

Integral Coaching

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This article explores a model for coaching that I have been applying within personal and business contexts.

At the centre of the model I have focused on Ken Wilber's work and especially his work on Integral Psychology. As a practicing coach my personal studies created a vibrant eagerness to focus on bringing together my understanding from personal development courses and coaching experiences, and place them into a larger developmental, integral, framework. It was in this 'bringing together', through my own efforts and with much guidance from my coaches, that I 'brought myself together.'

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In this article I will focus on offering an overview of this approach, including the influence of humanistic psychology practitioners that I consider to be the foundations that underpin the entire coaching relationship.

In brief, the model looks at:

- The coaching process
- 4 Quadrants
- Levels of consciousness
- Lines of development
- The self system
- States
- Adaptations

I will focus on one of the elements (the 4 Quadrant model) that is most important in an integral approach, whilst also outlining all other areas that are important.

Integral Coaching uncovered

Clients often ask, 'Why does this form of coaching produce such a profound 'affect?'' The answer is profound, but relatively straightforward. The Integral Coach uses a solid base of theoretical, experiential understanding and a demonstrated authenticity in the areas being explored. They will guide their coachee to try out different options at their existing level of being/consciousness until these attempts prove to be unsatisfactory. It is these options that we can call 'translation'- of little shifts. When all the options (translations) fail, there will be either total inertness, or -as is one of the differences, I believe, with Integral Coaching - *transformation*, that is, dis-embedding from one level into a higher one. This is a theme that has appeared time and time again throughout the coaching sessions and is central to personal development within specified contexts, i.e. Integral Coaching is about helping another individual evolve or develop through a process of *transformation*.

The coach's role is similar to the therapist in one sense. The coach won't 'therapise', but they will 'hold' the individual. Integral Coaching is an optimal experience for individuals looking to, as Carl Rogers put it, become a person. 'If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within themselves the capacity to use the relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur.'

This 'holding' is one of the fundamental aspects of Integral Coaching. The support function is not that of a crutch to be leaned on, but of a receptive container that pours forth compassion and understanding. In return the coach receives the pleasure of observing another individual's growth and development. The function of holding will, however, increase in effectiveness when the coach understands 'how to hold' what is 'to be held'.

I would like to set the scene with a passage from Carl Roger in *On becoming a person*. I feel it gives the essence of the Integral Coach's role.

'If I can create a relationship characterised on my part:
by a genuineness and transparency, in which I am my real feelings;
by a warm accepting of and prizing of the other person as a separate individual;
by a sensitive ability to see his world and himself as he sees them;
Then the other individual in the relationship:
will experience and understand aspects of himself which previously he repressed;
will find himself becoming better integrated, more able to function effectively;
will become more similar to the person he would like to be;
will be more self-directing and self-confident;
will become more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive;
will be more understanding and accepting of others;
will be able to cope with the problems of life more adequately and comfortably.
I believe that this statement holds whether I am speaking with a client, with a group of students or staff member, with my family or children.'

There are many other elements, listed at the beginning of this article, that build on this foundation to constitute an integral coaching approach. Every individual's route to transformation is different and will not necessarily follow the sequence outlined here. Instead, coaching can follow a flow along several paths which may be parallel or may be joined to each other. The elements of the model as described below can inform the thinking and being of client and any coach. The coach can select which elements to use and which not to use when structuring a coaching session.

Elements of the model

A – A coaching process

I have chosen Tim Gallway's GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, What next?) here as a process vehicle for the Integral Coach. However, this is not a mandatory place to begin, and I include it as it is well known in the coaching world. It should not be thought of as integral in its own right.

In the following I give an example of standard coaching procedure and compare it to Integral Coaching:

Example of 'standard' coaching:

A major issue for a coachee concerned money, in that the coachee could not attain the financial level they desired.

The coach decided to use money as an area to explore, and then follow the GROW process. This established the coachee's goals, their current position, their options for achieving their goals and what they could do next.

The Integral Coach might want to look deeper, looking at whether the next steps are ones of small shifts at the same level, or whether they constitute a move to a higher level (and here we must relate back to my earlier reference to translations (options) failing and leading to transformation). The issue of 'levels' will be dealt with later.

