

# Exploratory Perspectives for an AQAL Model of Generative Dialogue

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**Abstract:** Otto Scharmer's generative dialogue model of the four fields of conversation has been largely applied in organizational settings with the intent of fostering conditions for groups to learn to think together, generate new knowledge and solve the deeper problems that pervade organizational culture. This article introduces elements of Wilber's Integral or AQAL paradigm as an interpretive framework for advancing key distinctions within Scharmer's account of generative dialogue.

**Keywords:** consciousness, generative dialogue, integral, presencing, reflective dialogue

*The ultimate source of the Susquehanna River was a kind of meadow in which nothing happened: no cattle, no mysteriously gushing water, merely the slow accumulation of moisture from many unseen sources, the gathering of dew, so to speak, the beginning, the unspectacular congregation of nothingness, the origin of purpose. And where the moisture stood, sharp rays of bright sunlight were reflected back until the whole area seemed golden, and hallowed, as if here Life itself were beginning (Michener, 1995, para. 65).*

## Introduction

Like the proverbial Zen finger, Michener's quote directs our awareness to the hidden, yet always present source of life that plays a formative role in shaping us and our manifest world. Whether this underlying source is viewed from the form of a river, an artist's creation or a generative conversation, we are reminded of the significance of the subtle originating processes that are taking place *upstream* from our accustomed horizons of attention. Viewing this analogy within the context of group learning, a pervasive tendency of many groups is to unthinkfully invest their attention in the currents of thought, past associations and conditioned habits that invariably surface *downstream* in our spoken discourse. Debate and discussion, though well suited to serving the interests of previous cultural-historical periods, focus primarily on the specific downstream thought *content*. Often this takes place to the exclusion of individuals and the group being aware of the subtle process of thought itself (Bohm, 1996) and the hidden source or blindspot out of which our thoughts and experience originate (Scharmer, 2000). These exclusions may involve process as much or more than they involve content. For example, in traditional debate, well-ingrained strategies to defend or advocate our views arise in part from a focal identification with our beliefs, positions and judgments. As Scharmer has argued, in practice such modes of communication prevent us from noticing what is taking place upstream. According to Scharmer's research on presencing (Scharmer, 2000; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004), further upstream lies both tacit embodied knowledge and not yet embodied tacit knowledge (Scharmer, 2001) that emerges through contact with the unmanifest source of our experience.

Following from Bohmian dialogue<sup>1</sup> (1987, 1996) and the MIT dialogue project (Isaacs, 1993, 1994), Scharmer's framework of generative dialogue (GD) (Scharmer 2000, 2003; Isaacs, 1999) addresses the above modes of attention and knowing within four fields of conversation. Building upon Scharmer's contribution, this article explores a set of distinctions advanced by Wilber's AQAL<sup>2</sup> lens in order to establish new distinctions and orientating generalizations to better serve practitioners and facilitators working with the GD framework. On the whole, this article ventures a series of exploratory perspectives concerning how Wilber's AQAL model can help augment the transformative potential of generative dialogue practice in various contexts of social, cultural, educational and business innovation.

## A Brief Overview of Generative Dialogue

Scharmer's account of generative dialogue<sup>3</sup> offers at least two important contributions to the field of dialogue studies<sup>4</sup>. First, as a map of four archetypal fields of conversation that groups can develop mastery of, Scharmer's model (i.e., Figure 1) depicts how individuals and collectives move counter-clockwise from polite discussion (i.e., talking nice) through the field of debate (i.e. talking tough) towards more open, reflective dialogue and finally forms of collective intelligence<sup>5</sup> (i.e., generative dialogue). Scharmer (2001) describes each successive field as representing an increasingly complex pattern of conversation that reveals new forms of explicit (i.e., talking nice; talking tough), tacit embodied (i.e., reflective dialogue) and not-yet embodied tacit knowledge (i.e., generative dialogue). Secondly, GD offers a preliminary framework to honor more traditional forms of organizational and academic discourse alongside the relational and creative dimensions of dialogue, resulting in a more comprehensive map of conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> As a practice, Bohmian dialogue is a way of inquiring into the individual and collective presuppositions, ideas, beliefs, and feelings that ordinarily inhibit communication. Bohm's conception addresses both our underlying assumptions as well as the psychological pressures behind these assumptions. In this sense, Bohm is proposing a basis for creating a new kind of culture where opinions and assumptions are not defended incoherently and people think together (Bohm, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Wilber's AQAL model has become the shorthand version of his integral approach. AQAL is short for all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types (Wilber, 2003a). For the purposes of this article, I have focused on the first four lenses, as I have not found the distinction of types to be that useful in the context of Scharmer's model.

<sup>3</sup> Though Scharmer's framework is by no means exhaustive of the possibilities of conceptualizing communication within groups, it offers an important contribution in accounting for the basic horizontal stages of conversation, group formation processes and rudimentary conversational practices that support personal and collective development.

<sup>4</sup> The proliferation of dialogue across a number of disciplines has arguably given rise to an important field of study in recent years. See Alexander's (2004) dissertation, *Coalescing the Field of Dialogue* for a sound overview of this emerging academic discipline.

