

An Exploration of Integral Leadership

Susan Wright

John F. Kennedy University

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the subject of leadership in relation to the AQAL model (Wilber, 2000), from the perspective both of leaders themselves and their role and impact on organizations and the wider environment. The goal is to support leaders in their own development and to enhance their understanding of how to develop those they lead, in order to build capacities for both business success and responses to global problematics. “The Integral vision for business and leadership is concerned with creating long-term, ethically sustained growth that accounts for people, profits, and the planet.” (Burke, Forman, Thomas, Putz, 2006, p.84)

Available research looking at leadership from an integral perspective will be reviewed, with particular reference to quadrants, lines and levels. I will add my own AQAL perspective drawing on broader leadership research and personal experience. I hope to provide an optimistic view of progress to date and suggest some avenues for further exploration for accelerating development.

The Quadrants

Drawing on Wilber’s (2000) framework that includes individual and collective views in relation to exterior and interior dimensions, leadership can be viewed from at least four perspectives, as shown in Figure 1 below. In bold are the questions that might be framed by the leader to explore each of the quadrants. In italics are the central focus of attention in each of the quadrants. It should be noted however that there is much overlap and each starting point can provide a perspective on the whole matrix.

In the Upper-Left quadrant is the interior experience of the individual leader, the intentions, motivations, ethics, emotions. This is the first-person “I” subjective space or consciousness of the leader. In the Lower-Left quadrant is the collective culture of the organization made up of all the shared values and beliefs of the members. This is the second-person inter-subjective “We” space of the organization. In the Lower-Right are the various contexts in which the organizations exists, its systems, structures, customers and wider environment. And in the Upper-Right quadrant are the exterior actions and behaviors of the leader, the way the leader’s consciousness is expressed in terms of competencies focused on performing effectively in a role. Both of these right-hand

quadrants are third-person objective and inter-objective spaces, the “It” of the individual leader and the “Its” of the organization’s context.

<p>INTERIOR Individual: Who am I as a leader? <i>Consciousness</i></p>	<p>EXTERIOR Individual: What is my behavior as a leader? <i>Competency</i></p>
<p>INTERIOR Collective: How do I relate to others as a leader? <i>Culture</i></p>	<p>EXTERIOR Collective: What is the environment in which I lead? <i>Context</i></p>

Figure 1. The Four Quadrants

Using all four quadrants to examine the issue of leadership ensures that the fundamental perspectives are included in the analysis. However, this has not historically been the case, as referenced in a review of popular leadership books by Fuhs (2008). “The Right-Hand quadrant perspectives of measurable, observable phenomena such as behavior received 65% of focus, and the collective-oriented lower quadrants received 55% of the focus.” (p.154)

Investigation into what makes a successful leader is a relatively recent phenomenon (Wright & MacKinnon, 2003). Until the 1930s, leadership was seen as a fact of birth and social class, a matter of **Fate**. There was no need for analysis – you either were or were not destined for leadership. For a couple of decades and through World War II, emphasis began to be placed on the “Great Man” theory of leadership and what personal and behavioral **Traits** separated great men like Alexander and Columbus from the ordinary. In the post war period, attention turned to groupings of traits to form a leadership style, such as “Theory X and Theory Y” (McGregor, 1960) as being focused more on task leadership or more on people leadership. All of these studies were essentially Upper-Right analyses of observable behavior. They proved inconclusive in establishing the one best way to lead.

In the latter half of the 20th century as organizational growth amplified, researchers turned their attention to the **State** or conditions apart from the leader, the immediate environment of the team, for example, and its influence on leadership outcomes. Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) is an example of this contingent style of leadership. Emphasis moved to the best way to lead when certain states or conditions were present. This focus on the external environment grew through the end of the century as change accelerated and pressure increased on leaders and their organizations. It is only in the last decade or two, and increasingly, that we have turned our attention to the internal make-up or worldview of leaders (Upper-Left), and how they **Relate** from that internal perspective to the world around them (Lower-Left). The relatively stable social institutions that previously buffered leaders and their followers and provided safe harbors are gone. Strength to weather the turbulence comes from within rather than without. “Suddenly in the early 1990s, there appeared a spate of books, articles, conferences and conversations which cemented the realization that all that had been explored so far, with its concentration on externals, was not enough.” (Wright & MacKinnon, 2003, p.26) While each of these evolutionary stages continue to be explored to some extent, leadership from the inside out is now being researched extensively in studies of leaders’ consciousness and leadership culture (Senge et al, 2008; Scharmer, 2007).

