



The Gray Matrix – Tracking its History (1977-2015) ver1.0

My purpose in writing the following is to provide a record of the Gray Matrix and how it was developed. There have been several references to it in published literature but documentation of where and when it evolved are often erroneous and in conflict with the actual sequence of events.

With a good memory, good records, and a collection of hoarded documents over the years I have compiled the following – just for the record.

But I am also aware that I don't have the complete story and there may have been other developments taking place to which I was not party or of which I have been completely unaware. Others in media and missions have also been actively working on refining similar tools. Some of these, like James Engel and Viggo Sogaard, I have been deeply indebted to in my early years as they have been my mentors.

If I need to make two points clear they are as follows:

1. The Gray Matrix is not a late-comer to the 2-dimensional scene. It is probably the first.
2. It is not a derivative nor an improvement of Sogaard's 2-dimensional scale. The reverse is more probable.

The following is my story in which I have tried to identify the key elements and create a timeline of its development. I also identify those elements which distinguish it from other models that give it value in its own right and thereby meet the needs of many in ministry - more than just in media. The sequence of graphics is appended, each of which identifying when it first appeared.

The Main Characteristics

The Gray Matrix provides the following:

- A simple division of four areas of ministry focus based on where the listener¹ is at in terms of his understanding of the Gospel and his attitude towards things Christian – Jesus Christ, the Church and Christian people.
- A pathway of suitable programs that takes the listener from where he is now to where he needs to become as a follower of Jesus Christ. It represents a process.
- A simple method of locating people and their pathway to faith using basic cartesian (x,y) coordinates.
- It implies that there could be extensive work done in winning hearts and minds without much explicit Christian content. It implies the 'long game' and the role of 'pre-evangelism' in bringing about increased openness.

I first developed what became known as the Gray Matrix while I was still at Wheaton Grad School in January 1977. Here is how it came about...

My Time in Laos (1969-75)

During this time I visited Voice of Peace in Chiangmai on several occasions. I was inspired by the work of Viggo Sogaard and learned from him about the Spiritual Segmentation Model – Sowing, Reaping and Refining on an A-Z scale - which was shortly to be published by Bethany Fellowship (1975) in Sogaard's book *you need to know for a Cassette Ministry*². It had been developed during his time at Wheaton College Grad School where Dr Engel was head of the Communications department.

I first had opportunity to meet Jim Engel at a Communications workshop in Hong Kong in August 1974. It was there that he presented his [Engel Scale](#). For me it was like lights coming on! In Laos, I was running a recording studio in Vientiane for the Christian & Missionary Alliance (C&MA). We were making radio and cassette programs in Lao and Hmong (Meo) mostly, but also in other minority languages and later in English. I had also been adopting local communications media such as the musical way of telling stories as in Lao [Lam](#)³ and the Hmong equivalent.

Upon my return to Vientiane I immediately put the Engel Scale to the test. It helped enormously by giving me a basis for planning effective materials for listeners of both Buddhist and animist traditions. It also showed why some of our productions would not be appreciated or understood. For example, quite probably 97% of our potential student audience were at -8 on the Engel Scale.

However, experience was telling me that there was something missing... This struck me particularly when I was running a half-hour English-language program

¹ The term 'listener' will be used throughout for want of a more suitable descriptor for the intended person on the receiving end of our communication. This illustrates bias toward media and radio in particular, whereas in church ministry circles it will be different.

² Sogaard, Viggo, *Everything you need to know for a Cassette Ministry*, Bethany Fellowship Inc., Minneapolis, 1975.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mor_lam

each evening on Lao National Radio (Sept 73- Mar 74). We could not teach a lot directly but we could impact people's openness to Christian values.

I was having two problems:

1. Having an attitude change as part of the growth in spiritual awareness (included at -4 on original Engel Scale).
2. The effectiveness of our communication should not be seen in terms of Christian knowledge/awareness alone. It should also be deemed effective if it were opening people up to change and receptivity of the Gospel.

Wheaton College (1975-77)

After being forced to leave Laos in 1975 Hennie and I moved to USA for me to study Communications under Dr Engel in Wheaton Grad School. It proved to be an ideal time for reflecting on the previous 6 years in the light of my academic studies, which I enjoyed tremendously. It was the right time....