Example of Integral Coaching dealing with the same issue:

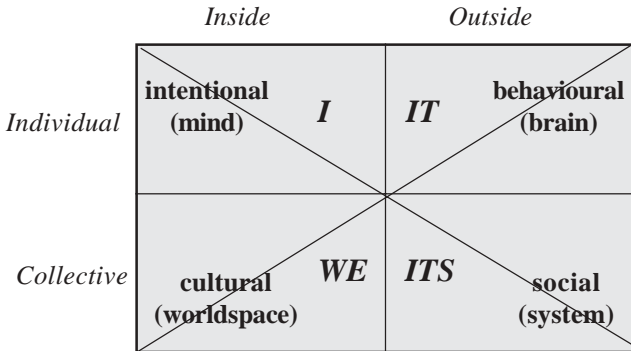
Over many coaching sessions, the coachee may have been helped to 'try everything' to move on financially at their level of being (consciousness). For example, the coachee may have made attempts to maximise their social security entitlement, to increase their income within an organisation, or to develop their own business. It is only when all these attempts are unsuccessful (when all the translations have failed) that transformation possibilities are revealed. For many of the earlier coaching sessions, the coach may have continued to explore the options from the coachee's existing level of being. It is only when this no longer works that the coachee can 'move on' to a higher level of being. For instance, they move from receiving social security payments to moving into employment because they can earn more money through that route.

Integral Coaching offers the opportunity to both increase personal competencies and to help personal transformation to higher levels of being for the coachee.

B - The 4 quadrants

Ken Wilber's 4 Quadrant model was one of the first models my coach took me through explicitly, after having used it implicitly to guide me all the while previously.

This aspect of my approach has to be the main focus for a coaching process to be considered 'integral'. In fact, if this is the only aspect that is used, then I would suggest that the coach has an integral approach, albeit a little flat and without the depth of all the other elements combined together.



4-quadrant thinking occurs when an individual is aware of their own internal world, their corresponding behaviours, the culture they operate in and the social system they are part of. But awareness alone is not transformational - the individual must also apply the model in practice. When a coachee's thinking is restricted to one or two quadrants only, there is a contracted sense of self and correspondingly limited results. Life is enriched when embraced in all four areas. On a personal level, working with my coaches enabled me to realise that I had spent too long introspectively exploring life, and that I needed to balance it with action in the world. I achieved this by entering a rewarding business environment that has also allowed my personal attributes and relationships to flourish, as well as delivering enough challenges for me to overcome and learning experiences that enabled me to grow!

The 4 Quadrant model raises questions of comprehensiveness and the balance of thinking and living. Both you as coach and your coachees will achieve better results if you understand the areas in which they focus their lives in relation to the model's four areas. You will also recognise the areas on which you tend to over or under focus.

Let us take a fictional case study. What is necessary for me to understand the phrase?

'I am a creative Integral Coach'

This question could be answered in many different ways. From the use of the question 'I am...', we recognise that it is a statement about 'identity'. It also says something about how I see myself, 'creative'. For me to say I am creative may mean that factors other than my own self-perception of 'me' as a practitioner are operating. Further, for me to make any value judgement about my capabilities, there must be an interpretation of what I do within the coaching culture. I must have interpreted what I do and where I do it within the

context of the coaching culture and community. So the identity level statement is not just a comment about myself, but also says that I exist within the coaching culture. The concept of 'I' is linked into and stands in relationship with the concept of 'we' – here the coaching community. Also, for me to be a coach, I might have received some sort of certification proving I am qualified, or my coaching qualification may be based on qualifications I already have – this may be from a university, a professional body or somewhere else. There will have been a system in place that recognises me (or my professional field).

So, the statement exists in 4 domains:

- in the domain of mind: '**I**' actually experience the thought in my mind
- there are correlative changes in **brain** chemistry: '**it**', i.e. activity in the brain etc. It is also the realm of observable behaviour – I 'do' something as coach
- In the domain of **culture**: '**we**', to agree or disagree with the statement
- In the domain of **society**: '**its**' – society has processes for certification of coaches

In order to have a more complete understanding of reality at whatever level of consciousness, Wilber suggests that all four quadrants (**I, we, it** and **its**) need to be considered in all life areas. To ignore any one is to reduce 'reality' into something that it is not. In the coaching context, it may help to broaden the way a person thinks about their life and its workings. In fact, I think it is part of the fabric of this process.