<sup>5</sup> Experiences within the fourth field of generative dialogue are reflected in O'Hara's (2003) description of Integral Groups, in addition to other intersubjective methodologies within the emerging field of collective intelligence (Hamilton, 2004).

Within each field of conversation, Scharmer charts a cluster of characteristic ways of listening, orientation to learning in relation to time, habits of attention and speech acts (Scharmer, 2000; Isaacs, 1999) as outlined in Figure 1.<sup>6</sup>

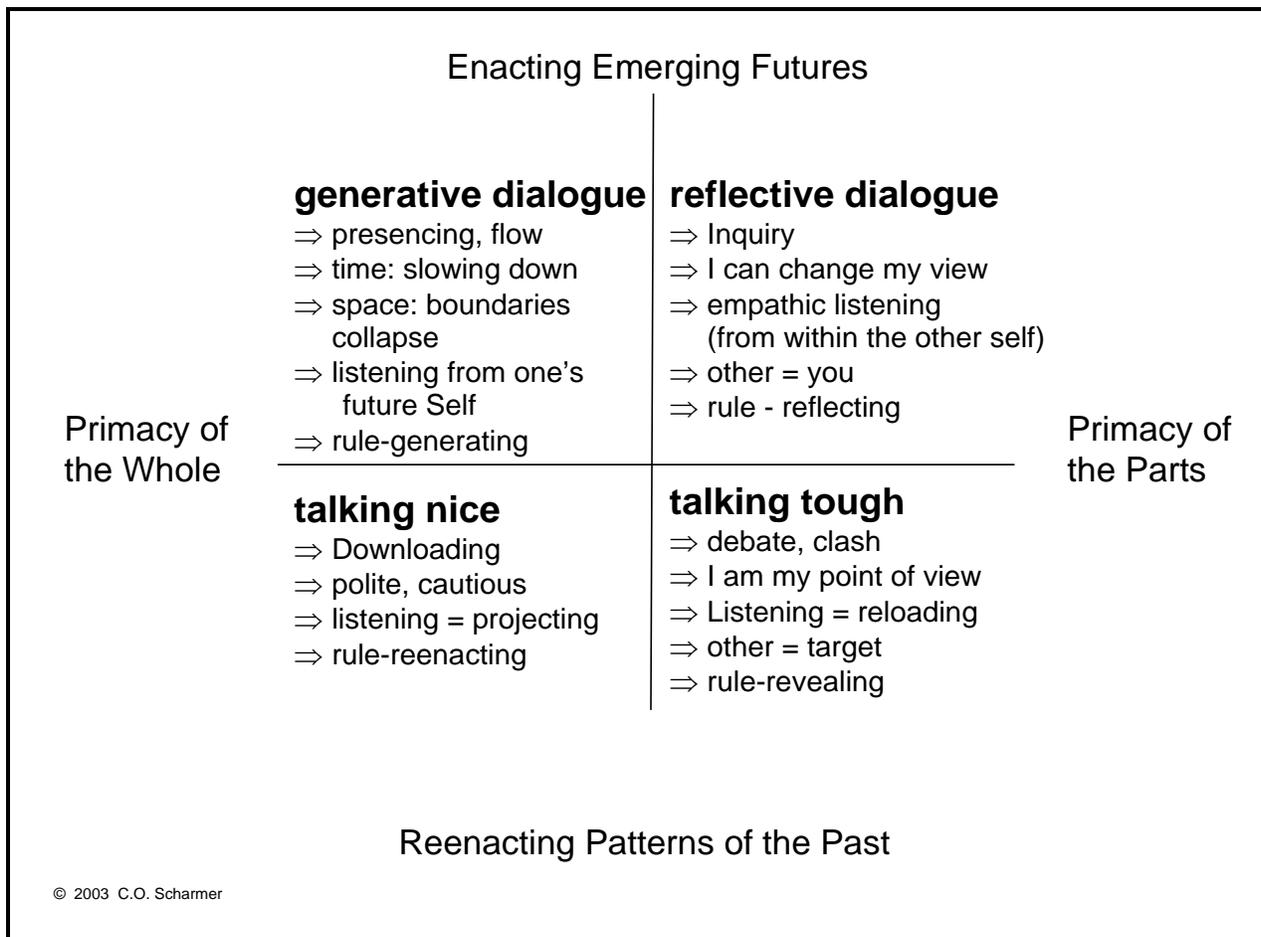


Figure 1. Four Fields of Conversation

*Note.* From “Four fields of generative dialogue,” by C. O. Scharmer, 2003, Generative Dialogue Course Pack. Copyright 2003 by C. O. Scharmer. Reproduced with permission of the author.

