



The art of integrating Integral Theory

Thoughts4Action

The following pages are an introduction to how we look at the world and what we do as a company and team – in other words to integrate Integral Theory in a company.

Firstly

The integral theory is a ‘map’ we use to understand the road we are travelling personally and as a team – as illustrated in the model.

Secondly

The integral approach is also a great tool to help us understanding reality – the R in our GROW coaching model (Goal, Reality, Options and What action). When people ask for help with getting direction (which is what a lot of coaching essentially is about) it is very difficult to help them if they do not have a clear understanding of their starting point. “Could you tell me the shortest route to London” is a hopeless question to answer if I do not

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know where you are starting from. And it’s the same problem in coaching. Whether you would like to win a marathon or start your own business you need a clear picture of where you are starting from and the Integral Map is a great tool to grasp the bigger picture of a person, a team or an organisation – and to understand their starting point.

Thirdly

The integral model is a wonderful tool for us because it helps us develop training that is not just focused on one aspect of human and organisational development – it helps us to stay balanced in our approach.

What is Integral?

The following text describes the theory in more detail and has to been adapted and abbreviated from the original text published by the Integral Institute under the title “What is integral”? You can read the original paper [here](#). If you are in the mood for the full monty I strongly recommend that you read Wilber’s blockbuster: “Sex, Ecology and Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution” – or you can start with smaller steps and start with the short, sweet and to the point version: “The Integral Vision: A Very Short Introduction to the Revolutionary Integral Approach to Life, God, the Universe, and Everything” (Paperback).

A search for a map of human potentials

Over the last several decades there has been an extensive search for a comprehensive map of human potentials. This map uses all the known systems and models of human growth – from the ancient shamans and sages to today’s breakthroughs in cognitive science – and distils their major components into 5 simple factors. Factors that are the essential elements or keys to unlocking and facilitating human evolution.

Comprehensiveness and effectiveness

The integral approach helps us to see ourselves and the world in more comprehensive and effective ways. However, one thing is important to realise from the start. The Integral Map is just a map. It is not the territory. We certainly don’t want to confuse the map with the territory, but neither do we want to work with an inaccurate or faulty map. The Integral Map is just a map, but it’s the most complete and accurate map we have at this time.

States

Everybody is familiar with major states of consciousness, such as waking, dreaming and deep sleep. Right now, you are in a waking state of consciousness (or, if you are tired, perhaps a daydream state of consciousness). There are all sorts of different states of consciousness including meditative states (yoga, contemplation, meditation, and so on); altered states (caused by drugs or alcohol); and a variety of peak experiences, many of which can be triggered by intense experiences like making love, walking in nature or listening to exquisite music.

Temporary states of consciousness

Everybody experiences various sorts of states of consciousness, and these states often provide profound motivation, meaning and drives, in ourselves and others. There’s an interesting thing about states of consciousness: They come and they go. Even great peak experiences or altered states, no matter how profound, will come, stay a bit, then pass. No matter how wonderful their capacities, they are temporary.

Stages or levels of development

Where states of consciousness are temporary, stages of consciousness are permanent. Stages represent the actual milestones of growth and development. Once you are at a stage, it is an enduring acquisition. For example, once a child develops through the linguistic stages of development, the child has permanent access to language. Language isn't present one minute and gone the next. The same thing happens with other types of development. Once you stably reach a stage of development, you can access the qualities of that stage – such as greater consciousness, more embracing love, higher ethical callings, greater intelligence and awareness – virtually any time you want.

Different stage conceptions

Generally, in the integral model, we work with around 8 to 10 stages or levels of consciousness development. One stage conception often used is that of Spiral Dynamics Integral founded by Don Beck based on the research of Clare Graves. We also use stages of self development pioneered by Jane Loevinger and Susann Cook-Greuter; and orders of consciousness, researched by Robert Kegan. But there are many other useful stage conceptions available using the integral approach.

