

# **Toward an Integral Approach to Organization Theory**

## **An Integral Investigation of Three Historical Perspectives on the Nature of Organizations**

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This paper explores organizational theories that have emerged over the last century and could be categorized in one of three broad historical perspectives: objectivist, subjectivist and intersubjectivist. In particular, it investigates how these three perspectives explain organization-environment relations, organization design and structure, and organization culture. Finally, it examines the feasibility of using the Integral Approach as a foundation for constructing an organizational meta-theory that includes the partial truths of each perspective.

### **Introduction**

Organization theory is inherently interdisciplinary. Its complex array of concepts and approaches investigate knowledge from a variety of fields including economics, sociology, political science, behavioral psychology, ecology, cultural studies, and linguistics. The number and diversity of distinct theories contained in organization studies renders references to organization theory misleading and somewhat ironic. The term suggests the existence of one inclusive, integrated, or singular theory explaining the form and function of organizations, when in fact there are many organization theories, covering dozens of topics in ways that seldom align and often appear to be in direct opposition to each other. Even multiparadigmatic approaches, aimed at the creation of organization meta-theory, have failed to produce one all-encompassing theory of organizations.

In all honesty, this article will not be terribly different; its aim is not to provide a conclusive, cross-paradigmatic organization meta-theory. While some believe that the field of organization theory is too young to have worked out the differences required to arrive this soon at a single meta-theory, others believe that organizations are too complex and too dynamic to ever be captured in a single theory. Finding the inclusion of multiple

theories from several paradigms of human thought to be the source of organization theory's strength and promise, some question the single meta-theory aim altogether.

While I am not certain where I stand on the feasibility and promise of a singular meta-theory for organizations—to feel differently before developing one seems in some ways imprudent—I do recognize that the field is ripe for a truly transdisciplinary investigation of both its core and vestigial components. Also, given the nature of organization studies as field—in that it extends to cover large and small, global and local, profit, non-profit, and governmental organizations—the single theory aim is simultaneously made more complex and pushed to favor theories that emphasize context, variability, and meta-mapping. Fortunately, both the need to account for increased complexity and the reliance on context transcending meta-mapping lie at the heart of what differentiates this article from other multiparadigm approaches. This point of differentiation emerges when making the shift from interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary examination. Rather than investigating cross-discipline commonalities and connections, a transdisciplinary approach to the creation of organization meta-theory begins with a non-organizationally confined meta-theory called the integral approach.

Developed over the past thirty-years by American philosopher Ken Wilber, the integral approach enables a transdisciplinary investigation by articulating how the unifying patterns and deep features of human knowledge traditions can connect organization theories at one order of magnitude beneath the surface connections they share. It identifies five essential elements or factors that allow for a comprehensive, situated understanding of nearly any field investigated by organization theory.<sup>1</sup> I believe it is the ideal platform upon which to build organization meta-theory as it is not constructed from the components of organization theory itself. As such, it can be applied to those components in a manner that integrates the essential truths of many paradigms.

The integration of multiple paradigms or perspectives allows one to embrace the inherent complexity and contradictory demands of organizational dynamics. As demonstrated nearly 30 years ago by sociologist Gibson Burrell and organization theorist Gareth

Morgan, the recognition of multiple perspectives on organizations is not new. They argued that different knowledge paradigms, fueled by different assumptions about the nature of reality, led researchers to investigate organizational phenomena in different ways, ultimately producing different theories.<sup>2</sup> Morgan's current view, though languaged differently, fully concurs. He explains that all theories of organization and management are based on metaphors or images. These paradigm-influenced lenses color our perspectives on organizations by influencing our ways of thinking and seeing in useful but oftentimes partial ways.<sup>3</sup> And it is exactly these partial perspectives upon which an integral approach takes aim. This article investigates three areas of organization theory—environment, structure and design, and culture—from three distinct historical paradigms or perspectives, which will be introduced in a moment. First, I'd like to investigate the very supposition that a meta-theoretical integration is even feasible, as it runs counter to the conclusions of other theorists, who question if such an approach is appropriate or even possible.

### **On the Possibility of Meta-Theory**

Unlike others applying the integral approach to organizations, my intention for this article is not to construct a complete integral organizational framework. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that the creation of such a meta-theoretical framework is indeed possible by showing how a transdisciplinary integration of organizational epistemologies can occur. By utilizing integral meta-theory to define the contours of organization meta-theory, powerful conclusions can be drawn from the deep structural points of integration rather than simple comparisons and accommodations of content-specific observations.

Traditional meta-theoretical approaches such as triangulation work within a single paradigm to point out, for example, that organizational learning, identity, and cognition are influenced by both individual and social dynamics. The integral approach—akin in several ways to Dennis Gioia and Evelyn Pitre's multiparadigm perspective and Marianne Lewis and Andrew Grime's metatriangulation—works to bridge paradigms in a syncretic, trans-historical manner of theory-building.<sup>4</sup> The integral approach offers one emergent distinction that renders it a meta-approach to these meta-approaches, and in so

doing, it helps to solve a problem that, if tracking Gioia and Pitre's conclusion, it should actually exacerbate.

One consequence of multiparadigm approaches, they note, is increased fragmentation and provincialism caused by the unwieldy proliferation of theoretical views.<sup>5</sup> With the integral approach championing less fragmentation as the result of multiparadigm efforts, what leads to these different assessments? A drastically different view of paradigmatic integration, I suggest. Gioia and Pitre assert that the difference in theoretical tenets, assumptions, vocabularies, and goals make paradigms incompatible. Because of these factors, they assert that paradigms cannot be "...collapsed or synthesized into some integrated framework," and that the same factors "...preclude any bona fide synthesis of competing theoretical views into some general model or convergence on some grand theory."<sup>6</sup>

The integral approach sees the integration of paradigms quite differently. Cross-paradigmatic judgments are guided by the principle of enactment, not by attempts to collapse, synthesize, or converge theories into one grand theory. Enactment—one of three principles on Wilber's integral methodological pluralism, which, in short, is a more appropriate name for the integral approach—states that phenomena are enacted or brought forth by a series of behaviors, paradigms, or practices undertaken by a knowing subject, whose subjectivity gives rise to a phenomenological world in the process of knowing that world.<sup>7</sup> When two paradigms are deemed incommensurable, it is because the point of comparison and attempted integration is the phenomena, not the paradigms. Put differently, and in line with the direction of this article, paradigms are deemed incommensurable when the content-specific, surface-level features are chosen as the point of integration. If the deep structural or perspectival/epistemological aspects of the paradigms are investigated, it can be understood why and how the content specificities appear as they do. Then, meta-paradigmatic or meta-theoretical integration is not only possible, but becomes almost self-evident.

### **Three Historical Perspectives**

Over the last two centuries, three broad perspectives on the nature of reality and human knowledge construction have been utilized to examine organization theory. Called modern, symbolic-interpretivist, and postmodern by organization theorist Mary Jo Hatch, they have produced numerous competing theoretical interpretations of each of the three areas of organization theory under discussion.<sup>8</sup> At the root of their disagreements are different epistemological and ontological assumptions or different ways of understanding reality. In short, the modernist perspective supports a positivist approach that emphasizes only the objective, external aspects of reality. The symbolic-interpretivist perspective views knowledge as relative to the knower and therefore insists that subjective awareness and individual meaning is the path towards understanding organizations. The intersubjective component present in the symbolic perspective is carried forward in the postmodern view, which sees all knowledge as context-dependant, meaning as not fixed, and reality as not independent of interpretation.

These three historical perspectives are easily situated after recognizing their connection to the fundamental dimensions of any occasion, outlined by quadrants component of the integral approach. Constructed out of two basic distinctions, that of interior versus exterior and individual versus collective, the quadrants give us four domains: (1) Interior-individual or subjective, (2) Exterior-individual or objective, (3) Interior-collective or intersubjective, and (4) Exterior-collective or interobjective.<sup>9</sup> As you can see, these clearly relate to the explanations of Hatch's historical perspectives as offered above. From this point on, I will employ an integral theory fueled adaptation to her terminology: the modern perspective will be referred to as objectivist, the symbolic-interpretivist perspective as subjectivist, and the postmodern perspective as intersubjectivist. I would like to entice a subtle shift in our relation to these concepts, hopefully without deemphasizing their important historical nature. To be clear, however, my reasoning is not based on an error in Hatch's choice or application of terminology.

Staunch adherents to these three perspectives—in organization theory and many other fields—typically posit their version of reality as the most fundamental or the most real.