Initially there is often well-intentioned politeness and conformity to past forms of knowing and knowledge building (Scharmer, 2000), which leads to undiscussables (Argyris, 1990) or threads of conversation that participants avoid. This dynamic can arise when participants hold back what they are thinking or feeling and infer meanings upon the contributions of others based on previous interactions or projection. In order to move beyond this initial group pattern, Scharmer points out that individuals need to bring what they are *thinking* into alignment with what they are *saying*. If this initial transition is delayed, it tends to manifest later on with individuals needing to voice their “truth.” The challenge in moving from *talking nice* to *talking*

<sup>6</sup> Scharmer’s model is presented in Figure 1 even though all of its dimensions are not explored within this article. For further reference on generative dialogue terminology not discussed here, see Scharmer, 2000, 2003. For expanded accounts of Scharmer’s initial model, see Isaacs, 1999; Gunnlaugson, 2006.

*tough* involves finding skillful ways to share the perspectives one is withholding or naming the dynamic within the conversation that is preventing authentic expression, as the container of the group dialogue tends to be unstable in this field (Isaacs, 1993).

Scharmer locates the conversational norms of argument and debate culture within the second field. Here participants can easily get locked into polarized and expressive views, followed by reactivity and combative listening (Scharmer, 2000). This culture of conversation risks various forms of breakdown (Isaacs, 1999) as individuals become overly identified with their perspectives and felt needs to impart or express their views. In my experience, moving from *talking tough* to *reflective dialogue* depends in part upon being more attentive to one's judgments, thoughts and psychological processes through the practice of "suspension" (Bohm, 1996). Suspension of one's judgments or reactions requires learning to bracket one's views and embrace competing perspectives as important partial illuminations of the larger gestalt of the group subject or issue. Shifts within the second field of conversation take place when participants who are otherwise locked into advocacy begin to collectively practice suspension as Bohm elaborates:

Suspension is not easily grasped because the activity is both unfamiliar and subtle. Suspension involves exposing your reactions, impulses, feelings and opinions in such a way that they can be seen and felt and also be reflected back by others in the group. It does not mean repressing or suppressing or, even, postponing them. It means, simply, giving them your serious attention so that their structures can be noticed, while they are actually taking place. Suspension may permit you to begin to see the deeper meanings underlying your thought process and to sense the often incoherent structure of any action that you might otherwise carry out automatically (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991).

Suspension helps groups become more aware of the pervasive tendency to reenact past patterns based on unexamined assumptions, perspectives or beliefs. Similar to meditation, suspension facilitates in-the-moment awareness of our thinking and emotional processes, in turn helping us temporarily shift from a first to third person perspective of the contents of our consciousness. This opens nested creative spaces within ourselves (UL) and the group (LL) to witness these contents as the dialogue process builds. With sufficient practice and duration in the third field of conversation, participants learn about the "structuring, layering or genesis of their experience" (Varela, 2000), which slows down the conversation and in turn helps develop skills of empathic listening and thinking together as a collective.

Following Bohm's *suspension of thought*, Varela's phenomenological gesture of "redirection" (Varela, 2000) helps make the transition from field three to field four. Redirection involves learning to subtly move our attention to sensing the source of the stream of shared meaning of what is trying to emerge through the greater dialogue group as people share their contributions. Put in another way, redirection involves literally redirecting one's attention to the newly emerging content and "to the source of the mental process rather than the objects within it" (Varela, 2000). According to Varela and Scharmer, the gesture of "letting come" is a recursive move of attention that involves being receptive to new meaning, knowledge and insights. As such, when conversations move from the field of reflective to generative dialogue, there is a shift from reflective inquiry into our tacit assumptions to learning to engage with future not-yet-embodied possibilities arising through the practice of *presencing*. Scharmer's analysis of presencing suggests that this threshold between *reflective* and *generative* dialogue is traversed

when participants within the group begin to “see from within the source of what is emerging, letting it come into being through us” (Senge et al., 2004, p. 45). Though different catalysts can bring a group across the creative threshold of field three and field four, it often involves a discontinuous shift from suspending one’s thoughts to *presencing* or redirecting one’s attention towards the emerging source of self-transcending knowledge. With practice, generative dialogue helps foster new capacities for collective intelligence as groups learn to cycle through the four social fields.

## Generative Dialogue Through the AQAL Lens: Exploring Wilber’s Quadrants Within Scharmer’s Fields of Conversation

Wilber’s AQAL approach rests in his quadrant model<sup>7</sup>, which acknowledges four basic co-arising perspective-dimensions of reality: subjective (i.e., the interior of an individual),

<b>UPPER LEFT</b>	<b>UPPER RIGHT</b>
Self and Consciousness	Brain and Organism
<b>Interior-Individual</b> <i>Experiences</i> Subjective	<b>Exterior-Individual</b> <i>Behaviors</i> Objective
I	IT
WE	ITS
Intersubjective <i>Cultures</i> <b>Interior-Collective</b>	Interobjective <i>Systems</i> <b>Exterior-Collective</b>
Culture and Worldview	Social System and Environment
<b>LOWER LEFT</b>	<b>LOWER RIGHT</b>

intersubjective (i.e., the interior of a collective), objective (i.e., the exterior of an individual) and inter-objective (i.e., the exterior of a collective):

Summarized as the interior and exterior perspectives of individuals and collectives, each quadrant refers to one of these four perspectives, each of which we can take on any life situation, and so upon any instance within the context of generative dialogue. Unpacking the quadrants within the generative dialogue model as a whole, any *moment* within one of the four fields of conversation is informed by a range of *experiences* (e.g., suspension, presencing, bearing witness), *behaviors* (e.g., advocating, inquiring, making decisions), *cultures* (e.g., the worldviews and values of the participants and group) and *systems* (e.g., guidelines and rules within organizations, classrooms, or learning communities where GD is taking place) that are particular to each of Scharmer’s four fields.

