



# talking about...

February 2009

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

## An Integral Approach

*"Human beings have a variety of intelligences, such as cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, musical intelligence, kinesthetic intelligence, and so on. Most people excel in one or two of those, but do poorly in the others. This is not necessarily or even usually a bad thing; part of Integral wisdom is finding where one excels and thus where one can best offer the world one's deepest gifts."*

... Ken Wilber (1949 - ) US, philosopher

One of the great influences on my work has been the integral approach developed by American philosopher Ken Wilber. The integral approach incorporates what Wilber calls "the big three". The idea of the big three is that in every situation involving a human being (or any other sentient being for that matter) there are always three aspects involved – an individual's inner subjective experience of the situation (known as the "I"), a group's inter-subjective inner aspect of the situation (known as the "We") and an external more objective view known as the "It"). Hence "the big three" is also known as the "I", "We" and "It".

The "I" involves our inner experience includes such aspects as our emotional states, our thoughts and physical sensations. It is the experience that only an individual has and is not shared with anyone else.

The "We" can be seen as the relationships and culture within which we exist. It includes things such as shared stories and beliefs, dynamics of authority as they relate to power and trust and is inter-subjective.

The "It" refers to what we can measure, quantify and point to as true. It is what is commonly termed an objective view and so whereas the "It" domain is very black and white – something is true or not, the "I" and the "We" are domains of interpretation.

The obvious question here is, "What does this have to do with organisational life?" To answer that question, it is important to look at the underlying idea of what an organisation is and how it works. The modern organisation evolved from the Newtonian idea that the universe can be seen as a machine. This view has a strong bias towards the "It". Many management theories stem from this idea and so we find ourselves in an organisational world dominated by key performance indicators and management by objectives. From an integral perspective this is an idea way out of balance.

To understand this better, let's look at an example. Information technology systems play a central role in today's world of work. Many organisations are in some state of introducing a new IT system. Whenever a new system is to be introduced, the vast majority of the effort goes into fitting the system's functionality with the organisation's measurable goals and processes. This makes sense as a computer system is fundamentally mechanical. However, an organisation consists of human beings who live in

an individual and shared subjective experience of the world. Hence, even though the process can be well designed, it is going to be placed into a context of an individual's subjective experience of that system and placed against a cultural background. This is why many IT implementations are not as successful as is expected. Not because the system's functionality is inappropriate, but because not enough thought is given to how to introduce the system into the culture and what an individual user's experience will be like.

Using an integral approach, these different perspectives – the "I", the "We" and the "It" – are catered for and in doing so a more comprehensive and effective way of doing things can be designed. One that caters for the nature of human beings. As the integral approach is universal, it can apply to any human endeavour. As a result, there are people around the world working on integral business models, integral health systems, integral environmental solutions and integral political systems, to name just a few.

Herein lies a great opportunity for an organisation. By developing approaches that incorporate "the big three", an organisation can develop better ways of doing what they do and giving themselves the opportunity to thrive in these more challenging times. They can create an integral organisation.

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**"A chief event of life is the day in which we have encountered a mind that startled us."**

... Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882) US, philosopher, poet, essayist

## Desiderata ...

By Max Ehrmann

*A good friend reconnected me with this piece of prose during the week and it seems as relevant today as when it was written in 1927 ...*

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,  
And remember what peace there may be in silence.  
As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.  
Speak your truth quietly and clearly, and listen to others, even the dull and ignorant; They too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexations to the spirit.  
If you compare yourself to others, you may become vain and bitter,  
For always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.  
Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble;  
It is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.  
Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery.  
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;  
Many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection.  
Neither be cynical about love, for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment  
It is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.  
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune.  
But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.  
Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.  
Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars;  
You have a right to be here.  
And whether or not it is clear to you,  
No doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.  
And whatever your labors and aspirations,  
In the noisy confusion of life, keep peace with your soul.

With all its sham, drudgery, and broken dreams,  
It is still a beautiful world.  
Be cheerful.  
Strive to be happy.

**"Culture is one thing and varnish is another."**

... Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 - 1882) US, philosopher, poet, essayist

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