The integral approach, on the other hand, sees each of these perspectives as right and all of them as partial. By naming these perspectives in line with the historical movements—in particular the modern and postmodern perspectives—we invoke the millennia-old battle over which is most right. If we recognize the perspectives as equi-primordial, and name them as such, we invoke an energetic shift away from the battle and towards our transdisciplinary aims: To create a meta-tapestry woven of their partial truths. By giving the perspectives names that are in line with the most fundamental aspects of reality, we can set the energetic stage of multiparadigm bridging rather than battling. It might seem trivial, but just to be clear, as I move on to explore organization theory, I will do so from these renamed perspectives, which, I hope, are understood by the readers as not separate from the deeply historical context presented by Hatch.

## **Organizational Environment**

### *Objectivist Perspective on Organization Environment*

The objectivist perspective defines organization environment as everything that lies outside the boundary of the organization. The environment provides inputs such as capital, resources, and labor and receives organizational outputs such as products and services. The conception is linear, mechanistic and, in some sense, overly simplistic, but its truths are unavoidable. In fact, this conception of organizations is fundamental to the first theories of organization-environment relations: environmental contingency theory, resource dependence theory, and population ecology.

Sociologists Tom Burns and George Stalker were among the first to suggest that organizational structure was contingent on or determined by environmental conditions. If the environment was uncertain, more organic forms allowed organizations to adapt to continual change, whereas, if the opposite was true, more mechanistic forms allowed organization to focus on processes and procedures for optimizing output.<sup>10</sup> Organization theorists Jay Lorsch and Paul Lawrence suggested that different environmental conditions create pressures for different degrees of internal differentiation, pushing them to isomorphically take on the forms dictated by the complexity of the environment.<sup>11</sup>

Resource dependence theory, as articulated by Jeffery Pfeffer and Gerald Salancik, offers a similar conclusion, which states that an organization's structure and function is determined by its environments. The premise is simple: dependant relationships exist between organizations and other actors in their network environment.<sup>12</sup> By understanding these power/dependence relationships managers can create strategic countervailing dependence to offset uncertainty and over-bearing external influence.

Population ecology, while still based on the assumption that environments wield considerable control over organizations, investigates the relationship at the level of the environment rather than the level of the organization. Population ecology theory holds that organization survival and the prosperity of individual members depends on the degree to which they can successfully secure inputs from a resource pool shared between interdependent competitors in the same environment. Therefore, organizational survival within resource niches hinges on the ability to adapt and survive in changing environmental conditions.<sup>13</sup>

The deterministic relationship present in these three objectivist theories sees organization structure and function as caused by observable characteristics of the environments in which they operate. This view, according to Gareth Morgan, lies at the heart of the "organizations-as-organisms" metaphor, which he feels has several limitations: (1) it fails to acknowledge that organizations and environments are in part socially-constructed, (2) it renders members of organizations as entirely dependant on environmental forces rather than as active agents, (3) it privileges the possibility of a functional unity when in fact empirical studies have shown that organizational elements rarely function harmoniously, and (4) it sees individuals as resources to be developed rather than human beings who are valued in their own right.<sup>14</sup> Morgan's critique points to the central elements of subjectivist conception, which asks whether structure or human agency has greater significance for understanding organization-environment relations.

### *Subjectivist Perspective on Organization Environment*

Institutional theory and enactment theory hold up either side of the structure and agency debate. The former sees organizations as shaping and constraining the actors operating within a social system. Philip Selznick, sociologist and early proponent of institutional theory, sees organizations as adapting to the values of external society in addition to the social characteristics of its participants.<sup>15</sup> The demands of society concern technical, economic, and physical demands on production as well as legal, social, and cultural demands on the roles organizations play in society. Richard Scott grounds the definition of institutions in repeated actions combined with regulative, normative, and shared cognitive elements that create meaning and stability for organizations.<sup>16</sup> This conception extends an organization's environmental needs beyond resources to social acceptability and credibility. Called social legitimacy by Mark Suchman, this conception views an organization as legitimate if its actions are seen as appropriate or desirable within a socially constructed system of norms, values, and beliefs.<sup>17</sup> The requirements for social legitimacy are an additional environmental factor influencing the structure and functioning of organizations. This time, however, the constraints include human-defined concepts of shared meaning and value.

Enactment theory also includes a human element in the organization/environment relationship, but it starts with an assumption that lies on the human agency side of the debate. Cognitive organization theorists such as Karl Weick begin with the assumption that environmental conditions cannot be separated from the perceptions of those conditions. Enactment theory states that decision makers enact their environment through interpretations of their perceptions. They interpret experiences of uncertainty as a lack of information or knowledge, which is then attributed to environmental instability.<sup>18</sup> Communication theorist Eric Eisenberg, expanded on organization theorist James March's conception of ambiguity theory by suggesting that in addition to enacting their environment people do not always promote correspondence between their intentions and the interpretations given to others in communication. Often, they omit contextual cues, strategically facilitating multiple interpretations of the same communication act in hopes of creating unified diversity.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the objectivist perspective, which grants more power to the environment, subjectivist theory, by including the element of human

interpretation, insists that the organization's members may have more influence on the environment than the environment has on them.

### *Intersubjectivist Perspective on Organization Environment*

Postmodernism's emphasis on the fundamental nature of intersubjective context includes the social construction of organizational realities and adds a component of self-responsibility. Once we recognize our roles as social constructors of organizations, responsibility for what we construct and how it affects those influenced by the organization become an ethical imperative for environmental relations.

In the post-industrial information age, networked organizational forms alter collective perceptions of the organization/environment boundary. What was once viewed as organization "in here" and environment "out there" shifts to an interpenetrating, interdependent and boundaryless organizational network with transparent or greatly permeable differentiation between organization and environment. The intersubjectivist perspective renders institutional theory as stakeholder theory, which views the interests of stakeholders as one with the organization itself. This deeply intersubjective bent is most apparent when organizational success is determined by the ability to attend to stakeholder interests, which are recognized by intersubjectivists as different but not to the extent that one set of interest is privileged over another.

Stakeholder theory injects an ethical obligation to consider the larger societal and environmental impact produced by organizational operations. Social legitimacy, gained in some part through awareness of environmental and social sustainability, gains a greater status in the postmodern, intersubjectivist conception of organization environmental relations. In a more extreme form, some adherents to the intersubjectivist view feel that continued organization theorizing is used to disguise hegemonic intentions, which, according to Marx, concerns the practice of interpreting the ruling class, or prevailing worldview, as universal. Another aim of this perspective is to investigate how language is used to construct hegemonic versions of reality. According to Paul Shrivastava, the modernist language used to describe organization-environment relations reduced the

natural world to “a bundle of resources to be used by organizations.”<sup>20</sup> The intersubjectivist investigation of language and the grand narratives of modernist thought seek to deconstruct the perceived truth in all views dissimilar to their own.

### *Integral Perspective on Organization Environment*

The Integral approach does not explicitly focus on organization theory and therefore does not offer a unique view on the organizational environment. However, it does feature several concepts that prove quite useful in sorting out the competing perspectives of the three historical perspectives explored above. The quadrants component of the Integral or AQAL framework—AQAL stands for “All-Quadrants, All-Levels”—situates these views by honoring their partial truths and jettisoning their absolute claims. In doing, it forgoes the need to determine which of them is “correct.”

Each theory explored thus far, from environmental contingency theory to stakeholder, can be viewed as emphasizing one or two quadrants, which represent the four irreducible aspects of any occasion. Again, taken together, they are the interior and exterior of the individual and the collective. These dimensions are reflected in the first-, second-, and third-person pronouns used in any language system. “I” refers to the interior of the subjective or intentional domain, “You/We”<sup>21</sup> to the interior of the intersubjective or cultural domain, “It” to the exterior of the objective or behavioral domain, and “Its” to the exterior of the interobjective or social domain.<sup>22</sup> Figure 1 illustrates these fundamental realities, or quadrants.