I also had my own under-graduate studies in Engineering Science to fall back on. If we were to incorporate an attitude dimension to the Engel Scale, it would need to be re-packaged using Cartesian coordinates using x- and y-axes. It would also mean inverting the Engel Scale so that pluses were up and to the right. (The shape of the emerging pathway is also reminiscent of the hysteresis loop- in one direction only!)

At the end of the Christmas/New Year break in January 1977 I presented the 2-dimensional model to Jim Engel for his consideration. It did not generate a lot of visible interest, but after leaving Wheaton the following month it continued to be uppermost in my thinking.

Early Days in FEBC (1977-82)

For two years after leaving Wheaton I worked for C&MA in developing refugee ministries working out of [FEBC](#)'s base in California where I was also getting involved with their Indochinese teams. I worked primarily with the legendary John Lee, FEBC's Hmong broadcaster whom I had known in Laos where he and his wife Pai were students at the Bible School. With our 2-year assignment complete (and the [Hmong Alliance Church](#) duly established) both John and I moved into FEBC. He became FEBC's Hmong broadcaster and I quickly became General Program Director.

One of the regular FEBC programming newsletters, Programming Perspectives, #4 in August 1981 featured *Programming with a Purpose*. It describes and provides an illustration entitled [Spiritual Attitude/Growth Chart](#). It has a -8 to +5 vertical axis for Spiritual Growth and Awareness, and a horizontal one from -5 to +5 showing Attitude from Negative to Positive. The four quadrants were named as follows I. Pre-Evangelism, II. Evangelism, III. Discipling & Nurturing and IV. Wooing back into Fellowship. On the chart are superimposed three possible paths of growth. In the bottom left are the arrows which indicate the "Effects of Good

Programming” – toward top right quadrant. (see diagram). It was essentially the same Gray Matrix as we have today – but had not yet adopted that name.

In 1982 we moved as a family to Manila where we were to live for nine years working with FEBC. These were good years because they put me in touch with new mentors – Mac Bradshaw and Gene Daniels of World Vision. I also was brought into a deeper and more profound understanding of the Kingdom of God, thanks to Rev. Darrell Johnson at Union Church.

Around the time we left for Manila Ed Dayton, Chairman of Lausanne Strategy Working Group and World Vision, was in touch with me. He had seen some of my work and asked me to consider writing a radio-based strategy paper for the WEF-sponsored [Wheaton '83](#) conference. He admitted to me that he had been a critic of missionary radio over the years but that what he saw in my proposal was what radio should have been doing all along. We agreed to call the initiative Radio In Church-planting Evangelism (RICE). It would focus on fusing the dual disciplines of Communications with Church Growth Theory (as expounded by Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner).

The paper, originally written in March 1983, which I submitted to the conference was [Radio in Church-planting Radio \(RICE\) – a Tool for Today's Church](#). That paper included a full-page diagram of the Matrix and in Appendix B contained a 1-page [“Explanation of the modified Engel/Sogaard Model”](#).

The chart [A Radio Strategy for Church-planting](#) (which was later to become the Gray Matrix) was at the heart of RICE. It described a planned approach to radio/media for church-planting.

[Dr Donald McGavran](#), the doyen of Church Growth, also invited me to meet with him in Pasadena in 1982 to review the potential for radio in encouraging church growth in ‘closed country’ environments. This came hot on the heels of the groundswell of interest in radio as a tool for church-planting prompted by the discovery of large numbers of Christians meeting together in China. They had been exposed to the Gospel, stimulated and nurtured through FEBC’s broadcasts, and their stories were demonstrated in the large numbers of letters received from listeners.

RICE, Lausanne, World by 2000 and ICMC

Wheaton '83 was evidently the main process by which the ‘matrix’ was propagated in that period. Until then, to the best of my knowledge, there had not been any 2-dimensional version published. It was not until 1993 that Sogaard published in his book *Media in Church and Mission* ⁴chapter 3 the 2-dimensional Strategy and Decision Model. Unlike the Matrix model it basically takes the shape of an inverted “T”. (Personally as an engineer I find the cartesian (4-quadrant) approach much more satisfying!).

