

## STRATEGY:



## THE PRACTICE OF THE FUTURE

BY CRAIG PARK, FSMPS, ASSOC. AIA

In 1995, Ken Wilber, one of the pre-eminent American philosophers, published an essay with a core argument that was to later become the basis for his book, *A Theory of Everything*. While Wilber's focus starts with individual development, he and his Integral Institute ([www.integralinstitute.org](http://www.integralinstitute.org)) based in Boulder, CO, have taken his theories to the logical next step and applied them to business and institutional organizational development. The institute's focus on communication, collaboration, and sustained connection form the basis for creating a professional practice that can succeed in any future scenario.

Wilber's model was a call to integrate "the big three" elements of life—morals, science, and art—each defined as a *holon* (something that is both itself a whole while at the same time being a part of a larger whole)—in our pursuit of a truly integrated (or integral) practice. He more simply describes these three elements as the "good," the "true," and the "beautiful," respectively.

**"At the end of the day, it is how we communicate value, deliver and receive value, and create value that will define the truly integral practice of the future."**

We can apply Wilber's model to the practice of a professional service firm in the same way, where communications (marketing/business development/PR) represents the morals (the value: the good),

leadership (management/finance/IT) represents the science (the facts: the truth), and project delivery (design/operations/HR) represents the art (the impact: the beautiful) of the practice. I believe the key to "the practice of the future" is recognizing the importance of, and having an equal consideration of, all three in creating the sustainable professional service firm.

Wilber's integral map further describes development potential in four quadrants representing individual, cultural, behavioral, and social spectrums. It is not just the awareness and acknowledgment of the importance of the three core elements of morals, science, and art. The successful firm of the future will be committed to individual and organizational development along the lines of the four quadrants to truly create a differentiated value proposition and enable the optimized service delivery.

Unfortunately, too often, silos are created to protect the interests of the three (and sometimes their component parts), which work counter to any attempt to create an integral approach to the clients' needs. Once created for geographic or functional reasons, these silos are very difficult to span. They work at odds with individual and organizational development, unfortunately but naturally being self-protective.

Wilber defines his comprehensive map as a way to make sure that any endeavor is "touching all the bases" when it comes to various problems and their solutions. Complex problems, like those we see every day,

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demand a comprehensive approach to their solution. Beyond technical competence, those solutions must combine systems theory to emotional intelligence to the impact of and on corporate culture.

Only when we truly and fully integrate the three core elements of communications, leadership, and project delivery—with the responsible practitioners in each area understanding, respecting, and supporting each other—will we have the fundamental framework for an enduring practice that can adapt to the inevitable economic, political, and social changes continually impacting the evolution of architecture, engineering, and construction.

One only has to look at the sweeping impact of the current financial crisis. Many firms are “hunkering down” to try to weather the storm. Few have developed the integral practice approach that may have anticipated and planned for the impact of radical change and are now prepared to not only continue but to grow through these difficult times.

The business cynicism of “faster, cheaper, better: pick two” (note the relationship—faster: good; cheaper: true; better: beautiful) rationalizes that one of the three will always be compromised if we provide the other two at a quality level in the delivery of our service.

The practice of the future will develop integral vocabulary, dialogue, and delivery methods that don’t compromise on any of the three, and as a result satisfies the clients’ demand for *speed* (within defined constraints of quality of service), *cost effectiveness* (within defined constraints of responsible and appropriate), and *quality* (within defined constraints of craftsmanship and execution).

Reaching a level of communication, collaboration, and connection with our clients that recognizes their goals, truly informs and enables their decision-making processes, and achieves a mutual understanding of measurable results is the key to competitive differentiation and ultimate practice success.

The practice of the future will be less about iconic results and more concerned with extending its growing cultural awareness to engage and address the societal impact of its resulting solutions. It will consciously seek to develop a physical manifestation (the building, infrastructure, or build-out we are commissioned to create) that is good, true, and beautiful.

Proficiency in the latest technological advances (e.g., building information modeling) is important. Creating expertise in a market niche can focus the efforts of the firm but may be risky if it demands change. Design innovation through advances in engineering and material sciences and the societal imperatives for sustainability (e.g., LEED®) will move the practice in more socially-appropriate directions. New service delivery models and alternate team/structures (e.g., design–build, CM@Risk) are evolutions of the practice of the practice.

*Integrated project delivery* is the buzz word du jour for A/E/C firms. Connecting owner, designer, and contractor in an integral business relationship is a good start toward the next progression of the practice.

However, at the end of the day, it is how we communicate value (morals: the good), deliver and receive value (science: the true), and create value (art: the beautiful) through our own communications, leadership, and project delivery teams that will define the truly integral practice of the future. ■

### About the Author



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