Re-balancing

It is because life exists within these 4 Quadrants that we need to realise the equal importance of each one and that they are non-separate and inter-dependent – they are integral. There is a tendency to over emphasise one Quadrant as being all-important, for example the Upper Left - 'I'. But even though the functional locus of consciousness (mind) is the upper left quadrant, it is a distributed function across all 4 Quadrants. In other words, you cannot just develop any one quadrant without this leading to a distorted view. Within each of the Quadrants – mind (I), body and behaviour (It), culture (We) and society (Its) – there is a path of development and each Quadrant is affected by the development of another area. For example, in the social system (Its) Quadrant, the move into an Informational age will also have seen a correlating move in the cultural (We) Quadrant, an increase in the 'view' that is more 'world' than 'self' centred. But there will also be shifts in the other Quadrants as they are non-separate and inter-dependent. The individual may have acquired new behavioural skills, for example computer usage, and potentially new ways of thinking that will help integrate all of the other parts.

Health

Health is often located in the 'I' and 'it' domains, it can be a coaching revelation to appreciate the cultural and social aspects to health as well. I chose the following example without any moral judgement, and I hope with a little compassion to anyone whose circumstances are, or have been, similar. So let's take a look at the example:

Example

A client has the misfortune to acquire a sexually transmitted disease.

The 'it' domain would be the physical manifestation of the disease.

The individual will usually receive a prescription from a doctor to deal with the physical problem. They may also 'feel' guilty about getting the disease despite it happening through no fault of their own. This guilt exists within the 'I' domain and is just as much a health issue as the one in the physical realm.

In turn, the individual may seek counselling to help with those negative feelings. They may also find that within their culture this condition is seen as a disgrace. Alternatively, their culture may accept that this is par for the course. Whichever way, the individual's feelings are likely to be affected by the culture they are part of – whether positively or negatively.

This cultural consideration is in the 'we' domain

If the individual exists lives within a social structure that allows appropriate medicines to be supplied over the counter (a system question), then their feelings and condition may dissipate more quickly. If, however, the person could not afford the best treatment, then the body, mind and culture aspects will be affected.

These are social system questions in the 'its' domain

Note: *Suppose the condition had been a facial skin complaint. In that case the individual can be affected in body, mind, culture (by people ignoring them etc) and social system. Not only is there 'the condition', how the person 'feels' about it, but there are also other people's reactions as well as, in this case, the doctor's 'rules' relating to priorities of treating or not treating skin complaints. All aspects could lead to the condition causing increased suffering.*

Integral Coaching and Integral Business Consulting can be seen as intimately related. One coachee who was running their own business found it fascinating that their mind had been fixed on the right hand domains ('it' and 'its') for so long that the left hand domains had suffered. The relationships ('we') can be neglected for many years (partly due to the internal challenges of the coachee). Quite simply, the relational aspects of business were at best ignored and at worst

scoffed at. With staff turnover at an all time high, the business was finding that low morale on a cultural level ('we') was seriously affecting the behaviours within the roles ('it') and the bottom line of the business ('its'). It was only when a new senior manager who had the capability ('it') and attitude ('I') to develop long-term relationships that business began, slowly, to improve ('it'). A focus shifted to balancing out the 'its' with a new and transformed 'we'.

C – Lines of development

Lines of development range from interpersonal skills, cognition and affect through to moral development. The coach's function in this area is to respectfully observe the problems occurring in the coachee's life and see which 'lines' could be enhanced.

Example

If a coachee 'feels' that people pick on him/her, then the coach may need to develop the coachee's interpersonal skills and affect (feelings).

Before establishing which lines are under-developed or even overactive, the coach builds up a mental model of the lines that are adequately developed within the individual.

Example

A coachee may be solely focusing on the act of making money and on the meaning of his meditation practice, leaving other lines such as those related to the needs of others underdeveloped.

D – Level of consciousness

There are three main personal learning transitions that a coachee using this type of methodology can experience. But as psychologist Lawrence Kolberg stated, we can be 'all over the place', so the levels are not always discrete.