⁴ Sogaard, Viggo, *Media In Church and Mission*, William Carey Library, Pasadena 1993 pp. 64-73

The paper was also a component of a RICE mini-consultation held in Manila in February 1985. That was attended by Jim Bowman (FEBC), Mac Bradshaw (WVI), Phill Butler (Interdev), Viggo Sogaard (WV Consultant) and myself. It paved the way for the 1st RICE Consultation held in Cambridge, UK Dec 1-4 1985 which included a wider group including anthropologist Dr Charles Kraft from Fuller Seminary.

I prepared a draft paper for that consultation. It was called *Radio In Mission* and it became the basis for the [Lausanne Occasional Paper #26](#) of the same name.

Presentations were also made at the Lausanne II conference in Manila in 1989 in concert with the World by 2000 initiative which sought to provide people with an opportunity to hear the gospel by radio in all the world's major languages.

In both 1993 and 1995 I conducted Radio Workshops at the AICC training held bi-annually in Chiangmai, Thailand. These were coordinated by Viggo Sogaard. It was while at the 1995 workshop that I drafted the fourteen roles of radio in an attempt to demonstrate the many uses to which Christian radio could be put.

Adoption by FEBC

In 1996 FEBC adopted the theme of *Close to the Listener*. In many respects this encapsulated the idea behind the Gray Matrix. Ultimately what we need to do is to bring a meaningful presentation of the Gospel, to some degree or other, into the everyday life experience of our listener.

[Radio Programming Roles](#) was published by FEBC in 1997. Ross James helped in editing this material, suggesting that the Gray Matrix complemented the fourteen roles. In the chapter *Fitting the Jigsaw Together* we demonstrated how the various radio roles could be used for people at various stages along the pathway to faith. It was also on his recommendation that I adopted the name The Gray Matrix for the model. This was because I had found that it was being used quite widely without any reference as to where it came from and without due credit being given. (One of the most memorable of these was when watching a video of the Yao Project at the Foreign Mission Board of the SBC in Richmond, Virginia.) The book was also published in Spanish, French, Bahasa Indonesia and Russian.

Radio Programming Roles was to become the backbone of FEBC's training for programming staff.

Dr Ross James became FEBC's director for Training and developed the Hands on Training (HOT) curriculum around 2000. One of the ten basic modules is on The Gray Matrix as it was deemed to be an essential component of FEBC's philosophy of ministry.

In 2003 I set up a web-site for a major revision and expansion of *Radio Programming Roles* (<http://www.radioroles.com>). It contained 6 chapters, one

of which was devoted to the Gray Matrix. Each of the chapters was published in 2010 on line via ISSUU (<http://www.issuu.com/frankgray/docs/>)

The Gray Matrix also has had its own web-site from 2002. This original version can be found at www.thegraymatrix.com, while the more contemporary and current version is at www.thegraymatrix.org

Fifteen years later the Gray Matrix continues to be taught in program training in FEBC and is considered to be one of its key components.

Interest from Academia

A few people have written to me over the past years – mostly the past ten – seeking permission to use or make reference to the Matrix in their dissertation. One of the first of these was Reinhold Straehler, a missionary to Sudan who wanted to include it in his Master's thesis⁵ from a South African university. It was about tracking the paths taken by five separate Muslim converts in Sudan. He adapted it for his own use.

Another, perhaps more significant study was by Paul Windsor for his doctoral thesis⁶ in New Zealand. He felt challenged by the need to find channels of communication that would work with sceptics, of which we have an increasing number in our western world. He had first come across the Engel Scale and was disappointed to find that for the -8 spot there was no appropriate form of Christian communication identified. He referred to it as... 'empty space'. It was then that he discovered the Gray Matrix and saw that what was being advocated there – an approach that touched the feelings and senses – was very much in synch with his appeal to the use of intrigue. This is consistent with C.S. Lewis's approach as in the *Chronicles of Narnia*, etc. It was fascinating reading and helped me develop a refreshingly new understanding of the significance of the Matrix.

