

INTEGRAL FUTURES

by Richard A. Slaughter

CHANGING METHODS AND APPROACHES

Futures practice has been dominated by forecasting and scenarios-based approaches. More recently we have seen the emergence of a social construction phase and another described as Integral Futures. Both forecasting and scenarios focus largely on the external world. Critical Futures Studies, on the other hand, examined what might be called the ‘social interiors.’ That is, it saw the familiar exterior forms of society (populations, technologies, infrastructure and so on) as grounded in, and dependent upon, powerful social factors such as worldviews, paradigms and values.

Futurists had not overlooked the latter, but they were seen as problematic. Methods to incorporate them systematically into futures enquiry and action were needed. Perhaps the central claim of Critical Futures Studies was that it is within these shared symbolic foundations that certain wellsprings of the present lie, as well as the seeds of many possible alternative futures. Since the latter is a guiding concept in futures work generally, locating the origins of these alternatives in the ways that different societies

actually worked was a significant step. Critical futures work, however, itself lacked something essential – deeper insight into the nature and dynamics of individual agency. By addressing this missing element Integral Futures has, in a sense, completed a long process of disciplinary development, perhaps resulting in a new phase of innovation and change.

A NEW MAP

Some years ago Ken Wilber found a way of integrating the central ideas from a wide variety of disciplines, including scientists, engineers, psychologists and even mystics. His synthesis resulted in a framework that views the world through a four quadrant framework created by a simple division between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ on a vertical axis; and between ‘individual’ and ‘social’ on the horizontal one (See Figure overleaf).

Each quadrant records the process of evolution in that domain – from simple stages to more complex ones. Hence there are four parallel processes, each intimately linked with the other: interior-individual development; exterior-individual development; interior-social development and exterior-social development.

According to Wilber, “the upper half of the diagram represents individual realities; the lower half, social or communal realities. The right half represents exterior forms – what things look like from the outside; and the left hand represents interior forms – what things look like from within.”

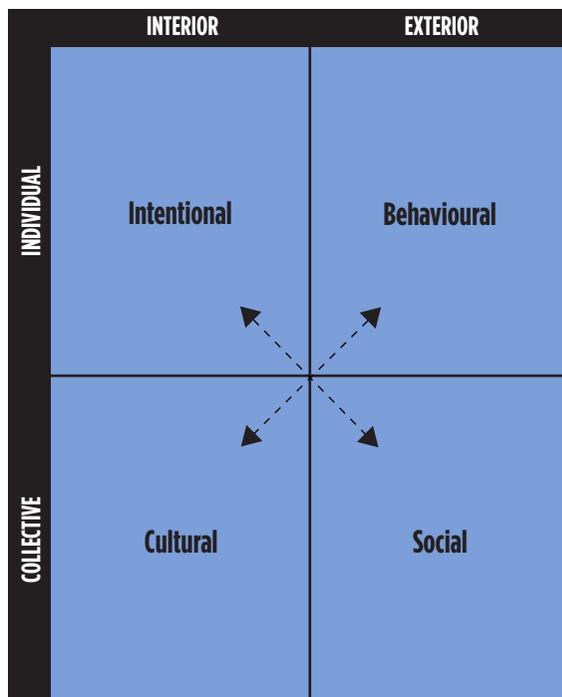
The four quadrant model can be further elaborated but even simple versions help us to question the widespread habit of viewing the

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world as if it were a singular entity – which is how it tends to appear. We unconsciously run quite different domains together, creating endless confusion. Now we can start to see how different principles and tests of truth apply in different domains. This, in turn, brings greater clarity to the kinds of tasks that futurists undertake, as well as opening out more innovative solutions.

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Figure
The four Integral quadrants.
 (Source: Ken Wilber)



CONSEQUENCES

If we direct our attention mainly to the external aspects of the human predicament then ways forward will forever elude us. The global context becomes a trap for humanity. In practice such conventional ‘exterior’ approaches to world issues cover only part of the territory. If we also explore the ‘interior collective’ (society) and the ‘interior individual’ (the unique world of each person) then it is evident that integral approaches bring new dimensions to futures studies.