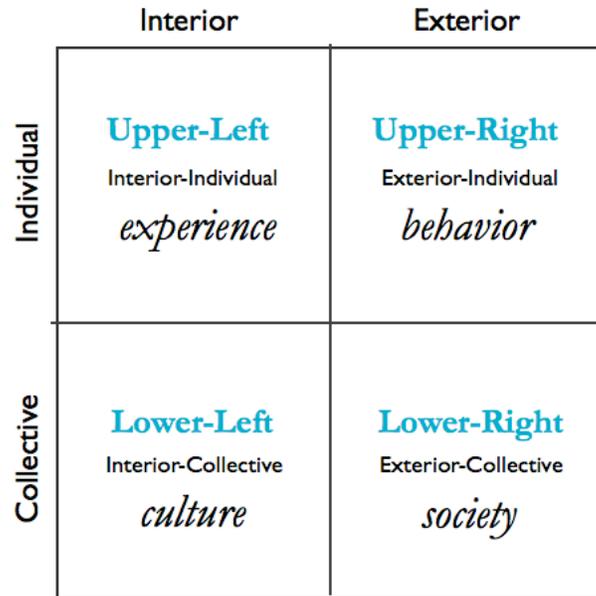


Figure 1. The Four Quadrants.

As fundamental aspects of reality spanning all disciplines and all theories, the quadrants are a useful mapping tool, which allow us to situate various perspectives according to what quadrant-dimensions they emphasize. While the typical approach to competing theories attempts to compare them according to accuracy, clarity, and ability to robustly explain the phenomenal world, an integral view recognizes that nearly all theories are partial in that they rarely demonstrate a balanced treatment of all four dimensions of reality. Being partial does not imply that theories are wrong, only that working with them singularly typically results in a less than comprehensive understanding of whatever is under investigation. By mapping objectivist, subjectivist, and intersubjectivist theories of organization-environment relations across the quadrants, as seen in Figure 2, the beginnings of a more comprehensive view are revealed.

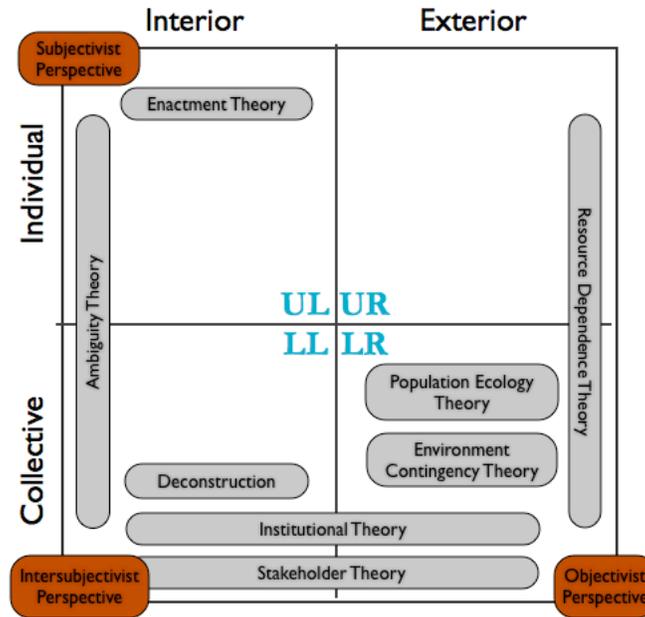


Figure 2. Organization-Environment Theory Quadrant Mapping

From historical perspectives to individual theories, each view of the organizational environment exclusively focuses on one or two quadrants. An integral approach to organization-environment relations would draw valid truth from each perspective, and every theory, but in a contextualized manner. So, rather than positing resource dependency as more fundamental than stakeholder theory, it would recognize the former as UR-LR oriented, and the latter as LL-LR. This simple integral mapping guides us in simultaneously recognizing that organization structure is partially formed by resource dependency and that the dependency dynamics have an interpenetrating relationship with impact on important environmental, social, and human stakeholders. Similarly, it prevents us from considering how individuals enact or socially construct perceived organization-environment relations without accounting for how the act of doing so creates institutional patterns of meaning and structure in the collective domain.

By shifting perspective from how theories compete to how they correlatively arise throughout the quadrants provides a truly integral way of making sense of multiparadigm approaches to organization theory. As the remaining areas of organization theory are

explored, additional integral concepts will be employed to further refine this more comprehensive view of organizational functioning.

### **Organization Design and Structure**

The concept of organization structure explores the relationship between parts in an organized whole. The early modernist assumption that structure was an objective entity that could be observed, identified, and measured led organization leaders to view structure as a stable form that significantly determined organization behavior and performance. Through the investigation of organizational lifecycles, the subjectivists came to view structure as more of a process than an entity, and the idea that form defined behavior was replaced with the view that communities of meaning defined structure. The intersubjectivist view has expanded this notion in hopes of replacing dominating and marginalizing structures with democratic forms that reduced inequality. Regardless of which version of organization structure one might prefer, both emerged from early objectivist conceptions, which in turn were based on Max Weber's notion of ideal bureaucracy.

#### *Objectivist Perspective on Organization Design and Structure*

Objectivist organization theorists took Weber's concept of ideal bureaucracy as the basis for three important components of organization structure: the division of labor, the hierarchy of authority, and formalized rules and processes.<sup>23</sup> The popularity of this view is not surprising as the produced results are clear. By distributing responsibilities and tasks throughout an organization, individual specialization in components of complex processes led to an increase in organizational efficiency and productivity. Similarly, by installing hierarchical structures of formalized reporting relationships, guided by standardized processes and operating procedures, organizations found that functional stability and control could permeate all structural layers.

Early objectivists relied on the components of ideal bureaucracy to unlock the highest levels of organizational performance. Further research has revealed that while a certain structure works for some organizations, others require something different. Structural

contingency theorist Lex Donaldson identified a constellation of organizational factors—strategy, size, environment, task uncertainty, and technology—that if allowed to influence organization structure, produced successful design.<sup>24</sup> This concept is not terribly different from the environmental contingency theory explored earlier. After empirical investigation, Burns and Stalker, early proponents of structural contingency theory, discovered that mechanistic organizational forms—featuring high levels of hierarchical control, clearly defined roles and tasks, and centralized decision making—actually inhibited innovation. Organic designs, however—featuring decentralized, informal structures—resulted in greater coordination, innovation, and creativity.<sup>25</sup>

Other objectivist researchers were interested in uncovering the typologies of organizational structure and form. Organization theorist Henry Mintzberg's structure in fives is the most notable typology. In this system, Mintzberg defines five typological structures: (1) simple structure, appropriate for small companies with power centralized in top management; (2) machine bureaucracy, for mass production companies dealing with highly specialized tasks and standardized production processes; (3) professional bureaucracies, for companies operating in complex but stable environments that require standardized skills; (4) divisionalized form, for complex and unstable environments where relatively autonomous divisions run their own businesses and executives and corporate staff manage through standardized financial and performance measures; and (5) adhocracies, where turbulent environments require constant innovation and decentralized decision-making handled in interacting project teams.<sup>26</sup> Each of these structures produces different organization designs, which reflect their varied constellations of structural contingency factors.

Evolutionary models, describing how organization structure changes over time, extended contingency approaches in an important way. Larry Griener's model contains several static stages of development—entrepreneurial, collectivity, delegation, formalization, and collaboration—each with a dominant focus that maintains relative stability until a crisis in survival brings forth the next stage of development.<sup>27</sup> This example of organization lifecycle theory predates more subjectivist conceptions of dynamic structural

development, which emphasize continuous interaction between strategy and leadership style at each level. Please note that the use of the term development in this section is that of the referenced authors. An integral approach to individual and organization development offers a critical distinction between these mechanisms underlying these two distinct evolutionary movements. In short, individuals develop through levels of increasing complexity in a unidirectional manner that does not exhibit stage skipping. A social entity or organization's level of development is determined by the developmental functioning of individuals who comprise the collective entity. As such, organizations do not necessarily proceed through stages in a unidirectional manner, even though this is sometimes the case. Furthermore, many organizational lifecycle theories such as Griener's often employ strict developmental terminology when they are in fact speaking of what the integral approach would view as a conflation of Lower-Left and Lower-Right quadrant levels and typologies.

Structuration theory investigates the interface of agency (free will) and structure (determination) in the development of organizational form. Structuralists claim that societies and institutions determine our roles and actions, while those who favor agency see humans as constructing the very social structures that structuralists uphold as determining behavior.<sup>28</sup> Replacing the idea of structure with the process of structuring allows for an integration of these two extremes. In a move that attempts to balance the Left and Right-hand quadrants, structuration theory reconceptualizes this process as interacting agents producing patterns of social structure through actions that are themselves influenced by the structures they construct. Social theorist Anthony Giddens sees structure as both enabled and constrained by the activities of interacting individuals.<sup>29</sup> Structuration theory's crossing of the organization and individual level of analysis reframes the structure/agency debate as the process of interaction between the material and symbolic aspects of human social relationships. This way of thinking—which is further developed by proponents of the subjectivist perspective—is a solid indication of a move to further integrate the interior and exterior dimensions of individuals and the collectives they co-create.