It also prompted me to work towards extending the vertical axis of the Matrix. The Engel Scale had been mooted in the 1970's and reflected the outlook of that time. Since then, however, the worldview of many has changed due to the impact of post-modernism – particularly in the western world. There is much disillusionment and scepticism. This meant that the Scale and the Matrix were both out-dated and that captions on the axis needed to be re-thought. The Matrix needed to be extended downwards to incorporate mission strategies to engage those who we might consider to be 'sceptics'. This was implied by Windsor and has been taken seriously. I am also indebted to [Paul Hazelden](#) for his suggestions in this area.

⁵ Straehler, R *Conversion from Islam to Christianity in the Sudan* M.Th thesis at University of South Africa, 2005

⁶ Windsor, P *The Role of Intrigue in the Communication with Sceptics*, D.Min thesis at Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School, 2011

These modifications have been incorporated in the [TGMX](#) version of the Matrix, which now begins at -10 and extends up to +6. The latter implies that more work needs to be done in the area of discipleship too.

Recent Developments

More recently I have also been greatly encouraged to find that a number of agencies involved in church ministries are actively using the Matrix in training and planning their work. Most prominent has been Messy Church which began in the UK in 2004. A recent book in their training series is called [Making Disciples in Messy Church](#) by Paul Moore⁷ (2013). In the first chapter it introduces the Engel Scale – but leans more toward the Matrix (pp. 23-33) showing how much time and effort needs to be expended in winning hearts and minds, thus attracting the un-churched, and the need for a process. The book had been published by [BRF](#) without my prior knowledge but I have since been in touch with both BRF and the author and they were both very gracious.

I also note from Google searches that the Salvation Army in New Zealand is using it in their Evangelism Pathway v.4 (2010) training manual. Cru (formerly Campus Crusade) have also used it in their Here's Life Inner City (Bakersfield) training manual. There are also other references to churches and agencies using the Matrix in their training.

Biblical Support

St Paul's oft-quoted passage in 1 Cor 9 :19-23 – becoming all things to all men - stresses the importances of tailoring our message to our audience. Sowing, Watering, and Reaping (1 Cor 3) are some of the best known themes – also supported by Jesus' suggestion that while some sow (and have done the hard work) – others are called in to reap the harvest (John 4:36-38).

Perhaps the best support, however, is found in the first chapter of John's Gospel where John writes – twice (in vv 14, 17) - about 'grace and truth came through Jesus Christ'. In Grace and Truth we find the two complementary dimensions – truth being the vertical axis while grace is represented in the horizontal. Our communication needs to contain both in equal proportion – as an extension of Jesus' ministry. This came as an exciting insight which I hope to explore further.

Final Words

Finally a word needs to be said about the work of the Holy Spirit who needs to be involved in the process throughout. The Matrix is not saying that bringing people to faith and discipleship is a mechanical process. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. This has always been noted in my writings. I have also made the suggestion that if there were to be a third dimension then that belongs to the hidden work of the Holy Spirit who oversees this whole process.

⁷ Moore, Paul, *Making Disciples in Messy Church*, Bible Reading Fellowship, Abingdon, 2013

It is also a matter of debate for those who assume a precise point of conversion – whether this is a matter of knowledge or of attitude. In other words does it happen when crossing from left to right? Or when crossing the horizontal axis? My preference is to suggest that there is a zone (as indicated in an early matrix diagram).

