The Integral Approach

Overview

"Integral" means "inclusive, balanced, comprehensive." The Integral approach may be contrasted to other methods—mythic, rational-scientific, pluralistic—which, as they themselves announce, *exclude* other approaches as being inferior. They are thus, by definition, partial and incomplete. These latter methods, although widely accepted and dominant in the world's cultures, tend to generate partial analysis and incomplete solutions to problems. As such, they appear less efficient, less effective, and less balanced than the Integral approach.

Like any truly fundamental advance, the Integral approach initially seems complicated but eventually is understood to be quite simple and even straightforward. It's like using a word processor: at first it is hard to learn, but eventually it becomes incredibly simple to use.

The easiest way to understand the Integral approach is to remember that it was created by a cross-cultural comparison of most of the known forms of human inquiry. The result was a type of **comprehensive map of human capacities**. After this map was created (by looking at all the available research and evidence), it was discovered that **this integral map had five major aspects to it**. By learning to use these five major aspects, any thinker can fairly easily adopt a more comprehensive, effective, and **integrally informed** approach to specific problems and their solutions—from psychology to ecology, from business to politics, from medicine to education.

What are these five aspects? Technically they are referred to as "quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types." Of course, unless one has already learned the "word processing system," as it were, then these aspects won't make much sense. But they are indeed very simple and easy to use once one gets the hang of it.

There is an important point about these five aspects. Because the integral map that they were drawn from was created by an extensive cross-cultural comparison of human capacities, these five aspects appear to be potentials **available to all human beings**. (We will see examples of this in a moment). Thus, the integral approach does not ask a person to adopt anything that they do not already have available to them. This is not some "outside" philosophy that people are asked to believe, but a pointer to potentials that they already possess but perhaps are not fully utilizing or expressing.

For example, one of the five aspects—called **quadrants**—refers to the fact that all major human languages have first-, second-, and third-person pronouns (for example: I, you/we, and it). These three dimensions of reality (I, we, and it) often show up as **art, morals,** and **science** (or the aesthetic expression of "I," the morals of "we," and the objective "its" of science)—the Beautiful, the Good, and the True is another version of these dimensions.

If we realize that "it" can appear in plural, or "its," then we have the "four quadrants" or dimensions that are present in all major human languages: I, we, it, and its—or the intentional, cultural, behavioral, and social dimensions of all human beings.

Upper-Left Quadrant "I" Interior-Individual Intentional	**Upper-Right Quadrant** "IT" Exterior-Individual Behavioral
Lower-Left Quadrant "WE" Interior-Collective Cultural	**Lower-Right Quadrant** "ITS" Exterior-Collective Social (Systems)

Notice some of the major and extremely influential modes of inquiry that are based in each of the quadrants:

- **Upper Left**: phenomenology, psychotherapy, meditation, emotional intelligence, personal transformation
- **Upper Right**: empiricism, scientific analysis, quality control, behavioral modification
- **Lower Left**: multiculturalism, postmodernism, worldviews, corporate culture, collective values
- **Lower Right**: systems theory, social systems analysis, techno-economic modes, communication networks, systems analysis

Which of those approaches is right? All of them, according to Integral theory.

The Integral approach simply points out that these dimensions of reality are present in all cultures, and therefore any truly comprehensive or integral approach would want to touch bases with all of those important dimensions, **because they are in fact operating in people in any event**, and if we do not include them in our analysis, we will have a partial, fragmented, and broken approach to any proposed solution.

Likewise with the other major aspects (levels, lines, states, and types). Most natural organisms show a capacity for development—an acorn grows into an oak through various levels or stages of growth. Human beings likewise show various stages of growth, which can occur in many of their innate capacities or functions: humans can evidence cognitive development, moral development, psychosexual development, interpersonal development, and so on. In short, human beings seem to have many **developmental lines** (cognitive, moral, psychosexual, etc.) that unfold in various **levels** or stages of development—what we call **levels and lines**.

The Integral map simply includes as many of these levels and lines as possible, because they seem to be operating in people in any event, and taking them into account would thus appear crucial in any truly comprehensive or integral approach to the world's problems.