The optimistic vision from this brief overview is that we are beginning to see all-quadrant perspectives in leadership which integrate previous partial emphases and provide a more balanced both/and path for a more holistic view. Senge’s (2008) latest book that deals with how individuals and organizations are working together to create a sustainable world may be an example of this approach. More is necessary if leaders and organizations are to adapt to the complexity and uncertainty of global economic and social turbulence.

A parallel evolution can be drawn for leadership development which has historically focused on the exterior dimensions as well. For example, leaders’ role as ‘planning, organizing, directing, controlling’ has been the basis for leadership training and development. The primacy of systems for setting strategic direction, communicating vision, structuring for maximum performance, and achieving short-term (usually

quarterly) results in order to meet financial targets has constituted successful leadership. Progressive organizations have moved beyond the Lower-Right quadrant to pay attention to developing leadership competencies (Upper-Right), those behaviors that can be measured and developed over time to correlate with leadership success. Very common in large organizations are multi-rater surveys that allow the leader to receive feedback from a 360° perspective. And to some extent, there is also a focus on the organizational culture (Lower-Left), its impact on performance, and the leaders' role in creating that culture through role modeling and decision-making. For example, the learning organization has received significant attention (Senge, 1994) for creating a culture that is responsive to change. Only recently has leadership development begun to ask about the self-awareness, the consciousness (Upper-Left) of the leader as an individual, the lens through which leaders see the world and how that shapes the way in which they construct reality in the first place. The mind of the leader is now a popular topic (Pink, 2006) and one that needs further exploration, particularly from an integral, all quadrant, point of view. Again optimistically, this emphasis has grown in relation to the need for a multi-perspective view that comes from the leader's own consciousness in order to deal with the complex issues leaders face as they take on larger and more difficult roles.

Lines of Development

One of the foundational elements of the AQAL model is the concept of developmental lines. These lines are 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner, 1993) or talents and abilities that allow us to navigate in the world. In leadership, some of the common lines to be explored include Cognitive, Emotional, Interpersonal, Moral, and Self. These lines of development provide a profile or pattern of a leader's relative strengths and weaknesses that can be compared to the requirements of the role the leader is required to perform in the organization's context and culture. These patterns, taken as an inter-related compilation of lines, are often referred to as a leader's altitude, referring to the overall capacity for dealing with complexity or the overall level of development in the leader's profile. Gaps in particular lines can be identified and addressed through coaching and development programs, although some are more difficult and take longer to develop than others.

Historically, researchers have tended to concentrate on cognitive ability which can be measured through IQ. Indeed, because we must be able to see the nature of the problem to solve it, the Cognitive line is the precursor for several other lines related to the self and others. One example is the Moral line. In the past few years, crises in leadership honesty and integrity in large corporations have focused on moral intelligence and the level of development required for moving beyond personal gain (Time Magazine, 2002). Research on the brain has revealed the importance of emotional intelligence or EQ (Goleman, 1998) and its impact on other lines, including the Cognitive. These lines can be portrayed as a psychograph for any individual leader, showing the relative strengths of a variety of lines.

Although usually associated with the Upper-Left quadrant of attitudes, values and intentions because they are interior to the person, leadership researchers have, in the last few decades, focused on measuring lines as leader competencies that can be observed and assessed in behavior. Competencies are Upper-Right actions based on Upper-Left abilities in the context of Lower-Right organizational contexts and Lower-Left organizational culture. In evolutionary terms, competencies encompass several previous leadership research perspectives. They are specific traits that relate leaders' behavior to particular organizational states. Boyatzis (1982) includes in competencies any motive, trait, skill, self-image, social role, and body of knowledge that can be causally related to effective or superior performance in a job. Being able to set out the competencies expected for a job and the job-holder allows the organization to recruit, evaluate, develop, promote, or release leaders depending on the match of competencies to expectations.

Over time, these lines have been measured for large populations of leaders who have been surveyed by their boss, peers, direct reports, customers and others, providing a broad-based or 360° view of the leader's capabilities (Lominger, 2008) in relation to expectations. As shown in Figure 2, some lines are perceived to be consistently stronger than others. These lines include high Moral standards, high Cognitive ability and an emphasis on Agency. At the weaker end of the spectrum are the Self-development and Interpersonal lines. This composite psychograph provides broad clues to how leaders' lines of development are expressed in their behavior and their patterns of strengths and weaknesses. For example, in reference to the earlier discussion of McGregor's leadership

style research, his Theory X might be seen as over-privileging the Agency line while his Theory Y might be seen as over-privileging the Interpersonal line.

