

## Revaluing Purple, Red and Blue

By Jasper Rienstra

### Introduction

In 2005 Don Beck asked Peter Merry to found the Dutch Center for Human Emergence (CHE Netherlands). Three years later several independent consultants, trainers and coaches, including myself, decided to start a 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier consultancy firm: CHE Synnervate. Our core product can be summarized as “Syn-nervating”. This term points to our conviction that in our present era we need two movements to further develop our organizations, institutions and societies:

- **Syn** - connects the different parts of a person, organization or society and
- **nervate** - vitalizes the new emerging whole.

Not by accident this two part term affirms the dance between the individuating and the accommodating colors of the Spiral.

The mission of CHE Synnervate is to meet our clients where they are and move them along in their natural maturation trajectory. This is what we communicate to the world and to our clients, whether they are Spiral informed or not. What we do not always tell our clients, but what we always practice is, “The Spiral is our client.” In other words, we meet and move our clients in their next natural step **on the Spiral!** In doing so, an interesting homogenous pattern seems to emerge in what those next natural steps turn out to be:

- 1) Most organizations we work with are, in terms of their internal drives and intentions, moving towards Orange-Green and sometimes Green-Yellow. Orange, Green and Yellow are also by far the dominant vMememes of individuals we measure with SDi assessments like Peoplescan or ValueMatch.
- 2) Most organizations and people in them are, in terms of their behavior, culture and systems, dominantly Blue-Orange or Orange-Blue driven with, especially in non-profits e.g. schools and municipalities, remnants of Purple family-culture and Red local rulers.
- 3) The client briefings we get are often a combination of
  - a. More healthy Orange please! (sounding like “professionalizing” and “real implementation of accountability and result-oriented management”) and
  - b. More healthy Green please! (sounding like “more sense of connection and communality”, “more cocreation between different parts of the organization” and “more focus on the whole, beyond local borders”).
- 4) The next natural step to become more healthy Orange/Green is for those organizations often to focus on re-including the less complex vMememes like Purple, Red and Blue.
- 5) At first our clients are often not so happy with our Spiral advice, “You want more Orange and Green? Then you need to start with including healthy Purple, Red and Blue!”. This is understandable because often they are happy to have just transcended and become free from the domination of those vMememes. But once they get their Yellow systemic perspective and consciousness switched on, they understand the transcend and include principle and they start to revalue Purple, Red and Blue.

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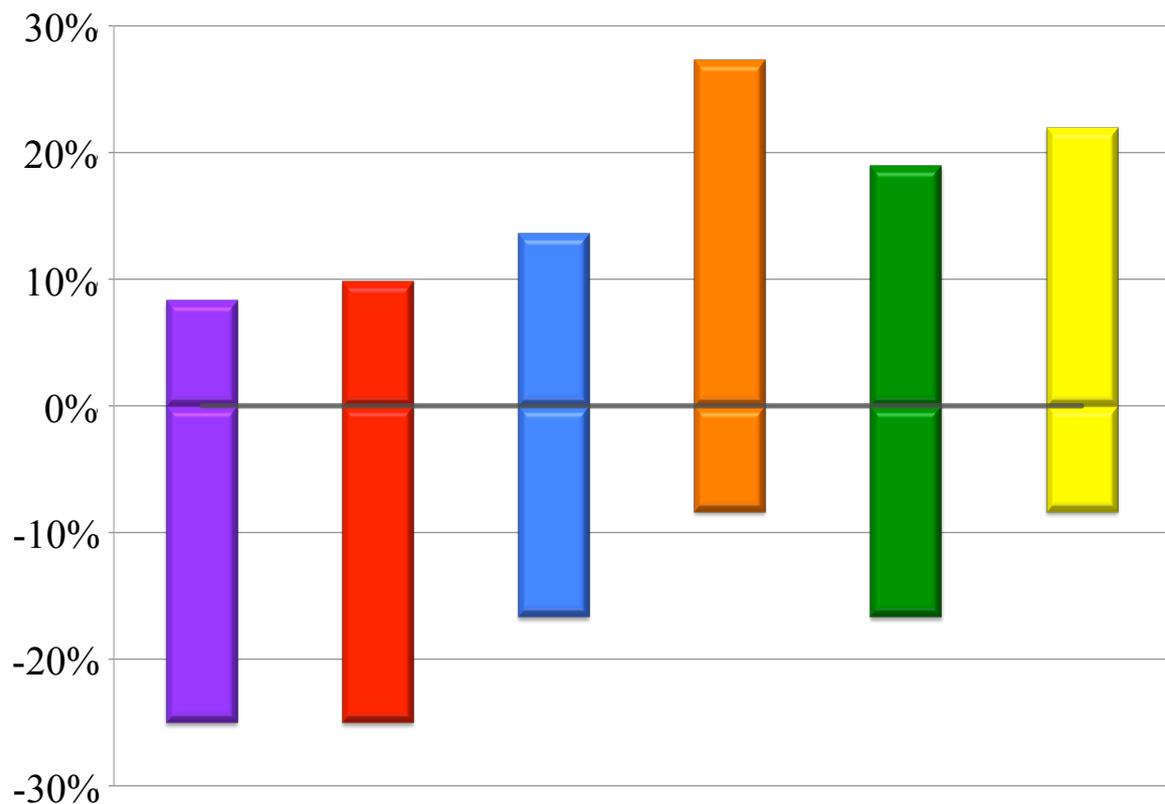
Ken Wilber phrases the transcend and include principle in *A Brief History of Everything* like this, "Evolution goes beyond what went before, but because it must embrace what went before, then its very nature is to transcend and include and thus it has an inherent directionality, a secret impulse, toward increasing depth, increasing intrinsic value, increasing consciousness. In order for evolution to move at all, it must move in those directions—there's no place else for it to go!"

