

Legionnaires who make the Difference in the Bingo-Spiral by not being Indifferent

David M. Boje, Legion Member and New Bingo Worker
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I decided to stop being indifferent to bingo, and actually go and volunteer to work trash clean up at the Wednesday event. I sat next to one of Johnny's sisters, and noticed, just how many Johnny relatives were taking up space at the tables, paying cash for the card and dabbers. When I wasn't picking up trash baskets from the tables, every 3rd game break, I watched the families, the handicapped, and lone people who came out to play bingo. I got there at 3PM, because that is what the sign says 'open at 3.' Johnny and Clint had been there since noon, and some volunteers (other than Amy, no others were Legionnaires). They had the tables and chairs in order, the trash bins out, and I helped Amy set out the bingo flags (you put them onto a table when a winner yells, 'Bingo!'). Customers came in from about 3PM till start time, and set up their spaces at the table, and greeted people they knew. Johnny set up special space in the hall for handicapped players, some with wheel chairs, others with one arm, or one leg. They liked particular sots, and Johnny got them registered with the Gaming Commission, so they could have their own name on a sign, placed just in the Hall where they wanted to sit.

In between trash work, I sat with Johnny's older sister and a family with a grand mother, mother, and two daughters about 12 and 7 years old. When the bingo began, promptly at 6:30PM, I watched them play, and tried to learn the lingo. Bingo is its own language, with terms like UFO, Small Kite, U-Pick-Em, Small Picture Frame, and the all important, Black Out. Black Out pays \$1,199 and Small Picture Frame \$75, as does UFO and Small Kite. Regular bingo pays only \$50, and if there are several winners, you must split it equally.

Johnny's sister and the 3-generation family I sat with had lots of fun, but went home empty handed. There were about 15 winners, in all the different games, and one gentleman won the Black Out, and took home the grand prize. I asked if he had something to say to the newsletter readers: "Winning is better than losing." Still, most people do not win every week, and only once in a great while. Johnny's sister has never won. I figure they come for other reasons. I noticed family members, and friends without family, actually sitting and talking together from 6:30PM (or earlier) till about 8:30PM when the Black Out played out. Imagine, no TV, and people talking, what a concept?

Time to get to my point: I study spirals and how they work in small business success and failure. American Legion Post 10 has a business, called 'Bingo' and it's spiraling. Keeping the bingo-spiral in control, in order, in cadence, and not out of control, in disorder is the job of every Legionnaire! Out of control spirals, move downward, into a death spiral, not only does Legion lose money, it can lose its

primary source of income to have a big hall, which it uses for many inspiring purposes, like stand down, or celebrations of Vietnam veterans, like myself.

Bingo, twice a week (Saturday and Wednesday) does form a *Bingo-Spiral*, throughout the year, with ups and downs in the repetition of that event. For the good of the Legion, it's time to learn about how Bingo-spirals operate in 'difference and repetition'.

Our problems with the Bingo-Spiral concern the nature of difference and repetition. It is a matter of studying why so many Legion members are indifferent to 'making the difference.' It is a matter of understanding how a limited concept of spiral, a weak concept of it, is not good for business.

Consider the difference in repetition of successive Saturday and Wednesday bingo events throughout the year, and from year to year. We could err and draw a simple spiral line of attendance, resource uses, personnel expenses, supply purchases, and the final net profit line. It would be a shallow representation that would tell us very little about how to 'make the difference' in a bingo business.

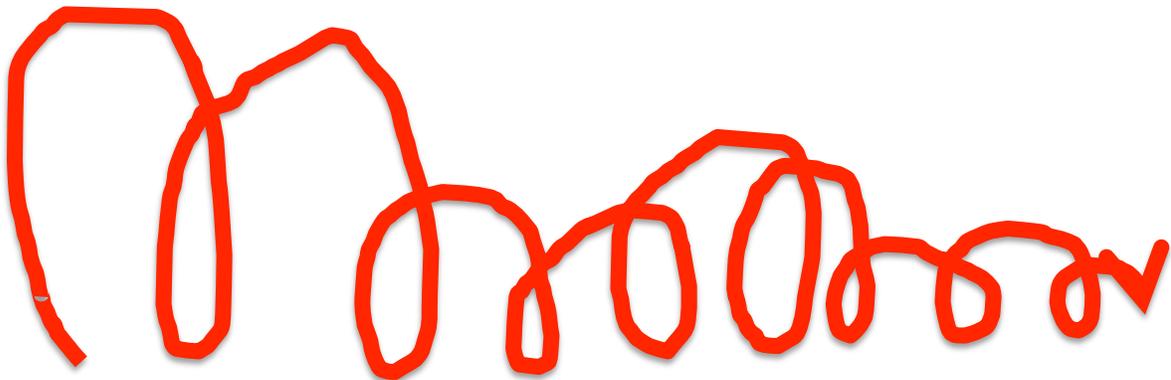


Figure 1: A Too Simplistic Spiral-Line of Bingo at the Legion

This spiral-line figure is too simplistic to tell us what is important about difference and repetition of the bingo events and their relationship to the mission of being an American Legion post.

