A Discussion of Ken Wilbur's AQAL Model
Author: Owen Cardwell, University of Lynchburg

Integral Theory

Like Nelson Mandela, I, too, have engaged in learning that produced "a substantial shift in perspective" so that the problems addressed in the local civil rights movement of Lynchburg, Virginia were addressed by "re-envisioning with creative and innovative solutions" (p. 171-172). This learning that produced creative and innovative solutions was evident in many unsung and unnamed heroes and heroines who participated in the marches and demonstrations, integrated the schools, and spent days and nights in jail, some of whom paid the ultimate price by giving their life.

An application of Theory U can trace the learning process and integral theory can serve as a developmental diagnostic.

Ken Wilber's model for integral theory, commonly referred to as AQAL, stands for all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, and all types. Wilber, et al. (2012) contend that "this is the simplest set of distinctions that can account for the complexity of our evolving world and the depth and breadth of consciousness for which authentic practice strives" (loc. 1628). AQAL is a powerful tool for mental integration of a tasks to skills component of adaptive and lifelong learning.

While it is often said that AQAL "makes sense of everything," the framework is not totalistic. In fact, Wilber would argue that it leaves out most of the details, to be filled in by new discoveries and individual experience.

Here is a brief overview of the elements of AQAL:

- *Quadrants* combine two fundamental distinctions: interior/exterior and individual/collective. The four resulting intersections give us the interior and exterior of the individual and collective (I, We, It, Its).
- *Levels* are higher-order structures that emerge as evolution breaks into new territory. These structures reflect attitudes of consciousness (such as egocentric, ethnocentric, world-centric). They are also sometimes called "stages" or "waves" of development.·
- *Lines* are specific areas in which growth and development occur (for example, interpersonal, moral, musical, needs, cognitive). They are also sometimes called "multiple intelligences" or "streams" of development.
- *States* are temporary, changing, and sometimes heightened forms of awareness (for example, waking, dreaming, deep sleep, meditative states, "the zone," and peak experiences).
- *Types* are horizontal differences (such as, masculine and feminine expressions, cultural differences, or personality types such as the Enneagram or Myers-Briggs, or strengths and talents as in the Clifton StrengthFinder assessment).

While we acknowledge that all of the aspects of AQAL could be utilized in identifying ways in which an adaptive and lifelong learning model that flows from tasks to skills to personal development and ultimately, societal development could become operationalized, we are limiting our discussion to quadrants and lines, with some discussion of levels. Psychologists have identified about two dozen dimensions of development, but our focus on lines of development will be limited to self, values, emotional, spiritual, moral, and cognitive development. Each of these dimensions of development addresses existential questions: Ego – Who am I?; Values – What is important to me?; Emotional – How

do I feel?; Spiritual – What is of ultimate concern?; Moral – How should I chose?; Cognitive – What am I aware of?

Quadrants

Using Wilber's AQAL model an integrally informed learner is one who can draw application across all four quadrants (thinking - I, behavior - it, culture - we, and social systems -its).

Wilber's AQAL four quadrant model presents a helpful way to begin the process of creating an "integrally informed [learner]" which can engage in determining "shared values." Figure 4.1 seen in Chapter 4 assists in giving a basic examination of the ingredients necessary to be explored in creating an "integrally informed [learner]." The quadrants refer to four dimensions of being-in-the-world.

The upper half of the diagram is labeled "individual," the lower half is "communal," or "collective"; the left half is "interior" (subjective, consciousness) and the right is "exterior" (objective, material).

The upper left quadrant is the individual interior, then, and represents the thoughts, feelings, intentions and psychology. Wilber (2000) offers, "This is…the home of aesthetics, or the beauty that is in the 'I' of the beholder" (p. 1274 of 6559). The lower left quadrant is the collective interior, representing relationships, culture, and shared meaning. The upper right quadrant is the individual exterior, which is your physical body and behaviors. And the lower right quadrant represents the collective exterior: your environment and social structures and systems. These four quadrants together refer to four corresponding perspectives of your present awareness: I, We, It, and Its.

The lower-right quadrant, the exterior-collective "Its" space, houses the systems that were engaged in my learning journey as a local civil rights leader. The Lynchburg Public Schools represented the educational system. The mayor and city council represented the political system, which provided funding for the schools. The fact that my father was the manager of a black insurance company meant that his income was not dependent upon the majority economic system. That was also true of Edward Barksdale, Lynda Woodruff's father, who worked for the US Postal service at the federal level. Cecelia Jackson's father was a dentist, serving the black community. Brenda Hughes' mother was a waitress in a black owned restaurant. Economic pressure could not be applied to our parents as it had been applied to the parents of the other original complainants. The business community, including the movie theaters and restaurants, were included in the economic system. The black church provided our spiritual support as representative of the religious system. Local and national media to include newspaper and television which provided daily and sometimes hourly reports and opinions regarding the civil rights movement represented the fourth estate or communications system.