### *Subjectivist Perspective on Organization Design and Structure*

The two primary points of differentiation between objectivist and subjectivist stances on organizational structure—generalizations cannot be applied across different organizations and emphasis is placed on the cultural rather than the structural—indicate that an organization's structure does not exist independently of human consciousness and social interaction.

The theory of institutional logic underscores this conclusion. The concepts of improvisation and routine provide the basis for socially-constructed structure. According to Martha Feldman, as individuals come to understand their work in various contexts, routines emerge as the flows of ideas, actions, and outcomes.<sup>30</sup> Routines are created and then re-created as different individuals perform different behaviors at different times. When confronted with a gap in organizational knowledge, individuals will use improvisation to create new routines. As they are repeated, improvisations can form routines and become institutionalized as structures of organizational functioning. A similar observation led Karl Weick to define structure as the "...emergent and unfolding process of routines and improvisations operating more like recipes than blueprints."<sup>31</sup> As objective behaviors connect with subjective meaning, institutional logics—the cognitive frames of reference and mental models that organize systems and compel action—are created and solidified into the social structure of organizations.<sup>32</sup>

Another subjectivist theory sees the creation of structure as happening in communities of practice, which share common action, meaning, and language. When groups of individuals, bound by common interests and shared repertoires, work toward common goals, communities of practice are formed around the connections between these individuals regardless of whether they adhere to formalized hierarchical relationships. Communities of practice are based on the idea of self-organization through shared action and shared language. They are also language communities that create and stabilize certain objective aspects of social structure as by-products of intersubjective interpretation that is shaped by common language.<sup>33</sup>

Subjectivist views on the creation of structure have not replaced the prescriptive approach to organization design favored by objectivists. Rather, the effects of that view have yielded an increased emphasis on the culturally-embedded meanings that permeate design contexts and on the symbolism of representations used in traditional organization charts. Intersubjectivists, on the other hand, insist that there are no structures underlying human existence and therefore profess a substantially different view of organization design and structure. And, as you may very well recognize, each of these views is alive and well today, co-existing in subtle tension with the emergence of an integrative perspective that weaves the partial truths of each approach.

### *Intersubjectivist Perspective on Organization Design and Structure*

Intersubjectivist views on organizational structure are extremely skeptical of the principles of hierarchy, centralization, and control, and therefore seek to deconstruct any concepts and structures that presuppose order, rationality, and the need for control. While they have interest in the same elements of structure explored by objectivists, their deconstructive aims attempt to expose the repressive and marginalizing implications taken for granted by other views.

Organization theorist Stewart Clegg focused on the need for organizations to de-differentiate as a response to overly-differentiated structures that lead to an over-dependence on the most powerful members of the hierarchy. De-differentiation allows organizations to avoid the need for integrating overly-differentiated activities by reversing the conditions of differentiation that created the need for integration in the first place.<sup>34</sup> De-differentiation achieves integrated functioning not through the hierarchical and structural elaboration of the objectivist perspective but rather by empowering individuals to self-manage and self-coordinate activities in semi-autonomous teams. This emergent feature of postmodern organizations, as compared to their modern counterparts, yields de-differentiation in production and differentiation in consumption.<sup>35</sup> Such a reversal of modernist ideologies echoes Clegg's statement about our changing times: "...the illuminative powers of the modernist representation of bureaucracy fade into dusk in our increasingly postmodern organizational times."<sup>36</sup> The question of de-

differentiation's effect remains, however. Does it serve postmodernism's emancipatory interests as suggested by Hatch, or as suggested by Michael Muetzelfeldt, is it really a technique for managing individual motivation and job satisfaction within production processes that are indeed functionally differentiated.<sup>37</sup>

The theory of feminist organization seems to serve these same postmodern aims but through a more explicitly acknowledged balancing of modern and postmodern perspectives on organization structure. It suggests that meaning resides in the continuous movement between what is present and what is absent in our language. This allows for the use of oppositional logic to deconstruct modernist assumptions of structure. First on the chopping block are modernist notions of bureaucracy, which are seen as a male-gendered and white male-dominated form of organization. The resulting concept of feminist bureaucracy, proposed by Karen Lee Ashcraft, simultaneously balances elements of traditional bureaucracy with feminist structures. Paradoxical pressures are alleviated in feminist organizational structures by balancing the formal and informal, specialized and generalized tasks, and hierarchies and centralization with egalitarian and decentralized elements.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, David Farmer's anti-administration theory suggests that the logic of bureaucratic administration can be juxtaposed with radical skepticism towards the ends and means of administrative acts and hierarchical rationality. This view calls for the balancing of reflection on what is present with what is absent in policies, procedures, and actions in hopes of surfacing a deeper understanding of the implications of organizational structure and form.<sup>39</sup> Typical of intersubjectivist conceptions, these deconstructive theories do not attempt to formulate alternative constructions, as doing so would only contribute to the problem of creating and sustaining the grand narratives of modernity. The integral perspective, however, moves beyond this perceived limitation by asking how new approaches can be constructed from partial truths of others.

### *Integral Perspective on Organization Structure*

As we have seen, the essential disagreement on the nature of organizational structure boils down to the battle between structure and agency. The modern objectivists see the former as the most influential variable and the postmodern subjectivists and intersubjectivists posit the latter as the single most important ingredient in formation of organizational structure. The debate is so pronounced that even Giddens, a late-modernist, led the integrative charge by describing the nature of organizational structure as the duality of structure and agency. From an integral perspective, Giddens' choice of the term duality is more accurate than it may first appear as integral views the battle between human agency and structure as endless and evolutionary. First, one will never prove to be more fundamental than the other. Second, an evolutionary retrofit to Giddens' view that structure is intimately connected to the agency of interacting individuals suggests that as individuals develop so too does structure—locking both into a dualistic, evolutionary dance of co-arising aspects of reality, otherwise known as the Left and Right-hand quadrants.

The quadrants arise from two of the most fundamental distinctions we can make about reality. These are not dualities in the same sense as meant by Giddens, but rather two complementary or opposed aspects of reality. The first distinction, between interior and exterior, or subjective and objective, forms the Left and Right-hand quadrants. Because the debate over organizational structure concerns organizations, the second distinction—between individual and collective—renders the duality of agency and structure as an emphasis on either the lower-left (LL) or lower-right (LR) quadrants. Emphasizing the LL as most fundamental are theories that fall on the agency side of the debate. This includes some aspects of structuration theory, the theories on communities of practice and institutional logic, de-differentiation theory, feminist bureaucracy theory, and anti-administration theory. Emphasizing structure, or the LR quadrant, are Weber's ideal bureaucracy, structural contingency theory, Mintzberg's typology, organizational lifecycle theory, and stage models of development. I describe the debate concerning

which theory or group of theories is most correct as endless, because both the LL and LR are irreducible dimensions of reality, which co-arise. This is to say that they arise in correlation; every LL structure of shared meaning has a correlative structure in the LR. A change initiated in one quadrant has a correlative effect in the other. They arise simultaneously and interact in an interdependent, irreducible fashion. This is the first important implication integral theory has for organizational structure.

Another implication stems from an exploration of the second quadratic distinction between individual and collective. The Upper-quadrants concern individual, or idiosyncratic aspects of reality, and the Lower-quadrants concern collective or plural aspects of reality such as organizations. It is here that the core of the agency/structure debate takes place. Holonic theory—another important component included in the integral framework—reveals a critical feature of organizational functioning by offering insight into the relationship between individuals and collectives—or humans and organizations/environments. A holon is an entity that is simultaneously a whole and also a part of a larger whole. A simple Upper-Right quadrant developmental progression from atoms to molecules to cells makes this concept clear. An atom is simultaneously a part of a molecule and a whole that includes atomic particles. A molecule is simultaneously a part of a cell and a whole that includes atoms. Every entity in this progression is a whole/part, or holon.<sup>40</sup> Despite appearing in several varieties, only the individual and social types are needed for this discussion. A human being is an individual holon that has all four quadrants arising as aspects of its being-in-the-world. That is, a human has individual awareness or subjectivity (UL), individual behavior or objectivity and physical characteristics (UR), as well as shared intersections in both the lower quadrants, which appear as shared meaning (LL) and shared behavior or structure (LR).

