

INTEGRAL LEADERSHIP PRIMER



TOWARDS AN INTEGRAL EFFECTIVE EXECUTIVE?

Back in 1966, Peter Drucker, the father of management theory wrote, “To be effective is the job of the executive. ‘To effect’ and ‘to execute’ are, after all, near synonyms. Whether he works in a business or in a hospital, in a government agency or in a labor union, in a university or in the army, the executive is, first of all, expected to get the right things done. And this is to imply that he is expected to be effective.”

If we substitute the word “leader” for Drucker’s “executive,” many of his four-decade-old insights are still relevant. Forty years later, as we consider a conceptual model for “integral leadership,” a central question remains, “what does it mean for a leader to be *effective*?” Drucker points to “doing the right thing” as a touchstone for leadership effectiveness. Sincere leaders who wish to be effective may reflect, “What are the right things to be done.” Well, as we shall see, what is “right” depends on one’s *perspective*.

As we reflect on the many perspectives on leadership that have surfaced in the years since Drucker wrote those words, we might consider what has changed during this time frame. For one, the sophistication of our collective ability to discern what is effective, and why, has changed—especially during the last decade since integral theory has gained traction. Leaders get a lot of things done, it turns out. But do they get the right things done? Harvard’s John Kotter points to research that indicates 70% of corporate change efforts fail. And when leaders do succeed in their intended changes, do they change the right things? Are the organizations better off as a result

of the change? By what measure? From whose perspective?

Many leaders and organizations have begun to recognize that fragmented, incomplete approaches are inadequate for today’s multidimensional, multilayered, ever-changing leadership challenges. Given the sheer complexity of today’s organization’s problems, it is no longer tenable to simply try to “plug-and-play” the latest management fad from a current bestseller. Experience shows this random approach to organizational development hinders as often as it helps. Organizations can no longer afford the unintended and often expensive consequences of partial, half-baked approaches.

Yet, it should be acknowledged that leaders and “experts” hold very different, and often contradictory, beliefs about the “right things to get done” that will lead to effectiveness. Postmodern voices cry for “transformational leadership,” modern voices call for “transactional leadership,” and traditional voices demand “authoritarian, command-and-control” leadership. Different mindsets, in different contexts, point to very diverse approaches to leadership. How can we make sense of this apparent complexity?

Given the complexity of organizational life today, along with the disorienting rate of change, it is no wonder that so many leaders and their organizations seem incapacitated in the face of their challenges.

We propose that an integral approach to leadership offers a comprehensive framework that attempts to take all currently recognized dimensions of the individual

and organization into account in order to more adequately answer the question of “What is the right thing to do?”. The application of integral theory to the field of leadership is chiefly concerned with providing insights and tools that leaders can utilize to tap into, leverage, and expand their capacities and the capacities of their organizations. AQAL Integral Theory has been called “a framework that makes sense of everything.” This groundbreaking approach offers sophisticated maps that can be used to understand the human being and the environment in which s/he functions. Dozens of books and hundreds of academic papers have been published on the application of AQAL Integral Theory to the fields of psychology, education, philosophy, spirituality, the social sciences, and the field of human growth and change. Next to the field of psychology itself, leadership may be one of the most obvious applications of integral theory. Individuals who have a sophisticated understanding of human nature along with a nuanced view of interpersonal and organizational dynamics may indeed be among the most highly qualified leaders. Yet until recently, the field of integral leadership lacked an explicit conceptual model that could be used to expedite its real-world application.

Ken Wilber describes three ways that theoretical frameworks can be employed: 1) Indexing existing knowledge; 2) Diagnosis; and 3) Prescription. As of

the writing of this article, the development and application of Integral leadership approaches is at a relatively early stage. As such, a primary value and benefit of an AQAL Leadership Model would be to serve as a heuristic device that can be used to index current knowledge in the fields of management and leadership. A model of this nature would hold promise of being able to situate many of the major management and leadership approaches into a coherent frame that could suggest when, where, and with whom various approaches may or may not work, and why. Armed with such a model, integral leaders could take major steps away from partial fragmented approaches and toward more comprehensive solutions with greater prospects of success.