The lower-left quadrant, interior-collective "We" space included my family structure, which was shaped by my father's activist involvement in the movement as membership chairman of the local branch of the NAACP and later as president. As stated above, he enjoyed relative economic independence since his employment was not impacted by the white community. My father was also the catalyst for our suing the school system for me to attend E. C. Glass High School. Our church was one of the African-American churches in the city and the place where many of the civil rights rallies were held. The church had provided a strong support system for me – members constantly reminded me that they were praying for me. The African-American community was relegated to just a few neighborhoods, so we lived together, worked together, went to school together, attended church together, joined the same social clubs,

fraternities, and sororities. The civil rights struggle also solidified the "We" concept in contrast to the "Them" who were attempting to deny us of our inalienable rights.

The upper-right quadrant, the exterior-individual "It" space, was the physical behaviors associated with integrating E. C. Glass: walking up those steps and through those doors on that first day, attending classes, and sitting down at our assigned desks. Although I cannot retroactively measure the brain activity, heart rate, and perspiration that attended those actions, I'm certain that all were at an elevated state during the five years of my learning journey.

Finally, the upper-left quadrant, the interior-individual "I" space, represents all of the emotions, cognitive activity, moral dilemmas, spiritual encounters, self-reflection and self-awareness, etc. that was taking place within me as I moved from school desegregator to civil rights activist to civil rights leader.

Wilber, Patten, Leonard and Morelli (2011) indicate, "phenomena arise in all four dimensions simultaneously. The 4 quadrants co-arise (or, more precisely, 'tetra-arise') in the experience of every *now*" (loc. 1704). For one to both be aware of the narrative being performed and to be able to reframe that narrative, it is important to recognize all four dimensions in any situation.

Levels of Consciousness

The second basic element of the AQAL Framework is levels of consciousness. Wilber, Patten, Leonard and Morelli (2011) argue that there are higher and lower structures of consciousness and we can grow to higher levels in progressive stages or waves of development. For example, we move from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, or American society moved from slavery to segregation to civil rights (loc. 1712 - 1725). Our level of consciousness represents our worldview. What this means for our personal transformation is that we can intentionally focus on harmonizing development across all four quadrants.

The names of the stages seen in self, values, emotional, spiritual, moral, and cognitive development all differ, but the stages show a path that involves the same broadening of perspectives. Benner (2012) cites Ernest Schachtel when he says "Growth on any of the lines of development involves expansion of boundaries and what we would call a differentiation or emergence of embeddedness" (p. 48). Robert Kegan (1982) observes that this differentiation, from what was previously background, always involves a reorganization of our sense of what is self and what is other.

For example, in *Integral Life Practice,* Wilber, Patten, Leonard and Morelli (2011) utilize Kohlberg's model of moral development to demonstrate what is involved in increasing awareness of levels of consciousness.

An infant at birth has not yet been socialized into the culture's ethics and conventions; this is called the pre-conventional stage. It is also called egocentric, in that the infant's awareness is largely self-absorbed. It cannot take the perspective of others and thus cannot regard them as similar beings deserving of moral regard. But as the young child begins to learn its culture's rules and norms, it grows into the conventional stage of morals. This stage is also called ethnocentric, in that it centers on the child's particular group, tribe, clan, or nation, and it therefore tends to exclude care for those not of one's group. But at the next major stage of moral development, the post-conventional stage, the individual's identity expands once again, this time to include a care and concern for all peoples, regardless of race, color, sex, or creed, which is why this stage is also called world-centric. If the individual then keeps on

growing…they will progress to a post-postconventional or kosmo-centirc stage of moral development, thereby becoming capable of identifying with and caring for all sentient beings. (loc. 1777)

Let's apply this simple format of the levels of consciousness attained through my learning journey into authentic leadership. Prior to my desegregating the public schools and perhaps during the last half of the school year 1961-1962, I would describe my level of awareness as pre-conventional. Even though I had some sense of the impact of our being at E. C. Glass on the entire community, my primary concern was how the experience was affecting me – my day-to-day safety, my social life, the sudden notoriety.