A social holon such as an organization, work group, or political party is, in a very simplistic way, comprised of individual holons. A social holon, unlike its members, does not have all four quadrants arising as aspects of its being-in-the-world. Put differently, only individual holons have agency because only individual holons have a dominant monad, or central “I” that controls its operations. Social holons do not have a dominant

monad and therefore cannot control their members in the same way that an individual controls its constituent parts. A social holon has the two lower quadrants as dimensions of it beingness, and therefore features a dominant mode of discourse or resonance, which consists of shared LL signifieds, and a dominant mode of production or structure, which consists of LR signifiers or shared artifacts. Therefore, it is misleading to say that a social holon is comprised of its members. In the truest sense, a social holon (such as an organization) is comprised of its members plus their shared mode of discourse (or shared Lower-Left quadrant dimensions) and their shared mode of production/structure (or shared Lower-Right quadrant dimensions).<sup>41</sup> Please don't allow the somewhat restrictive nature of the terms discourse and production to render this definition of social holon as reductionistic. Remember, these terms represent the multifarious complexity of the shared LL and LR life-worlds of a social holon's members.

These shared modes exist simultaneously and cannot be reduced to each other. In regards to the agency/structure debate or the nature of organization structure in general, the following conclusions are derived from an integral perspective: (1) organizations are social holons, (2) organizations do not have a super-agency over their members, (3) organizations are comprised of their member's shared intersections of discourse and production, (4) a nexus-agency or agency-in-communion is derived from these shared intersections, and (5) implicit organization structure is created by the interplay of its members shared LL and LR dimensions, even if explicit structure is imposed by an organization's leader or board of directors. With the social holonic nature of organizations being so fundamentally defined by the lower quadrant intersections of its members, it follows that an integral approach to organization design would equally account for their shared interior and exteriors.

### *Integral Perspective on Organization Design*

If all holons emerge holoarchically, with every next higher level transcending and including every previous level, wouldn't it make sense that organizational design reflected this developmental reality? And, if so, wouldn't it make sense that it did so in more than just the Upper-Left quadrant? These ideas, along with the conclusions outlined

above, have important implications for organization design. Several key components of Elliot Jaques' concept of requisite organization (RO), emerging from his stratified systems theory approach to management, illustrate these concepts implicitly through application.

Before introducing some basic RO concepts, I would like to preface this treatment by indicting its brevity as neither doing justice to Jaques' body of work or covering it comprehensively. This treatment is included for three simple reasons. First, I believe Jaques' work has not gained the exposure it deserves. Second, it offers a direct challenge to the intersubjectivist perspective through its use of hierarchy. In the hands of a skilled integral organization leader, RO's concepts can support the re-entrance of healthy, actualization hierarchies, which were confused with unhealthy, dominator hierarchies in one of postmodernism's deconstructive rants. Finally, Jaques' articulation of information processing and task complexity offers a missing UR developmental correlate to more commonly cited UL development of organizational leaders—and, as such, his work complements rather than contradicts the findings of UL development oriented theorists.

Jaques describes four qualities needed by individuals to function successfully in a managerial hierarchy. These qualities, while not identified by Jaques as such, cover the quadrants in balanced manner:

1. The necessary potential capability or time-horizon (TH), which is a measure of the level of a person's information processing complexity—his or her raw native ability—to match the level of complexity of the role, measured in time-span.<sup>42</sup> (UL and UR correlation in role)
2. The skilled knowledge (K/S) required to function in the role.<sup>43</sup> (UR, LR)
3. Sufficient valuing of the work in the role, so as to be fully committed (C) to doing the work.<sup>44</sup>(UL, LL)
4. The ability to carry out the required behaviors (RB).<sup>45</sup> (UR)

Jaques describes these four fundamental qualities as superior to the common yet sometimes destructive practice of using personality traits as requirements for certain

types of work. If the individuals in consideration have an appropriate degree of demonstrated sociability, initiative, honesty, loyalty, and reliability, staffing decisions made in reference to these qualities will help leaders get the right people, in the right roles, at the right time, and in all functions of the organization.

With the right people in the right roles, the next piece of the organizational design puzzle according to Jaques is to create the correct operating conditions by giving managers four essential authorities. These may seem like common sense, but they often get caught up in confusion between individual and social holonic agency. In line with the integral perspective on organizational structure, these authorities are granted to the individual manager not to that manager’s supervisor, thereby, from an integral perspective, insuring one aspect of healthy hierarchical functioning. In doing, the manger’s agency is honored, allowing them to enact strategy at their level of the organization and helping to create functional people systems. Jaques four authorities are:

1. Authority to veto an appointment if they believe a candidate cannot do the work required for the role.<sup>46</sup>
2. The authority to remove an unsatisfactory subordinate from a role after due process.<sup>47</sup>
3. The authority to decide what types of assignments to give subordinates and not be bypassed by their own managers in this regard.<sup>48</sup>
4. Authority to decide at what level of effectiveness a subordinate is working and what level of merit pay the subordinate should receive.<sup>49</sup>

Once the organizational roles and authorities are in place, Jacques suggests structuring those roles by creating a hierarchy that relates to an individual’s developmental capability to process information. The result is what he calls levels of work.

<b>Stratum</b>	<b>Time-Horizon</b>	<b>Typical Roles</b>
VIII	50 years plus	Super corporation CEO (i.e., GE, Exxon)
VII	20 – 50 years	International Corporation CEO

VI	10 – 20 years	Group Vice President, International Corporation
V	5 – 10 years	Business Unit President, CEO of midsized firm
IV	2 – 5 years	General Manager, large plant manager, Vice President
III	1 – 2 years	Line Manager, Department Director, Senior Professional
II	3 – 12 months	Front-line manager, Supervisor
I	Up to 3 months	Front-line employee, lead hand

Figure 3. Levels of Work.<sup>50</sup>

The levels of work concept is a key principle in RO-based organization design. It is included as an integral perspective on design because its hierarchy is not arbitrary, but rather incorporates UR developmental unfolding, a very real and often overlooked aspect of individual holonic development. Empirical research conducted by Jaques and others on RO-based organization design’s effect on strategy implementation is compelling—so much so that I feel it is of a comparable degree of importance to the UL developmental research conducted by folks such as Robert Kegan and Bill Torbert.<sup>51</sup> Please note, that this is a cross-quadrant comparison. The development of a leader’s consciousness concerns UL evolution, while Jaques work concerns the evolution of UR behavioral and task complexity; these are not the same developmental movements. Further investigation may indeed yield developmental correlates between the two domains, but in the meanwhile, the conclusions of one domain should not be seen as a violation of conclusions in the other. An integral perspective would rather seek to understand how they interrelate and how they can simultaneously inform organization design.

The next two key elements of an integral perspective on organizational design stem from an application of Jaques’ work to a design system called holoacracy.<sup>52</sup> Designed and first implemented by Brian Robertson, holoacracy features two elements—circle organization and double linking—both of which are explicitly informed by an integral perspective on organizational structure. And, both components honor the nature of social holons in so far as they work directly to create a healthy dominant mode of discourse and production.

Circle organization attempts to reconfigure a typical organizational hierarchy as a holoarchy of semi-autonomous, self-organizing circles. The next higher circle determines the aim for each circle, which retains the authority and responsibility to execute, measure, and control the processes it employs to achieve that aim.<sup>53</sup> While not mentioned explicitly by Robertson, if the lead role in each circle had the four qualities and was given the four authorities mentioned by Jaques, and if the roles contained in each circle were arranged in accord with the levels of work, a truly integral organization design could be theorized.

Next, holoacracy employs the concept of double linking to connect circles across the organization. Even though it goes unnamed on Robertson's report, double linking seems based on Rensis Likert's Linking Pin theory, which asserts that successful managers link to both those who supervise them and those for whom they are a direct report.<sup>54</sup> In holoacracy, double linking requires that a lower circle be linked to the next higher circle by two people. The first resides in the higher circle and sits in the lower circle as the person ultimately accountable for their results, and the second sits in the lower circle and is elected to the higher as a representative to surface concerns.<sup>55</sup> One beneficial result of this dual linking is a perspectival redundancy that allows the concerns of both circles to be represented by two people coming from opposite directions.

A theorized design structure combining Jaques' and Robertson's contributions honors the difference between individual and social holons and balances the structure/agency debate. Circle organization places individuals into working groups that make up social holons within the larger organizational social holon. A levels of work informed holoarchy of double linked social holons connects individuals, possessing Jaques' four qualities and given the four authorities, with other individuals residing in different social holons across the organization. As each social holon's dominant mode of production/structure takes on this structure, their dominant mode of discourse reconfigures in relation to both the strategic direction carried through the higher circle's downlink and the representation carried from their circle's up-link. The interpenetration of social holonic nexus-agency with individual holonic agency prevents misdirected or repressive agency of either

variety through a structure that sets individual and groups into healthy communion with each other. The result might very well be a balance of structure and agency unrealized by other organization design forms—as far as I know, however, evidence of this effect has not yet been demonstrated.