AQAL IN A LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

The art of leadership represents a significantly complex engagement. Organizational leaders interact with stakeholders and make decisions based on their conscious and unconscious assumptions, values and worldviews. These paradigms are animated by and influence a potentially staggering array of personality typologies, multiple ways of processing information and experience, and continually shifting performance states. Effective leaders magnetize an organizational field that inspires a sense of meaning and direction among their stakeholders. They become exemplars, able to integrate multiple perspectives into shared values, vision and action. When successful, the result is an aligned and adaptive organization characterized by a fully engaged workforce and outstanding performance.

Integral leadership is distinguished from other incomplete and partial leadership approaches by the inclusion of five fundamental components derived from integral theory and methodology. These include: dimensions of the organization (a.k.a. “quadrants”), lines of development, levels of complexity (on each line), typologies, and performance states.

Quadrants

Some leaders are proficient with the *objective* (technical) dimensions of organizations while others are adept with the *subjective* (human) elements. In addition to the objective (exterior) and subjective (interior) “dimensions,” organizations can be *viewed* from an individual or collective perspective. These dimensions—the interior and exterior of individuals and collective are also referred to in integral theory as the four quadrants. The quadrants are “perspectives.” By taking these multiple perspectives into consideration, integral leaders leverage all dimensions of an organization in a more comprehensive and effective way.

Historically, many approaches to leadership development emphasized the individual interior dimension along with competencies such as strategic thinking,

UL	Individual Interior (Subjective) Capacities Awareness Intention Worldview	"I" "We"	UR	Individual Exterior (Objective) Applied Skill Performance Accountability
LL	Collective Interior (Subjective) Culture Shared Expectations Shared Values Collective Morale	"It" "Its"	LR	Collective Exterior (Objective) Systems Infrastructure Policies Environment

communication, influence skills, and innovative thinking. Leadership development is most effective when the individual interior dimensions are supported by concrete skills, accountability and performance that can be measured and refined in the individual objective dimension. In recent years, businesses have come to realize that the collective subjective (corporate culture) is key to high performance and that organizations benefit by cultivating teamwork and communication as well as aligning every dimension of the organization to a shared core ideology. Further, the enterprise’s tangible systems (information technology, financial processes, policies, and compensation programs) can then be aligned, linked, and tuned (to these other

When leaders attempt to apply partial solutions, such as Business Process Reengineering (BPR), which emphasizes the Lower-Right “organizational systems” quadrant, while under-emphasizing or ignoring the other quadrants (the people and culture, and behaviors that must align, link and function with those very systems), then failure is a likely outcome.

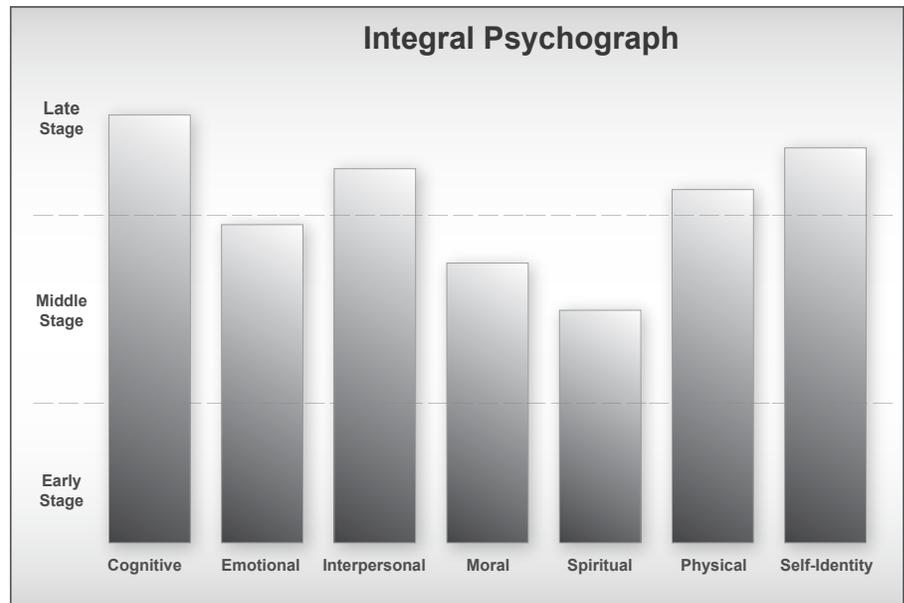
dimensions) for maximum leverage. This holistic perspective of factors and influences on change and management within an organization has not been the normative practice in most businesses.

Yet without recognizing the impact of the other quadrants on success, a surprising number of management theorists still scratch their heads trying to figure out why the vast majority of BPR efforts were dismal failures.

