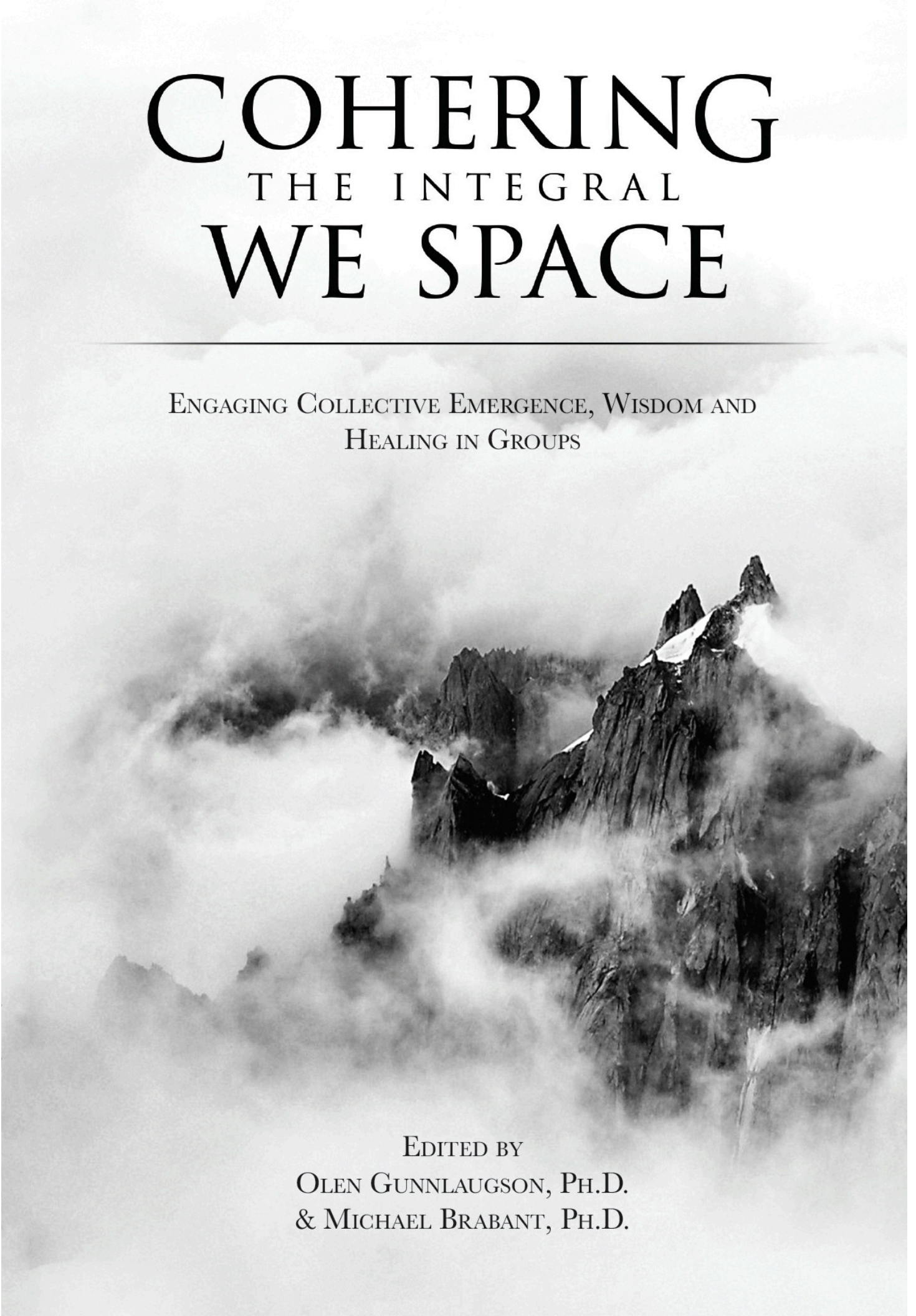


COHERING THE INTEGRAL WE SPACE

ENGAGING COLLECTIVE EMERGENCE, WISDOM AND
HEALING IN GROUPS

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CHAPTER 4

In, As, and Towards the Kosmic We

Geoff Fitch

Introduction

This chapter describes the experiences, lessons learned, and essential practices of Causal Leadership communities, a form of integral transformative we-spaces central to the work of Pacific Integral. For over ten years, Pacific Integral has been exploring, facilitating, and researching transformative change in an integral, developmental context through the Generating Transformative Change (GTC) program, its own organization, and other communities of practice it has convened and participated in. While the GTC's structure has evolved over its history, it is currently a 9-month, intensive leadership and personal development program. In this time period we have facilitated and engaged with dozens of different integral collective we-spaces, involving over 200 individuals and over durations ranging from months to several years. The core of this exploration has been the GTC program, which enacts and facilitates a new way of being and relating, which we refer to as Causal Leadership. This chapter describes our intentions, theoretical orientations, experiences and learning with our experiments in integral we-spaces, as well as offers what we see as key practices for we-space development.

A foundational orientation to this work is a developmental understanding that spans the concrete, subtle, causal and non-dual worlds through which our conceptions of I and We emerge and evolve. The term 'concrete' refers to the world of the senses, of ordinary perceivable matter, of individuals and groups in their concrete appearances. The 'subtle' is the world of mind, with its conceptions, emotions, constructions and contextualization, the world

of imagination and subtle contexts and systems. The ‘causal’ is the domain of awareness itself, of the unconditioned mind, full and empty, the witness and the manifest phenomena of all concrete, subtle and causal realities. The ‘non-dual’ world is that which is beyond, includes, and unifies all distinctions, the world beyond mind that also births mind and all forms.

As one’s understanding of ‘I’ and ‘We’ evolves through these territories, the depth of our awareness and perspective reflects what we mean and experience as ‘we-space.’ The specific contours of the movement from subtle, intimately personal we-spaces to causally grounded spaces, in which the concrete and subtle I and We are fully present and interpenetrate each other, and our awareness of the ground of being represents the leading edge of most of the communities Pacific Integral convenes. In these spaces, the ‘I’ is not backgrounded but rather unique personal expressions are highly valued in an unattached, non-demanding way, as are collective expressions. The experience is of one arising phenomenon in the paradoxical coincidence of seemingly individual and collective consciousness. What we think of as collective intelligence is heightened, but so is individual intelligence. While this developmental understanding is mentioned at the outset, as it informs the language we use to describe we-spaces, it is not meant to essentially prioritize this perspective above others, such as the dimensions of shadow, embodiment, interpersonal authenticity, or service.

Lessons Learned

Pacific Integral did not set out primarily to develop powerful we-spaces, but rather to facilitate the transformation of individuals and collectives, and to deepen our understanding of how the process of transformative change and development occurs. As we began to appreciate how this transformation must occur in real, intimate community, this endeavor led us directly into working more broadly with we-space, which ultimately became central to our work. Early on we recognized that we had embarked on an ongoing, unfolding experiment, grounded a sense of participative collaboration with the ineffable. We consciously approached our work with that understanding in our being and in our actions. As a result, this unfolding adventure let us to several challenging inquiries.

First, as we engaged with the long-term development of the participants in the program, we began to recognize the limits of the frameworks we were holding, such as Integral Theory (Wilber, 1995; Wilber, 2006) and Spiral Dynamics (Beck, Cowan, 1996), and of our understanding of them to inform the transformative processes with

which we worked. We wondered – how do people develop, really? How do they actually show up differently as they grow through stages and develop new capacities? This developed into an ongoing longitudinal research project into adult development, including growth across several dimensions and states of consciousness. This resulted ultimately in our theory and practice of Causal Leadership (Ramirez, Fitch, O’Fallon, 2013; O’Fallon, Ramirez, Fitch, 2014) as well as the StAGES model, a new, integral theory of development, articulated by Terri O’Fallon, one of the founding partners (O’Fallon, 2011; O’Fallon, 2012; O’Fallon, 2015). In this framework, we made new discoveries into how people conceive of and relate to ‘I’ and ‘We’ as they evolve, how they engage in collectives, how they connect and make sense together from diverse perspectives, and what supports healthy growth in individuals and collectives. While informed by our orienting frameworks, including integral theory, much of our discovery pushed the boundaries of and gaps in what those frameworks offered us, and in some cases exposed their limitations and biases.