In this chapter I will illustrate this pattern by sharing my experiences in leadership development in organizations and how I go about revaluing Purple, Red and Blue.

### The Need to Revalue Purple, Red and Blue

In my leadership development projects, I like to work with SDi as a perspective that offers some grip on the complexity of reality. As a starting point we often work with SDi tests like Peoplescan or ValueMatch, to obtain a personal profile of each participant in terms of vMemos that they accept/reject more or less. Such assessments will provide us with a profile of the sort below.

vMeme Profile - Example



I often see the following pattern. Many people in management positions are predominantly driven by Yellow, Green and Orange. They have little acceptance and a huge rejection of Purple, Blue and Red. The briefing that they give me when they contact me is often about wanting inspiration, being inspired, collectively and becoming a better team while doing that.

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Such a briefing is consistent with their dominant vMemos. After the introduction of the vMemos, in which I go to great lengths to be as neutral as possible about the colors, many managers wake up (or reawake) to the importance of the Purple/Red/Blue basis in life, and in their leadership.

For the closure of the personal leadership part of a program, I often host a ritual in which I invite everybody to say aloud, in front of all the others, what their highest value is in their work (or life even) and what their first next natural step in their leadership development will be. Almost always I find that most of the managers have Yellow/Green inspired values (“I want to make everybody thrive”, “real connections”, etc.) and a Purple/Red/Blue informed next step, for example:

- To get more real connections I want to include my Red autonomy more. My next step is to no longer avoid the confrontations that I inevitably have to make.
- To make everybody thrive, my next step is Blue. I am going to pay more attention to keeping my staff on the same page and to have enough predictability around my plans, so that everybody can keep up with me.
- To establish a culture of great freedom I am going to manifest my Purple leadership more. I am going to be aware of where my symbolic leadership is needed in terms of chairing meetings, giving closure, providing information (even when it is not very inspiring or new).

My reflection on this is that there is a big misconception here, i.e. that leadership is better/more important than management. And really, this is literally what these leaders/managers say and tell to the world, “We have to get from management to leadership!” In other words, they think that the more complex vMemos are to be preferred over the less complex vMemos. But of course, if you transcend and *exclude* vMemos, you get empty vMemos without a foundation. SDi often helps to get this point across, and to give the antidote for it. In the next paragraph I describe a concrete example of a manager that learned to revalue Purple, Red and Blue.

### **When more Yellow/Green leadership has the opposite effect.**

#### **Situation**

In the department of Art and Culture of a Municipality with a dominant Blue/Orange culture the atmosphere is negative and unproductive. Targets are not met. Individual and ad-hoc ways of working rule. There is very little open communication - but lots of complaining. The rest of the organization is getting tired of not being able to count on this department to deliver something of quality on time.

Ralph, the newly appointed manager (dominant Yellow/Green) is watching all this and wonders what is going on. His tendency is mainly to respond to questions of his staff with new questions, because he wants to trust their own responsibility to do what is needed. He is an optimist. However, even he sees that things are getting worse and worse. Moreover, people are complaining about his leadership: Ralph is unclear, indecisive and he doesn't take people's feedback seriously. One of his workers says, “He acts like a UN Blue Helmet, always neutral, never takes a stance. But that is not what a manager is meant to be like, is it?”

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**SDi Diagnosis**

Ralph explains the situation to me, telling he doesn’t like to play the role of a policeman. He wants to be the Yellow/Green manager he prefers to have as his own manager, someone creating space, inspiring, concentrating on the big picture and always open for innovation. In his ears ”a Blue Helmet” sounds like a compliment!

