

## **Integral Futures Methodologies (2008)**

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Special Issue Wins Award from The Association of Professional Futurists for One of the Top Three 'Most Important Futures Works' of 2008

*This special issue highlights the spread of ideas around Integral Philosophy popularized by Ken Wilber and introduced into foresight by Richard Slaughter in his tenure with the Australian Foresight Institute, which has carried on with this work. The special reflects how academics and practitioners are making increasing use of Integral ideas in a practical and applied manner.*

Andy Hines

### **Editorial**

Richard A Slaughter

As is well known the futures field emerged during the mid-Twentieth Century because people could see that, far from there being any single 'destination' for humanity, there were instead many possible futures, some of which were not greatly to their liking. 'Thinking ahead' became more than a personal pastime or indulgence. It became an imperative – at least to those who were paying attention. While some remained 'asleep' in the routines and assumptions of everyday life, others were 'waking up' to the implications: humanity might be headed for the stars or its own early extinction. Moreover there were profound ethical issues involved in passing on a compromised world to future generations. Everything depended on how the species responded to a range of emerging challenges and opportunities that could be seen with increasing clarity.

As is also well known, several new futures organisations were formed, methods were developed, scholars and practitioners alike rendered their insights and experiences into a rich and extensive literature. But as the field was maturing so an ideology that undermined it was also growing in strength and power. Despite some successes the futures field remained a social and cultural side-show that was unable to effectively counter or respond to the immense challenges posed for it (and the world) by the spread of economic liberalism – the ultimately futile but, in the short term, extremely powerful, view that markets were to be the dominant mechanism by which humanity would order its affairs and thus select its main pathway(s) into the future.

If the 'invisible hand' of the market was in charge of the compass then no one really needed futurists for any serious top level decisions. To many of those in positions of power and influence FS smacked of old-fashioned and discredited notions of centralised planning - and everyone knew where that led! Some governments, states, a few government agencies and various corporations turned to futurists on occasion to help with second-order concerns such as strategic planning, identifying emerging market segments, deciding which

technologies to pursue and other such instrumental questions. Scenarios became popular for a number of reasons, among which is that they did not entail a commitment to any particular future. One could 'play' in a range of well-drawn future environments and then return to the here-and-now with dominant ideologies largely unchallenged and with ones deepest assumptions pretty much intact. One could say that scenarios were the perfect tools for market-oriented users.

By the early Twenty-First century, the view of reality represented by economic liberalism had run its course and one could begin to hear intelligent voices even within the corporate sector admitting publicly that 'markets have failed; we now need progressive governments'. [2] In one respect the market view had succeeded – it had 'produced the goods' as it were, for affluent, and near affluent, populations. More people than ever before found themselves living at higher material standards of living than previous generations could have dreamed of. Unfortunately, however, these material gains were very unevenly distributed. So, for example, while these well-off minorities became entranced with innovations like the Internet, SUVs and plasma televisions, they forgot that a significant proportion of humanity still did not have access to clean water, basic health care or telephones – to say nothing of a life free of endemic conflict. They also overlooked the fact that behind the facade of compulsive global marketing lay a much more challenging reality – the real costs exacted upon the world system (including the less-privileged) of what had been portrayed as unambiguous advances. [9]

It's helpful to remember that, since growth is the engine of capitalism, and markets are the mechanism by which this growth is achieved, the system we've been living with for several decades contains *no inherent principle of limitation*. Even as the evidence of a compromised planet mounts to a point beyond contradiction, so the marketeers re-double their efforts to stimulate consumption. [1] All of which reflects rather poorly on the futures field. If we are, in fact, now heading into a period when the unrestrained effects of economic growth and affluent over-consumption are generating increasingly serious consequences, we have arrived at the point when futures work, as it has been known, becomes all-but redundant. In the coming chaos of the post oil era – which is far closer than most yet realise - humanity will *experience* the effects of an over-stressed and compromised planet, not merely seek to avoid such effects through applied foresight. [4] The fact is that, in spite of several decades' effort, neither the growth dynamic mentioned above, nor the resulting tide of destruction that goes with it, has been dented by futurists or others. Experience looks increasingly likely to be *the* agent that stimulates broad-based grassroots demands for more foresight that the politicians will hear and respond to. And that leads into extremely difficult territory.

A more hopeful role for futures studies, and improved prospects for the wider world, requires a reinvigorated, re-positioned and fundamentally re-vitalised field. The times are too late for anything else. It needs to achieve significant advances in understanding itself as well as new ways of operating effectively in an ever more unstable world. At its best the promise of Integral Futures is that it

can help bring the field to this new level of operational capability. Whether it will actually do so or not is anyone's guess, and there are of course many obstacles, but, in my view, the goal is within reach.