Often the first transition is to complete the movement from concrete operational thinking (using Piaget's terms) to formal operation thinking. Concrete operational thinking is acting in the 'here and now' whereas formal operational is more 'what if?' thinking, as the individual has the capacity to generate more options about potential future scenarios. They also consider other people's viewpoints far more. This shift will have started as a teenager, but often is not held as a stable level of consciousness.

If the shift to formal operation thinking is negotiated and stabilised, stages of later development can then be supported. Using Robert Kegan's term of self-authoring, we can express this next shift between levels to be one of objectifying the internal world of thoughts, feelings or emotions. An individual is no longer 'had' by their emotions, they begin to 'have' them – this can free the person from much emotional instability (but see *G – Adaptations and defences* below).

Later, when the individual is ready, the Integral Coach can aid the coachee's transition beyond both of these levels. Post formal operational thinking will then emerge, revealing a cognitive capacity for cross contextualisation. This is when the individual no longer takes on different roles in life, but takes 'the theme of their life', their centredness, across into different contexts. This is the awakening of dialectical thinking ('what if?' thinking) where an individual is able to work through contradictions and bring about higher level solutions.

E – The self system

It is the 'self' on the spiral of development that does all the moving around. This is the 'self' that navigates the lines of development through the levels of consciousness, deciding whether to hold on or let go. This is the sense of 'I' at each stage.

The sense of 'I' extends into the self-images of personal competencies and is an essential aspect of performance. The self system gives a degree of unity to mind, and the self that:

- makes the choices out of those available at a particular level
- makes the adaptations/defences that ensure its protection
- metabolises the individual's experience into a more stable structure
- integrates and balances the elements

The coach supports the self on this journey with all of the processes he or she uses.

F – States

At this point along the developmental path, the coach helps to stabilise emotions and supports individuals who collapse into more primitive emotions. Instead of encouraging the coachee to take more and more action, the coach supports and empathises with the individual's current state. Once this emotional state has been appreciated and accepted, the individual will feel supported in moving out of these emotions into more positive states by themselves. This may take some time, and the coach's role is to 'hold' the individual and support them to make the necessary internal adjustments. When the individual knows they are being 'held', they will move on.

G – Adaptations and defences

As the self navigates the developmental path, things can (and do) go wrong. Depending on the stage of development, these may be minor and be manifested as neuroses, such as giving oneself a hard time; alternatively, they can be crippling. This is a challenging area to explore, but as Carl Jung said in *Psychological Reflections*, 'We cannot change anything until we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses.'

All coaches use established techniques to shift obsessions, phobias and so forth from a stable self. The coachee with a stable self is no longer ruled by their emotions and displays a more consistent sense of self. This allows the individual to take up healthier adaptations. If however, the Integral Coach notices the need for psychotherapeutic interventions for the following areas, they may decide not to take action themselves:

- earlier adaptations/defences such as the self 'splitting' – where emotion towards an object is flipped backwards and forwards from good to bad, or
- narcissism – where the self is not fully differentiated from the world around, the individual feels that everything revolves around them and their needs.

Instead, the Integral Coach may direct the coachee's attention to key published material in order for them to have a cognitive understanding of the levels and structures of consciousness and the corresponding adaptations/defences. From there the individual will search within themselves to discover the necessary interventions, or can be directed to appropriate therapists. It is not the job of a coach to 'fix' these problems.

George Vaillant's *Adaptation to Life*, based on a 30 year study, is a superb reference for anyone studying adaptations or defences. Briefly, they vary from the less mature defences such as destructive behaviour towards oneself or others, through to the more mature such as humour and suppression. By understanding their less mature defences, the coachee can be helped to recognise when their defences are being activated (and when they slip downwards to an earlier level of defence). As Vaillant suggests, there will always be 'defences' or 'adaptations', but the quality of the individual's life (as stated in the research) will be largely determined by the adaptive stance they have.

Conclusion

Integral Coaching looks at how develop people to higher (and more integrated) levels of consciousness as well as higher competencies at their current level. To conclude this bare bones overview I would stress that Integral Coaching is not a quick fix. The process supports the client's ongoing learning and development while helping them to see that a current challenge is a reflection of all the above elements working together.

Further Reading

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