It was not until the summer of 1962, when I began to be involved in demonstrations and marches, that I began to develop some sense of righting an injustice being done to the African American community. I also began to be much more attentive to what was taking place on the national scene. Perhaps it was because I had actually met Martin Luther King, Jr. face-to-face. By the summer of 1963, when my father took me to the March on Washington, I had evolved from a school desegregator to a civil rights activist to a local civil rights youth leader.

It would be years later, after I had been serving as a pastor, that I would enter into the post-conventional stage, where I had a concern for "all peoples, regardless of race, color, sec, or creed." While I believe I have developed the capacity to take wider and deeper perspectives, it is difficult to honestly say that I have entered the kosmo-centric stage, though I believe I have frittered around the edges.

By analyzing the impact on the four quadrants, I have a better integrated understanding of my worldview at each level. When I was at the egocentric level, my thoughts (including beliefs and emotions) were directed towards the impact of the events were having on me, my values were self-centered, my motivation was self-preservation and perhaps some level of self-promotion. My actions were dictated by what was taking place in my inner life. I sought my family, church and community to serve as protectors. It was clear that many of the social systems were aligned against our attempts to seek equal treatment.

At the ethnocentric stage, my thoughts were more directed toward the African American community. I began to believe that I had a "calling" to participate in the struggle. It was clear that only four students had won the "privilege" to attend previously all-white E.C. Glass High School. Therefore, I had a sense of responsibility to the community. My actions were to actually attend the school for the remaining three and a half years of high school and to perform at as high a level as possible. From a cultural standpoint, I became a representative of my family, the race, and indeed, the community-at-large. The educational, economic, governmental, social, and even religious systems were on trial.

My current worldcentric view came much later, and while I believe I am adopting a kosmo-centric view in some areas, I cannot clearly declare my worldview as having achieved that level.

Wilber, Patten, Leonard and Morelli contend, "With an understanding and acceptance of levels as progressive and permanent milestones along the evolutionary path of your own unfolding comes an implicit drive to grow into higher levels and help others do the same" (loc. 1800). Being integrally aware of levels can influence an adaptive and lifelong learning commitment.

Lines of Development

According to the AQAL model, consciousness does not develop monolithically in all areas at the same time. There may be correlations among growth in different areas, and growth in some areas may be necessary for growth in others, yet multiple developmental lines can be distinguished through which growth occurs in a relatively independent fashion (Wilber, Patten, Leonard and Morelli, 2011).

More than two dozen dimensions of development have been identified, but for the purpose of illustration, we will focus on ego, values, emotional, spiritual, moral, and cognitive development. Wilber (2000) states, "These lines are 'relatively independent,' which means that…they can develop independently of each other, at different rates, with a different dynamic, on a different time schedule" (p. 28). You can be advanced along some lines, medium in others, and low in still others – all at the same time. And so, "overall development – the sum total of all these different lines – shows no linear or sequential development whatsoever" (p. 28).

Each of these dimensions of development addresses existential questions that are important for me as an expression of adaptive and lifelong learning:

- Ego – Who am I?
- Cognitive – What am I aware of?
- Values – What is important to me?
- Emotional – How do I feel?
- Spiritual – What is of ultimate concern?
- Moral – How should I chose?

Each line of development has its own independent unfolding of stages or levels. And higher stages are built upon and incorporate earlier stages. No stage can be skipped and "the stages emerge in an order that cannot be altered by environmental conditioning or social reinforcement" (p.28).

Ego development – Cook-Greuter (2005) describes ego development theory as "a sequence of how mental models themselves develop over time…a psycho-logical system with three interrelated components: operative, affective and cognitive" (p. 3). The operative component looks at what we see as the purpose of life, the needs we act upon, and the ends we are moving towards. The affective component deals with emotions and the experience of being in the world. The cognitive component involves what we think about ourselves and the world (p. 3).

Much of what was going on with me during this learning journey was an attempt to discover who I was and who I was becoming. That is a normal developmental process during the teen years; however, the impact of my involvement in the local civil rights struggle heightened the need for identity formation. *Who am I?* was the overriding existential question of the day. I did not have the luxury of just being a developing adolescent. Was I a school desegregator, a civil rights activist, a racial agitator (as designated by the local press), a communist (also suggested by the local news), or an emerging leader? Through the experiences of that five-year span, I believe I developed a healthy sense of Self.

