Towards a Theory of Transpersonal Decision-Making in Human-Systems:

A Neurolinguistically-Modeled Phenomenography

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TOWARDS A THEORY OF TRANSPERSONAL DECISION-MAKING IN HUMAN-SYSTEMS:

A NEUROLINGUISTICALLY-MODELED PHENOMENOGRAPHY

By

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“The external operation of circumstances had to assist one another in the course of a man’s life in such a way that, at the end thereof when it had been run through, they made it appear like a well-finished and perfected work of art, although previously, when it was still in the making, it had, as in the case of every planned work of art, the appearance of being often without any plan or purpose. But whoever came along after its completion and closely considered it, would inevitably gaze in astonishment at such a course of life as the work of the most deliberate foresight, wisdom, and persistence.”

(pp. 207 A. Schopenhauer 1851/1974)

Chapter I: Introduction

Humanity stands transfixed on the edge of a mysterious and largely unknown universe. Staring into this abyss we have continually sought to make sense of the chaos confronting us. Science has become the predominant means of exploration in the modern world, and yet it is increasingly challenged by post-modern speculation. The objective approach that science has promoted, as the preferred way of knowing, doesn't seem to satisfy us at the deepest levels of our experience of being human.

We yearn for something more … something that will fulfill our desire to know – about what isn't present in ordinary terms, and yet is still perceived. We want a means to know about what cannot be known using ordinary means, to make sense of the unpredictable and seemingly chaotic events we encounter, to plot a course into our individual and collective futures.

We marvel at those among us who seem to possess the unique gift of navigating life and all its variety with aplomb. These are the individuals who appear somehow able to reach out and perceive the patterns swirling around us, and to respond elegantly. They create the experience they desire. It is this ability, which hovers just at the fringe of our awareness, that may offer us, not answers, but rather alternative ways of knowing about ourselves and about the universe we inhabit together. This way of knowing may also offer us some of what we need and desire to create a world that we want to live in and one worth leaving to our children.

Background & Context

Sometime during the volatile and intense era of the 1960's in the United States, specifically on the West Coast in the San Francisco Bay Area, the worlds of modern philosophy and psychology were undergoing changes unprecedented since the beginning of the 20th century. The distinct gap that had existed between Western and Eastern ways of thinking and knowing were collapsing. Worlds of ideas began to merge and coalesce into something previously unknown. There in the midst of the tumult of this intellectual and social upheaval brought to a head by America's involvement in the Vietnam War a counter-cultural movement was peaking. Taking with it some of the brightest and best that America had to offer at the time, this movement spurred new ways of thinking, about the individual, the individual's place in society and the individual's place within and relationship to the cosmos itself. This new thinking took on many forms in disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, psychology and education.

Whole new movements sprung from the fertile ground of this newly plowed 'terra incognita' – encounter groups, gestalt therapy, sensitivity training. Among the new sprouts were two newly framed disciplines transpersonal psychology and neurolinguistic programming. Both of these disciplines were aimed at offering practitioners new ways of addressing issues of personal development within a therapeutic framework. In 1968, Abraham Maslow and Anthony Sutich, two humanistic psychologists,

formed the new "Journal of Transpersonal Psychology." Then in 1972, two researchers, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, collaborated on a book, "The Structure of Magic" that formed the basis for the discipline they co-developed, which they later called Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP).

Although both disciplines began with the intention to develop new therapeutic approaches to personal change, development and transformation, both became, through time, much more as well. Transpersonal Psychology and Neurolinguistic Programming developed into full-formed applied epistemologies with which to view the human condition. As applied epistemologies these approaches offer practitioners a way to elicit, access, utilize and modify a client's (structural form of) knowing. Traditional psychological approaches to client intervention are based in addressing the content of what a client knows (to be true of and for themselves, and the world around them). These technologies offer their practitioners different lenses then had previously been used to consider the individual and their relationship to the larger systems within which they operate.