The consequences include:

- a balancing of inner and outer perspectives;
- multiple and yet systematic views of our species’ history and development;
- access to the dynamics of social construction, innovation and ‘deep design’;
- aspects of the ‘deep structures’ of more advanced civilizations;
- a new focus on the detailed development of the practitioner (not merely his or her cognitive ability); and
- new methods, tools and approaches.

Like any other toolkit or innovation, these tools and perspectives have limitations. Yet even at this relatively early stage they provide new starting points for depth insight, practical wisdom and a more durable foundation for ground-breaking futures work. Part of this involves the shift from conventional to post-conventional stages.

CONVENTIONAL TO POST-CONVENTIONAL

Conventional work in any field plays a vital part in the overall picture. It operates within pre-defined boundaries according to defined rules using well-known ideas and methods. A great deal of futures work in the world is like this. It serves well-known needs and clients. It operates in familiar territory: corporations, planning departments, consultancies, government agencies and the like. Those working in this mode tend to focus on the ‘exterior collective’ domain

(technology, the infrastructure, the physical world). Such work can be enhanced by considering post-conventional approaches and explicitly including the interior domains.

Post-conventional work recognizes that the entire external world is constantly ‘held together’ by interior structures of meaning and value. Two brief examples: the dogged pursuit of economic growth, and viewing nature merely

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as a set of resources for human use. In a post-conventional view, objective accounts of the world are not possible (even within the so-called ‘hard’ sciences). Rather, human activities everywhere are supported by subtle but powerful networks of value, meaning and purpose that are socially created and often maintained over long periods of time. Post-conventional work draws on these more intangible domains and certainly demands more of practitioners. It means, for example, that a focus on various ‘ways of knowing’ (e.g. empirical, psychological, critical) becomes unavoidable. Yet the effort involved is certainly worthwhile. Careful and appropriate use of the new methods means that practitioners can gain

deeper knowledge and more profound insight into both the currently changing social order as well as its possible futures.

A RICHER VIEW OF HUMAN AGENCY

The next step was to begin to correlate different approaches and methods in futures/foresight work with a new appreciation of the ‘individual interiors,’ the unique inner world of each person. One widely known approach was through ‘spiral dynamics,’ based on the work of Clare Graves. It depicted a nested series of ‘human operating systems’ that provide clues as to what is going on ‘under the surface.’ The approach can be used as a guide to individual and social interiors but it is not immune to critique and is by no means the only option. Various stage development theorists provide detailed insights into over twenty distinct ‘lines of development’ in human beings (e.g. values, communication, self concept etc). The practical consequence is that we can gain greater clarity about our own ‘ways of knowing’, our preferences, strengths, blind spots etc, as well as those of others.

Such developments imply that successful practice involves more than mastering some of the better-known futures techniques. One of the most striking discoveries is that it is levels of development within the practitioner that, more than anything else, determine how well (or badly) any particular methodology will be used or any practical task will be performed. In one sense this is obvious. An inexperienced or poorly trained



practitioner will always get inferior results when compared with others who have in-depth personal and professional knowledge. Yet, on the other hand, there are all-too-few professional training programs that take the interior development of practitioners seriously. The experience gleaned at the Australian Foresight Institute and its later iterations provide tangible evidence that support this view.

It is now obvious why the earlier tendency to focus on a practitioner’s cognitive development and methodological skills provided an incomplete picture. As Peter Hayward and

others have demonstrated, to be a success in any field demands a good deal more than cognitive ability and technical competence. For example, ethical, communicative and interpersonal lines of development are equally vital to the well rounded practitioner.