Finally, we have "states" and "types." **Types**: there appear to be different types of awareness. For example, one of the most commonly discussed is that of masculine and feminine ways of knowing (where the masculine type appears to be more autonomous and analytic, and the feminine type more relational and embodied). The important point is: are we acknowledging and taking into account the fact that there might be different types or ways of looking at a problem, or are we trying to take one way and force it on others?

The same with "states": Not only do human beings appear to have various **types** of consciousness and various **stages** of consciousness, they also seem to have many different **states** of consciousness. Many of the major states are well-known—waking, dreaming, and sleeping, for example—and once again, these major states are clearly **potentials that are present in all human beings**.

The Integral approach simply asks us to take all the known states into account when analyzing why and how human beings act as they do. Just as many individuals might be operating at different waves or stages of development and as different types, so many might be operating from a different state. Taking all of these into account will give us a much more accurate map of the terrain we are trying to address.

Thus, to briefly summarize: the Integral approach looks at any problem—personal, social, ecological, international—and attempts to identify all of the important variables that are contributing to the problem in each of the five major domains (quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types). A truly Integral approach might draw equally on systems theory and meditation, technological innovations and emotional intelligence, corporate culture and behavioral modification—the full spectrum of potentials in all of the quadrants, all of the levels, all of the lines, all of the states, all of the types.

The Integral approach thus elicits solutions that acknowledge and incorporate all of these important factors, without excluding or denying any of them—because all of them are clearly affecting the present situation and the problems being generated, and anything less than a truly Integral approach might actually make matters worse, not better.

Combating Absolutisms for More Effective and Balanced Solutions

By contrast, the methods of the other major approaches now widely used—mythic-religious, rational-scientific, and pluralistic—appear to have major biases built into them, because they advance their truth as the only fundamentally correct approach while condemning the others as inferior or even dangerous.

An obvious example is the **rational-scientific method** in its exclusive form. It focuses problem analysis (and solution) on systems and processes, and for the most part excludes issues associated with individual meaning, aesthetics, and group culture. Even systems theory, which claims to be "comprehensive" and "all-inclusive," in fact privileges the "it" and "its" domains—and explicitly denies irreducible reality to all of the "I" and "thou" and "we" domains of aesthetics, morals, and culture. In other words, science and systems theory *absolutize* their own favorite quadrants (the "it" and "its" dimensions).

Likewise, postmodern pluralism often grants reality to the social or cultural dimension (we), but it tends to deny any sort of objective reality. Pluralism tends to absolutize the "we" dimension and deny reality to objective "it" and "its." All science is therefore looked upon as a mere interpretation, much like poetry. But clearly, a diamond will cut a piece of glass no matter what

culture it appears in. In other words, there are important objective truths (or "its") that need to be honored if any enduring solutions to the world's problems are to be discovered.

Thus, the Integral approach **accepts the partial truths** of both science and pluralism—**they are each correct when dealing with their own quadrant or dimension**—but denies that they alone have the only truth. **By combining all of their important contributions**, the Integral approach is able to offer fresh, comprehensive, and exciting approaches to resolving some of the world's recalcitrant problems.

Specific Applications

The value of a more comprehensive or integral map lies in the fact that it can be fruitfully applied to virtually any human endeavor, thus significantly increasing the probability that specific issues and problems can more effectively and efficiently be addressed and resolved.

These include such pressing issues as:

- Educational Problems and
- Business and Organizational Leadership
- Environmental and Ecological Problems
- Health and Medical Issues
- Political Problems and Solutions
- International Political and Military Issues
- Personal Transformation and Integral Spirituality

In the following section we will outline a few examples of how a more comprehensive and adequate approach—which takes into account the five major aspects of quadrants, levels, lines, states, and types—can offer fresh and innovative solutions to major problems. Obviously, in this short space we can only hint at the comprehensive nature of the Integral approach, but hopefully enough to suggest its possible importance.

Change Initiatives in Organizations: An Example from Business

The Integral Approach has many practical applications. It suggests that every transformational change effort needs to address all five of the major aspects of human beings. To do less than that is to leave out crucial variables that will seriously hobble effectiveness—whether the change effort involves helping individuals, creating personal meaning, addressing ecological issues, or managing sound and effective government and business leadership.