An integrated organization design, incorporating the five concepts described in this section, honors the conclusions uncovered by taking an integral perspective on organization structure. Even though the effects of a design structure informed by the four qualities, the four authorities, levels of work, circle organization, and double-linking are not fully understood or tested, initial attempts at integrating several of these elements have yielded positive results. As we shift our focus toward a discussion of organization culture—the last element of organization theory to be explored—it is important to point out that the vacillation between meta-theory, theory, and applied theory aims to implicitly demonstrate how an integral approach to organization theory is not entirely removed from the realm of relevant application and practice.

### **Organizational Culture**

Traditionally, the concept of culture referred to the cultivation of crops. Not surprisingly, organization culture was therefore not always part of the standard discourse on organization theory. Not until sociology and anthropology coalesced as academic disciplines did the cultivation of human beings gain consideration by those interested in modernist dynamics of organizations. Elliot Jaques' 1952 publication of *The Changing Culture of a Factory* was one of the first to conceptualize organizational culture.<sup>56</sup> He argued that the modernist emphasis on structure and function had led researchers to ignore the human element of organizations. By the early 1980s, organizational culture had become a hot topic, with organizational leaders and theorists alike seeing it as the new way to enhance organizational effectiveness. The debate between competing historical perspectives on culture began as quickly as the acceptance of the concept emerged.

### *Objectivist Perspective on Organization Culture*

Dutch organization theorist Geert Hofstede's empirical research on national culture traits in late 1970s IBM legitimized culture as a topic in organization theory. He demonstrated that culture was a portal through which society influences organizations. This effect was particularly pronounced in the multi-national context in which he worked. He identified four cultural dimensions, stemming from differences observed in IBM's subcultures: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. collectivism, and masculinity vs. femininity.

Power distance refers to the way in which organizational members relate to an unequal distribution of power, wealth, and status. High power distance cultures such as Brazil, Singapore and Arabic countries relied heavily on hierarchy. Subordinates saw hierarchies as an existential inequality, and therefore expected that an autocratic boss would tell them what to do. Lower power distance cultures, like Denmark, Austria, and Israel, viewed hierarchies as displaying an inequality of roles that did not reflect essential differences among people. Subordinates rating as low on power distance expected their supervisors to be more democratic in nature and to consult with them on organizational functioning.<sup>57</sup>

Uncertainty avoidance describes how individuals from various cultures have learned to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. Hofstede discovered a large variance in national cultures and a notable impact on organizations. The degree to which certain individuals felt threatened by ambiguity and risk determined their level of tolerance as either high or low. In cultures of low uncertainty avoidance, he found that people were accepting of innovative ideas, differences of opinion, and behavior that did not conform to social norms. High avoidance cultures were found to be more heavily formalized and standardized with rules, regulations, and control used to reduce ambiguity and the behavior typically accepted in low avoidance cultures.<sup>58</sup>

Individualism versus collectivism refers to the degree to which a culture reinforces group conformity in behavior. Evidence for this dimension is seen across all areas of society, from religious beliefs to living arrangements, and education to military practices.

Hofstede discovered that highly individualistic cultures—who view individual rights as paramount and individualism as an expression of well-being—gave precedence to tasks over relationships in an organizational setting. In collectivist cultures, individuality is seen as undesirable and possibly alienating. As such, a sense of identity and belongingness emerges through the formation of cohesive and supportive groups. Organizationally, individuals from collectivist cultures gave precedence to relationships over tasks.<sup>59</sup>

Hofstede's final dimension, that of masculine versus feminine, indicates how the separation of gender roles manifests in organizational cultures. In highly masculine cultures, men were more assertive and emphasis was placed on work goals, achievement, competition, and career advancement. In highly feminine cultures, gender separation was less pronounced and individuals were most concerned with interpersonal relationships, service, quality of life, intuition, and preserving the physical environment. Next, we turn to Edgar Schein's theory of organizational culture, which, while investigating culture at organizational level rather than national level, is influenced by Hofstede's work, which defined the webs of meaning that set the context in which organizational culture emerges.

Anthropologists such as E. B. Tyler traditionally defined culture as the shared knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, and customs shared by humans as members of a society.<sup>60</sup> Schein's treatment of culture features four additional elements that further define the nature of shared interiors. First, culture implies that in addition to being shared, the beliefs and practices have structural stability. Second, culture has depth, or it is constituted by the elements of human existence that are less tangible or visible than behavioral manifestations. Third, culture has breadth in that it pervades all aspects of an organization. Lastly, culture has a pattern that integrates its various elements into a coherent whole.<sup>61</sup> These refinements surface in Schien's definition of organizational culture:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has

worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.<sup>62</sup>

Basic assumptions, the core element of Schein's theory of culture, are embedded in this definition as the formative driver to all cultural emergence. In a system he calls the levels of culture, Schein describes how basic, unseen assumptions about reality nurture and support a group's values, which determine cultural norms and are manifested as cultural artifacts, or expressions of behavior and action. Basic assumptions operate below the surface of awareness and are therefore often taken for granted. They surface in the culture's values when decisions are made about social principles, goals, standards, and beliefs. These values, which are more accessible to awareness than assumptions, still operate below the surface to some degree, that is, until they are challenged. When members behave outside of the value-influenced cultural norms, values are called into question and normative pressures are placed on members who act outside of these unwritten behavioral rules. Artifacts are tangible expressions of norms and values. An understanding of a culture's values and assumptions derived through an investigation of its artifacts, while very commonplace, is misleading, says Schien, as an artifact's distance from the cultural core leads to ambiguous interpretations.<sup>63</sup>

The defining characteristic of these two objectivist perspectives on culture is that they describe the observable dimensions of culture in a way that allows for easy prescriptions for management. The subjectivist critique of this approach focuses on the unsurfaced cultural assumptions of the researcher. As we will see, the subjectivist perspective emphasizes the reporting and description of culture based on subjective knowledge derived from inside the cultural territory under investigation.

### *Subjectivist Perspective on Organization Culture*

Adherents to a subjectivist perspective on organizational culture see it as being constructed when interacting individuals interpret their reality and make collective sense of meaning. Employing a subjectivist ontology and an interpretative epistemology,

subjectivists view the meaning derived from an understanding of cultural artifacts as context dependent. This concept, called contextualizing, is central to the subjectivist approach. Rather than viewing artifacts in isolation, they seek to experience them where and when they naturally occur, in an effort to understand the contextualizing effects of culture from the inside as do members.

Similar to objectivists, the subjectivists investigate artifacts, but they do so in a manner that is more so concerned with symbols. According to sociologist Abner Cohen, “symbols are objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotion, and impel men to action.”<sup>64</sup> An artifact is made into a symbol if it is used to communicate and make meaning. Therefore, not all artifacts are symbols. Subjectivists are concerned less with the specific meaning of symbols but rather the process by which symbolic meaning is constructed. Similar to Schein, who identified the difficulty of understanding cultural assumptions based on interpretations of artifacts, the subjectivists make this point a central element in their discourse. An understanding of a culture's core can only be had by digging beneath the levels of artifacts and symbols from within the context in which that meaning is created to determine the essence of a culture.

The concept of digging beneath the surface to discover symbolic meaning is described as thick description by Clifford Geertz, whose 1973 book *The Interpretation of Culture* injected the subjectivist perspective into mainstream organization theory. Geertz's methods were ethnographic in origin and founded on his belief that culture was the web of significance created by man and that their study was not driven by science in search of laws but interpretation in search of meaning.<sup>65</sup> Thick description seeks to understand the meaning of artifacts used as symbols by understanding the inferences and implications of the behavior underlying their use. Thick description involves the use of contextualizing, vivid descriptions, clear documentation, direct quotes of sources, and the comparing and contrasting of one's cultural assumptions and beliefs with those of the culture being described.