Second, as we encountered the interpenetration of I and We, we began to see its implications for transformative change. To understand interpenetration, you might consider the move from either/or to both/and consciousness. In the latter, two aspects remain distinct but are understood to be in a deeper kind of relationship, more interdependent. Interpenetration is the next step in this process, to a recognition of “one within the other.” The implication of this leads to an understanding of unity beyond distinctions; one is many and many is one. Understanding subtle interpenetration, for example, one can see that, because no one is truly independent of the collectives in which they appear, they cannot truly change without a change in their relationships; likewise no social system can transform without a transformation of the individuals involved. This realization took us into a deep exploration of both individual and collective transformation, as it occurs in every moment. How can we work with transformative change in I and We simultaneously?

Third, this opened the question of leadership: what is transformative action and leadership from the causal ground? What is choice, vision and motivation from the groundless ground where we find the distinction of I and We interpenetrate and become more paradoxical (O’Fallon, Ramirez, Fitch, 2014)? How does leadership and followership occur when I and We collapse into the background (Ramirez, Fitch, O’Fallon, 2013)?

Fourth, we explored how to stabilize the deep states of openness that the individuals and collectives were touching into, which represent an extraordinary potential to which we all have access. This spawned two other important paths of learning: How does shadow relate to

this work, as we so often encounter disowned shadow material in this process and see that our conception of I and We is limited by our defenses against a fuller and deeper whole. And, as human beings touch into these deeper spaces, how do we integrate the universal with the personal? How do we hold our highest and deepest realization, while attending to the extraordinary limits of our personal will and resources?

Evolving Conceptions of We-Space

The developmental framework that grew from these inquiries (O'Fallon, 2015) makes several unique and important contributions that are relevant to understanding we-space. Most notably it clarifies important ways our conception of I and We change as we develop, and as such, how we define and engage with 'we-space'. The StAGES model describes 12 stages that occur through iterating patterns over three tiers – concrete, subtle, and causal (Fig. 1). These 12 stages include six important shifts in perspective taking. The first pattern and most relevant to this discussion is the pattern of I and We. Each tier consists of two I-oriented stages and two We-oriented stages. Thus, as we go through this evolution (which spans from infancy to rarer, later stages of consciousness), we go through six unique understandings of I and We, each of which has two stages associated with it. Each stage transcends and eventually includes the prior understandings.

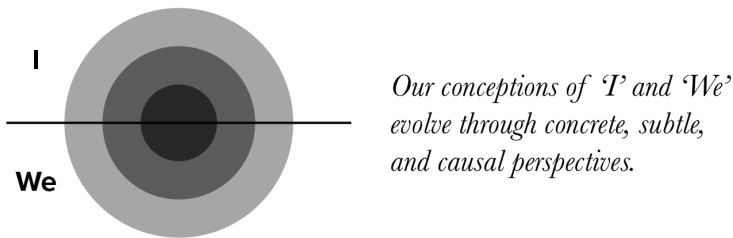


Figure 1: Concrete, Subtle, and Causal I and We

Briefly, in the first person perspective, we are in the concrete 'I' stages. (In the StAGES model, these are called 1.0 Impulsive and 1.5 Opportunist). It is 'all about me' and there is no understanding yet of a 'We.' One can see others but does not have a truly unique identity separate from others, nor does one see others as unique in their own

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right. The focus is on one's concrete needs and wants. The second person perspective stages foreground the concrete 'We' (these stages are called 2.0 Rule-oriented and 2.5 Conformist). In this perspective, I see that others see me and that, in order to satisfy my needs, I must work with others and make and follow rules together. In these 'We' stages, the 'I' is present and understood, but backgrounded, or deprioritized, in favor of relationships and groups. The next perspective gives rise to subtle 'I' stages, where we realize we have a subtle self – the thoughts, emotions, and independent mind of rational consciousness (3.0 Expert and 3.5 Achiever in the model). Again this is an I-oriented space, but the we is present and backgrounded. The 'We' that is present, however, is the concrete we, groups and their norms and rituals, since no new subtle 'We' has yet been discovered.

