

## Lines or “Streams” of Development

Taken from [Website of Michael Dewan-Herrick](#)

Considering the quadrants alone gives us a tremendous scope of possibilities for what we might notice and respond to in caring for others. A fully integral approach, however, attends to yet further possibilities. These have to do with the different ways we can experience and express ourselves within the quadrants and are called *lines, levels, states, and types*. Let’s begin with lines.

Have you ever noticed how people tend to be strong in certain ways and not so strong in others? One friend is an accomplished musician, but she can’t seem to stay in a healthy relationship. Another friend is a whiz on the computer, but he doesn’t seem to have a clue about his emotional life. Or have you known people who are intellectually astute, able to analyze any situation, yet they don’t seem to know right from wrong?

Human development does not occur in one monolithic movement, but in a great variety of ways. These different ways can be seen as separate lines or streams that unfold relatively independent of each other. We each have areas in which we excel and other areas in which we are less developed. Becoming fully human is not about excelling in every single line, but working to develop those capacities that we value and find most necessary to a meaningful life.

Howard Gardner, in his groundbreaking book “Frames of Mind” , identified 7 separate lines of intelligence, and provided one way to begin looking at different human potentials. They are as follows:

- Linguistic (knowing how to use language)
- Mathematic (ability to solve mathematical problems)
- Spatial (ability to see the relationships between objects in space)
- Kinesthetic (skill in using one’s body)
- Musical (talent in making music)
- Interpersonal (knowing and relating with others)
- Intra-personal (knowing oneself)

We haven’t space here to explore each one of these, but we can at least notice that people tend to be better at some of these 7 intelligences and less accomplished in others.

Gardner’s system is just one way to consider multiple lines. There may be no limit to the number of things that human beings can be good at. The ability to grow beautiful flowers might even be a line in itself! However, there do seem to be a handful of major lines of development that are especially useful to pay attention to when caring for others.

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## Cognitive

The cognitive line has to do with our ability to know things through conceptual thought, although it includes our earlier stage of sensori-motor development. Basically this has to do with how “smart” we are, in the most usual sense of the word. In our culture and educational system, we tend to value the cognitive line above the others. It is important and has been said to be “necessary but not sufficient” for development in the other lines. By itself, however, it hardly enables us to be fully human. As Garrison Keillor has said: “Sometimes intelligence is like four-wheel drive; it just allows you to get stuck in more remote places.”

## Affective or Emotional

This line is about our “emotional intelligence”, our ability to know through feeling. Are we able to experience a range and intensity of different emotions? Are we aware of our emotions when they arise? To what degree do we ignore and suppress our emotions; or do we simply act them out impulsively? How sensitive and perceptive are we about the emotional experience of others? Are we able to empathize and use our emotional resonance with others to guide our responses? The affective line encompasses the entire realm of our capacity to feel and how we are able to make use of our feelings in conducting our lives.

## Interpersonal

This line is about our ability to engage with other people. Being able to read social cues, enter into conversations, arrive at mutual understanding, resolve conflicts, advocate for our needs, collaborate in joint ventures- these are just part of what is involved in the interpersonal line. It includes our ability to receive, interpret, and respond to the verbal and non-verbal messages of others, as well as our ability to express ourselves so that we are understood. How we initiate, maintain, and end relationships are also aspects of the interpersonal line.

## Moral

The moral line has to do with how we think about what is “right” and “wrong”, as well as how we choose to act when confronted with moral or ethical dilemmas. Are we exclusively concerned with our own wants and needs, or do we also consider others? Do we obediently follow the rules or commandments of our own group, or do we independently think through the implications of our choices? Are we interested only in the well-being of our own family, community, or nation; or do we care about the happiness of all sentient beings

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everywhere? What gets included in our embrace of care is a measure of our development in the moral line.

## Needs

Abraham Maslow pointed out that as we grow and mature we experience different kinds of needs. We begin with physical needs and then develop through emotional and psychological needs. If we are able to meet all of these needs then we experience the need for self-actualization and ultimately for self-transcendence. A primary task of providing care is to help others meet their needs, so it is very important that we have some discernment of where a person is at in this line.

## Self or Ego

This line is about who we think we are and experience ourselves to be. It is how we might complete the following sentence: I am \_\_\_\_\_. It is whatever we identify with; for instance, our body, mind, spirit, social role, age, gender, race, class, religion, etc. Our felt sense of being a single, separate, continuous something (however we happen to put this together) is at the heart of the self line. What are we willing and able to include as part of our identity? What do we exclude? Is our sense of self constricted or expansive? Do we feel fragmented and confused about who we are, or do we feel integrated and whole?

## Spiritual

The word “spiritual” has so many connotations that it can be confusing or almost meaningless to talk about if not precisely defined. Some would say that there is a spiritual line of development that starts at infancy and continues through life, while others would say that spiritual development is a higher stage that only comes later in life. Rather than argue for one perspective or the other (they all contain some truth), I simply want to point out that our understanding of “God”, or “higher purpose”, or “the Great Mystery”, or “enlightenment”, or any self-transcending principle, can represent a major aspect or “line” of our development.

There are many other lines that we could learn about and attend to, but these provide a good starting point. When we enter another person’s life with the intention to care for them, we could notice that they are more or less developed in different areas. Just making the effort to pay attention to this could be an expression of our care. As we become more familiar with different lines, and how a particular person embodies them, we can tailor our approach to care in ways that more precisely fit with that person’s actual needs.