Thick description greatly influenced the practice of using organizational stories and narratives as tools for understanding culture. Organizational narratives are stories of real events that when analyzed reveal aspects of an organization's culture and specific practices. They have come to form the basis of narrative epistemology, which believes that organizations can be understood by investigating the stories that members tell, because humans develop knowledge by listening to and telling stories to one another and themselves. Communications scholar Ellen O'Connor's research investigating narratives in organizational start-ups revealed three types of narratives at play in organizations: (1) personal narratives that include the life history and vision of the founder, (2) generic narratives that created the companies business plans and strategies, and (3) situational narratives of critical events that explain why things are done in certain ways in the organization.<sup>66</sup> O'Connor's findings were corroborated by an interpretative study of CEO interviews from the *Harvard Business Review*. Nearly all of the CEOs in consideration scored high on narrative competence ability with the founders/entrepreneurs relying heavily on the epic personal narrative type.<sup>67</sup>

Another interesting emergent sourced in the subjectivist perspective is the theatre metaphor, which likens organizational culture to acting in that individuals in both arenas perform in various roles. The implications of this metaphor have been taken in several directions. First, organizations are described as having a front stage where members put on their public face and co-create an organizational performance to stakeholders. They also have a back-stage where roles are loosened and members behave differently. The gap in performance between front and back stage can be viewed as an indicator of organizational culture.<sup>68</sup> Next, organization theorist Heather Hopfl compares actors and organizational members in that they both have to give up a part of themselves in order to play a role successfully. She argued that the cost for corporate actors, who act for different reasons than those working in theatre, must be accounted for in terms of the hypocrisy, degradation, stress, and emotional burnout that result from performing.<sup>69</sup> The theatrical means by which organizations perform their tasks are investigated by the theory of organizational performativity. In a move similar to the intersubjectivist perspective, its investigation is aimed at why the "whole person" is not accepted in the workplace.

### *Intersubjectivist Perspective on Organization Culture*

The intersubjectivist perspective views organizational narratives as the textual space where multiple voices and their language systems combine to construct meaning. This notion, referred to as intertextuality by French linguist Julia Kristeva, suggests that texts exist in a network of other texts where they reference and refer to each other in a way that provides some of their meaning. Therefore, the idea that a text has an original meaning intended by its author is off base and does not account for the reading and re-writing that occurs by many different authors and readers over time. When this concept is applied to organizations, culture, organizational members, symbols, and actions are viewed as interwoven texts that create one another via ongoing mutual interpenetration. In the hands of intersubjectivists, the concept of intertextuality has led to radical uses of narrative, which undermine their understanding and deconstruct their meaning.<sup>70</sup>

Some intersubjectivist researchers view culture as inconsistent, ambiguous, and in a state of constant change. They believe that short-term alliances never form into subcultures and never into a unified culture as its discourse is always changing. This view sees culture as fragmentation, opposite from the typical shared meaning, shared assumptions view held by other perspectives. A fragmented culture has no unity of understanding, no consensus and, even if this appears to be the case, it is very temporary. As organizational dynamics unfold, different aspects of member's identities and role performances are called into play and therefore, what seems like a consensual configuration in one moment is bound to change as soon as the dynamics shift. The idea that a unified culture exists in what is really fragmentation is attacked as a power play, a guise used to mask manipulation and control of others. The next intersubjectivist theory applied to culture takes this manipulation head on.

The ideological nature of modernist narratives which consider stories to be expressions of organizational unity are, in the view of postmodern communication scholar Dennis Mumby, systematic distortions of culture because they support relationships of dependence and domination by maintaining particular meanings.<sup>71</sup> The deconstruction of

organizational narratives yields a range of competing interpretations, which, when not offered explicitly in the story, are called into question as manipulative attempts to have culture join around a single meaning or interpretation.

French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra, which means "no reality," applied to organizational culture leaves us with no culture to study. Rather, proponents of this view see members engaged in simulations, images, and interactive performances. Simulacra is used by intersubjectivists to deconstruct the notion that cultures are linked to underlying assumption and beliefs systems. They maintain that a cohesive culture is merely an illusion created by hollow rituals, symbols, and seemingly shared actions, all of which support a range of different interpretations. This concept has been applied by a number of researchers. Studying female engineers, Joyce Fletcher concluded that relational practices such as mutual empowering and team collaboration were undervalued, ignored, and caused to disappear by masculine-biased culture.<sup>72</sup>

Sociologist Douglass Ezzy suggested that the notion of trust and family in an organization culture is a simulacrum that is contradicted by competitiveness and a focus on individual achievement.<sup>73</sup> Ethnographic researcher Gideon Kunda found workers who complained that it was difficult to maintain a boundary between their organizational and true self. They worked long hours at the cost of their personal lives and encountered higher rates of burnout, rendering the simulacrum of organization autonomy as a way to repress and control those who believe in it.<sup>74</sup> With the objectivists believing that culture is "out there" awaiting observation and understanding, and the intersubjectivists finding shared meaning to be an illusion, it is safe to conclude that organizational culture is a hotly contested aspect of organization theory. The integral perspective clarifies several competing claims to the nature of culture and offers an approach that once again allows for the integration of these historical perspectives.

### *Integral Perspective on Organization Culture*

When offering high-level generalizations about the quadrants component of the Integral framework, the Lower-Left quadrant is often described as culture. Understood as the shared meaning, understanding, and beliefs of an individual or social holon, describing

the Lower Left as the domain of culture is in general accordance with the three historical perspectives usage of the term. When showing how the quadrant domains have manifested in language systems as pronouns, the Lower Left is described as the second-person pronoun “you,” and most accurately as the first-person plural pronoun “we.” When one person is speaking to another person, you have a first person talking to a second person. The first person has access to their individual interior, but they cannot “see” the other person’s interior.

However, when they reach a place where both individuals feel that “we understand each other,” they experience or “feel” each other’s interiors in resonance and a “we-space” is created. The concept of a “we-space” is the most foundational aspect of cultural resonance or unity. An integral perspective of organizational culture explores three critical concepts pertaining to the Lower-Left quadrant: (1) the two different modes of investigating “we-spaces,” (2) four levels of cultural expression and analysis, and (3) the effects of Lower-Left quadrant absolutism.

The different methods employed by objectivists and subjectivists for cultural investigations should not be relied on to the exclusion of the other, because they do not stand in opposition to each other as often conceived. Rather, they reveal the cultural domain from different, but equally valid perspectives; the objectivists investigating cultural expression from the “outside,” and the subjectivists from the “inside.” As seen in Figure 4, the four quadrants are rendered as 8 distinct zones when a holonic boundary, represented as the circle, is used to create the distinction between the inside and outside view in every quadrant.<sup>75</sup>

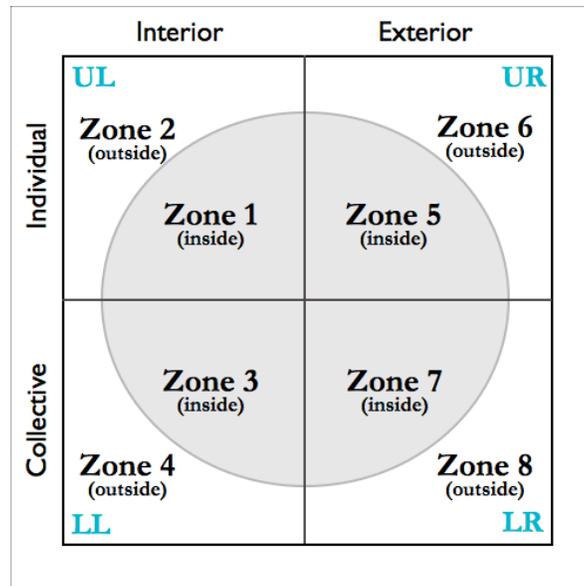


Figure 4. The Eight Zones

In the LL cultural domain, consider the phenomenological difference between investigating shared interior phenomena from the inside via a hermeneutic methodology, revealing what an interior *feels* like compared to investigating it from the outside via an ethnomethodological perspective, which reveals what an interior *looks* like. Consider this in regard to the theoretical perspectives explained earlier. Modernist objectivist researchers such as Hofstede and Schein study cultures through observational and empirical methods that situate them outside the cultural boundary looking in. From this vantage point, they fail to capture a refined understanding of how meaning is intersubjectively constructed, but do offer very worthwhile generalizations—such as Hofstede’s cultural dimensions or Schien’s levels of culture—that apply across cultures. Subjectivist approaches such as Geertz’s thick description and O’Connor’s narrative types, investigate culture from inside the cultural boundary, thereby revealing the dynamics of meaning construction at play in particular contexts. An integral perspective does not recognize one of these approaches as more fundamental or better than another, but rather as distinctly different modes for investigating the Lower-Left domain of culture. An integral approach to organizational culture would include both inside and outside—subjectivist and objectivist—methodologies to develop the most inclusive, or most integral, view of culture.