This can be stated with confidence because, over several years, a new generation of fearless, integrally informed futures practitioners has been emerging. Anyone who has read their work, spent time with them, listened to their accounts of working in organisations of all types, both public and private, and noted the results cannot but be impressed. What distinguishes them is that they share a number of characteristics that emerge from 'growing into the field' through an Integral framework. For example they:

- are very clear about their own immersion in, and debt to, particular cultural traditions;
- are keenly aware of their own values and perceptual filters;
- have a systematic overview of the main 'reality domains', how each interacts with the others and what methods of enquiry, tests of truth, are appropriate to each;
- have broad access to what I call the 'infinite tool kit' embracing a variety of related fields;
- are active in the process of reinvigorating traditional methods and evolving new ones;
- understand that 'solutions' emerge from complex processes of which they are a part and can seldom be pre-programmed; and, critically,
- work consciously from a post-conventional stance. [5]

Among the central discoveries of the Integral approach is that it is 'depth *within* the practitioner that determines how well or badly any particular method is used'. This is one of those rare 'new ideas' that changes everything. Among many other things it directs attention back and away from methods per se to the personal (and to some extent, social) interiors from which they emerged in the first place and upon which they entirely depend. Being a 'good futurist' or 'an effective foresight practitioner' is no longer a question that hinges on a one-dimensional concern for cognitive capacity! Many other lines of capability are involved along with requisite stages of development. A corollary is that the kinds of answers, solutions, that are now required cannot, in principle, be found in the domain of conventional thinking, conventional work (what I call 'problem oriented' futures). The latter has run its course and is now exhausted for non-trivial uses. [6]

Is the rise of Integral Futures part of a 'slow-burn' revolution? Time will tell. Meanwhile, here is a sample of work from what might be called the current 'leading edge'. Peter Hayward kicks off with a paper that sheds light on how the integral perspective has developed and explores some of the implications for those working in the field. He draws on the work of key theorists to suggest that integral futures work is based on *perspectives*, rather than methods per se. Gebser contributes a theory of the structures of consciousness. Habermas seeks to integrate social theory, philosophy, psychology and morality. Wilber proposes a multi-perspective rationality that challenges post-modern relativism. With this

as background Hayward then explores three lines of development from the work of Kohlberg (on moral judgement), Graves (on values) and Loevinger (on ego development) to research the experience of two cohorts of students within a post-graduate foresight program. The particular value of this work is that it reveals some of the hitherto poorly-understood struggles, trade-offs and dilemmas to be faced as programs of study are undertaken that help people move from a conventional to post-conventional stance. The latter is more complex, systems aware and reflexive; it arguably leads to the most productive options for futures work yet available. [7] The dilemma, which is clearly revealed here for perhaps the first time, is that for many this takes them beyond what the commercial world requires, values and will support. The paper therefore clarifies some of the risks and rewards involved in pursuing advanced futures work of this kind. [3]

The present writer follows with a review of how the approach 'refreshes' several futures methods, including scenarios, the T-cycle, causal layered analysis (CLA) and environmental scanning. In each case it attempts to show how certain earlier limitations are revealed and corrected through an integral frame. Specifically, it shows how pre-integral work over-emphasised external factors (such as technologies and empirical trends) and largely overlooked the 'shaping interiors'. Critical futures work went some way to re-balancing the field, yet its focus on cultural interiors (languages, traditions etc.) still failed to deal with individual interiors (the unique inner world of each person). Careful use of the four-quadrant model not only places the latter on an equal footing with more familiar domains, it also provides a depiction of ways that different forms of knowledge, and knowledge-seeking, 'fit together' in a wider pattern. Advanced futures enquiry can therefore become better grounded, more systematic and more directly applicable to major world issues than before.

Josh Floyd tackles the difficult subject of the integral renewal of systems methodology with admirable clarity. He distinguishes between systems *theory* (involving emergence, hierarchy, communication and control) and systems *thinking* (as epistemology, leading to theories of systems). He notes the 'subtle reductionism' that occurs when human subjectivity is overlooked and explores a number of ways that various players have sought to include it. As in other fields, a variety of systems methods address different aspects of the integral four quadrant model, e.g., causal loop mapping (the shared IT world), soft systems analysis (the shared world of WE) and critical systems (the individual world of I). This is an immensely clarifying paper with many implications for futures thinking and practice. For example, by becoming familiar with the uses and limitations of systems-related tools and approaches, futures practitioners can enhance their capacity for understanding how complex systems unfold through time. Equally, by developing the capacity to integrate methodologies that explore systems from the perspectives of *communicative and emancipatory interests* (as well as often-dominant *technical* interests) subsequent practices, decisions and actions will more effectively contribute toward preferred futures.