Cognitive development - Benner (2012) concludes that "cognition is one of the central dimensions of the self's development because advances on each of the other dimensions is to some extent dependent on cognitive development" (p. 37). Cognitive development has to do with informational processing, conceptual resources, perceptual skill, language learning and other aspects of brain development. The cognitive existential question is: What am I aware of?

As I moved from school desegregator to civil rights activist to local civil rights youth leader, my sense of both self-awareness and experiential-awareness expanded. By experiential-awareness, I mean the ability to define the influence of external events on internal processes. In a real sense, it is the cognitive ability to integrate the development of the "I" quadrant with that of the other three. Movement in my participation level required deeper levels of engagement with the social systems at play. It also increasingly defined me as an opponent of those systems. I became more embedded in the cultural quadrant and my identification with those who were being oppressed by those systems. My behaviors increasingly exposed me to greater levels of danger, and I became more aware of challenges to my thought processes including my values, beliefs, hopes and aspirations.

Values development – Cognitive development is necessary, but insufficient for developing all other lines. In fact, many people are more advanced in terms of cognitive functions than the others. Howard Gardner (1993) discovered this in the examination of what he called multiple intelligences. Even though the lines of development operate independently, they are interrelated. For example, values and feelings play an important role in both ego and cognitive development. In fact, they all form parts of the Self.

Sociologist Morris Massey (2014) describes three major periods when values are developed: the imprint period (ages 3-7), the modeling period (ages 8-13), and the socialization period (ages 13-21) ("Morris Massey"). I was in the socialization period during the years of my civil rights involvement. During my imprinting period, my parents had strongly influenced my values system, particularly my father, and that would continue through the stages of values development. It was during the modeling period that I became actively involved in Fifth Street Baptist Church and met Dr. Virgil Wood; this is when the court case took place that allowed us to attend Glass High School and the television and newspapers were filled with images and stories about the civil rights movement in other parts of the country.

Emotional development – There is some evidence that emotion has an important impact on basic cognitive processes, including decision-making and behavioral choices. Behavioral data have often made it appear that adolescents are poor decision-makers. This led initially to hypotheses that adolescents had poor cognitive skills relevant to decision-making or that information about consequences of risky behavior may have been unclear to them (Botvin, 1991; Tobler, 1986). However, there is also substantial evidence that adolescents engage in dangerous activities despite knowing and understanding the risks involved. As a result, there is now increasing recognition of the importance of emotion in decision-making (Lowenstein & Lerner, n.d.).

From a behavioral (It) standpoint my increasing involvement as a civil rights participant increased the risk of danger for me, my parents, friends, and those in the community who were also involved (We). Emotionally (I), I had to weigh the risks posed by the social systems (Its) against the potential gains initially at the egocentric level and subsequently at the ethnocentric level.

Spiritual development – Benson, Roehlkapartain, and Rude (2003) define spiritual development as…

> …the process of growing intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental 'engine' that propels the search for connectedness, meaning, purpose and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. (p. 205)

The civil rights movement had a decidedly spiritual influence from the African American church tradition and background of Dr. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders to the rallies held in countless

African American churches across the nation. Often the themes associated with the "movement" were taken from Old Testament stories of the Exodus and references to justice and oppression. Because I was raised in the church, these images had a profound effect on me. The challenge was to translate the feel-good sensation from the church rallies and the speeches and sermons to an internalized spiritual process that I could own.

When I was challenged emotionally, I learned how to pray. When I was face-to-face with danger, real or imagined, I had memorized scriptures that I could repeat to myself. I would equate my experience to Daniel in the lion's den or the Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, facing the fiery furnace. Later I began to see my involvement as a "calling" on my life. This experience laid the foundation for almost 50 years as a Christian minister.

Moral development – Again, using Kohlberg's model of moral development, at the preconventional level, moral dilemmas are reflected in terms of individual needs. Power is usually the determinant when moral conflict arises. When I initially became involved in the local civil rights struggle as a school desegregator, the moral tensions were between conformity to power or the status quo of segregation and my own individual interests of safety, peer acceptance, and academic achievement as an adolescent. However, as I became increasingly involved in the local struggle, my individual view toward morality proved to be inadequate to deal with the kinds of moral conflict confronting me. The need to integrate the individual interior quadrant of emotions and values with my behavior and community interests against the oppression of the social system propelled me to the conventional level and led to my decision to take on more of an activist role.

At the conventional level, Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) say that "moral conflicts are now seen and resolved in group and social terms rather than individual terms. Right or justice is seen to reside in interpersonal social relationships" (p.56). It was no longer enough just to secure my right to attend the school of my choice. The issue now became the rights of my community to enjoy the same privileges and benefits of citizenship secured by the majority community – the right to eat where we wanted to eat, to watch a movie in the same comfort afforded to whites, the right to swim in a publicly supported swimming pool.

