

Chapter 2

Integral Meta–Impact: Integral Theory and Applying It With Meta–Theory Methodology for Validation, Dynamic Insight, and Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Integral theory presents as a theory of everything. As such, how do we validate its use while applying it as a methodology and investigating its blind spots? Meta-theory methodology can authenticate integral theory and provides a check on its comprehensiveness. The methodology draws on relevant mid-range theories and integral theory (a meta-theory itself) to refine and justify a study's methods while simultaneously applying theory to specific research. This rigor creates clarity and insight. Complex issues—for example, the concept of sustainability that illustrates this chapter—are characterized by many different (mid to meta, conceptual to applied) theoretical approaches. Meta-theory methodology assists to sift these, highlight critical points, and realize integral theory's promise.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that we are now in a state of global emergency. This unprecedented worldwide crisis is a symptom of a much deeper problem: the current state of our consciousness; how we think about ourselves and our world. We have the urgent need, and now the opportunity for a complete rethink ...
Ervin Laszlo and David Woolfson in Thomas Berry, *Dreamer of the earth* (2011)

*Ken Wilber ... highlighted how serendipitous it is that integral frameworks are emerging at the same time that humanity is being confronted with complex issues like climate change... it is no mere coincidence that such post-national problems are arising at the same time that integrative approaches are being developed to provide global solutions. Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, Executive editor introduction, Volume 5(1) *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice* (2010a)*

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Integral theory (Wilber, 2000a, 2005), sometimes referred to more formally as an *all quadrants, all levels* (AQAL) framework, is a prominent foundation for research. Practitioners are attracted by its ability to map and model an understanding across broad, wide-ranging and divergent fields. It promises to assist in navigating the complexity. As a '*Theory of Everything*' (Wilber, 2000b) it has significant appeal as it appears suited to multi-scale scopes and disparate perspectives that difficult and important topics (such as sustainability) can present. Additionally, it helps to identify suitable research approaches (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2010b; Marshall, 2012).

A theory of everything has obvious relevance across society. It may address the full spread of our human, ecological, organisational, social, political, cultural, ethical, historical and future development, transformation capacity-potentials and present awareness issues at play around priority areas of concern. Consequently, integral theory investigation has broad appeal for any field that is characterised by our own and other's perspectives, alongside cultural-style influences and shared unconscious biases, as well as (often) more obvious economic or scientific drivers as significant and important influences. The Integral theory section (1.4) of this introduction outlines the theory and its widespread use.

Despite the appeal of integral theory, it presents something of a conundrum. If the theory is comprehensive and we are using it for the insights and clarity it provides how can we simultaneously check its validity? The very appearance of completeness could mask bias or analytical blind spots.

1.1. Methodology Outline

This chapter is a structure to deal with multiple theories, meta-theory (including integral) and a meta-theory methodology. It outlines: 1) The promise of integral theory 2) A validation framework 3) Meta-theory methodology for application and research 4) Illustrates utilisation. The chapter's structure is:

- The next section 1.2 Theory and meta-theory sets the framework for the usefulness of these analytical approaches.
- The 1.3 Meta-theory section provides a short definition of this type of theory and its usefulness.
- Section 1.4 Integral theory overview is an outline of integral and its applications.
- Section 1.5 A sustainability case is a practical short example. This multifaceted concept - many theoretical and practical approaches can be applied to it - is used to illustrate the whole chapter.

The Meta-theory methodology section (2) sets out how to systematically undertake analysis and validation:

- Section 2.1 Building meta-theory and 2.2 Meta-theory development and testing outline the framework's first steps.
- Section 2.3 Summary and application into integral theory describes the process of applying the review from the previous steps.

Section 3 Discussion considers how meta-theory methodology can assist a researcher:

- 3.1 Integral on integral considers how an integral framework alongside meta-theory can deepen analysis and support conclusions drawn from these analytical processes.

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