Cohering the Integral We-Space

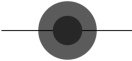
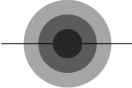
	Perspective	Foreground	Background
	1 st person	I (concrete) body, senses	(none)
	2 nd person	We (concrete) groups, rules	I (concrete)
	3 rd Person	I (subtle) thoughts, ideas, emotions	We (concrete)
	4 th Person	We (subtle) contexts, paradigms, systems	I (subtle)
	5 th Person	I (causal) awareness, source, emptiness	We (subtle)
	6 th Person	We (causal) manifestation, Kosmos, whole	I (causal)

Table 1: Six distinct understandings of I and We. Our conceptions of ‘I’ and ‘We’ evolve through concrete, subtle, and causal perspectives.

This pattern continues with the fourth person perspective, where the subtle ‘We’ is foregrounded. The subtle We consists of the perception of one being situated in and arising out of a plurality of contexts (in the 4.0 Pluralist and 4.5 Strategist stages). The ‘We’ isn’t then a specific group, but it is a space, and that space is complex. It consists not only of outer manifestations, such as the room, the systems in which the context is embedded, the cultural context and form, but also inner manifestations, such as the attitudes, beliefs, assumptions,

states of awareness, and ontological dispositions we bring to the moment. Here, people begin to understand that one can have, if the context is right, an experience of the kind of deep connection to another, once thought reserved for a soul mate. It is at this level that the notions of we-space, collective intelligence, and collective evolution begin to arise, although we can say that collective intelligence takes form at concrete, subtle and causal levels (O'Fallon, Ramirez, Fitch, 2014; O'Fallon, 2010).

At the fifth person perspective, individuals awaken to their ever-present awareness as the ground of their own being. They begin to identify with this being as a new self, both empty and full, transcendent and immanent. In these stages (5.0 Construct Aware and 5.5 Transpersonal), the 'I' is foregrounded but the subtle 'We' remains as a context for this I. The 'I' is however not what we conventionally think of as 'I' – our concrete bodily self or our subtle thinking or narrative self, but rather our causal self, the limitless open horizon of awareness that we paradoxically seem to share with everyone and everything. Knowledgeable that deep subtle we-spaces are possible, individuals often desire to experience them in this causal experience, for example, by bringing the practice of witness consciousness into their collective experience (Gunnlaugson & Moze, 2012), and to provide a context in which their causal selves can express themselves and be recognized.

At the sixth person perspective, this new 'I' is again backgrounded as it lets go into a much larger, causal 'We.' In the sixth level stages (6.0 Kosmic and 6.5 Illumined), the 'We' is all of concrete, subtle, and causal manifestation itself, the Kosmos, the utterly full and empty existence, eternal and beyond time, infinite and beyond space. Here one experiences themselves as this whole, with their apparent (even causal) 'I' birthed by and birthing the whole. At this stage we see a waning of the interest in 'we-space' work as it is normally conceived, which most often is identified with the concrete groups and subtle containers in which they take place. This is suggested by the term 'space' which suggests a context. We-space is a particular space, while at the sixth person perspective, attention moves to the one manifest reality itself, that which is and births all spaces. There is a keen interest at the sixth level in living as this larger collective, which has its own sense of 'We', and in allowing the intelligence of the whole, and that which births the whole, to express one's existence. In this sense, this very much reflects the interest in collective intelligence at the fourth stage, but is no longer grounded in any specific group or context but in reality itself.

As mentioned, each of these six unique perspectives of I and We is further divided into two distinct stages: first, a more receptive stage, which is about awakening to a new perspective taking capacity and