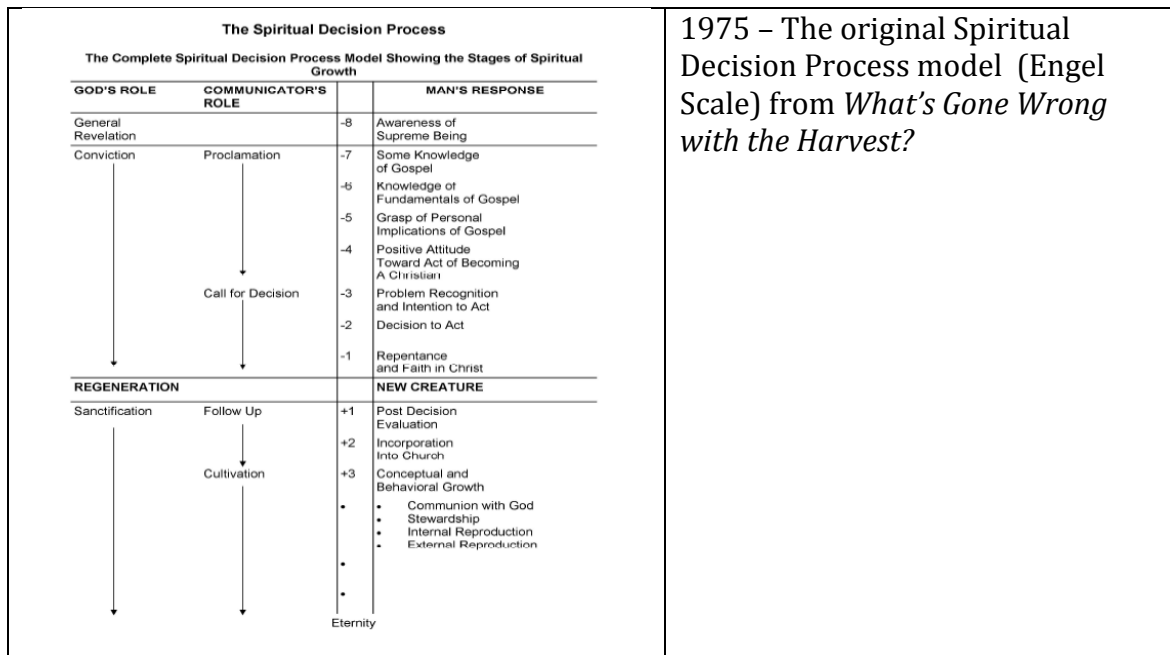
If we can draw one conclusion it is this: The Matrix is finding widespread acceptance outside of the media context and it will likely continue to do so...

Frank Gray

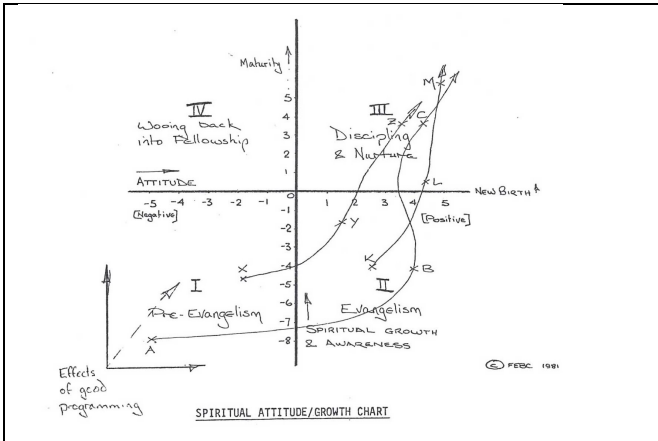
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24th April 2015.