Example of using stages

To show what is involved with levels or stages, let's use a very simple model possessing only 3 of them. If we look at moral development, for example, we find that an infant at birth has not yet been socialised into the culture's ethics and conventions. This is called the pre-conventional stage. It is also called egocentric, in that the infant's awareness is largely self-absorbed. But as the young child grows up and begins to learn its culture's rules and norms, it moves into the conventional stage of morals. This stage is also called ethnocentric, in that it focuses on the child's particular group, tribe, clan or nation, and it therefore tends to exclude care for those outside one's group. But at the next major stage of moral development, the post-conventional stage, the individual's identity expands once again, this time to include a care and concern for all people, regardless of race, colour, sex or creed which is why this stage is also called worldcentric. Thus, moral development tends to move from "me" (egocentric) to "us" (ethnocentric) to "all of us" (worldcentric) – a good example of the unfolding stages of consciousness.

Lines of development

I'm good at some things, not-so-good at others.... Have you ever noticed how unevenly developed virtually all of us are? Some people are highly developed in, say, logical thinking, but poorly developed in emotional feelings.

Some people have highly advanced cognitive development (they're very smart) but poor moral development (they're mean and ruthless). Some people excel in emotional intelligence, but can't add 2 plus 2.

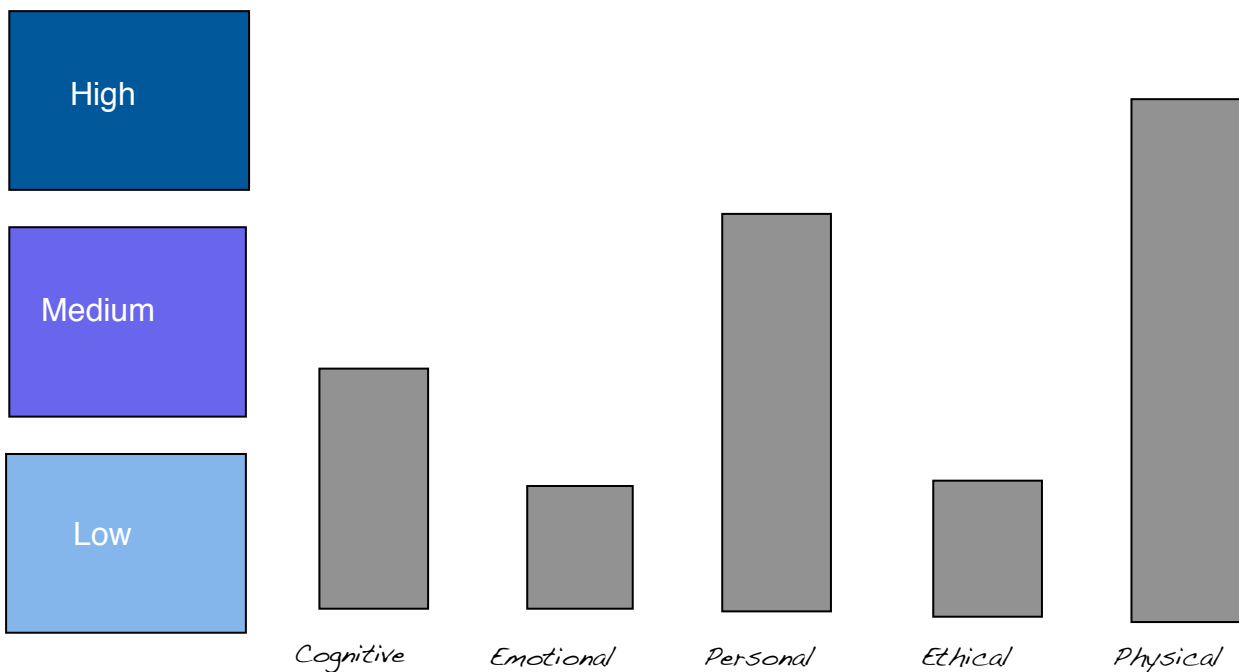
Multiple intelligences

Howard Gardner made this idea fairly well-known using the idea of multiple intelligences such as cognitive

intelligence, emotional intelligence, musical intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence etc. Most people excel in one or two of those, but do poorly in the other multiple intelligences. It can be illustrated in a so-called ‘psychograph’.

