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August 11, 2003 *excellence through insight*

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Integral Theory

"Theory is extremely useful, because your theory determines what you can see"
--Albert Einstein

Integral theory provides a new and more comprehensive understanding of reality. This new understanding includes the value, and transcends the limitations, of the worldviews previously provided by the traditional institutions of science, philosophy, or religion. The integral vision achieves this expanded view of reality through the use of a new meaning-making framework, a framework that allows us to organize and incorporate the research findings and insights of a great number of disciplines. These include the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, neurology, ecology), psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, business, politics, art, ethics, religion, and spirituality.

Although much of integral theory has existed in one form or another since ancient times, the specific insights and comprehensive understanding that makes the integral vision so powerful did not fully emerge until the late Twentieth Century. Integral theory traces its lineage through the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Henry Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Jean Gebser, Jurgen Habermas, and Clare Graves. And most recently, the theory has been expanded, clarified and further developed by Ken Wilber, Robert Kegan, Don Beck, Allan Combs, Jenny Wade, and others.

A complete exposition of the details and implications of the integral vision is beyond the scope of this section of the website. However, what follows is a brief description of five of the basic features (or "technologies") of integral theory and the benefits that stem from the application of these technologies to business situations.

Feature #1 -- Clear identification of the structures of consciousness
The identification of distinct, universal structures of consciousness that exist in both the subjective awareness of individuals, and in the collective culture of organizations and entire societies. Integral theory can now clearly describe the underlying architecture of consciousness and culture -- viewed as a whole, these structures are best described as taking the form of a spiral-shaped dialectic progression of value-driven worldviews -- a series of nested "natural epistemologies" that shape the way people and organizations perceive and interact with the world.

Benefit #1 -- "Mind reading"
Allows leaders and managers to better understand the motivations and needs of customers and employees. Being able to see the underlying architecture of value structures and worldviews provides for better conflict resolution, more astute hiring, more psychologically sophisticated marketing and customer communications, and overall more effective leadership.

Feature #2 -- Delineation of the mechanics of "internal" evolution
Integral theory applies the scientific principles of evolution and systems theory to the understanding of human development and organizational dynamics. The mechanics and tenets of evolution apply to human organizations as well as biological organisms. The universal trajectory of healthy development is transcendence to higher levels through inclusion of lower levels. Development gets stuck when the mechanics of evolution are frustrated by various types of dysfunction.

Benefit #2 -- Reduction of pathology, promotion of growth
Understanding the mechanics of evolution allows leaders and managers to identify the causes and solutions of organizational and personal pathology. Further, this understanding provides for superior organizational design and better strategic planning, and more effective problem solving.

Feature #3 -- Connecting the basic dimensions of reality
Integral theory clearly identifies the essential dimensions of any business situation -- the dimensions of "I, We, and It" -- subjective mindsets, organizational culture, and objective systems. Integral theory shows how activity in any one of these dimensions is intricately connected to, and coexistent with, corresponding activities in the other dimensions.

Benefit #3 -- Improved strategy and the ability to make changes stick
In any business initiative, the "I, We and It" dimensions of reality are simultaneously in play all of the time, but because of a limited ability to see these dimensions or their essential connections, managers rarely coordinate them as skillfully as possible. Most change efforts fail because they focus on only one or two of these dimensions. They are partial solutions leading to partial results. Integral theory provides a method for training people to see all the dimensions simultaneously. With a broader scope of vision, and the tools to work competently in each dimension, organizational changes are made more meaningful and can be better sustained and built upon.

Feature #4 -- Powerful technologies arising from a new "physics of quality"
Integral theory clearly identifies the nature and behavior of value itself. Recognition of the underlying "physics of quality" clearly reveals the compass headings of improvement for any situation. Integral thinking recognizes how "the beautiful, the true and the good" can be most fully achieved, even in an environment of limited resources and less than ideal conditions. This aspect of integral theory also leads to more effective goal setting for individuals and teams. Through the use of integral theory, goals can be crafted that are realistic, achievable, and inspirational -- stimulating passion and producing extraordinary results.

Benefit #4 -- Higher quality products, services and organizations
When leaders truly understand what quality really is, they can better energize their organizations for the passionate pursuit of the highest achievable quality. Recognizing value itself as a form of energy that is "metabolized" by the dynamic system that is the business organization allows for better "value nutrition" and superior organizational performance.

Feature #5 -- The technology of public agreement
Integral theory shows how the attitudes and opinions of employees and customers can be changed and improved through the identification of the unconscious assumptions that bind people. The integral approach to business can thus transform complaints into commitments and blaming into personal responsibility. By applying the "technology of public agreement," managers can rely less on policies and rules and more on the individual initiative of those closest to the problem.

Benefit #5 -- Turns negatives into positives
It has recently been indisputably shown that the culture of an organization is among the most important factors in success or failure. Integral theory provides managers with the knowledge and the skill to craft relationships so as to produce human organizations of unparalleled excellence.

Please see our bibliography for further reading on the subject of integral theory and its many benefits.

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