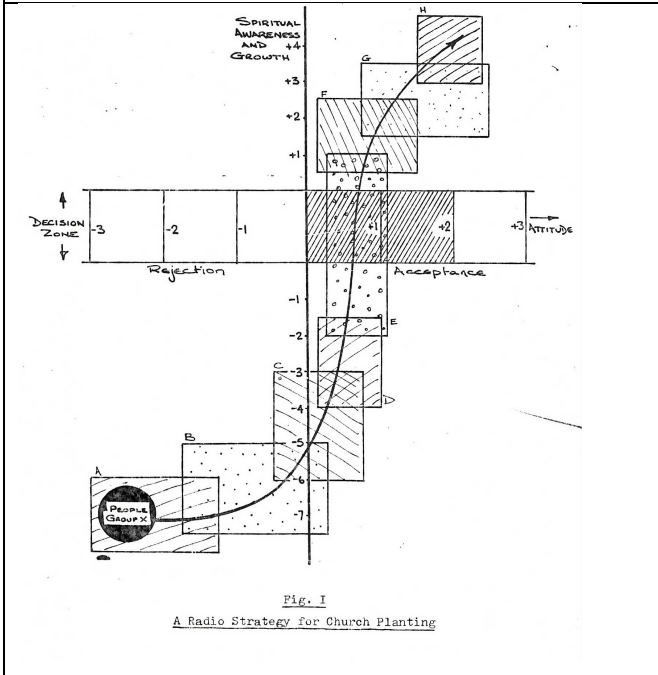
Appendix: Diagrams



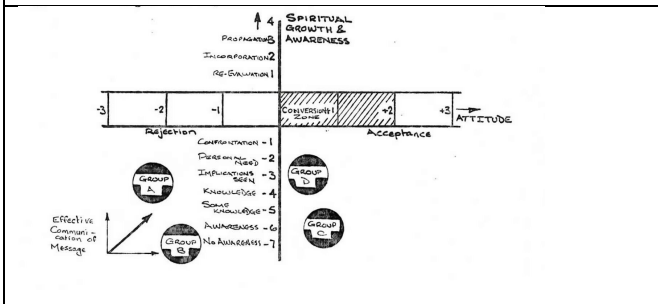
1975 – The original Spiritual Decision Process model (Engel Scale) from *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?*



1981 – included in the FEBC Programming Perspectives #4 *Programming with a Purpose*. It was accompanied by a description of the meaning of each axis, and the four quadrants. It also indicates the effects of good programming and suggests three possible paths. This early version showed the horizontal scale running from -5 to +5

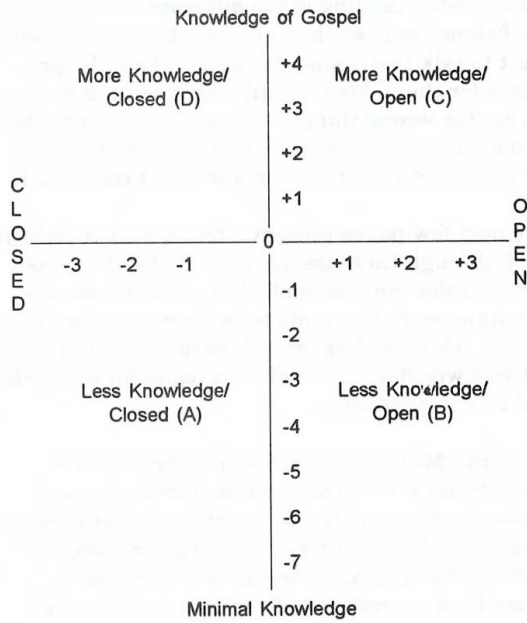


1983 – included following p.9 of *Radio in Church-planting Evangelism (RICE)* and prepared for the Wheaton '83 conference. Labelled as 'A Radio Strategy for Church-planting' it clearly shows the possible pathway to faith for People Group X and the different programs that might be used for various stages of their progress. The page that follows also describes what each of these programs might look like. Note that -8 has now been dropped as attitude is separated out as a separate independent dimension. There is also a Decision Zone rather than a definitive axis.

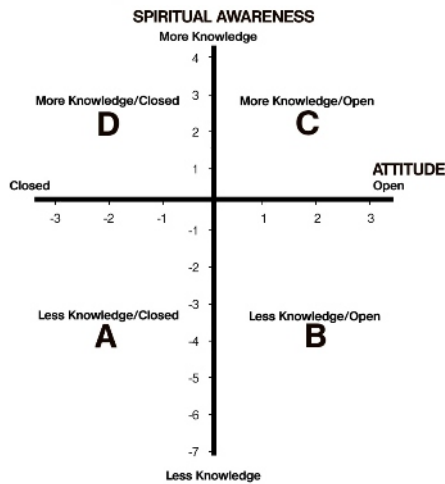


1983 – This diagram is taken from *Appendix B. Explanation of the modified Engel/Sogaard Model* of the above paper which explains why the changes were made. It also describes the added value brought by the two-dimensional model