INTEGRAL FUTURES PRACTICE AND ‘PROTO-SOLUTIONS’

Integral Futures frameworks acknowledge the complexity of systems, contexts and interconnected webs of awareness and activity. These all influence the behavior of individuals and groups. They also shape structures and events

Figure

Generic ‘proto-solutions’ to global dilemmas. (Source: R. Slaughter, *The Biggest Wake up Call in History*, Foresight International, 2010.)

An earlier version of this paper was published as "Integral futures: a new era for futures practitioners", in C. Wagner, *Foresight, Innovation and Strategy, Towards a Wiser Future, World Future Society, 2005.*

in the physical, social and psychological worlds. These frameworks incorporate developmental perspectives that recognize individual and collective access to different structures of consciousness, from which a great deal flows. Human development is seen as multi-dimensional, following inter-related, discoverable forms. There are specific ways of understanding and working with different dimensions of development, including how these interact.

In this view innovative problem solving actively acknowledges phenomena from each of the quadrants. They include: the specific ways that stakeholders construct meaning and significance; culturally derived perspectives, rules and systems of meaning; the social infrastructure, including people's concrete skills, behaviors and actions; and, finally, the nature and dynamics of the relevant societal structures and systems. It follows that Integral Futures practitioners will therefore not be content with merely tracking external 'signals

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of change.' They will also become proficient in exploring different perspectives to find approaches that are appropriate to different situations. They will be open to a wide range of perspectives and interpretations. It is then but a short step to considering the implications of what I refer to as 'proto-solutions' to global dilemmas that emerge from each of the quadrants (See Figure on previous page). I have developed this concept further in my book, *The Biggest Wake-Up Call in History.*

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Integral approaches to futures enquiry and action provide us with richer options than hitherto. They help us to engage in

depth with the multiple crises that threaten our world and its nascent futures. As futurists and foresight practitioners we can look more deeply into ourselves and into our social contexts to find the 'levers of change,' the strategies, the enabling contexts, the pathways to social foresight.

Such work reaches across previously separate realms. It regards exterior developments with the 'eye' of perception that it consciously adopts. It participates in shared social processes and takes careful note of shared objective realities. In other words this is an invitation to move and act in a deeper, richer and more subtly interconnected world. Post-conventional and integrally informed

Most Important Futures Works

Six pillars: futures thinking for transforming
by Sohail Inayatullah

"Six pillars" is an ambitious attempt to rethink the futures process, compressed into a journal article. Inayatullah, who also developed Causal Layered Analysis,

proposes connections between six foundational futures concepts, six questions, and six pillars of practice. The article, published in *Foresight*, also outlines ways to integrate a number of well-known futures techniques, including macro-history, scenarios, futures wheels, integral futures,

and emerging issues analysis. Some of the futures history is a little unreliable; the discussion of 'used,' 'disowned,' and 'alternate' futures is particularly rich.

- **Andrew Curry**

futures work is not for the faint-hearted. Yet it suggests a range of constructive responses to a world currently desperate for solutions to the encroaching global emergency.

For more details, including extracts and info on related works, please go to:
www.foresightinternational.com.au/.

Further Reading

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THE FUTURE OF HUMAN HEALTH TREATMENTS

by Darko Iovrik

In the future, most health treatments will focus on the treatment of chronic diseases, partly motivated by the increasing proportion of the older population, and partly by the desire for eternal life. These approaches will use biotechnology, mainly genetics, in order to achieve increasingly impressive results. The increasing costs and risks of these technologies will require an appropriate government response, which might or might not be adequate, leading to the first key uncertainty: the extent and success of regulation in controlling the risks and maximizing the benefits for the wider population. The second uncertainty relates to the clash between two competing visions for humanity: naturally healthy on the one hand, trans-humanist on the other, emphasizing self-development through technology. The latter uncertainty will not be resolved by 2025, but the trend will be clear.

This is a summary of Darko Iovrik's paper, which won first place in the Individual Category in the APF's Student Recognition Program in 2009.

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