Figure 2. Wilber’s Four Quadrants

*Note.* Adapted from <http://holons-news.com/fourquadrants.html>

<sup>7</sup> According to Wilber (1997, p. 4), “These four quadrants are a summary of a data search across various developmental and evolutionary fields. I examined over two hundred developmental sequences recognized by various branches of human knowledge – ranging from stellar physics to molecular biology, from anthropology to linguistics, from developmental psychology to ethical orientations, from cultural hermeneutics to contemplative endeavors – taken from both Eastern and Western disciplines, and including premodern, modern, and postmodern sources.”

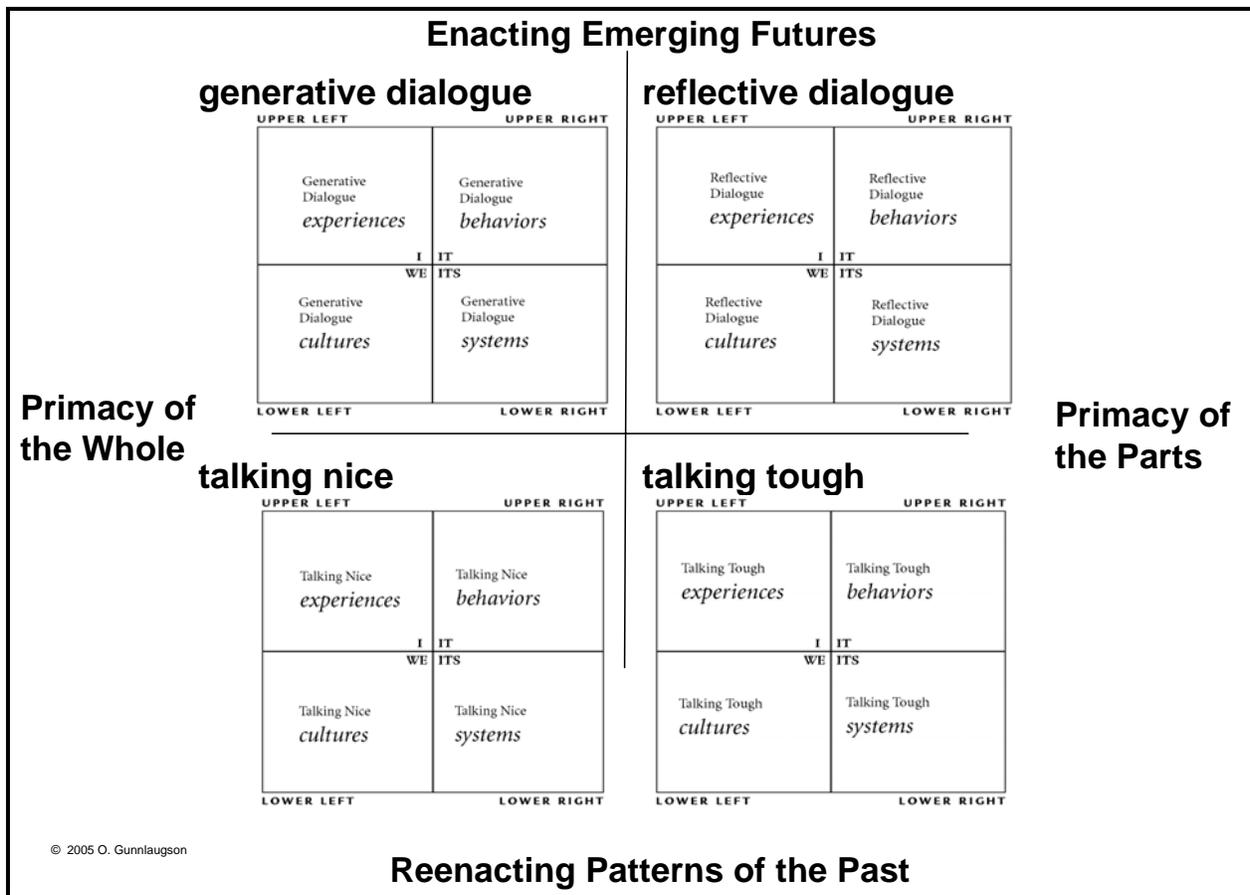


Figure 3. Wilber’s Four Quadrants Within Each of Scharmer’s Four Fields

*Note.* From “Four fields of generative dialogue,” by C. O. Scharmer, 2003, Generative Dialogue Course Pack, Copyright 2003 by C. O. Scharmer, Adapted with permission of author.