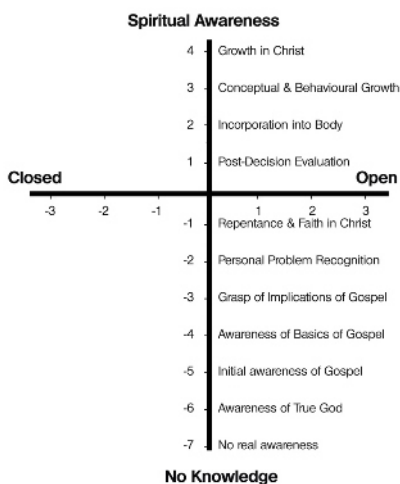
Fig. 1 The Gray Matrix



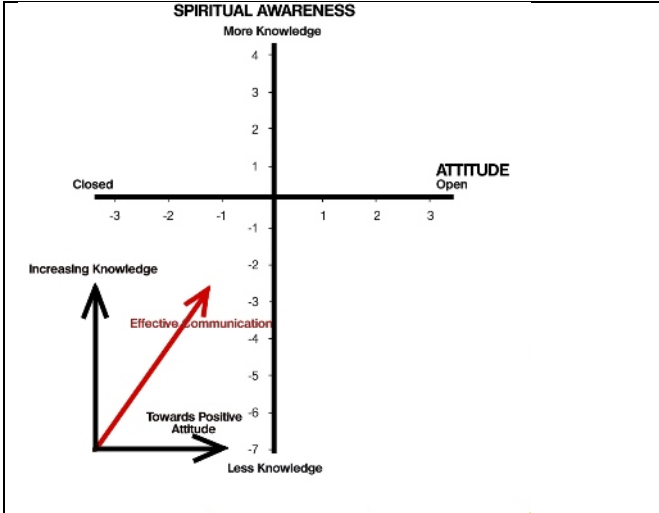
1997 – The Gray Matrix as it first appeared in *Radio Programming Roles*. Note that no captions were included for the various points on the axes. This was because the principle of two dimensions was being emphasised over the importance of precise points. The Decision Zone had also been dropped in an attempt to reinforce the cartesian coordinate structure. Each of the four quadrants was identified



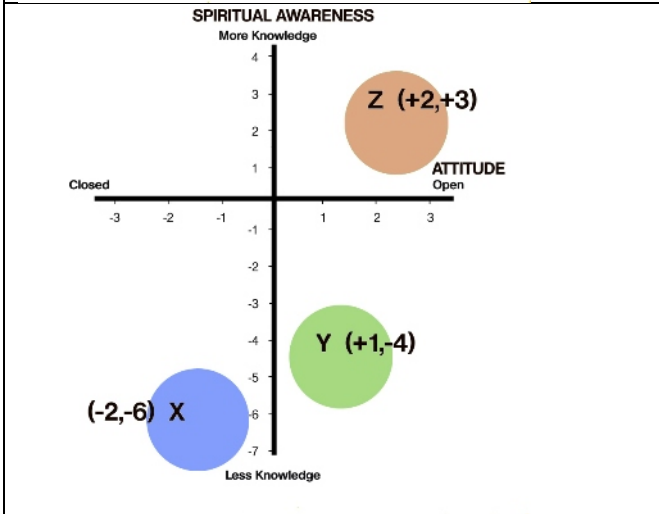
1997 – The revised, on-line 2002 version. While no helpful name was assigned to each of the four quadrants I find those assigned in the Messy Church manual helpful: A: Friendship Quadrant, B: Good News Quadrant, C: Growing in Christ Quadrant, D: Apathetic Quadrant.



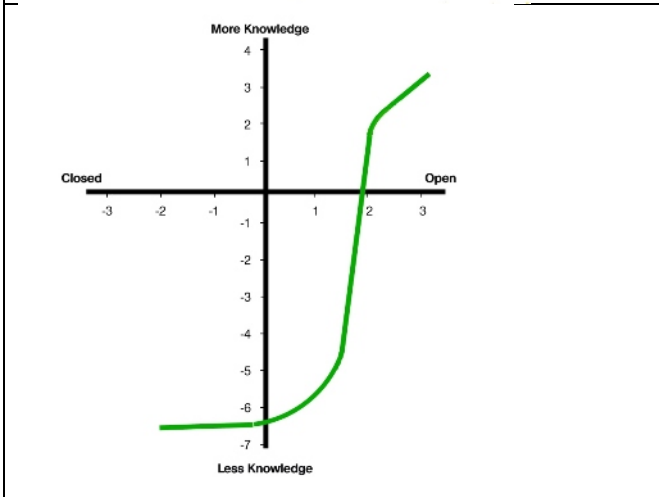
1997 – Captions added in The Gray Matrix Powerpoint (PPT). These were selected to be basically the same as in the Engel Scale (for those who wanted captions)