These insights can be applied to peak organizational as well as individual issues. Installing a new systems or process initiative without assuring an integrated balance of all relevant functions is a recipe for underperformance and in some cases disaster. Yet most leadership practices (in business, government, ecology, education) leave out some major aspect of human reality—they focus on only one quadrant, or only one level, or only one line, and so on—thus severely limiting their overall effectiveness.

This dangerous inadequacy returns to haunt the proponents of these partial models, as their very partialness tends to hobble truly effective change. Let's give a few well-documented examples of how such partialness can cripple business management and leadership theories and practices.

We have seen that all human beings have access to at least four major quadrants or dimensions: "I" or intentionality, "we" or culture, "it" or individual behavior, and "its" or systems behavior. In practice we find that most change agents (whether working with individuals, groups, or organizations) tend to focus on one of those quadrants at the expense of the others.

For example, **behavioral modification** focuses exclusively on the **Upper-Right quadrant** by attempting to directly change personal behavior. (In business, this includes such approaches as Total Quality Management and Theory X). Although they possess an important part of the puzzle of effective change, such methods do not address Upper-Left quadrant issues relating to individual psychological development and values-based motivations. Nor do they perform their interventions in the context of a supporting culture (Lower-Left quadrant) or organizational systems (Lower-Right quadrant). In effect, they leave out three-fourths of the factors required for a successful intervention.

Emotional intelligence training is one example of the methods (such as "Theory Y") that point out that productivity is often a product the emotional and subjective wellbeing of the people involved. In other words, it focuses on a particular line of individual development in the **Upper-Left quadrant**, which can be very helpful, but it leaves out crucial factors in the other three quadrants (which usually return to sabotage any real change).

Likewise, corporate and **organizational culture** consultants focus on the **Lower-Left quadrant**, pointing out that extensive research has shown that much of an organization's performance depends on cultural values in the organization itself—an important piece of the integral puzzle, but one that, by itself, leaves out vital factors in the other quadrants.

Systems theory experts and **systems managers** focus on the networks of dynamic flows of products and information in vast systems of interaction. Again, this is another important piece of the integral puzzle, but one that leaves out the important interior dimensions of the I and we domains (which usually return to sabotage the system). In other words, systems experts tend to work the **Lower-Right quadrant**, neglecting or even excluding the other three. And so on.

What makes the Integral Approach so innovative is that, by using a more comprehensive map employing all four quadrants, the important contributions of all of those methods can be incorporated into a **truly effective approach that covers all the bases**. Each of those methods is addressing an important dimension of human existence, and by seeing how each of them fits together into a larger picture, they can all be used synergistically to significantly enhance effectiveness.

Including All Quadrants, All Levels, All Lines

Let's give a specific example of this using one of the quadrants—that of interior individual development (the "I," or Upper-Left quadrant).

Dr. Robert Kegan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education (and a founding member of Integral Institute) is one of world's leading psychologists and a pioneer in applying developmental theory to adult life and work challenges. In his book *In Over our Heads*, Kegan documents how modern culture places implicit developmental demands on the average citizen that extend beyond the developmental levels that most other theorists document in today's developmental literature.

Kegan identifies five developmental levels or "orders of consciousness" that define how a person knows the world or constructs reality. The first three levels are similar to those found in today's child and adolescent development texts: *impulsive* (ages 2-6 yrs), *egocentric* (6-teens), and socialized or *conformist* (teens and beyond). Most adults (>80%) in developed nations reach at least the conformist or 3rd order of consciousness, where a person is able to internalize a value system, understand and respect the needs of others, and think abstractly.

In addition to the three commonly accepted stages or orders of consciousness development, Kegan adds two others—*autonomous* and *integral*. At the autonomous or 4th order of consciousness, a person becomes "self-authoring"—that is, they become capable of constructing their own value systems as opposed to operating within the value systems given to them by their

culture, family, or place of work. And at an *integral* or 5th order, they begin to bring together and synthesize many different value systems into coherent and meaningful wholes.