Given that each quadrant exerts a relative influence within each social field of conversation, practitioners can call upon these four basic dimensions of their experience in any field of generative dialogue for a *broader* communion with different perspectives of their reality as its arising<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to generating the above distinctions among *Experiences, Behaviors, Cultures and Systems* within Scharmer’s four fields, Wilber’s quadrant model expands upon Scharmer’s

<sup>8</sup> The quadrant model also offers a practical template to track the blindspots of the GD process more skillfully. When participants know the GD model, they can bring awareness to these four basic dimensions and perspectives in-the-moment to see if there is a territory within the field of conversation that is being ignored or neglected. Perhaps there is a breakdown within the group where the behaviors (UR) of the conversation are keeping the group stuck in *Talking Nice*. What shift in behaviors might serve as leverage points to help the group move to *Talking Tough* or *Reflective Dialogue*? Maybe there is something about the organizational culture (LL) that is constraining the conversation in terms of the tacit rules or guidelines that individuals adhere to. Recognizing this, a skillful group can bring in interventions into the LL to help move the field of conversation towards *Generative Dialogue*.

explanation of how rules evolve through the four fields (i.e., Figure 1). Instead of talking nice being merely about rule-reenacting, we can see via Wilber's four quadrants that rules are being collectively re-enacted within the Lower Right Quadrant, as are the UL experiences, UR behaviors, and LL cultures associated with those rules. If we move to the field of talking tough, it is not just that rules are being *revealed*, but the experiences, behaviors, cultures and systems surrounding those rules are being revealed as well. For reflective dialogue, experiences, behaviors, cultures and systems are being *reflected upon*. And for generative dialogue, experiences, behaviors, cultures and systems are *generated*. Framed in this way, we can honor the evolution of rules or guidelines within groups as well as these broader fundamental dimensions of reality (experiences, behaviors, cultures and systems) where evolution is tetra-unfolding within the generative dialogue process. This distinction becomes particularly significant in ensuring these four vital horizons of emergence within a given conversation are taken into account by the generative dialogue group. Additionally, Wilber's quadrants become particularly significant in the fourth generative field as groups evolve new experiences, behaviors, cultures and systems, ensuring that the full generative potential of the model is exercised.

Another practical example of the quadrants' usefulness is in its comprehensive honoring of diverse and competing epistemologies. An intrinsic bias of constructivist forms of dialogue practice is that they tend to privilege subjective (UL) or intersubjective (LL) ways of knowing as more important than objective (UR & LR) ways of knowing, if objective ways of knowing are believed to even exist<sup>9</sup>. Versions of dialogue informed by constructivist thought tend to rank interpersonal harmony and equality as the highest form of truth making within group life. With the epistemological map offered by the quadrants, it is apparent that this approach to dialogue need not exclude or marginalize other forms of knowing (i.e. particularly objective ways of knowing). In this way, the quadrants prevent generative dialogue from being used as a forum for the exclusive hearing of the values of the sensitive self<sup>10</sup>, helping groups move beyond civically egoic forms of "conversational narcissism" (Arnett, 1992) by giving voice to a broader range of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives *within* each of Scharmer's four fields of conversation. Again, the quadrants facilitate the transition to a more integral practice of generative dialogue by honoring the four co-arising dimensions of reality within *all* the four fields of conversation.

## **“Levels” and “Lines” Informing Generative Dialogue Practice**

*No problem can be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it – Albert Einstein*

In this section I evaluate Wilber's developmental *levels* within the context of various developmental *lines* (Wilber, 2003a), which represent distinct capacities of consciousness. Although there are lines of development running through all of the quadrants, for the purposes of

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<sup>9</sup> With the advent of deconstructive postmodern thought, objectivity or an objective perspective has been radically questioned, and in certain extreme constructivist circles, outright disregarded.

<sup>10</sup> Values of the sensitive self include consensus process, human bonding, ecological sensitivity, egalitarian thinking. As Beck and Cowan (1996) and Wilber (2002) note, the sensitive self places an emphasis on feelings, prohibition of hierarchy, relational, strives for authenticity, sharing, caring community.

this article, I will focus primarily on those developmental lines within the interiors of individuals and collectives (UL and LL quadrants) that inform GD practice. Given the absence of an empirically supported developmental model that measures the overall level of individual consciousness, it is important to note that *levels* refer to the orders of complexity within a given developmental line (Wilber, 2003a). In other words, as Wilber (2003b) explains, the particular context of development determines what one is measuring as Wilber elaborates:

There is no such thing as a level of consciousness: a 'level of consciousness' does not exist by itself, because it is always a level *of some line* that is being measured: there is a level of moral development, a level of self development, and so on, but not a separate thing called a level of consciousness that you can see and measure. Consciousness always has some sort of content, and that content—moral, cognitive, spiritual, psychosexual, linguistic, artistic, etc.—is what you see and measure (p. 2).

Wilber draws on a broad assortment of developmental theorists and expands upon Gardner's notion of "multiple intelligences"<sup>11</sup> with his distinction of *lines* or *streams*.<sup>12</sup>

While not all the higher developmental *levels* of certain key developmental *lines* are capacities that are available to every participant, the later conversation fields of generative dialogue (i.e., reflective and generative dialogue) call upon more complex *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal* capacities of consciousness than the fields of polite discussion or debate.