exploring the many dimensions of it; and second, a more active stage, in which one wants to move forward and create with these capacities. Altogether, this points to an extraordinary diversity of the constructions of human mind and has deeply informed Pacific Integral's seeing (and letting go) of we-space, informing this unique aspect of our work. Without developmental awareness, humans unwittingly reduce an approach to a particular developmental orientation or passage. As an example, the movements toward integral and evolutionary perspectives seem to posit a certain ideal, a 'from' and 'to' state, which from a truly developmental perspective can only be an overlay on one's unique individual and collective trajectory, and inevitably provide a limit to growth as much as an impetus to it. In GTC, we have learned to hold our collectives in a kind of meta-container, allowing for the integration of this developmental diversity. This is an orientation that reflects the perspectives that begin to arise at the sixth level and beyond; that the occasion reflects the Kosmic whole (and even this is a projection on the ineffable by the ineffable), the infinite diversity birthed through the interpenetration of the concrete, subtle, and causal worlds. This orientation also expresses a deep intuition that as the family of sentience, we must come together at a much deeper level than our evolving perspectives, and find ways to meet each other and integrate in our developmentally (and otherwise) diverse perspectives and qualities. In a recent cohort, we held a group of individuals spanning six developmental stages (across 4 levels of perspective taking), each of whom expressed experiences of being met and challenged in the space, sensing and existing in a whole, of which there could be no truly commonly held conception. Still, there was no denying its reality.

This brief description offers some orientation to the principles and practices of Causal Leadership collectives.

Principles and Practices

While holding this depth and span of diversity of consciousness in our awareness, Pacific Integral supports the emergence of what we came to call Causal Leadership collectives that consciously engage in developing their capacities for the embodiment of a causal awareness/field, while expressing those capacities as service in the world. This allows the emergence of a deeper intelligence to flow through them and to allow their subtle collective space to reflect their causal awareness:

A stabilized conscious causal collective begins to arise when enough individuals walk around with individual causal recognition and expression and share a collective

experience and understanding of how they can source from this infinite causal intelligence, influencing concrete and subtle collective intelligence by collectively accessing the causal field of existence – that is, they begin to “causalize” the former, unbending subtle contextual-systems and concrete community expressions that they have lived within. These communities tend to release the subtle ceilings that hold people in place and give space for the individuals within them to soar in their individual causal expressions, seated in and arising out of this empty creative potential of the infinite causal ground. (O’Fallon, Ramirez, Fitch, 2014, p. 92)

To support this, causal collectives need deep holding of the causal space and the developmental span of the individuals. The first and most important practice to mention is to develop state capacities in the individual and group that allow them to access, sustain and eventually be responsible for their causal awareness. Initially this may be as simple as learning breathing and awareness practices that allow individuals and groups to let go of energetic and physical holding and to rest in the stillness of awareness itself. Likewise, we practice bringing a constructive developmental perspective – the understanding that the mind is constructing in every moment and that those constructions are influenced in part by developmentally formed structures, helps to allow the individuals to disidentify with their perspectives and to hold in their awareness the developmental diversity that is present in the collective. The practice of holding a developmentally aware and fluid container is complex. It includes building capacity for self awareness of one’s own perspective taking, developing authenticity, witnessing practice, holding an open space in which participant’s perspectives are welcome and held while avoiding reflexive movement towards agreement, and learning to listen in new ways to the energetic movement of the whole.

As each developmental level emerges, it, to some degree, both transcends the limits of the previous stages and includes the previous stage’s capacities. This transcend-and-include movement has been central to integral understanding, but not without its limitations at a practical level. In real terms, we see that all the stages to which we have experienced and have access are operating in us, that the transcending may happen as we move into a new stage, but the practice of including never ends, as we continually reach back and integrate shadow elements, revisit past developmental challenges, and build skills and capacities from previous levels that are incomplete. This also exposes what might be called a bias toward vertical development in integral work. Movement toward later stages implies greater maturity, but it also implies greater immaturity in that it may do nothing to address

the unconscious shadow, incomplete growth and experience from earlier stages. While landing someone in a new place, even profoundly more rich and complex, this growth presents a whole new set of developmental demands. Causal collectives, for example, may touch into profound states of intuition and creativity, but may not know how to organize a meeting or resolve conflict in ways that arise out of and support this new consciousness.

Similarly, the same way modern, embodied spirituality has integrated the psychological understanding that causal states can be used to bypass (to avoid shadow and un-integrated parts of ourselves), the same is true of causal collectives. Deep states of connection, openness, pleasure, and presence that are possible in we-spaces can be used to bypass the conflict, projection, and defensiveness that can arise in relationships. The journey into deeper states and structures of awareness, therefore, must be just as much a journey to deeper intimacy, authenticity, and embodiment. This is expressed by the metaphor that growth can be upward (vertical development in states and stages), downward (integration, shadow work), outward (developing the breadth of maturity and capacities at each stage), and inward (self-understanding, soul work, truthfulness).