The massive shift in the last 30 years from command-and-control corporate cultures to decentralized organizations—where business units, managers, and individual employees are given greater and greater latitude to design their own work in response to rapidly changing market conditions—reflects an implicit demand for 4th order consciousness in the workplace

To illustrate this point, Kegan uses an example of two managers—Peter and Paul. Peter is an executive who has worked for Paul in the same company for 15 years and has moved up in the organization with Paul as Paul was promoted. Peter is characterized as a highly competent 3rd order manager and Paul a 4th order manager, with Paul initiating major new lines of business and other "out-of-the-box" ideas and Peter serving as a loyal lieutenant who uses Paul as a mentor and sounding board for all important decisions.

Paul, now a senior executive, gives Peter the opportunity to run a fully independent spin-off company of which the parent firm will own a majority stake. In the spirit of full empowerment, Paul makes it clear that all future decisions, from marketing to sales to pricing, will be Peter's to make and refuses to offer future advice on these matters other than to set broad objectives (e.g., profit) similar to those laid down by a board of directors to a CEO.

Peter is then left to face alone the conflicting demands of his sales force who resist being separated from the parent company, the challenge of developing an independent corporate identity with his sales channels, and the challenge of transforming a successful but conservative division into a entrepreneurial stand-alone company. In the process of trying to mediate these conflicting demands without Paul's support, Peter literally finds himself "in over his head" in meeting the 4th order tasks set in front of him.

Kegan goes on to show how most popular management theorists, either unfamiliar or dismissive of an adult developmental approach, wrongly assess Peter as having a skills or character deficit, where in fact the issue is the complexity or order of consciousness that Peter uses to construct his reality.

No amount of training or exhortation to self-empowerment will help Peter if his fundamental frame of reference is to work within an externally created value system. Like water to fish, working within a received frame of values is subject (implicit) rather than object (explicit) to Peter's current order of consciousness, and any attempt to help him construct a culture for his new company must address this vertical as opposed to merely horizontal developmental challenge.

Some leading-edge corporate training and research organizations are incorporating vertical as well as horizontal developmental models in their training and leadership efforts. For example, the Center for Creative Leadership has an ongoing research effort focused on how skills training (e.g., delegation) could be improved by customizing that training according to the level of consciousness of the person receiving the training. CCL has been working directly with Kegan in this important area of research.

Using Kegan's subject/object assessment tool (which requires about an hour of administration), it is possible to gain a reasonable assessment of a participant's order of consciousness and provide that information to a trainer or skills coach who can then **tailor their training accordingly**.

For example, working with a hypothetical manager such as Paul, who operates from 4th order consciousness, it would be possible to help train him on a variety of delegation styles that would be optimized for the level of development of his staff (e.g., more structured with 3rd order, less so with 4th order employees). In this sense a vertical developmental perspective is not only more

targeted and effective, it honors a deep and important dimension of diversity in the workplace that has been largely ignored or addressed indirectly in an ad-hoc fashion.

Why is that important? Kegan has given a superb example of why and how levels or stages of consciousness are an important factor in any effective change and transformation in business. The existence of stages or levels of consciousness is, of course, **one of the five major aspects addressed by the Integral method**, and Kegan has clearly demonstrated why taking this variable into account is crucial in any effective transformation.

Let's give one last example, this time focusing on **lines** of development. An Integral model points out that there are not just levels of development—as outlined by Kegan—but that different human capacities (or "lines") develop through those levels. For example, there is cognitive development, emotional development, spiritual development, interpersonal development, and so on. A person can be highly developed in one line—such as the cognitive—and poorly developed in others—such as emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, or group dynamics.

Thus, Paul might reach a 4th order level of consciousness in his thinking capacity, but only a 2nd order level of moral development. That is, he is very smart, but rather ruthless and unethical. Or perhaps somebody is well developed in the aesthetic or artistic line, but not well developed in the interpersonal line—the standard "bad boy artist," for example.

The idea of "levels and lines"—the notion that a person can be highly developed in some lines, medium in others, and poor in yet others—becomes crucially important, for example, when it comes to business leadership. Is the individual leader an "integral leader," well developed in many important lines? Or does he or she excel in one line (such as cognitive brilliance) and yet lag in others (such as interpersonal skills), so that the advances made in some areas are all but wiped out by the damage caused in others? An integral coach or trainer could help this person spot which areas need development in order to become an even more effective and successful leader.