**SDi Applied To The Situation**

I confronted him with the following SDi analysis, “If you want to show real Yellow leadership, you have to start with the question, “What is needed NOW? What is at THIS moment the bottleneck for the natural next step in the development of your team? Notice that healthy Yellow only can function on a basis of healthy Purple, Red, Blue, Orange and Green. If not, Green/Yellow interventions will probably have the opposite effect of what you’re striving for, i.e. less harmony and less inspiration. It seems this is actually happening. So, this situation seems to need the following from you. “

<b>More leadership in the areas of:</b>	<b>In terms of SDi:</b>
Take the lead, frame what is happening, be clear and create clarity.	More pro-active Blue. Less Yellow/Green “helicoptering” and stick to the main issues only.
Show that it is rewarding for your colleagues to tell you what is bothering them. Take their feedback seriously and give a reaction.	More reliable and predictable Blue. Less Green putting things into perspective.
Address people: Enforce agreements in a visible way, repeat decisions if needed, respond to irrational feedback too.	More Red directness and Purple symbolic visibility.
Pay attention to persistent problems in the team. Even if that is by saying sorry for the persistency and making repairs where needed.	More Red boundaries and Blue perseverance and accountability to successfully bring issues to closure – once and forever.
Stop acting as a Blue helmet. Be visible, Show that you are the manager.	More Purple, Red and Blue presence, Involvement and a hands-on mentality, instead of Yellow/Green abstraction and distance.

### **Intervention**

Ralph recognizes the value in this analysis and is happy with the concrete guidance. His Yellow/Green values support him to stay open for the feedback and to learn from it. He asks me to coach him in discovering and recognizing opportunities in his daily work to show (Purple) symbolic visibility, to sharpen his communication style and to practice his attitude and behavior in situations needing clear presence.

Ralph also recognizes that when he figures out everything on his own about the best approach for his leadership this nearly always results in following his Green/Yellow preferences. So, after the earlier mentioned diagnosis, he (temporarily) uses me as a sparring partner for these issues. The effect is that Ralph starts to see his blind spot (Purple, Red, Blue) and becomes more and more able to manifest these values too. For example, he had the habit of sending mails with many open reflective questions to his colleagues. Now he is being more and more transparent about his own vision, opinion and expectations. An extra effect is that Ralph is becoming interested in finding out more about the underlying causes of his negative prejudices about these vMemos. This may indicate that he moves from “closed” to merely “arrested”, in terms of potential for development.

### **Results**

Ralph is manifesting himself, very consciously, as a manager much more than before, despite his natural tendencies to disappear and zoom out. He provides more direction and clearer boundaries. He explicitly opens meetings, and clearly sets agendas. Ralph sees that this works; there is more openness, rest and connection. Ralph starts to enjoy it. And, he feels a growing admiration for the mayor who appears to be a real master in simple modern rituals with which he instantly seems to create connection and team spirit in a group, e.g. he notices that the mayor starts and ends meetings with an informal “hey you guys... “.

Ralph also realizes that something is not right when he is the only one working late each night in order to deal with all the stuff that his team likes to dump in his mailbox. This realization stimulates him to be even more clear and strict in his communication. He is amazed to learn that his more directive style is accepted rather easy by his colleagues. He even gets the idea that people actually like this more directive way of doing even though they sometimes disagree with him. The atmosphere of “fiddling while Rome burns” disappeared quickly. Ralph is solving problems and clarifying grey areas within his department in a constant and perseverant way. Upon reflection many internal issues appear easy to improve and the focus is shifting slowly outwards again, towards clients, project development and professional challenges.

In the next paragraph, I zoom deeper into the issue of how manifesting less complex vMemos can be crucial to heal the more complex vMemos.

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### **How Manifesting Purple, Red and Blue Can Be Crucial For Healthy Orange, Green and Yellow**

SDi helps to get a precise and realistic perspective on the natural next step in one’s leadership. Many people I meet, who have “connection” and “innovation” as their highest values, discover via SDi that their natural next step is:

- To manifest more autonomy;
- To address their colleagues in a more direct way; or
- To put their presence, clarity and focus into the team more instead of choosing for a meta-position.

In short, their natural next step is to manifest more from the Purple, Red and Blue perspective, just like manager Ralph from the paragraph before.