Bingo-spirals have whorls, one after the other, two times a week. A whorl is an evening's event, its attendance, its monetary expenses on materials, and the monetary intake, hopefully resulting in profit. The size of each Bingo-whorl (two times a week) can be measured by attendance, the amount of supplies used, the cost of paying personnel, the amount customers spend on bingo cards, bank deposit from the evening, and amount of food sold and consumed, and the number of trash bags accumulated in the dumpster. Spiral is both a concept and an Idea.

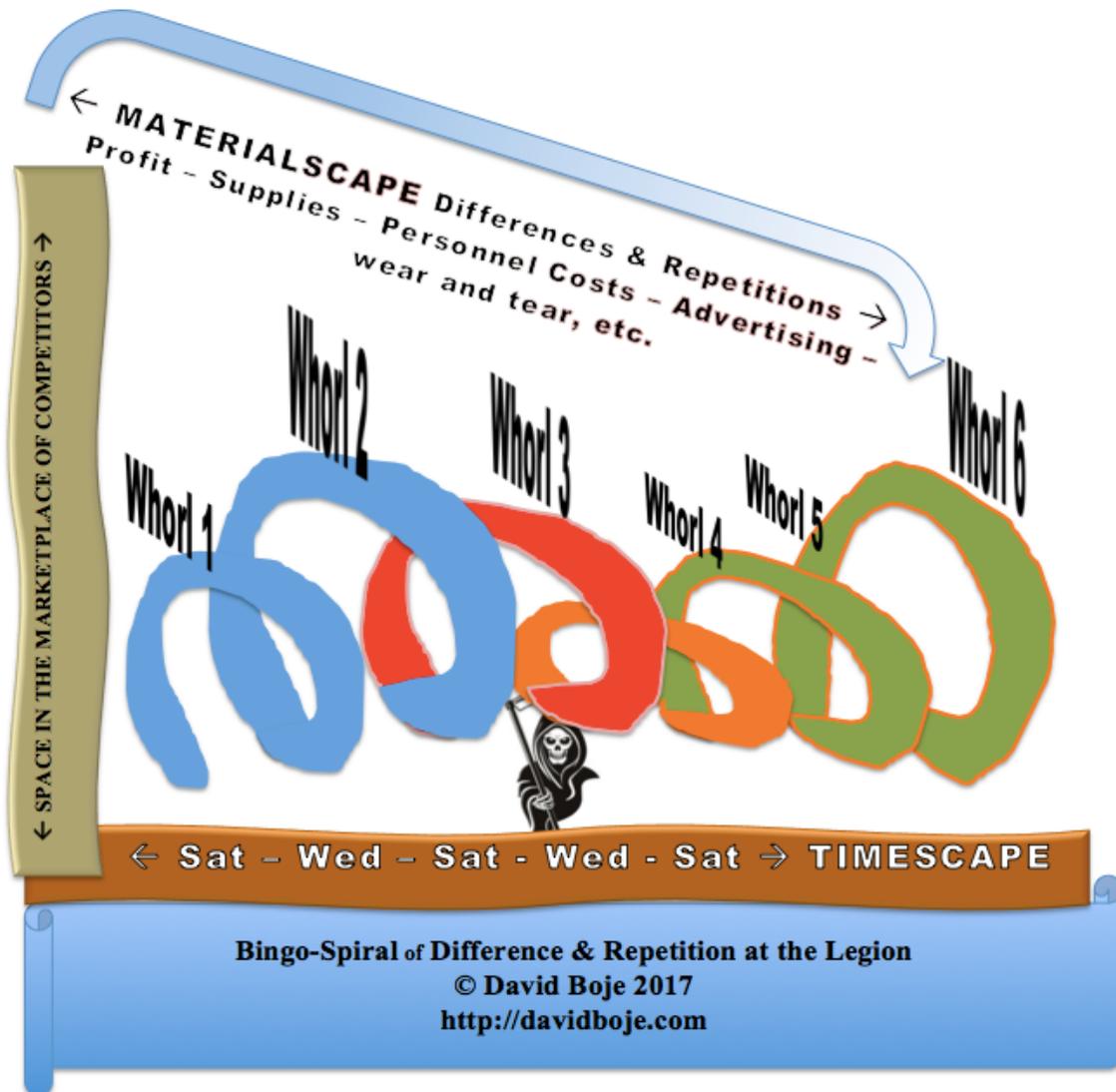


Figure 2: The Bingo-Spirals has Saturday & Monday WHORLS of different REPETITION proportion and substantive DIFFERENCE (© D. M. Boje 2017)