Perhaps the foregoing examples are enough to suggest that an Integral Approach to leadership (in business, politics, ecology, education) would include a comprehensive perspective covering all the major bases. Are all the quadrants being included in the assessment and suggested interventions? Are all the developmental stages and levels being included? Are all the important developmental lines and capacities being engaged? (As well as all states and types of consciousness?)

Approaching any problem with a more comprehensive perspective can be expected to dramatically improve its chances of success, and such a comprehensive or "touch-all-the-bases" approach is central to the Integral ideal.

Applying the Integral Method to Organizational Change Initiatives

The Integral approach is sometimes called **AQAL** (pronounced *ah-qwal*), short for "all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types." It is also called an **Integral Operating System** (**IOS**), using a computer analogy, because once IOS is installed, you can run any applications software on it that you want (i.e., applications to organizational issues; leadership development; political, health, and environmental problems; personal psychological and spiritual transformation, and so on.)

The IOS simply checks to make sure that you are including all of the major dimensions of human existence in order to insure that whatever program you are running is as comprehensive, effective, and productive as it can possibly be—not because this is an "outside" philosophy, but because it is one that engages the potentials **already present** in each and every human being in the most positive fashion.

IOS can therefore serve as an invaluable tool to practitioners in their assessment and creation of a change initiative in virtually any area. The Integral Approach does not herald the development of yet another set of models and techniques that claim to solve all business problems. Instead, the Integral Approach **contextualizes and shows the interrelationships** between existing and future assessment and change management tools, helping practitioners call on those best for the situation at hand, leading to more effective, balanced, and sustainable change interventions. The Integral Approach to leadership in any area implies that there is no "one right way" of approaching change, but that all tools need to be carefully brought to bear on crucial issues. It is the change practitioner, in particular, that is the vital link translating theory into effective action.

One of the most important roles the change practitioner plays is working in concert with the client to intelligently assess (from an integral perspective) the nature of the problems the client is facing, the current capacities of the organization in question, and the willingness of the client to engage in the work necessary to address the gap that may exist between the two.

Both the assessment and the suggested remedies can be most effectively conducted using the Integral Approach, which does not guarantee the outcome, but does guarantee that all capacities are being brought to bear on the issue in as comprehensive a fashion as possible. If there is a solution, the Integral Approach is therefore, by a wide margin, the one most likely to be its midwife.

Pioneering Applications of the Integral Approach

The specific applications of an Integral approach are many. Because the model was developed by a cross-cultural examination of the available capacities of human beings, an Integral Approach can be used to help facilitate virtually any human endeavor.

Our approach continues to be, in all ways, grounded in actual research, evidence, and data wherever possible. Therefore, one of the primary goals of I-I is to continue to support extensive research into specific problem areas and issues, in an attempt to learn more effectively how integral approaches can further help resolve many of the world's recalcitrant problems. This research is, and will continue to be, made available to any who wish to take advantage of it.

Specific research projects include:

- Personal psychological and spiritual transformation
- Global ecology
- Integral business and organizational practices
- Integral medicine
- World hunger/famine
- Education (in first, second, and third-world settings)
- International politics
- Integral city and community planning
- Integral conflict resolution
- Organizational development in general (IOS apps)
- Personal transformation and Integral Transformative Practice

The details of these projects are now being developed by **core teams** in each of these areas. For this general overview, perhaps we could give a very brief outline of what these integral projects have in common: namely, each of them takes a particular problem area (e.g., ecology, education, medicine, international politics, personal transformation) and focuses on issues such as: **What aspects of this problem have been ignored by traditional approaches? How can an integral analysis shed light on these neglected areas?** By taking a more comprehensive and balanced approach, can we gather evidence and data showing (1) **that** and (2) **how** a more integral approach actually helps resolve these heretofore stubborn problems?

In **ecology**, for example, we have presented (at an Esalen conference on Integral Capitalism) a more integral analysis of how ecological problems can be approached using "all quadrants, all levels, all lines." Most ecological "solutions" focus merely on the exterior or "it" dimensions of the problem: we must limit carbon dioxide emissions, we must ban fluorocarbons, we must recycle wastes, we should use hypercars, and so on.