Intelligences unfold in stages

Various multiple intelligences include: Cognitive, interpersonal, moral, emotional, and aesthetic. Why do we also call them developmental lines? Because those intelligences show growth and development. They unfold in progressive stages. What are those progressive stages?



The stages we just outlined. In other words, each multiple intelligence grows – or can grow – through the 3 major stages (or through any of the stages of any of the developmental models; whether 3 stages, 5 stages, 7 or more). You can have cognitive development to stage 1, to stage 2 and to stage 3, for example.

Types combined with levels, lines and stages

Types simply refer to items that can be present at virtually any stage or state. One common typology, for example, is the Myers-Briggs (whose main types are feeling, thinking, sensing and intuiting). You can be any of those types at virtually any stage of development. These kind of “horizontal typologies” can be very useful, especially when combined with levels, lines, and states. To show what is involved, we can use “masculine” and “feminine.”

The 4 Quadrants: I, We, It and Its

Now, if we just had states, stages, types and lines they would be a heap and not a system or map. In order for them to form a system or be useful as a map of the organizational world that we operate in we need to combine them. This is where the quadrants come in.

Upper-left and upper-right quadrant

For example, in the Upper-Left quadrant (the interior of the individual), you find your own immediate thoughts, feelings, sensations and so on (all described in first-person terms). But if you look at your individual being from the outside, in the terms not of subjective awareness but objective science, you find neurotransmitters, a limbic system, the neocortex, complex molecular structures, cells, organ systems, DNA and so on – all described in third-person objective terms (“it” and “its”).

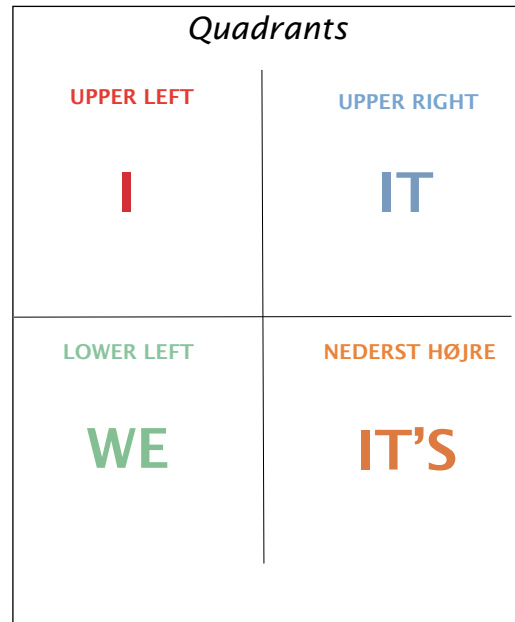
The Upper-Right quadrant is therefore what any event looks like from the outside. This especially includes its physical behaviour; its material components; its matter and energy and its specific body – because all those are items that can be referred to in some sort of objective, third-person, or “it” fashion.

Lower-left and lower-right quadrant

In the Lower-Left quadrant, cultural development itself often unfolds in waves, moving from what the pioneering genius Jean Gebser called archaic to magic to mythic to mental to integral and higher. In the Lower-Right quadrant, systems theory investigates the collective social systems that evolve (and that, in humans, include stages such as foraging to agrarian to industrial to informational systems).

For this simple overview details are not as important as a general grasp of the unfolding nature of all four quadrants, which can include expanding spheres of consciousness, care, culture and nature. In short, the I and the We and It can evolve. Self and culture and nature can all develop and evolve.