Given the wide range of critiques against hierarchical models of stage development as privileging some combination of elitist, gender or ethnocentric biases by the researcher (Reeves, 1999), it is perhaps no surprise that dialogue theorists have been reluctant to draw correlations between one's level of consciousness (along specific lines) and one's capacity within different fields of conversation. Nevertheless, not all of the higher developmental *levels* of every developmental line are available to everyone, nor are all developmental lines significant to generative dialogue practice. As the next section outlines, in my experience as a facilitator of generative dialogue, I have found that certain capacities of consciousness offer important contributions to the process and practice of generative dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Gardner's seven types of intelligences include: kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence and interpersonal intelligence.

<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on these developmental lines as a whole, it is important to note that the sequential (i.e., horizontal) movement through the fields of Scharmer's model is not to be confused with the movement up through the developmental (i.e., vertical) stages along different developmental lines of Wilber's AQAL model.

<sup>13</sup> Given how little Scharmer's model has been researched, determining what levels of what lines are more pertinent to serving generative dialogue than others remains an open question. In light of the absence of such research, this article attempts to offer a conceptual outline of an assortment of candidates. In my experience, these lines greatly assist and catalyze the emergence of the generative field of conversation. By sketching out a more integrally informed map of the interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities that support the emergence of generative dialogue, my intention is to help point the way to greater mastery of the practice. That said, it is important to note that experiencing the four fields of generative dialogue is not contingent upon individuals being at a high level in a few or all these lines. Each field of conversation emerges out of the larger gestalt of the group interaction, which is greater or is constituted with more complexity than the sum of its parts (individuals). The distinction of lines is

## Cognitive Line

Beginning with the cognitive line, we cannot ignore Wilber's notion that the formal stage of cognition (i.e., discursive rationality) does not yet have the capacity to integrate the multiple perspectives with which we are presented by our increasingly interconnected world. That capacity, which Wilber terms "vision logic," becomes available with the emergence of the *postformal* level of cognition. According to Wilber (1995), vision logic is the capacity to allow differences and contradictions to coexist, and in doing this, to see how otherwise incompatible notions can fit together through forms of multiple perspective taking. Indispensable to the fourth field of generative dialogue, the nature of vision logic glimpses how things might "fit" together by weaving perspectives from the multiple currents and systems of meaning and ways of knowing that arise within the generative dialogue process.

Vision-logic is supported by "meta-awareness"<sup>14</sup> (Jordan, 2000), which develops from the practice of suspension. Becoming meta-aware of our experience in conversation helps invite a creative space or clearing to notice emerging meaning or knowledge. In this sense, generative dialogue participants learn to stabilize themselves at a position of meta-awareness that is at least "one level above habitual engagement" (Varela, 2000). If we look to the spoken discourse traditions of debate, the psychological pressure of debate tends to block the emergence of meta-awareness and vision-logic by keeping participants absorbed with the downstream content and context of a given argument. In my experience with debate, this tends to result in polarization of different perspectives, and a tendency to overlook the deeper assumptions underlying the differences or how the differences might be integrated. On the other hand, participants witnessing their reflexes of thought and emotion rather than unconsciously acting out and subsequently identifying with these reflexes characterize the later fields of reflective and generative dialogue. Similar to meditation practice, suspension offers a way station for the self to dis-embed from its habitual identification with the ordinary waking state of consciousness and re-embed within the witness self position. According to Jordan (2003), meta-awareness (like vision-logic) is an advanced form of cognition that can attend to and draw support from a variety of emotional, behavioral and thought content without identifying with such content as who one is and therefore is not prone to being lost in such streams of consciousness.

## Emotional Line

In addition to cognition, another developmental line that is relevant to generative dialogue is emotional intelligence. Although many developmental lines develop in a relatively independent way, Wilber also regards developmental lines as "streams" (2000), which is helpful in the case of emotional intelligence, which relies on cognition as well as other neighboring developmental lines. In the field of reflective dialogue, participants begin to invite more relational ways of

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intended to engage those practitioners who are interested in cultivating greater mastery of the capacities that support and enhance the emergence of generative dialogue.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jordan (2000) offers a definition of meta-awareness:

Meta-awareness means awareness of the sensorimotor schematas, emotions, desires and thoughts that tumble through our being. Instead of being had by one's habitual behavioral patterns, emotions, desires and thoughts, meta-awareness means that there is a locus of witnessing in consciousness that can make the behaviors, emotions, desires and thoughts objects of attention (p. 33).

knowing and being through conversation that develop our capacity to embrace differently shaded emotions without necessarily repressing or expressing the emotional content. With practice, generative dialogue groups develop the capacity for a form of collective “emotional alchemy” (Goleman, 1997), where emotional pain is met with collective compassion and openness. However, depending on each individual’s stage of development of emotional intelligence and other supportive lines (e.g., moral and cognitive intelligence), there will be a greater or lesser ability within the group to hold conflicting emotions well. Furthermore, generative dialogue develops an individual’s capacity to embrace and allow for different shaded emotions, in turn making participants less prone to being emotionally reactive. Yet, once again, there will be individuals who have not yet developed their emotional lines to this degree and so rely on the modeling from others within the group who have. Further advanced forms of emotional intelligence enable participants to not only to imagine what one would think and feel if they were in someone else’s shoes, but also to imagine what *another* person thinks and feels (Jordan, 2003). Higher levels of emotional intelligence enable people to be less tangled up and hooked by their own or other’s emotions, which helps avoid the marginalization of creative processes through the “tyranny of intimacy” (Arnett, 1992, p. 32) and other forms of group narcissism.