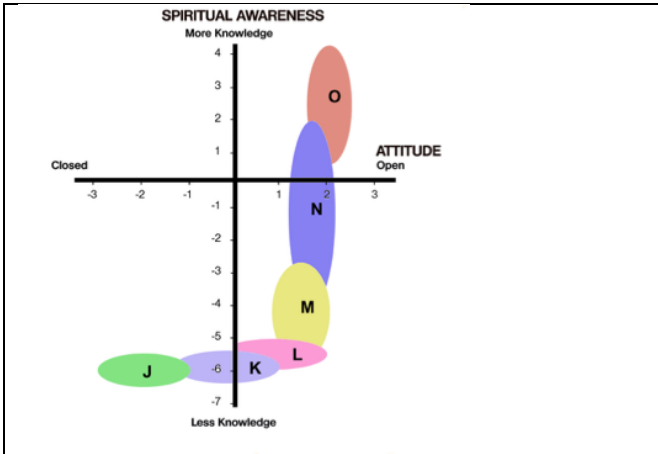
1997 – The direction of effective communication (from 2005 PPT). It is probable that direction to the right might precede vertical progression for those in Quadrant A. For those in Quadrant B progression might be all vertical.



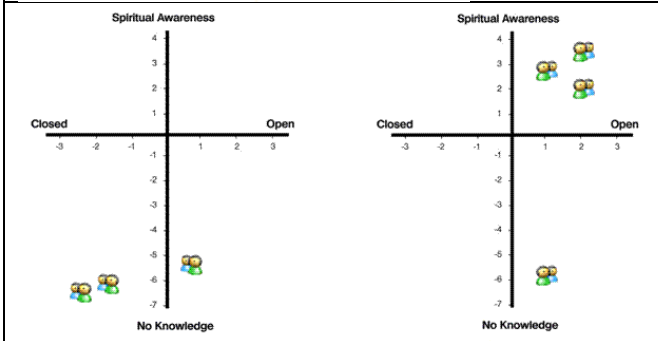
1997 – Identifying where people are located (from 2005 PPT). It is helpful to see where people are so that we can find suitable programs for them.



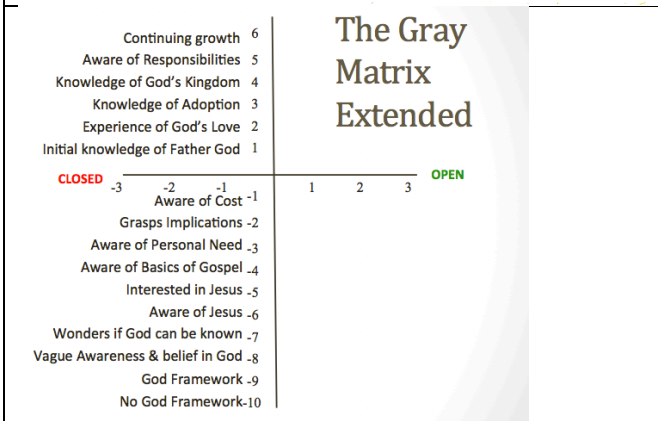
1997 – Possible Pathway (2005 PPT ver.) – or ‘journey into discipleship’ (Messy Church). The main point is that there will be a process involved – that might even take five years or more...



1997 – Laying the Pathway using a progression of programs (L-O)(2005 PPT ver.). Different programs are needed to suit people at various stages.



2005 – Comparison between where groups of people are being targetted (L), and where programs are attracting audience (R). (PPT)



2013 – Gray Matrix2: TGMX – The Extended Gray Matrix. New captions, extended y-axis to included sceptics (-10) and extending discipleship (+6) (PPT)