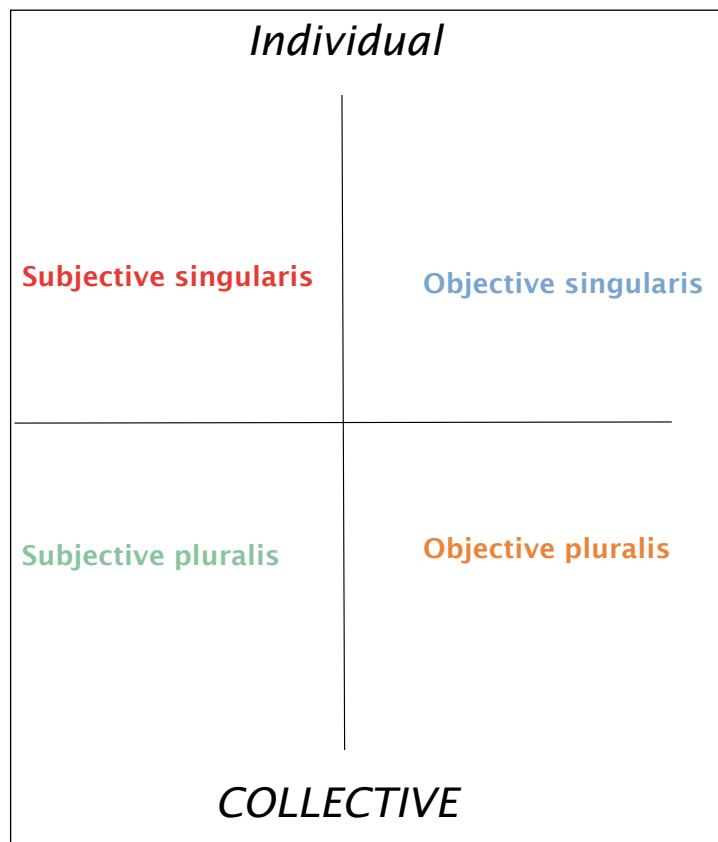
An example might provide a more specific overview of what the four quadrants is all about.



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A depressed person can be described on the basis of the four quadrants. He has an inner subjective experience of his depression – melancholy etc. (upper left). At the same time his brain most likely has a low degree of the neurotransmitter serotonin (upper right). He finds himself in an intersubjective context, which might be difficult – bullying, social injustice or something like that (lower left).

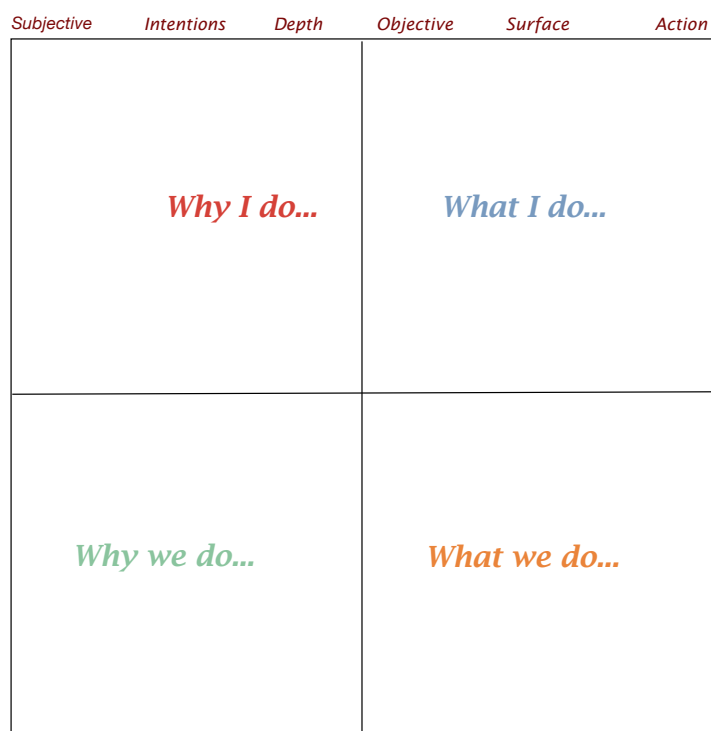
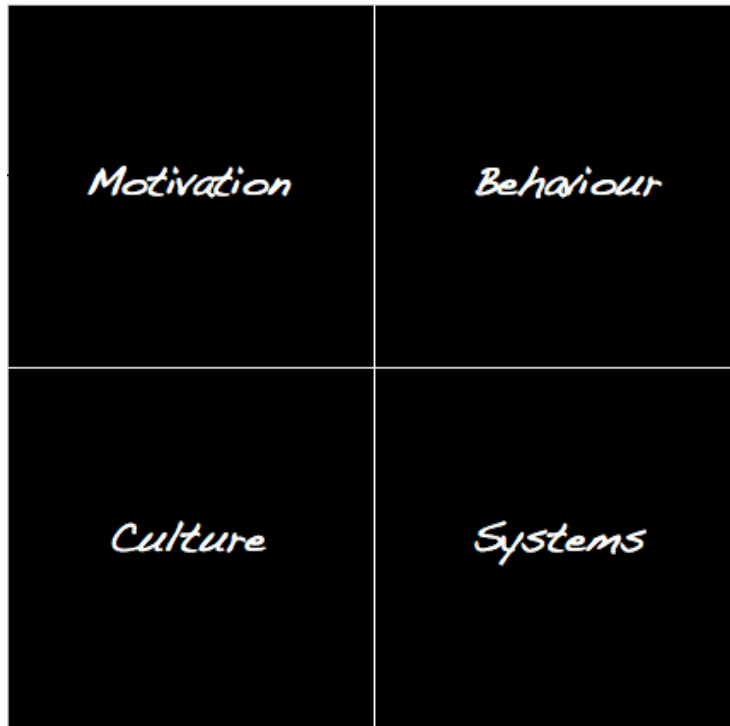
Finally he might find himself in a society in the times of a financial crisis with a lack of food, accommodation etc. (lower right). This is subjective, intersubjective and objective singular and plural. When we consider all these aspects we have a quite detailed description of the depressed person’s situation.



