQUOISE, which is about global synthesis and renewal, then CORAL which is just beginning to appear. According to Dr Graves, this second tier also consists of six levels of complexity and there are further tiers beyond that our brains cannot yet begin to encompass.

This is a very brief introduction to an absorbing subject. Don Beck and Chris Cowan's book, *Spiral Dynamics*, contains fascinating descriptions of what happens as people and organisations move out of and in to different memes. You will recognise most

Do you recognise yourself?

BEIGE. *Basic theme: Do what you must to stay alive.* Uses instincts and habits just to live day to day. Food, water, warmth, sex and safety have priority.

PURPLE. *Basic theme: Keep the spirits happy and the tribe's nest warm and safe.* Shows allegiance to chief, elders, ancestors and the clan. Preserves sacred objects, and observe rites of passage, seasonal cycles and tribal customs.

RED. *Basic theme: Be what you are and do what you want, regardless of others.* Stands tall, expects attention, demands respect and enjoys self to the fullest, right now, without guilt or remorse.

BLUE. *Basic theme: Life has meaning, direction and purpose with pre-determined outcomes.* Sacrifices self to the cause, truth or righteous pathway. Impulsivity is controlled through guilt, everybody has their proper place.

ORANGE. *Basic theme: Act in your own self interest by playing the game to win.* Progresses by learning nature's secrets. Believes optimistic, risk-taking and self-reliant people deserve success and that

societies prosper through strategy, technology and competitiveness.

GREEN. *Basic theme: Seeks peace within the inner self and explore, with others, the caring dimensions of community.* The human spirit must be freed from greed, dogma and deviousness. Would spread the Earth's resources and opportunities equally among all. Reaches decisions through reconciliation and consensus.

YELLOW. *Basic theme: Live fully and responsibly as what you are and learn to become.* Believes life is a pattern of natural hierarchies, systems and forms and values the magnificence of existence over material possessions. Understands that chaos and change are natural.

TURQUOISE. *Basic theme: Experience the wholeness of existence through mind and spirit.* Believes that self is both distinct and blended as part of a larger, compassionate whole. Everything connects to everything else in ecological alignments. Holistic, intuitive thinking and cooperative actions expected.

of the people and organisations you know! The nature and management of change, and problem solving are topics covered in the three-day seminar and explored in detail in the book. If you are a leader with responsibility for managing change, *Spiral Dynamics* could be the answer to a prayer.

Ken Wilber, the author of *A Brief History of Everything* and one of the world's greatest living philosophers, has recently teamed up with Don Beck to form *Spiral Dynamics Integral*, an initiative aimed at "managing large-scale interventions, change and transformation."

How can we help ourselves to reach a higher level? There are no methods that guarantee that anyone will change their thinking. However transformation is more likely if we meditate, and if we take an integral approach, improving the health of all aspects of our being: physical, emotional,

mental and spiritual. Reading integral books like Ken Wilber's, or just thinking about and observing how the memes manifest will help to develop our brain's capacity to handle more complexity.

Remember that although our psychology and rules for living adapt to new living conditions, the older systems stay with us. We may devote the weekend to green projects, function well in a high-powered orange job, and still drive like a red road-hog, impose strict blue rules on our staff, carry a purple lucky charm and wallow helplessly beige in bed with flu!

Rosemary Wilkie was co-founder of Mensa France with Marianne Seydoux, and a member of the IGC in the Sixties. She rebelled against blue, battled through orange and green, and now sits on a yellow sofa writing books for children.