### **Collective Intelligence Line<sup>15</sup>**

*The Next Buddha May be a Sangha* – Thich Nhat Hahn

As participants explore the latter fields of generative dialogue, they develop the capacity to experience more *interdependent* processes of learning and thinking together. With sufficient practice and duration, participants learn how to sense, listen and think together from the shared source of emerging shared meaning that is arising through the present moment. In moving from the individual-oriented to the collective-oriented fields (i.e., transition from talking tough to reflective dialogue), the boundaries between participants begin to soften through empathic listening, and suspension of thought and judgment, which brings the personhood of the participants into the foreground. When the group passes the final threshold into generative dialogue, the practice of collective presencing gives way to newly emerging forms of *collective intelligence*.

Berkeley professor of cognitive science Eleanor Rosch describes this as a movement from analytic knowing to a form of wisdom awareness she describes as “primary knowing” which involves a “transformation from the subject-object-separation consciousness, towards an order of perception that happens from the whole field, not from within a separated perceiver” (Rosch and Scharmer, 1999, p. 21). According to Rosch, primary knowing requires developing the capacity to literally sense and align oneself with the source of the unclear knowledge emerging from the field itself. In learning to recognize and embody forms of primary knowing, participants develop the skills to support one another in cultivating fields of collective learning that increasingly rely upon collective attention, intention and capacity building within the fourth field stage of generative dialogue.<sup>16</sup> In spite of the absence of empirical research on the subject, interest in

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<sup>15</sup> Though AQAL theory does not explicitly identify collective intelligence as a line of development, I have included it here as a preliminary conceptual exploration of both an individual and collective capacity of consciousness that may be later validated by empirical research.

<sup>16</sup> It is helpful to visualize the developmental line of collective intelligence as a developmental capacity of the collective interior (LL) of a group. While all groups can potentially experience different orders or

collective intelligence and collective methods for learning and thinking together has grown considerably within the past decade<sup>17</sup> (Hamilton, 2004).

## “States” of Consciousness

Wilber’s (2000) model of “states” of consciousness is derived in part from the world wisdom traditions as well as the more recent field of consciousness studies. According to Wilber (2006), the great wisdom traditions Vedanta Hinduism and Vajrayana Buddhism both maintain that the three *natural states* of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and deep dreamless sleep—correspond with three great *bodies* or waking *realms* of being (gross, subtle, and causal) in daily life. In both traditions, the bodies<sup>18</sup> are said to be the energy support of the corresponding mind or state of consciousness (e.g., the gross bodymind, subtle bodymind, and causal bodymind). Wilber uses the terms “gross,” “subtle,” and “causal” to refer to these three broad states of waking awareness, even though, technically, they refer to the energetic support of those states.

Within the context of generative dialogue practice, as a tentative orientating generalization it is my experience that each of these three states are roughly enacted with the three *transitions* from talking nice to talking tough; talking tough to reflective dialogue; reflective dialogue to generative dialogue. The *gross* bodymind or our conventional waking state is maintained from talking nice to talking tough to the extent that participants are still engaged within their discursive minds and have not yet begun to take a perspective on their own or the collective conversation. The shift from *gross* to the *subtle* bodymind is facilitated by suspension of thought and feelings in the transition from the field of talking tough to reflective dialogue. Opened through suspension, the subtle bodymind is stimulated when groups and individuals slow down to make in-the-moment contact with their thought processes and underlying source. This shift is also similar to what takes place in meditation where one moves from being subject to one’s thoughts, emotions and consciousness to witnessing these contents both individually and as a collective. Finally, with presencing, my experience is consistent with Wilber’s claim that “presencing” evokes the “causal state” (Wilber and Scharmer, 2004) inasmuch as presencing calls upon the spacious and vast *causal* bodymind. Here participants begin to experientially make contact with the threshold of emergence, which gives rise to manifest thoughts, ideas, and intuitions that begin to crystallize in our awareness.

Again, considered in the light of provisional orientating generalizations, these “state” shifts become particularly interesting when viewed from the four quadrants. For within the previous distinction of *GD cultures*, groups go through these state shifts bringing about a movement from

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levels of collective intelligence, some groups are invariably more creative or intelligent than others. Partly this is due to the capacities individuals bring to the field of conversation, but partly also the collective capacities of a group to cycle through Scharmer’s model of generative dialogue and to embody collective wisdom.

<sup>17</sup> For a helpful overview of the field of collective intelligence, I recommend consulting Craig Hamilton’s (2004) groundbreaking article *Come Together: The Power of Collective Intelligence* in the May-July 2004 issue of *What is Enlightenment*.