All of this describes the Integral Map with a certain amount of detail – the kind of detail that you would find on a world wall map. If you want further details you will need to dive into the writings of Ken Wilber. For all practical purposes we sometimes need an even simpler map than the one we have used so far.

Using the term Holon

When we look at organizations and try to understand what is going on we can draw the simplest of maps on the back of a beer mat:



Even with a map as simple as that we can start to explain much of what is going on in organizations – what is new is how things are connected, and not so much what is going on. Combining the 4 quadrants like this is also referred to as a ‘**holon**’ – a term first used by Arthur Koster (The Ghost in the Machine).

Rules of holons

There are a number of rules regarding holons that are very useful when we consider whole organizations as holons. Wilber uses a list of 21, but in our simple model we only need a few to illustrate the main principles.

1. If something can be found in one quadrant, it necessarily has to be found in the other quadrants as well.
2. A holon can only function at it's best if there is congruence between what happens/exists in one quadrant and what happens/exists in the other quadrants. If my company (lower left quadrant) has other values than myself (upper left quadrant) it's not a good match on the long run. One of us has to change.
3. Any given holon will at any time fight to stay the way it is – a unit separate from other units. Because if it doesn't it cannot exist. At the same time a holon has to seek community because it can't be a holon if it's not a part of something else.

Everything is part of something (and everything is therefore connected)

Everything has both an interior and exterior aspect, and what can be observed in one quadrant will somehow be reflected in the other quadrants. In order for the whole to function optimally there must be a balance or congruence between all four quadrants. The perspective *Agency/Communion* is an example of the balance between the individuality and collectivity. You also call it Yin and Yang or a feminine/masculine set of values.

Agency is based on action and is associated with a masculine set of values. Communion is about relations and caring. Both men and women have masculine and feminine sides of their personality. Women has a tendency to move towards communion while men move towards agency. However, it doesn't have anything to do with their gender or sexual orientation.