It is heartening to know that generally leaders have high moral honesty and integrity. Competencies related to morality are usually thought to be ‘price of admission’ traits so that leaders who are doubtful are eliminated from the pool of possible candidates for leadership positions. It is also good to know that generally leaders have high intellectual ability as this is a prerequisite for developing several other lines.

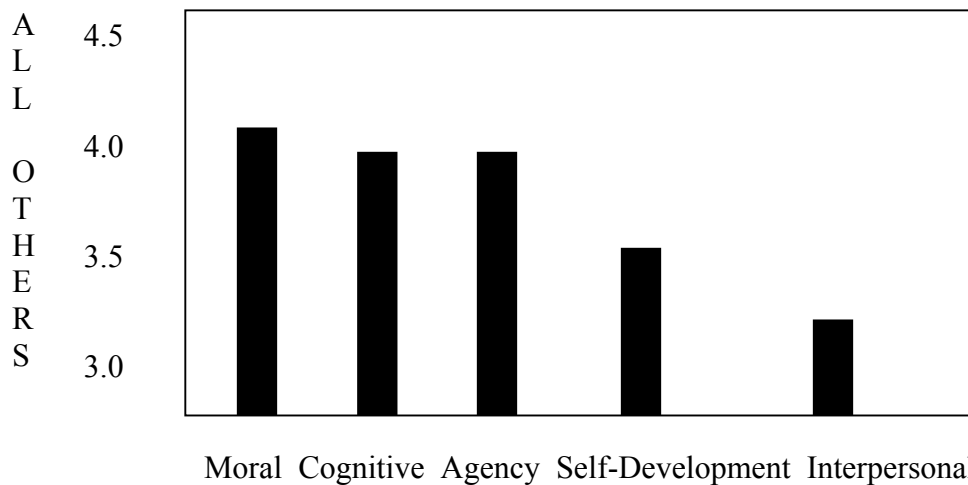


Figure 2. Leadership Psychograph

Interesting here for further exploration is the relationship of, for example, high level Cognitive functioning in relation to a weaker line like Self-development and what impact that has on decision-making. Or the relationship of a high Moral line with an almost equally high level of Agency and the dilemmas that creates. Of note is that there is no reference to spiritual development in competency research – it is not yet considered a necessary attribute and, in any case, cannot be easily measured. There is more writing in this area recently (Coombs, 2001; Whyte, 2001, for example) but the concept of spirituality in leadership is ill-defined and may be highly dependent on the perspective of the researcher, so remains an area for further discovery. Optimistically, though, most organizations are including these lines of development in their talent management strategies and using a variety of challenging job assignments, coaching and mentoring,

and experiential training programs to enhance the chances of a successful match between the leader and the job to be done.

Levels of Development

Levels of development are another dimension of the AQAL model, one that is implicit in the concept of lines and through which our lines are expressed. Throughout our life span, we develop through a sequence of stages or levels, each of which fundamentally alters our view of ourselves and others. “Stage development from one level to another can be thought of as a *step function*, where a person leaps to a new plateau of understanding, often after years of preparatory growth, setbacks, and change.” (Putz, 2006) Development researchers divide the life span into several levels, usually between three and seven, marked by unique characteristics. Each stage transcends and includes the previous stages to expand its breadth and depth of perspective. As our stage of development determines what we see and how we respond to the world, the developmental level of the leader is of paramount importance for it shapes the view of all the rest.

One example of leadership development through stages includes five levels as summarized below (Hochachka, 2006, p.20). Wilber’s levels of consciousness are included in brackets.

Coercive: The leader as dictator; employees as replaceable parts in a machine.