Chris Riedy then casts a sympathetic look at one of the newer futures methods: causal layered analysis. After describing the four basic levels of analysis used in CLA (the litany, systemic causes, discourse/worldview and myth/metaphor) he

suggests that Integral Theory treats the notion of development rather differently. The latter is not seen as a straightforward linear progression through levels. Rather, development is understood as a fluid process that occurs along many, relatively independent developmental *lines*, at varying rates. The lines are seen as distinct categories of development, or holarchies, identified by developmental theorists and practitioners. Reidy locates the sources of CLA's notions of depth within Indian philosophy and other sources. But the four layers identified by Inayatullah do not readily correspond to the levels identified in Integral Theory. Rather, they include a mix of what the latter defines as quadrants, levels and lines.

Some of the differences between CLA and Integral Theory are metaphorical, and easily resolved, while others are structural. For example, Reidy points out that the ability to reflect on the discourses in which one is embedded and the myths to which one subscribes is not available to everyone but emerges only after a long process of individual development from egocentric or pre-conventional stages. Thus, in applying CLA, practitioners need to bear in mind that some participants may not be able to step outside their identification with a particular discourse, worldview, myth or metaphor. Overall, CLA is one of the most successful of the new tools available and is widely used, in part because it provides numerous opportunities for reflection, understanding and new thinking. From an integral viewpoint, however, it tends to under-emphasise individual interior development and over-emphasise cultural factors.

What is perhaps most useful to practitioners is that the paper goes beyond critique to suggest how more integral versions of CLA embracing lines, quadrants and levels can be developed. To do so involves setting aside the view that discourse, worldview, myth and metaphor represent deeper realities than the various structures in the behavioural, systemic and psychological quadrants. The layered conception of reality can be retained, although layers would be redefined to coincide with the developmental levels identified in each quadrant. Instead of moving up and down four layers, an integral CLA would need to move *across* four quadrants and up and down *multiple* levels in each quadrant. Finally, Reidy concludes that CLA can be successfully applied within an Integral framework in at least two ways. First, to draw out deep cultural commitments alongside other methods that focus on the behavioural, systemic and psychological quadrants. Second, to dig down through the levels in each quadrant to deepen understanding of how reality looks and feels at each one.

Chris Stewart contributes a well-articulated piece on integral scenarios that breaks new ground in this highly visible, yet deeply contested, area. Drawing on the work of Gebser and Hayward he proposes a developmental overview of scenario practice through a series of 'worldviews of foresight' that move from relatively simple stages to more complex ones. Each of these is seen as useful and appropriate in relation to the complexity of the context. It's partly for this reason that the ability to recognise the signature strengths of each of the worldviews is regarded as a defining feature of the integral foresight worldview. Quality criteria for scenarios include relevance, diversity of worldviews and breadth/depth of discourses. The integral level adds further detail to such

criteria through (a) including the strengths and avoiding the weaknesses of different scenario methods developed by the different worldviews; and (b) only including the different worldview approaches that are relevant to the originating context and purpose of the scenarios.

Two subsequent steps involve a review of Wilber's Integral Operating System (lines, levels etc.), or IOS, which is then summarised in a quite straightforward generic scenario matrix. Of particular value here is the way the author provides summaries of several scenario projects in which features of the IOS are highlighted, along with some of the specific outcomes that they produced. The two distinguishing features of all integral scenarios appear to be a synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of any human situation, and the ability to engage successfully with complex environmental dynamics. The paper will be of interest to all scenario practitioners who are willing to review their assumptions and methods and to explore some of these options in practice.

Mark Edwards takes us into related territory with an original piece that considers the mediation of social futures through his own version of the IOS. Edwards approaches the question of social mediation through the ways that the social informs the personal and how different internalisations are related to human consciousness. He considers how these dynamics play out in the interaction of 'mediated pasts and futures'; also how an integral lens brings help to structure the fundamental worldviews involved. A key point about mediating all this complexity is to have recourse to adequate concepts, frameworks and structures. Another is that clarity of view in this context makes it possible to achieve coverage and balance of a large number of intervening variables. Considerable clarity is brought to the piece by the use of tables and diagrams. It is further focused by the use of three brief scenarios dealing with the future of health care. This 'worked example' permits the author to summarise his view of the 'mediating agents' in this specific context. He concludes that 'all visions of the future and products of foresight carry with them personal and cultural predilections (SIC) that are not often explicitly stated. The integral indexing of worldviews provides a means for analysing ... how imagined futures are given substance and significance in the present'.