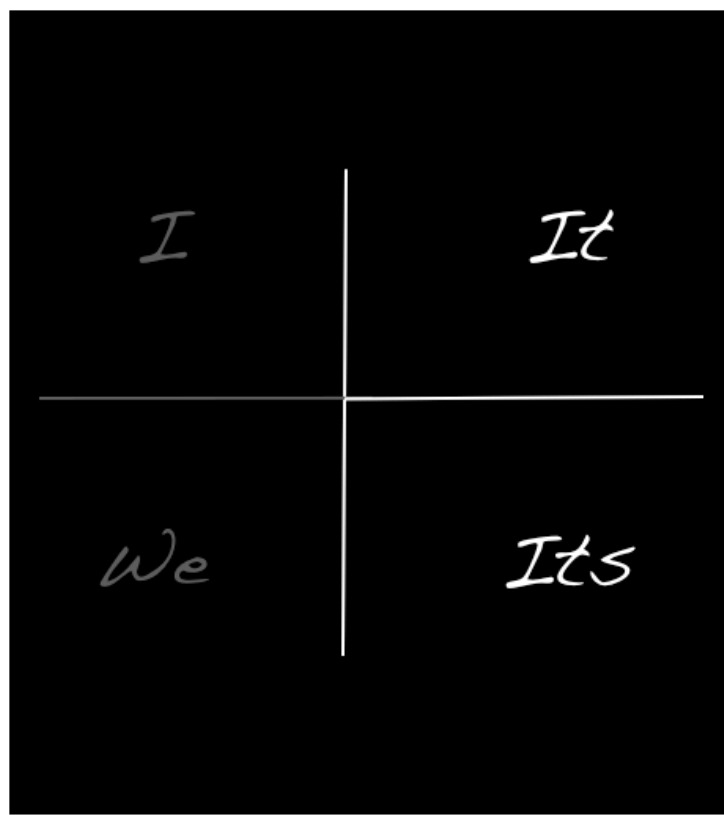
If you look at the world through an Agency perspective something has to happen – not all that talking, let's get to the point and find solutions. If you look at the world through a Communion perspective your focus is on dialogue and relations before you move on to problem solving.

Culture is reflected in our systems – giving us a common language

Again very simply put - the culture that we have in our organization will be reflected in our systems and in the motivation and behaviour of each individual. But if we create systems that are in conflict with our culture (or the culture we would like to have) then we will not get the motivation or behaviour that we are hoping for. As you may now see this not only gives us a wealth of information and understanding of how things function or do not function, we also now have a common language that we can use to address these problems.

The problem on focusing on only one quadrant perspective

Most business theories only look at a part of this map. B.F. Skinner – who coined Behaviourism – was only looking at the upper right quadrant. Jung and all the management theories that have been inspired by his thinking tend to look at human development only from the upper left perspective. Karl Marx wrote hundreds of pages on how to solve the world's problems seen through the lower right quadrant – and great thinkers like Thomas Kuhn and Max Weber wanted us to believe that it was all a question of culture. They are of course all right – and all wrong. Using the Integral Map we see that looking at the whole always mean that there are at least 4 perspectives to everything and within each of these four perspectives there are always states, stages types and lines. Wilber calls this AQAL – all quadrants at all levels.



Awareness of interior and exterior realities

Most of the management training and leadership development that you can find today are focused on the right side – teaching objective, empirical and behavioural ways of knowing. But from an integral perspective developing leaders capable of operating beyond the conventional action logic must also include the left side, the interior “I” of the upper left quadrant and the intersubjective “we” space of the lower left quadrant. Developing post conventional stage capacities start with awareness of interior as well as exterior realities.

The perspective Agency/Communion is a good example of how important it is to have a balance between the right and left side of Holons. Typically, Agency is what’s going on in the right side and communion what’s going on in the left side. As it becomes more and more clear that all the world’s problems can be solved only through action and looking at facts (right side) – but also have to involve dialogue and mutual understanding to get out of the mess we’re in – then it also becomes clear why Communion and the feminine set of values get more and more present in societies today.

If we collect all of the many aspects concerning integral theory and holons – the many intelligences developing continuously at different levels and stages, the many states that we find ourselves in during the day, our types and our set of values – then you might start to grasp that there are many variants of the human existence and humans are developing constantly – some to a great extent and some to a less extent – throughout our lives. This is what Integral Theory is all about – an ‘eternal’ map of of the human existence.