Transpersonal Psychology and NLP share the commonalities of being systemic in design, examining and including previously unconsidered data regarding the human condition, and the development of new approaches and techniques for application and the consideration of the individual in relation to the larger system(s) within which they operate. They also differ on significant points as well.

THE TRANSPERSONAL APPROACH:

The transpersonal lens offers the user a larger context to consider the individual operating within and in relation to a system that extends beyond them. The word, transpersonal has it's roots in two Latin words, trans*,* meaning beyond or through, and personal*,* meaning mask or facade – in other words, beyond or through the personally identified aspects of self (Braud and Andersen, 1998). One of the many proposed definitions of transpersonal psychology concludes that the contemporary field is: "concerned with the study of humanity's highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding and realizations of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness." (pp. 91, Lajoie and Shapiro, 1992)

Transpersonal approaches consider aspects of the individual experience that are beyond the limits of the individual themselves. This allows the transpersonal approach to consider content that is outside of the content considered by the first three waves of psychology (psychoanalysis, behaviorism and humanistic psychology). Starting as the "fourth wave" of psychology the transpersonal approach escaped the boundaries of therapy and psychology to develop into a way of considering all aspects of human endeavor. These considerations can include: whole systems thinking, teleological projection, cosmological considerations, transcendent experience, spirituality, and mysticism. As such transpersonal psychology qualifies as an applied epistemology providing us with a well-formed way of knowing – ourselves, others, the systems and even the cosmos – within which we exist.

NEUROLINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING:

Neurolinguistic programming (or NLP) has been referred to by one of its primary researchers and developers, Robert Dilts, as "The Structure of Subjective Experience." The NLP model is based in the elicitation and calibration of the individual's subjective experience and the way in which it is codified, accessed and utilized. Richard Bandler and John Grinder stated that they had developed a system for codifying the way in which, subjective experience is held by the individual and modeling it.

The NLP lens is built around communication as an event that occurs within a system processed as a cybernetic feedback loop. This loop is defined by and built upon sensory data as the individual utilizes it in linguistic, verbal and non-verbal ways. The basic technology of NLP includes the ability to calibrate the communication event (linguistically, verbally and non-verbally) and to model it in relation to the individual(s). The primary extension of the NLP model was the consideration of process in knowing. This extension suggests that how something is known determines what it will represent to the individual semantically – i.e.: meaning is determined by form or syntax. The syntax or structure of knowing is considered within NLP as a process. From an NLP perspective an individual's experience is always subjective based on how they process information. The basis of NLP's epistemological approach is based in sensory awareness.

As with Transpersonal Psychology, Neurolinguistic Programming has expanded beyond the original boundaries of therapeutic application to applications in education, business, and personal development. As an approach to considering human communication and the construction of subjective experience, including within the last two decades almost any area where people interact – especially in relation to producing mutually desired outcomes, many new applications of NLP have emerged.

Significance of the Study

Valuing the Transpersonal in Decision-Making

At the heart of many, maybe all human endeavors, is the activity of decision-making. Some form of decision-making precedes all human action other than purely reflex action, and even our instinctive behaviors can be overridden cognitively, such as controlling the blink reflex, through an act of will or training. Thus it is the premise of this researcher that decision-making is a uniquely powerful human distinction with regard to its extensiveness, pervasiveness and significance in human action.

For many years decision-making as a topic of research has been pursued by researchers ranging from those in the social sciences, such as—group dynamics, in business and politics, in psychology with prolific studies in human interaction and judgment, in economics and mathematics with traditional topics such as game theory and more recently behavioral economics becoming more prominent. Yet with thousands of studies in decision-making spread throughout these multiple fields of research there is a dearth of material on the effect and impact of the transpersonal consideration in and/or on decision-making per se. This researcher could not find any readily available studies in the searches of professional journals, dissertation archives or even in broad internet searches where the primary topic of the research was the transpersonal consideration in decision-making. In the business context the material seemed to be completely absent, this researcher could not find a single study when

searching for material on the transpersonal consideration on decision-making in business.