To further integralize an approach to organizational culture, a simple Lower-Left quadrant developmental spectrum is added to the equation. Development occurs in all quadrants as holonic expressions unfold in ranked holarchies where each level transcends and includes every previous level. If a four-stage progression is used in the Lower Left, four distinct levels of cultural expression emerge, as seen in Figure 5.

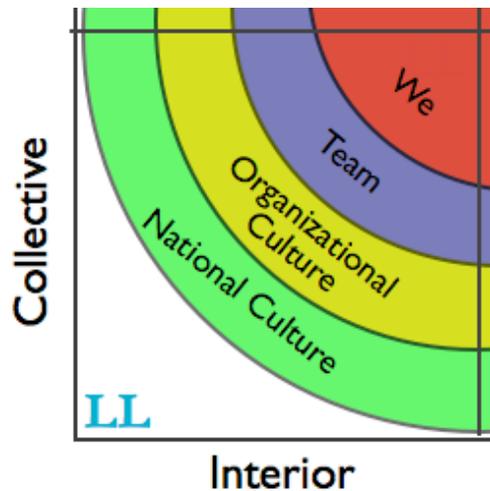


Figure 5. Four Levels of Cultural Expression

By differentiating the expression of culture into these four levels, an integral analysis of organization culture allows one to identify the level of investigation, to cover the entire spectrum of expression adequately, and to avoid making broad conclusions about culture that are valid only at or for a certain level. A quick indexing of the approaches utilized by the three different historical perspectives shows that most theories—from narrative epistemology to the theatre metaphor and Schein’s levels of culture to deconstruction—investigate the two intermediate levels: the team or subculture level, which concern groups of individuals, and the organizational level, which includes the aggregate of teams and subcultures comprising a full organizational culture. Covered more sparsely are the “we” level, which concerns the resonance and “we-space” creation of two individuals, and the national level of cultural background. Focusing on less than the full spectrum is not problematic if identified as such. With each level featuring different dynamics and having different effects on organization culture as a whole, the singular investigation of

levels is warranted. Problems arise when one level is taken as *the* definition of culture or when certain conclusions are applied to all levels.

The latter is most exemplified by the intersubjectivist argument that culture doesn't exist because cultural unity and shared understanding is a falsehood. A nuanced and more integral perspective on this would say that authentic shared understanding is more difficult to develop at the organizational level than at the individual level, but to conclude that culture is not real is to deny the verifiable reality of the most complex and most simple levels of cultural background and shared resonance. The conclusion at the other end of this spectrum is equally problematic. The extreme belief that objective and individual truth does not exist because all knowledge is intersubjectively grounded renders the LL quadrant as the most fundamental or the most real. Found in some versions of postmodernism's attack on all things modern, this example of quadrant absolutism elevates a partial truth to the absolute level, and prevents a balanced application of an integral perspective.

Echoing the sentiment of Gareth Morgan—whose central message about organizational culture is that our understanding is often far more fragmented and superficial than reality itself—the realm of shared interiors, at all levels of analysis, is indeed elusive and in many ways mysterious.<sup>76</sup> Fortunately, with an integral approach, we can harness the valid partial truths of each theory, from every historical perspective, to achieve an understanding that is far less fragmented than any current alternatives.

## **Conclusion**

An integral approach starts with a simple question: How can we develop a map of human experience in which everyone, throughout history and across different knowledge paradigms and competing historical perspectives, is at least partially correct? Put differently, it asks if there exists a map—built on the assumption that no one is 100% wrong all the time—which distills the essential threads of these partial truths into a elegant tapestry, or integral framework, that can be used to make sense of even the most disparate or seemingly incompatible knowledge claims? The answer, I believe, is yes,

and a partial result in the organizational realm is demonstrated here. By using only two of the core elements of the integral framework—quadrants and levels—and a handful of concepts—holons and zones—I have tried to reveal how the integral approach can be used to make nearly two centuries of organization theorizing compatible at the meta-theoretical level through an investigation of objectivist, subjectivist and intersubjectivist epistemological perspectives.

By constructing this compatibility from the deeper structural points of integration rather than simple accommodations of perspective-specific organizational observations, we can avoid Gioia and Pitre's warnings about multiparadigmatic theorizing. Instead of increased fragmentation and provincialism, the use of integral meta-theory guides the outlining organization meta-theory toward an achievement of the opposite results. Each historical perspective's different theoretical tenets, assumptions, vocabularies, and goals are not a barrier to the enactment principle of integral methodological pluralism. This is because each historical perspective or paradigm brings forth different but fully compatible experienced phenomena—if, that is, the phenomena are held in a framework that accounts for each enacted quadrant domain. So, again, the opposite of Gioia and Pitre's sentiments is revealed: the bona fide synthesis of competing theoretical views into some general model or grand theory is not precluded.

Put differently, it is not rendered impossible. And, to further this point, I think integral organizational theorist Mark Edwards would concur. In developing an integral meta-theory for organizational transformation, Edwards arrives at a similar conclusion through a meta-theory building method that examined over 300 sources and identified 24 conceptual lenses or components in need of inclusion by a truly integral meta-theory. By not directly confronting the question of if an organizational meta-theory is possible but by building one himself, readers are left to conclude that Edwards takes the question as given. After confirming that every component or lens of the AQAL framework was present in the organizational theories he studied, his research aimed to identify the conceptual lenses that were missing from AQAL and to propose a more rigorous method for building integral meta-theory. His suggested refinements indict AQAL as an

incomplete meta-theory, but again confirm as feasible the use of integral meta-theory to guide the construction of organizational meta-theory.<sup>77</sup>

By honoring every enacted quadrant—and level, line, state and type—the integral approach emerges as a “grand theory” that permits the situating, synthesizing, and integrating of each paradigm or historical perspective’s approach to organization theory. Despite my vacillation between meta-theory, theory, and applied theory, I hope to have at least implicitly demonstrated that an integral approach to organizations is also not entirely removed from the realm of relevant application and practice. If the work of integral practitioners continues to validate that statement, an integral approach holds considerable, and largely unmet, potential for extending our understanding of organizational dynamics. By uncovering the deep structural patterns that connect one paradigm to every other, it provides the ideal foundation upon which to build the future organization meta-theory.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Integral Approach, please see: Wilber, K. (2006). Integral spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world Boston, Shambhala, Wilber, K. (2007). The integral vision: A very short introduction to the revolutionary integral approach to life, god, the universe, and everything. Boston, Shambhala.

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<sup>7</sup> Wilber, K. (2003). "Excerpt B: The many ways we touch—Three principles helpful for any integrative approach."

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<sup>20</sup> Shrivastava, P. (1995). "Ecocentric management for a risk society." Academy of Management Review(20): 118-137.

<sup>21</sup> When "we" is used as the second-person perspective, what is being referred to is technically first-person plural. "The rationale is typically something to the effect of: 'We' is technically first-person plural, and 'you' is technically second-person. However, Integral Theory makes the distinction that oftentimes, when

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people are using the pronoun 'you' they are interacting with other people from a third-person perspective, treating them effectively as if they were an 'it,' or an object. Thus, most times when 'you' is used, a third-person perspective is being inhabited by the speaker (the 'I,' or first-person). When any 'I' and 'you' have a chance to reach a mutual, or shared understanding, then the 'you' is transformed from an 'it,' or a third-person object, into an actual second-person with whom the 'I' can reach a shared understanding. That shared or mutual understanding is what we call a 'we,' or a circle of 'we,' or the LL quadrant. That 'we' is composed of at least one first-person and one second-person, and thus we often refer to the 'we' quadrant as the second-person perspective—the perspective of shared understanding between a first-person and a second-person (though a 'we' is often comprised of many more members than just two)."

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 20

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.

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- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.p. 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.p. 17.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.p. 17.
- <sup>50</sup> Dutrisac, M., H. Koplowitz, et al. Ibid.An executive's guide to RO-based organizational design.p. 40.
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- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Hatch, M. J. and A. L. Cunliffe (2006). Organization theory: Modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives. New York, Oxford University Press.p. 178.
- <sup>61</sup> Schein, E. (2005). Organizational culture and leadership (3rd ed.). San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.pp. 14-15.
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- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.; Hatch, M. J. and A. L. Cunliffe (2006). Organization theory: Modern, symbolic and postmodern perspectives. New York, Oxford University Press.
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