Spirals have repetitions of the whorls (2 Bingo events a week) and differences (between whorls, some larger, others smaller) in three dimensions. Above I show five whorls of a dynamic spiral that has the dimensions of space in marketplace (landscape), time in a timescape, and materials in a materialscape. The three dimensions are inseparable, but let's pretend we can tell them apart:

1. **SPACE (Landscape) IN THE MARKETPLACE OF COMPETITORS** - St. Genevieve has the same \$1,199 blackout as the Legion; Elks' blackout is \$800'; Three Crosses blackout is \$700. There is also market space for Knights of Columbus and Tortugas (Mesilla). Legion is vying for top market share in the Landscape.

2. **TIMESCAPE** – Saturday and Wednesday events all year round, and the preparation for the events, the managing of the events. Johnny and Clint start work at noon and leave at 9PM (or later), and then put in about 5 or more additional hours doing accounting, supply runs, and passing out flyers to boost attendance. They supervise 3 cashiers (none of whom are Legion members), 1 caller (not Legion), 4 cleaners working to empty baskets from each table 4 times each evening (1 is Legion), and 4 food people (none are Legion).
3. **MATERIALSCAPE** – Material things like money, supplies, utilities, the hall, tables, chairs, and bodies (workers, managers, caller, clean up crew, food crew, Legionnaires there and not there, and customers there and not there), and any profit once bills are paid. A sizeable number of customers are families, some with children. Bingo materiality is not just the elderly. About 12 players are handicapped, and have reserved places in the materialscape of other players. I think if you counted the number of Johnny's and Clint's relatives, playing, it's what keeps attendance excelling.

It's all about repetition and difference: The whorls occur in repetition but the whorls are each full of difference. Spiral is a concept, a representation of the shape and form of the whorls. Spiral is also an Idea, what and how it does 'difference and repetition' of the spiral happen? Concept and Idea of spiral are not independent, and do interact. To manage and organize Bingo you have to understand the concept of spirals. And you also have a really good Idea of how whorls are repetitions of the event twice a week that can be quite different if you know what to observe.

Making a Difference is Opposed by Overcoming Indifference: There are two types of indifference among our Legion members. Type one is the Abyss of Legionnaires who will have nothing at all to do with bingo. You hear them saying "I hate bingo" or "I never play bingo" or "I have nothing to do with bingo." Type two indifference is the scattered Legion members who only see the calm waters of bingo events, pay some lip service to bingo being important to fund the Legion's other events and keep the hall open, but are no less indifferent than Type one.

The Difference that 'Makes All the Difference': The abyss of indifference and the surface indifference are in relation to how many people from the Legion Post 10 actually promote, participate, and send their friends and relatives to play bingo. The 'difference' that 'makes the difference' is the determination of the Bingo-Spiral moving upward into profit, or it becoming a downward 'death spiral' into bankruptcy. Bingo-spiral is not a hobby, it's an actual business. Nothing to play around with. Its not a game, when its life or death of a post.

An example of **what to observe about Bingo spirals:** Observe the weather difference. A few weeks a heavy rainstorm that flooded the streets interfered with ago Bingo at the American Legion Post 10 in Las Cruces New Mexico, and kept many people home. Instead of the usual 115 to 150 customers, there were 80 committed

souls who turned up at the Legion's Bingo Hall. Bingo happens on Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the year. But every Bingo night is different.

Observe back to school season differences: Next Saturday it's 13 August, a time period when parents and grandparents shop for school clothes and supplies for the young ones. This is an external event (school starting up) that will predictably lower attendance at Bingo.

Observe the backup players. One Saturday the 'caller' (reads off the bingo numbers) was away dealing with an illness, and the only Bingo manager, certified by the New Mexico Gaming Commission to be a caller was out of town. So Bingo was cancelled, and instead of 115 to 150 customers, there were none. This sent ripple effects spiraling into the future attendance, until customers regained confidence that, 'yes, Bingo still exists at American Legion, Post 10.'

There is a process of learning how to manage the internal and the external causes of spiral changes. For example, now the Legion knows it needs two back ups for the 'caller', a second Legionnaire (thanks Bruce) has completed training, filled paperwork with the state and is awaiting certification. If the main 'caller' of Bingo is absent, then there are two backup Legionnaires, ready to step in.