Finally Joseph Voros sketches in the broad outlines of a philosophical and methodological approach to integral enquiry in general. He employs a well-known typology of research or inquiry paradigms (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory). Each inquiry paradigm is shown to engender certain commitments and assumptions that are inherent in and constitutive of the paradigm. The paper tracks the shifts in these paradigms over several decades from broadly objectivist outlooks to subjectivist ones; also how, broadly speaking, developments in futures methodologies have followed this general trend. Four main purposes of these inquiry paradigms are defined. They are: 'prediction and control; critique and transformation (leading to emancipation); understanding and insight (leading to re-construction of prior constructions); and human flourishing (through political participation)'. Here, in an extremely compressed form, we can see the roots of many of the issues and motivations that permeate the futures domain.

Voros outlines some of the attributes of an integral approach to futures enquiry, many of which will be familiar to the reader from the above. What may be less obvious, at first sight, is that such an approach does not lead directly and unproblematically to any particular method! Rather, in Voros' view, it leads to *choices* about particular forms of practice and a concern that whatever forms are chosen should be correct and appropriate. Overall, the value of the paper is the way it locates futures work in general, and integral futures in particular, within the matrix of established understandings about the evolution of enquiry paradigms. This makes it much easier to see how such work relates to, questions, and arguably contributes to the body of knowledge in general.

What, therefore, does this special issue contribute to the continuing development of the futures studies field? First, the authors have demonstrated that there is substance and value in this area. To clearly discern what this means does require a certain commitment of time and effort and a willingness to set aside earlier preconceptions. But if these papers demonstrate anything at all then it is that there is immense value in looking in more depth at this area. Its applications are very wide, affecting training, development, theory and practice at every level and in every location. Bear in mind, too, that this is merely a sample of new work and more will emerge over time in a variety of forms: papers, books, projects, methods and so on. Second, the emergence of Integral Futures seems to be a genuinely new stage of development for futures enquiry and practice. It brings into play quite new ideas and principles, providing structure where there was none and, in particular, casting light on the hitherto-obscured 'individual interiors'. As such it up-grades our capacities to understand and address the key issues of our time. [8]

One implication is that those involved in running futures projects may find it easier to move away from empty exhortations about the need for 'cultural change' and begin to incorporate some of the essential knowledge about how cultures and consciousness are both highly structured and interdependent. [10] Another is that an Integral approach gives us the capacity to move beyond many of the zero-sum games that turn on being ultimately 'right' or 'wrong' since, in this view, 'everyone is right' in the sense of having part of the truth! The rider is that 'not all truths are equal'. Yet since this question is addressed within the IOS, in principle it should be easier to transcend the 'paradigm wars' that have plagued the field in pursuit of a more unified stance.

Third, while it is true that Integral Futures is, in essence, a perspective, a way of understanding and operating, it is also true that the new breadth, depth, range and coherence that it encourages also lead directly not only to 'refreshing' earlier methods, but also giving birth to quite new ones. Indeed, an immediate task facing us may well be to attend to the generative encounter between, on the one hand, the depth insights emerging from Integral Futures enquiry and, on the other, the practical demands that emerge in the hands-on work that practicing futurists and foresight practitioners are engaged in day-by-day. Some hints of this process can be found throughout this special issue and it is to be hoped that they will emerge more fully in the near future.

Fourth, a depth understanding of the Integral perspective provides a welcome boost for understanding, promoting and applying foresight work in general, and especially progress toward the widespread implementation of social foresight, without which all our work may be in vain. It will not escape the attentive reader that 'stage development theory', clarity about worldview commitments, depth in the practitioner, enquiry paradigms, the Integral Operating System and so on all bring new dynamism and capability to this hard-pressed domain. It's therefore time to renew the push for futures thinking, methods, frameworks and so on to 'go mainstream' in education at every level, from primary schools to universities. The old questions about whether or not futures studies, applied foresight, are disciplines may never be resolved. What has been resolved is the fact that the domain supports serious and advanced enquiry into the most pressing concerns of our time. As such it should be fully represented in educational contexts.

Equipped with these gifts, futures studies, applied foresight, can emerge from the ghetto of insignificance and conventional thinking. Equally, practitioners can be increasingly clear about how they deal with the underlying interests, worldview, fundamental purposes, etc., of the organisations they work with and for. In the post-Enron era, perhaps the best reason to work for a multi-, or trans-national corporation is not simply to assist its 'bottom line' but, rather, to help transform it. The best reason to work for a government is to help it understand the centrality of effective social foresight and to put in place the means to support it. Beyond such 'middle range' tasks we need to wean this over-heated civilisation away from its destructive and divisive 'growth at all costs' path towards futures that are both sustainable and just. These are not tasks for the ill equipped or the faint-hearted. They challenge us to our depths. Yet when we begin to take those depths seriously and become aware of what they hold we find all the resources we could possibly need.

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## References

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