To support this, causal collectives attend to the concrete and subtle dimensions of themselves. The work of integration, healing, and horizontal growth is a regular focus of causal collectives. Shadow work and practices that support intimacy and embodiment are central tools of these causal we-spaces. Our collectives learn about and practice shadow work together, including understanding the dynamics of group shadow – scapegoating and marginalization, e.g. – as well as collective horizontal and vertical autopoiesis. They also practice emotional awareness and intimacy and embodied practices through play, dance, creative expression and improvisation. The inclusion of these approaches serves to expand the realization of the individual's and collective's potential, to serve greater fluidity, agility and impact of their work together. As further elaborated below, they are also held in balance with the actual living of life and work together and individually, not as an end in themselves but as an integral dimension of the life of the group and its service and being in the world.

As 'I' and 'We' are two interpenetrative perspectives on one occasion, this suggests that we can and should see our development in any moment through these two lenses, even if at different times we may have a preference for one or the other. It is useful to understand that the collective births, limits, and liberates the individual, just as the individual(s) birth, limit and liberate the collective. From a concrete understanding, we see our individual and collective autopoietic patterns as shaping the moment. Groups have ways they come

together, how they sit and interact with each other, what is acceptable to say or not say, do or not do, what energies and emotions are considered better than others, and so on. These autopoietic patterns take more nuanced and complex forms, too. At a subtle understanding we see the stream of individual and collective thought and experience shaping the moment, including the whole of human culture in its power and diversity. For example, in some groups, an understanding of development often reveals a subtle pattern of preference for more-developed perspectives and for individual attainment, which can find its roots in the deep habits of the modern Western mind.

As in all groups, the individuals bring their own hidden personal and cultural biases, which include patterns arising from race, gender, national, socioeconomic, psychological, and other historical factors. We endeavor to engage in this process in the spirit of mutual vulnerability, supporting the process to expose and learn from these patterns as is needed, in both our participants and in ourselves. Our efforts to bring diversity in to our groups, as well as hosting the program in different cultural environments, has been helpful in this work.

To respond to this, Causal Leadership collectives aim to create a developmental culture, including inquiry, radical openness to change, and an awareness of these individual and collective patterns—a transformative posture that recognizes the individual and collective as interpenetrating. In practice, this may mean, as an individual, I intend to be in a place of inquiry – asking how am I seeing the moment/situation? What perspective am I looking through? What is unseen, or unconscious in me that is shaping my experience? How am I seeing the ‘We’ and the other such that my seeing forms who we, and they, are? Likewise, as a collective, what patterns of perception and action are shaping and limiting who we are? Can we be aware of our unseen assumptions and agreements as to who we each are, and hold those lightly, open to revision, experimentation and exploration? This collective inquiry must be founded on interpersonal inquiry, where we develop the trust and skill to vulnerably give and receive feedback, explore authentic experience we have of each other, as well as the stories we tell ourselves about each other. This practice of self- and mutual-inquiry, letting go, and letting come of the emergent self/collective is essential to the practice of Causal Leadership communities.

Next, ‘we-space’ practice can become subtly disembodied or disconnected, in the same way individual spiritual practice can, if it does not include engagement in the world and life that expresses the spiritual heart that has opened in practice. A causal ‘we-space’ can be a space of practice, but we are also in many collectives, part of one larger whole and as the human heart is by its nature connected and giving, our service in all of our relationships, families, communities,

markets, and the world as a whole is an essential part of the we-space practice. We have therefore continued to see this as 'leadership' work, and, while the construct has limitations, it reminds us that our deeper intent is to liberate expression, service and impact in the world.

To support this, Causal Leadership collectives aim to bring the world into the collective and the collective into the world. They do this by including in their scope all of the fields of connection and practice the participants are involved with, and by including an orientation to service and action. This radical inclusion of the macro and micro, individual and collective, as well as the personal and universal, arises out of a deeper global intent that springs from the later stages of awareness—that we are expressing care for the whole as we express care for the individual. In facilitation, we endeavor to both broaden our moral span of care and assist participants to learn to listen more deeply to the meaning and purpose of their lives, while stretching ourselves to engage more fully in that purpose in the world. In practice, these collectives engage in work together and mutually support each other's individual expressions in the world. They hold space for each other's deepest heart intention for the world, and out of that, a radical and audacious space of potential for each other's lives and for the life of humanity.