The same is true for having backup people to work the trash cleanup, every third game, during a Bingo night. I volunteered to do trash cleanup 9 August (Wednesday) and learned a whole lot about Bingo-spirals, and how to manage them. It takes four people to collect all the stubs and used cards, soda cans, and food wrappers, placed in little white or blue baskets, about three to a table, and not be walking about when the calling of the numbers resumes in the next game. It takes backup people, should one or more of the food workers be absent. Without food, people leave to get their own food elsewhere, and many don't come back.

Observe the rules and laws of the Gaming Commission. It takes three staff plus two Bingo managers (Johnny & Cling), to handle the paperwork, help customers buy their cards and dabbers, and do it quick enough that people do not wait in interminable lines. The Gaming Commission must certify each staff person before they can handle the money.

Observe the supplies. When a type of card games or pull-tab game, runs out, a customer may never come back. If there are no more dabbers, those in need of a dabber, are disappointed, and may not return. They head to one of the four other main Bingo competitors in Las Cruces, and they spread the word, "Legion let its supplies run out. Don't go there!" Rumors send ripple effects into the future spiral-whorls, for a long time, until forgetting sets in.

Bingo-Spirals have Symmetry and Dissymmetry: Bingo-spirals are dynamic systems, and each whorl is different in its repetition than the next one, or the one before. Bingo attendance, how the regulars come back and set in same seats is part

of symmetry. Johnny, for example, sets out signs for some of the disabled regulars to have a particular seat at a particular table that they like. This required planning, going to Gaming Commission, with some forms for each handicapped person, wanting this service. Its what I call fore-caring, in advance, preparing for the whorl, so it has some stability and sameness, one night of bingo to the next. There is dissymmetry in and between the spiral-whorls, such as when there is no back up caller available, or no backup to clean up the litter baskets, or backup for an absented cashier. Sometimes this can shutdown the system, and other times just throw it into temporary disorder.

Bingo-Spiral Needs Effective Communication between the Elements:

Communication takes place within and between whorls, and the social as well as the material elements express positive symmetry, or cancel each other out in dissymmetry. The communication of what is happening within the sociomateriality of the Bingo-Spiral-System is both the external signals (weather, back to school season, holiday, competitor increases Blackout payout), and the internal signals about the real movements of the spiral in attaining support and legitimacy as a central activity center of the Legion Post 10 (for example, executive post members working the event, members bringing entire family to the event, promoting the event by handing out flyers and talking it up as best in the city, etc.).

The Bingo-Spiral is a Network Fabric, a Snake's Skin Stretched Upon the Wholly Shape of Internal Organs:

The outward appearance, the skin of the Bingo-Spiral has its material repetitions (whorl-by-whorl) and the internal aspects of the snake are hidden from view, more secret, as the snake constitutes itself and sheds its skin. Outwardly the Bingo-spiral is a variable performance curve that has two dissymmetrical aspects, a spiral that can move up and down in profitability. However, to understand how it is moving profitably or losing money requires learning about the internal repetition within difference. The Bing-managers and the American Legion Post 10 executive committee must work together, to monitor the external (weather, competition, gaming trends), and manage the profit/loss curve by attending to the spiral signals. It is like swimming in the ocean, where there are currents and waves (back to school, actual stormy weather, etc.). You learn to swim with the current, crossing the waves, or flowing with the waves. You need practical familiarity with wave-signs and current-signs to manage Bing-spiraling. Some leaders say 'do as I do' and others say, "do with me" and we work together to negotiate the waves of 'difference and repetition' (Deleuze, 1994: 23). Waves are different and they have repetition, whorl after whorl, the ocean spirals.

Rumors are Deadly Signs: When a customer does not get the seat they want, or the house runs out of the gaming card they prefer, it can create a bad wave, with consequence to the movement of the spiral, and to Bingo-spiral fortunes. Competing Bingo establishments gain the rumormonger, but perhaps to their own disadvantage. Still there is a lot to be said about paying attention to customers' complaints, and dealing with difference instead of doing indifference to the feedback.

In sum, the difference that makes a difference is not being indifferent to the Bingo-Spiral. It takes a whole Legion to have a successful Bingo-Spiral, one that competes with St. Genevieve, Elks, and Three Crosses. I was amazed at Johnny and Clint, how much dedication, lots of hours, putting out flyers, stepping up and making a difference. I observed the indifference of most of us legion members, who don't show up to bingo, don't work the event, don't invite friends and relatives, don't make the difference.