<sup>18</sup> According to Wilber (2006), for the wisdom traditions, a “body” simply means a mode of experience or energetic feeling. So there is coarse or gross experience, subtle or refined experience, and very subtle or causal experience. In other words, these are *phenomenological realities* that present themselves to our immediate awareness. While everyone has access to all their bodies and the energy of each of these bodies, Wilber notes that not everyone is present to these bodies in the moment.

their *collective* gross bodymind to their *collective* subtle bodymind to their *collective* causal bodymind. More recent theorizing within the emerging field of collective intelligence indicates the formation of a “group bodymind” (Bohm, 1996), “co-intelligence” (Atlee, 2003a, 2003b) or “collective mind” (Hamilton, 2004) when vital thresholds of group experience are crossed. However, none of these collective metaphors take into account the respective shifts in the group *state* of consciousness, leaving out a vital dimension of individual and collective experiences. With the distinction of *states*, we bring attention to the correlative shifts of participants’ consciousness in relation to the unfolding field dynamics of conversation and the gesture of moving back upstream to the source of our experience (as depicted in the opening quote).

Just as Wilber (2006) has pointed out, more frequent movement through *state* changes facilitates and quickens the development of *stages* along different developmental *lines*. In this way, generative dialogue, like other methods of collective intelligence<sup>19</sup> can serve the role of an intersubjective (LL) yoga that facilitates individual’s temporary change in *state* of consciousness, which over time can help participants develop enduring levels of consciousness along different lines. Experiencing these deeper states in group conversation as a vitalizing dimension of the conversation can help catalyze profound motivation and meaning in the process of conversation as a co-creative practice. As gateways to the temporary emergence of transcendent states of being that often evoke deep feelings of sacred connection with life and the greater cosmos, my experience is that helping groups identify and access these states brings forth the dormant gross, subtle and causal realities that accompany these states.

From experiences facilitating and participating in generative dialogue groups, I have found the framework of *states* helpful as a set of distinctions to recognize and name these state-shifts in their moment-to-moment experience. As Wilber (2003b) frequently comments, regular meditation practice also helps us learn to dis-identify with the *gross* contents of consciousness and in turn free up attention for *subtle* or *causal* contents/realities:

As meditation deepens, different contents tend to arise, often moving from gross contents (objects of the senses and mental representations of them) to subtler contents (visions, illuminations, bliss) to very subtle or causal contents (vast formlessness, consciousness without an object) (p. 1).

Contemplative practices such as meditation<sup>20</sup> offer an *intrapersonal* (UL) practice for individuals to experience a shift in their *state* of consciousness. As a complementary *interpersonal* (LL) practice, generative dialogue offers a venue to bring about shifts in the gross, subtle and causal *states* of consciousness through conversation. From this perspective, an

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<sup>19</sup> Other intersubjective methodologies of collective intelligence include Roshi’s (2006) *Big Mind*; Cohen’s (2004) *Enlightened Communication*; among others.

<sup>20</sup> Wilber (2003b) elaborates on the relationship between different types of meditation and connection with states of consciousness:

For example, in a type of meditation known as savikalpa samadhi (or mediation with an object of awareness), one can directly (while fully awake) experience the higher reaches of the subtle realm; in states of nirvikalpa and jnana samadhi, one directly experiences the causal realm; in states of sahaja samadhi, one directly realizes the nondual (which we will discuss in a moment). In all of those cases, one is developing one’s capacity to experience higher states by converting them into *permanent acquisitions*. States that are normally unconscious have been made conscious; states that are normally temporary have been made permanent (p. 10).

objective of generative dialogue practice is not to leave behind the conventional or gross states of mind or to label them as egoic and therefore a hindrance. Rather, it becomes important to cultivate the flourishing of all states and their respective bodyminds as portals to a more integral understanding of multiple depths of reality as it unfolds and is co-created through conversation. Consistent with the Vedantic tradition, Wilber (2003a) refers to such a state as “Turiya,” which is the ability to simultaneously *witness* and *experience* all three states and bodies of the gross, subtle and causal. Recognizing that every state has its relative value, but that learning to individually and collectively embody deeper states offer more relative value gives credence to Scharmer’s (2000) reflection on a conversation with Bill O’Brian, “the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener” (p. 1). Given that each state of consciousness contains a distinctive self-sense, level of reality and scope of sensitivities, activating deeper collective states through the generative dialogue process invites participants into heretofore unexplored frontiers of knowing, learning and being.

## Closing Remarks

As this article outlines, an AQAL interpretation of generative dialogue introduces several new distinctions for GD practitioners to broaden and deepen the scope of their practice. Given the respective influences of the different dimensions of our consciousness within the four fields of conversation of Scharmer’s model, this article initiates a preliminary inquiry and positing of directions to inform further theorizing and research within various contexts of GD practice. Future generative dialogue practitioners will benefit from considering different possibilities for how AQAL interpretations can advance the capacities and potentials of existing groups. Finally, it is my hope that this article will inspire the continued development and refinement of generative dialogue as a transformative practice within the emerging field of collective intelligence.

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