Engaging in this service in the world, practitioners often confront outmoded perspectives and habits on organization and leadership. Unique challenges arise as causal collectives, who may be able to sustain deep meditative and relational spaces, attempt to organize, make decisions, and create together in the limitations of time and space. To address this, Causal Leadership collectives need to learn to sustain and embody the causal in the context of transformative action. The practice of developing this capacity is complex. At an individual and collective level, it involves being able to sustain and embody causal practice in distracting, chaotic and challenging moments. Organizationally, it involves adopting or inventing practices that reflect more complex, later stages, such as those suggested by Theory U and Holacracy. Socially, it requires that collectives develop the capacity to be energetically fluid, being able to let go, shift, and transform moment to moment. "In Causal Leadership one experiences that there simultaneously is and isn't a leader, that one is simultaneously a leader and follower and neither, and the field of change is inter-systemic, holistic and complex." (Ramirez, O'Fallon, Fitch, 2013, p. 11)

These challenges, principles, and practices are some of the learning we have discovered in our engagement with we-spaces in our Causal Leadership collectives. We recognize that the deep, transformative we-spaces in which Causal Leadership is grounded are a reflection of the natural movement of consciousness to fuller expressions. In

addition, as we deliberately bring 'leadership' into the work through an integration of consciousness and action in the world, these we-spaces move beyond an exploration of we-space itself, to enacting the awakened awareness of I/We as expression in the world. This occurs in context, in life, limits, time constraints and diverse environments that are realistic and embodied. It is an intention of this work that we not just experience or train ourselves, but that the intelligence of the we-space find its way into the world, beyond the rarified containers we can create. This work is very contextual and an ongoing exploration of ourselves and our graduate community. This integration requires a depth of working at multiple levels: leadership, organization, intimacy, shadow, relationship, awareness, energetics, and so on, while engaging the unity of distinct practice spaces, the ordinariness of life, and conscious creation, Divine Being itself. In this sense, the potential for we-space work that we hold is to create conditions for new 'leadership', collective action, and the transformation of human society.

Having said this, we might admit that, seeing the whole, inclusive of our multiple ephemeral constructions of each other and all of it, leaves us with no clear boundaries. There is only the wonder of Being. What is happening occurs through our concrete manifestations, our subtle experiences, and our causal construction and witnessing; each individual consciousness reflecting and refracting that perfect wholeness, shining such-ness. This might seem to lead to a sense of relativism, but it is far from it. There is something yet deeper guiding this process. In the midst of this enactment of the wholeness that is shaped through these dimensions, there is absolutely a sense of truth, goodness and beauty that shapes and guides the experience of the We-Space. Miraculously, as each of us may tell quite a different story about what occurs in our collective, we know it to be one story. Although we might have distinct individual needs and impulses, there is a deeper heart that can recognize this truth. We breathe as one and resonate with the same intelligence that animates the whole, even while we seem to hold quite different concrete, subtle and causal points of view. Any sense of irony or paradox is outshined by the beauty and goodness that is this Heart's Truth.

Author Bio

Geoff Fitch is a coach, trainer, and facilitator of growth in individuals and organizations, and a creator of transformative leadership education programs worldwide. He is a founder of Pacific Integral, where he was instrumental in the development of the internationally-acclaimed Generating Transformative Change program, now offered three continents and in its 24th cohort. Through these programs, he has researched and developed novel approaches to individual and collective growth, and has designed and facilitated dozens of residential learning retreats. He has been exploring diverse approaches to cultivating higher human potentials for over 25 years, including somatic and transpersonal psychology, mystical traditions, innovation and creativity, leadership, integral theory, and collective intelligence. Geoff also has over 30 years experience in leadership in business. He holds a master's degree in Transpersonal Psychology from Sofia University and B.S. in Computer Science, magna cum laude, from Boston University, and has additional studies in jazz music, philosophy, and management. Learn more at pacificintegral.com and geoff-fitch.com.

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