We do not deny the importance of such measures (which address the Lower-Right quadrant). But the Integral Approach goes one step further and asks: have we also looked at any changes that might be necessary in the interior dimensions (of the "I" and "we")? For example, using Kegan's model, the first thing we note is that "ecological awareness"—or an actual concern for global ecological issues—does not fully emerge until 5th order consciousness. In other words, unless a substantial number of world leaders themselves possess an integral framework, **ecological issues will not receive the balanced attention they deserve**.

The same goes for political, business, military, economic, and diplomatic issues and problems. In order to adequately assess global, widespread, and systematic problems, a leader must be able to think globally—to think in comprehensive, integral ways. The Integral approach helps with just that task, by offering **a global map for a global world**.

In international politics, for example, the exterior dimensions (the "it" and "its" quadrants) are being driven by economic factors, often focusing on global capitalism as it encounters local cultural realities (summarized in the popular book by Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*).

But that economic analysis focuses merely on the exterior dimensions. Samuel Huntington, in his influential *The Clash of Civilizations*, points out that much of the world's political dynamics is driven by the differences in **cultural values**, which he sees centered on nine major civilization blocks.

But Huntington analyzes those civilization blocks merely from a horizontal geopolitical location. A more integral approach would point out that many of those blocks are actually at different orders of consciousness (as researched by, e.g., Kegan).

Which of them is right? **All of them**—or so the Integral Approach would maintain. But to date, all of the major approaches to world economic and political dynamics have severely limited themselves by merely focusing on just a few quadrants, or just a few levels, or only a few lines, or perhaps some important types. But none of them have offered a framework that allows us to see how all of them have an important influence on the nature and function of international politics, business, military, and economic realities. Clearly they are all playing a hand in the final shape of the international situation, and the Integral Approach shows explicitly how they all fit together.

But beyond that, our specific research projects focus (in this case) on very particular areas—such as Iraq, Palestine, the Balkans, as well as inner-city America—in an attempt to determine the precise weight that each of the five major aspects of human existence contributes to these various problems (through both theoretical and practical analysis and assessment). And therefore what the most effective tactical and strategic interventions might be to help move the process forward toward some sort of resolution.

Likewise, in each of the other example areas, Integral Institute attempts to both advance our theoretical understanding of integral approaches, as well as design particular research and application cases. We design careful experimental research that can help not only prove, but disprove, any of our theoretical suggestions. If we are wrong in a particular area, we want to be the first to find out.

Experts in each of these areas—global business, international politics, ecology, medicine, conflict resolution, etc.—have been organized in order to plan and carry forward these specific research agendas. This is one of the primary goals of Integral Institute: *research actual instances of an integral approach in action*.

Needless to say, these are not merely theoretical issues, but ones that directly impact the future of humanity itself. One last, quick example: world hunger and famine. Most approaches to world hunger focus on the exterior dimensions in an attempt to find ways to produce more food and distribute it to more people. Again, we do not deny the importance of those measures (which address the Lower-Right quadrant).

But a more integral approach would also point out the following. As Nobel-Prize winning economist Amartya Sen demonstrated, famine has historically occurred only in non-democratic societies. Even in today's world, all famine occurs in non-democratic areas (one of the reasons for this, according to Sen, has to do with the necessity of unfettered information flow in order to effectively distribute food).

But, as research such as Kegan's has consistently demonstrated, democracy and democratic values *emerge only with 4th order consciousness*. It follows that a significant number of individuals must have access to 4th order consciousness in order to avert famine. *That is, famine is not due primarily to a lack of food, but to a lack of consciousness development*.

An Integral Approach takes all of those factors into account, especially when researching—and then designing solutions for—recalcitrant problems such as world hunger, political turmoil, cultural clashes, educational and medical deficiencies. The Integral approach does not advocate one particular value system over another, but simply helps leaders assemble the most comprehensive overview available, so that they can more adequately and sanely address the pressing issues now facing all of us.

Likewise with issues ranging from ecological sustainability to education for a global tomorrow, from personal transformation to integral spirituality, from integral law to integral transformative practice: by becoming an integrally informed individual in any of those areas, one can leave the world just a little bit more whole than one found it.