On a separate note the topic of the transpersonal consideration has recently become an extremely fashionable topic in many areas of application and from many different perspectives. The transpersonal consideration has become a common research topic, resulting in hundreds if not thousands of articles and many books on transpersonal issues in virtually all the fields mentioned above. So why then is there so little research available on the transpersonal consideration in decision-making, and seemingly none as it relates to business? Could it be that the transpersonal consideration in decision-making is so ubiquitous that there has been no perceived need for such specific research? This seems to this researcher especially strange in the business context where an avalanche of materials on decision-making can indeed be found.

Decision-making is a common program topic in business school curriculums. Most business schools have at least one course in decision-making available to students, while others offer minors in decision-making within the overall study of business or entire concentrations devoted to decision-making. So decision-making certainly doesn't lack sufficient attention within the general domain of business studies. It seems to this researcher that the topic of the transpersonal consideration on decision-making in business is an area ripe for study.

Widening the Scope of Decision-Making

Given these points of consideration it is reasonable to presume the presence of the transpersonal consideration in decision-making and even the improvement and/or enhancement of decision-making by its presence. Of course it must be left open to the analysis of the data and the conclusions developed from it to show such correlation if it does indeed exist.

This researcher notes that this area of study, specifically how the transpersonal consideration in decision-making, impacts the quality of decisions that are made in terms of their consequences, may yield significant insights and potential advantage to decision-makers of all kinds. This may be in fact most pronounced in the domain of business where the role of the senior most individual is often that of being the decision-maker (or surely major influencer) for the organization. Often issues such as economic impact— the environment, and the distribution of wealth and resources both locally and globally— are the product of such decisions. These organizations are impacting the greater scope of humanity through the specific decisions taken by them. This is especially true when these decisions are considered in light of their consequences, both negative and positive, across space and through time.

An outstanding question could be posed at this point in defining the research to be undertaken,

"How does the transpersonal consideration improve or enhance the decision-making process?"

Or even,

"Does the transpersonal consideration improve or enhance the decision-making process?"

These are both valid questions for research, yet in regard to this study they must be put aside for the following reasons:

1. This is a qualitative study, specifically designed to establish the validity for further study, not a quantitative one that attempts to validate existing or developed data in relation to an existing theory or hypothesis. As such it seeks to expand on the idea central to the study; the presumption that there is a transpersonal consideration in the decision-making process, while accepting that the conclusions developed from the data may refute such a presumption.
2. Within the qualitative tradition it is considered appropriate to begin from the premise of reasonability, i.e.: "Is it reasonable to expect that the focus of the study is a valid topic for research?" This is especially true when considering the possibility research leading to the basis for the development of a new theory, e.g.: Grounded Theory approach to qualitative research.
3. The particular approach of this researcher is based in part on the neurolinguistic tradition and the idea of exemplar modeling. This presumes that there is an exemplar or exemplars to be modeled, and therefore part of the research to be performed is to define the

presumed exemplar(s) to make locating such an exemplar(s) available for future additional research.

4. The basis for collecting, analyzing and developing the conclusions based on the data will be phenomenographic. The phenomenographic methodology suggests the assumption of phenomena that can be presented to participants in the study and developing the data based on their experience of the phenomena.
5. With the phenomenographic approach to research if there are no participants that can be found that are already aware of including the phenomena, in this case the transpersonal consideration in their decision-making, it would be perfectly reasonable to introduce them to such a consideration prior to exploring their experience of it. That is, there is no need for an a priori experience of the research topic within the phenomenographic approach to doing research.
6. As a phenomenological study it is valid to presume preexisting theory or even theories to be organized in relation to the data discovered by the study.

The position taken by this researcher in regard to this study is that "all the information is out there" waiting to be discovered in relation to itself. That is, the theory/theories already exist, e.g.: transpersonal theory, neurolinguistic theory, decision-making theory … and have not yet been co-joined in relation to uncovering the impact of the transpersonal consideration in decision-making, especially in relation to decision-making