Kohlberg and Hersh indicate that at the conventional level "there is an appeal to authority but the authority derives its right to define the good not from greater power…but from its social sharedness and legitimacy" (p. 56). They go on to raise important questions. First, "if society defines the right and the good, what is one to think when one recognizes that different societies choose differently in what they label as good and bad, right and wrong?" (p. 57). Secondly, "if one cannot simply equate the right with the societal and the legal, then what is one to do?" (p. 57).

Kohlberg and Hersh conclude,

> The way out of this moral relativism or moral nihilism lies through the perception that underneath the rules of any given society lie moral principles and universal moral rights, and the validity of any moral choice rests on the principles that choice embodies. (p. 57)

It has often been pointed out to me that all of the authority was at the government's disposal. We had no power except the power of protest and a conviction that we were morally right. I made the conscious decision to engage in civil disobedience.

As demonstrated above, each of these six lines of development needs to be integrated across the four quadrants that represent the individual and collective, the interior and exterior. And each of these six lines is subject to particularized levels of consciousness. The lines of development are both independent and interrelated. Taken together the quadrants, levels, and lines help to integrally inform one seeking to engage in authentic leadership.

I purposefully did not include a discussion of states and types, though I acknowledge that such discussion could be helpful at some level. My intention was to best represent how integral theory could be used as a development diagnostic in examining a tasks to skills to personal development to societal developmental model of adaptive and lifelong learning.

When my father took me to the March on Washington in August 1963, I was among a limited number of persons in attendance who had had a personal encounter with Martin Luther King. I did not realize it then, in the moment; however, upon reflection over 56 years later, I strongly suggest that moment provided the crucible for my launch into a journey toward authenticity. If I were to apply the quadrant model to my emerging self at the edge of the reflecting pool on those hallowed grounds that day, all four quadrants were at play – the I, the It, the We, the Its. The memory of sitting in the floor, singing freedom songs with Dr. King, the emotions, my beliefs, values, whatever thoughts that were inundating my mind, were all emanating from the Upper left quadrant. I was physically present, heard the speeches, sang the songs, smelled the grass, felt the summer heat, experienced it all – Upper right quadrant. My father was there at my side as a reminder of the values and beliefs engendered by my family and though I could not see him, Dr. Virgil Wood was there, as a reminder of how Lynchburg and the local civil rights movement had helped to shape me. I was engaged with a community of fellow "believers" – Christians, Jews, members of the Nation of Islam. Our individual faith traditions did not matter. We were all there for a common cause. Blacks and whites together, and who knows what other ethnic and racial groups, were represented. But we were not operating out of our individual ethnicities – we were the brotherhood/sisterhood of humankind – Lower left quadrant engagement. We addressed and engaged the systems that both challenged our right to inclusion in the American dream and represented the American creed that, indeed, all men are created equal. It was at that moment that the impact of Martin Luther King as hero and journey mentor became a reality.

At the Presencing Institute in Barnstable, Massachusetts in October 2013, I shared with Otto Scharmer the framework that I was proposing for this dissertation. Scharmer assured me that the progression of my thought was both logical and feasible. He commented that he and Ken Wilber had talked on several occasions about seeking to explore the connection between Theory U and Integral Theory. This is evidenced in Mapping the Integral U (n.d.) cited in this paper. Scharmer said that perhaps it was my lot to complete the connection that he and Wilber had failed to make (Scharmer, C.O., personal communication, October 17, 2013).

Further Research

What is the impact of this suggested process on different target groups (e.g., academically underachieving African American males, incarcerated African American men, church members who are seeking spiritual growth)? Will the outcomes be different for African American females, other ethnic minorities, white youth? What would be the impact of a curriculum designed around this suggested process offered in public schools?

This paper provides the theoretical underpinning; however, it suggests some possibilities for future research in areas where I am currently working.

This paper has focused on adaptive and lifelong learning. However, I am also aware that in many of the illustrations, I have uncovered examples of shared/collective leadership. A study that compares and contrasts authentic leadership and shared collective leadership focused on the Lynchburg civil rights movement would be a logical area of research. This paper was a personal reflection. Were there other authentic leaders? Was there a tension or cohesion between shared/collective leadership and authentic leadership? There was disagreement among the recognized leaders of the African American community about the strategy that needed to be employed in Lynchburg.