Lines and Levels

Developmental psychology describes “lines of development” that refer to specific capacities necessary to perform successfully in different circumstances. These “lines” develop over time through increasing complex levels of maturity, education and skill. Ken Wilber aggregated over one hundred of these in *Integral Psychology*. Some of the most important developmental lines relevant to leadership include: cognition (including strategic thinking), emotional intelligence (self-awareness, social awareness, and interpersonal acumen), and moral development. Leaders can identify their “leading lines” of development and cultivate a leadership style that leverages these natural “gifts.” Leaders also do well to explore “lagging lines” of development that represent limitations and/or weaknesses.

Lines of development dictate how well leaders perform in any given set of circumstances. These lines of development can be measured using “levels of complexity”. For example, a leader may possess a high “level” of development in cognitive ability (e.g. high IQ) but may have a low level of proficiency at interpersonal



skills (e.g. low EQ).¹ In addition to an awareness of one’s own lines and levels, integral leaders can develop the ability to recognize levels of complexity (on crucial lines of development) in their followers and even consciously seek to complement their lines and levels through their direct reports. This knowledge informs the leader how best to delegate, support, and coach team members based on their unique capabilities.

States

In the last ten years, the field of business has been the beneficiary of the practical scientific developments in sports psychology and the study of “performance states.” Authors Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehr have linked many of these neurophysiological states (of mind and body) prevalent in professional athletes to today’s “corporate athletes”. Furthermore, Daniel Goleman’s best-selling book *Primal Leadership* provides abundant research showing that a leader’s mental

and emotional states can have significant and measurable impact on the collective morale—and therefore performance—of an organization’s workforce. Leaders who are serious about consistent, sustainable performance (both individually and organizationally) can learn to identify and cultivate performance states such as focus and concentration, self-confidence, creativity, mindfulness, clarity, charisma, reflectiveness, intensity, relaxation, and recovery.²

Types

Psychologists use the term “typologies” (or “types” for short) to describe predictable behavior patterns that are recognized across groups of people. Two of the most universal types are masculine and feminine or their energetic corollaries, “agentic” and “communal.” Many leaders are familiar with Meyers-Briggs types (e.g. introvert, extrovert, judger, perceiver, thinker, feeler, intuitor, and sensor) and the DISC (dominant, influence, steady-

THEORY AND PRAXIS OF INTEGRAL LEADERSHIP

Theory Framework

AQAL Matrix Arising in Self X AQAL Matrix in Others X AQAL Matrix in Organization

Praxis Framework

- AQAL Awareness (akin to strategic thinking)
- AQAL Approach (akin to strategic planning)
- AQAL Action (akin to execution)

ness, conscientiousness) typology model. Types can be helpful for a leader's own self-awareness as well as informative with regard to effective ways to support, delegate, influence, and motivate followers.³

INTRODUCING THE AQAL LEADERSHIP MODEL

Under the direction of Brett Thomas—in collaboration with Ken Wilber—the Integral Institute Business and Leadership Center developed a prototype of an AQAL Leadership Model that serves as a starting place for the ongoing development of integral leadership.

The “Theory Framework” (see illustration) serves as a high-level, orienting framework. The term “leadership” naturally implies a leader and followers (a.k.a. an organization). Integral theory shows that the five components of AQAL can be recognized in the leader, in the followers, and in the organizational as a whole or put another way, the “I,” the “We,” and the “It.”⁴

Integral leadership is essentially about perspective taking. Integral leaders perceive complex situations through the various AQAL “lenses” in order to gain a more complete, comprehensive, and accurate “view” of the situation. This integrally informed view leads to unique conclusions, approaches, and actions.

Do not be deceived by the apparent simplicity of this model. Readers are reminded that “AQAL Matrix” stands for all of the fundamental dimensions of reality (Quadrants, Lines, Levels, States and Types). Each of the four quadrants can have lines, levels, states and types; and every person in the leadership scenario (every member of the group, employee or stakeholder) has their own AQAL Matrix, and the organizational entity as a whole also can be seen through the perspectives represented by the matrix. Therefore *AQAL Matrix Arising in Self X AQAL Matrix Arising in Others X AQAL Matrix Arising in Organization* actually represents a staggering array of perspectives and possibilities.