(Red)

Rules/Roles: The leader as benevolent authoritarian, the classic manager; employees as members of the bureaucracy who follow the rules and don’t make mistakes. (Amber)

Pragmatic: The leader as heroic achiever with results as the goal at any cost; employees are consulted as long as they support the end goal. (Orange)

Principled: the leader as values-based facilitator concerned with means as well as ends; employees as empowered and developed as long as they support the values. (Green)

Perspectivist: the leader as intellectual and philosophical perspective-taker depending on the situation; employees as leaders themselves supported as needed.
(Teal)

From this brief example, the evolution of a leader and an organization can be seen as a stage-like sequence of development. Such a framework enables leaders to become conscious of the dynamic interactions between themselves and their organizations, and “how they, through strategic and conscious effort, can change their focus, goals and operating structures to become more self-aware, principled and effective.” (p.20)

How to achieve the transformation from stage to stage, however, is not obvious or easy, either for the leader or the organization. For example, leaders may be at different levels than most of the staff in their organizations, operating as, say, a Principled leader in a Pragmatic organization, where employees wonder why they should spend time in meetings about values when they have work to be done. In these situations, leaders can be what Kegan (1994) refers to as “over our heads”, perhaps explaining why communication is so difficult and there is so little trust in senior teams (Towers Perrin, 2007). Conversely, leaders’ stage of development can be incompatible with the transformational change required to be successful in today’s turbulent marketplace. Rooke and Torbert (1998) note that only leaders who operate from at least an integral (perspectivist/teal) level can accomplish major cultural shifts in organizations.

The optimistic view in development levels is that although individual leaders must work through the stage sequence over time and through their own efforts, the organization can develop based on the center of gravity of its members. It can move quickly, even jump stages. The question to explore here is what organization development means from a stage point of view. Is it possible for a leader to influence the dominant discourse that is the organizing principle of the necessary stage of development? Is it possible to array jobs and people such that each level finds its proper home within the organizational hierarchy?

One possible avenue for discovery may come from Elliott Jaques (1991) who spent over 40 years detailing a method for integrating developmental stages and cognitive lines with leadership and organization. Although he does not use AQAL terminology, many of his concepts have similarities that may be applicable. His central thesis is that

the level of psychological complexity must match the level of role complexity for leaders and organizations to be successful. “Once cannot exercise managerial leadership...unless one has the necessary capability to carry out the managerial work...required in the role, at a level of complexity or capacity that matches the level of work in the role.” (p.25)

Jaques first describes four fundamental types of cognitive processes that we move through as we mature: assertive, cumulative, serial and parallel processing. These stages are repeated as we move through four levels or orders of mental complexity: concrete, abstraction of verbal variables, abstraction of concepts, and abstraction of universals. These categories seem to mirror Wilber’s (2000) Amber, Orange, Green and Teal levels of development. “Thus, we get a series of repetitions of the four cognitive processes in each of the four worlds of information complexity.” (p.58) Jaques uses this method of recursive internal and external complexity to establish the current and future potential capability of leaders through their careers and matches those with the role requirements for jobs at various levels in the organizational hierarchy. He believes that maturation of cognitive capability occurs naturally so that leadership development entails providing challenging assignments that are consistent with the leader’s potential, and attending to values and knowledge through coaching, training and mentoring. Here, he seems to mirror Kegan’s (1994) notion of the appropriate balance of challenge and support. The effective organization, then, is one where the complexity in work matches the complexity in people, in the same organizational layer.

<p>INTERIOR Individual: Cognitive complexity and earned respect</p>	<p>EXTERIOR Individual: Measured task/role complexity (time-span)</p>
<p>INTERIOR Collective: Organizational and personal values alignment</p>	<p>EXTERIOR Collective: Organizational hierarchy of requisite levels (matched task/role and cognitive complexity)</p>

Figure 3.

Requisite Organization and the Four Quadrants

Figure 3 summarizes Jaques' 'requisite organization' in relation to Wilber's quadrants. Jaques' theories have been applied in large organizations with some success and many proponents but are still considered radical, rigid and difficult to fully implement in an integrated way. However, they are an example of a form of integral organization which may warrant further investigation.

This paper gives some starting points for further exploration and discovery. The claim made here is that leaders can significantly benefit from an AQAL perspective on their own development and that of their organizations, particularly as uncertainty, complexity and change accelerates in the business world. Putz (2006) reinforces the challenge:

Quadrants: Enterprises put themselves at risk if they do not use quadrants.

Lines: As job scope and complexity increase, the minimum development threshold of each line increases as well.

Levels: There are an increasing number of problems that demand higher levels of inner development/complexity than is currently found in the average manager.

(p.95)

For leaders and those who coach and advise them, the challenge is to discover innovative and relevant ways to diagnose issues and address them from an AQAL perspective. Of particular importance is further exploration of the dynamic interplay among the lines and levels of the quadrants and how these can be integrated and applied in leadership and organization development.

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