This is not rocket-science and seems even quite simple compared with higher and more complex ideals like connection (Green) and systemic innovation (Yellow). However, if you take a closer look, those simple steps actually appear to be manifestations of connection and innovation:

- In the end, the most powerful way of connecting with others, is connecting with yourself. Real agency enables real communion and vice versa. And, innovation is not created by following others, but by manifesting your deepest purpose with an autonomous, free spirit and pro-active entrepreneurship.
- In the end, addressing issues in a respectful way is one of the most powerful ways to invest in better connection and the learning and innovation ability of a system. But, addressing colleagues can be stressful and can in the short term cause friction instead of connection. That is why for many people this is the natural next step, yet to be taken. Addressing each other about “what bothers you” is in my experience often the breakthrough leading to real relationships and real innovation instead of “talking still more about what inspires you”.
- In the end, bringing in your presence, clarity and focus fully is what creates real commitment and connection with a situation. That is how you become an insider and a co-creator instead of an outsider and an external observer. The U Process (Scharmer et al, 2009) shows clearly how deep transformation and innovation is not possible without really engaging as part of the system, “sensing from the whole”. The only way for real innovation of a system is to live your membership of that system fully.

Just doing more Purple, Red and Blue, sounds fairly simple. And it is! At the same time it is one of the biggest challenges for present leaders to really integrate these values in their Green/Yellow leadership. It takes courage, perseverance and readiness to get your hands dirty. And, it takes the ability to see the simplicity in the complexity of it.

In the next paragraph, I describe one of the simple techniques I use to help leaders in the challenge to see their blind spots in valuing Purple, Red and Blue, the reversion practice.

### Coloring Your Blind Spot: The Reversion Practice

Recently, during an SDi level 1 certification training in the Netherlands, one of the participants became aware of her purely negative associations with all things around Red. I invited her to participate in a reversion practice and she did, with the following results:

- **Step 1:** “Tell me all those negative Red associations. Don’t make any restrictions, just report all that is in your mind”. This was the harvest: Aggressive, macho one-upmanship, taking yourself very seriously, raging, ruthless, ignoring the feelings of others, placing yourself in the center of attention, unpredictable, unreliable, taking the stage.
- **Step 2:** “If you consider that all negative things are an exaggeration of something that is in essence a positive thing, what would be the positive sides of all those examples?” As expected at first she didn’t succeed in finding the connected positive core qualities for all her negative associations...because that was her blind spot. But with some help she started to recognize, “Ah yes, of course...!” This was the harvest:

<b>NEGATIVE Red is too much of</b>	<b>POSTIVE Red is</b>
Aggressive	Powerful
Macho one-upmanship	Show yourself, take your seat
Taking self very seriously	Self-confidence
Raging	Being transparent, not denying real feelings
Ruthless	Purposeful, drive, loose
Ignoring other’s feelings	Being autonomous, independent, authentic
Placing self in center of attention	Being present, not hiding
Unpredictable	Spontaneous
Unreliable	Unapologetic
Taking the stage	Playing big, not playing small
Anger	Zest and passion

The point? For raging, intimidating dictators, no reversion practice will help. However, for most people coloring one’s blind spot with new positive associations can help to diminish one’s prejudices, and provide an opening to revalue the values rejected earlier.

## Conclusion

I believe that the time and our Life Conditions are ripe now for 2nd tier consciousness to manifest itself in all aspects in our life, in our world – which means, also in our organizations. This does not mean that I think the people in Gaza, Syria, etc. are ready for 2<sup>nd</sup> tier. But I think their situation is. All interventions that came from 1<sup>st</sup> tier perspective have failed, and will continue to do so. The complexity, the way everything is connected with everything, is so inevitable, that a 2<sup>nd</sup> tier perspective is just as inevitable for sustainable improvement. A typical 2<sup>nd</sup> tier perspective analysis would be to determine the next natural step and to facilitate that step to happen – meeting everybody where (in which vMeme) they are.

If the Spiral is our client, the next natural step for organizations (as well as for people!) to transcend to 2nd tier, is often to include less complex vMememes. Because there is no transcending without including, as Ken Wilber points out so adequately. And, as I demonstrate in this chapter: including means not only to stop excluding earlier vMememes. When a more complex vMeme emerges the earlier vMememes get included pretty much as automatic subroutines. These included subroutines that serve the less complex vMememes are sufficient to provide satisfiers, but this does not mean they are the most effective, most efficient, or most healthy ways possible for these subroutines to be configured. It takes active and conscious attention to revaluing these less complex vMememes, in order to infuse them with the wisdom available from the complexer vMememes. Healthy reframing of earlier automatically formed vMememes requires attention to and appreciation of the benefits these systems provide to the whole person and organization.

In revaluing Purple, Red and Blue as the next natural step towards the most healthy and effective expression of 2nd tier cognition, it becomes clear how these vMememes are not a burden from what went before, but rather they are the acupuncture points to create the essential breakthroughs in the right direction. With this perspective on the less complex vMememes, it becomes once again easy to see their great but sometimes hidden value. By refining the configuration of the less complex vMememes, we foster the most healthy and balanced emergence of human beings in our organizations – serving the Spiral.

### References:

1. Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything* (Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston, MA, 1996), pp. 37-38.
2. C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 2009)