While the “Theory Framework” addresses the basic map, or perspectives, under consideration, the “Praxis Framework” (see illustration above) addresses the *practices* available to leaders as they engage their followers and their organization; in other

words, what leaders actually do. As such, this conceptual model represents a pioneering first attempt toward an “Integral Organizational Steering” framework.⁵

AQAL Awareness is shorthand for awareness of the quadrants, lines, levels, states, and types at play in one's self, one's followers, the organization, and the broader environment. This organizational steering framework includes yet transcends similar concepts in conventional management theory. *AQAL Awareness* is akin to “strategic thinking”, and is suggestive of activities such as competitive analysis, stakeholder analysis, cultural analysis and a host of other activities undertaken to inform leaders and organizations.

AQAL Approach points to the actual strategies, methodologies, and plans that are designed as solutions to problems, or blueprints for strategic initiatives intended, to move the organization from their current reality to some desired future state. This, of course, is akin to what is generally known as “strategic planning.”

Of course approaches (strategic plans) have minimal value until successfully executed. *AQAL Action* refers, quite broadly, to all of the specific actions and behaviors available to individuals and organizations in the leadership context as well as the specific actions that must be employed

to successfully execute any particular approach.

The “Praxis Framework” can be applied to an organization’s macro reality of discerning and implementing paths to success or to a leader’s micro reality of discerning the dynamics of a specific interpersonal engagement, selecting an approach, and applying an intervention.

SUMMARY

This brief text introduced the AQAL Leadership Model. Additional Integral Leadership Collaborative presentation materials describe the components of this model in greater detail.⁶ Readers are encouraged to study these additional materials to gain a more complete understanding of the power and potential that’s “under the hood” of this integral leadership conceptual model.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 IQ is used here as an introductory example of one competency (or intelligence) associated with cognitive development. However, since IQ is only one of many components of cognitive development, high IQ is not a reliable indicator of high cognitive complexity.
- 2 Of course states can occur in any of the four quadrants. Emotional states (performance states) of an individual (interior) also known as the Upper-Left quadrant are emphasized here in this brief introductory statement. Also, Ken Wilber often uses Gross, Subtle, and Causal, (or waking, dreaming, and deep sleep) as examples of states. We can refer to those broad-based, universal states as “fundamental states,” and emotions and moods as “phenomenal states.”
- 3 Here again, types occur in all four quadrants. In simple terms, types can be thought of as “categories” that have no vertical ontological/developmental relationship. If one “type” evolves into another following a predictable developmental sequence, or if one type is subsumed in another type (atoms are subsumed by molecules), then those would be “levels” (stages) and not types.
- 4 “I,” “We,” and “It” is shorthand for I/We/It/Its which in turn is shorthand for individual interior, collective interior, individual exterior, and collective exterior; in other words, the four quadrants. Stopping and pausing on this “quadrants within quadrants” representation gives a glimpse into the complexity and the requisite cognitive capacity required of leaders who wish to understand and skillfully employ this model. While it is beyond the scope of this presentation to delve into “Integral Methodological Pluralism” or “Integral Math,” experienced practitioners will recognize that this exploration of “perspectives of perspectives of perspectives” both informs and can be an aid in understanding and applying the AQAL Leadership Model. While organizations (collectives) are mainly comprised of the lower two quadrants, we can consider the upper quadrants to represent the interior capacities and exterior behaviors of the individual members of the organization. The quadrants represent the four fundamental perspectives (interior/exterior and individual/collective) of a sentient “holon.” A holon is something that is both a whole and a part of a larger whole, such as molecules are parts of atoms, which in turn are parts of cells, which are parts off organs, and so on. The quadrants can also be applied to “social holons” with the following caveats. Social holons have “members” not “parts” and lack a “dominant monad” or central nexus of control. In a theoretically strict sense, social holons therefore only possess interior collective (LL) and an exterior collective (LR) quadrants; two quadrants not four. However, Wilber has pointed out that as long as this is kept in mind, it can be useful to think of the perspectives represented by the quadrants as “quadrivium” allowing for a more loose application to social holons. In this way, we could take the Upper-Left interior individual quadrant (quadrivia) of an organization to represent the interiors of the individual persons working in the organization, and the Upper-Right individual exterior quadrant (quadrivia) to represent the exteriors, or behaviors, of the individuals working in the organization.
- 5 See “Introduction to Integral Organizational Steering” paper by Thomas, Eilertsen, Jones and Soderquist.
- 6 Please also see the following Integral Leadership Collaborative documents: "Leader Ability," "Leading Others," and "Leading an Organization."