

# FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE:

Using Ken Wilber's Four Quadrants for your organization's journey towards more sustainability



Ken Wilber's Integral Theory provides a comprehensive framework that can be applied to address complexity in organizations, for instance in the context of shifting towards greater sustainability. His Four Quadrants model is a powerful tool for achieving a holistic understanding and approach. The Four Quadrants divide reality into four interrelated dimensions: individual-interior (subjective), individual-exterior (objective), collective-interior (intersubjective), and collective-exterior (interobjective).

## How to use this tool

Conduct this exercise in a workshop with a change team or leadership team to map and understand the organization's sustainability journey.

### Workshop steps

#### 1. Setup:

- On a flipchart, draw a cross to create four quadrants. Label the axes as follows: Interior, Exterior, Individual, Collective.

## 2. Describe the Target State

- **Objective:** Define the organization's desired state regarding sustainability or regeneration for the next 2-5 years using the four quadrants.
- **Individual Exercise:**
  - Each participant identifies what should appear in the organization's future for each quadrant and writes their thoughts on sticky notes. Refer to the quadrant descriptions provided below as examples, but also consider aspects unique to your organization.
- **Group Activity:**
  - Collect and organize the sticky notes on the flipchart. Group similar ideas together.

## 3. Discussion:

- Review the collected input and identify consistencies and discrepancies. Aim to reach a common understanding where possible, recognizing that not all aspects need to be agreed upon fully. Embrace ambiguity as part of the process.

## 4. Describe the Current State:

- Repeat the previous steps to describe how sustainability is currently perceived and implemented in the organization. Identify the present aspects and initiatives already in place.

## 5. Comparison and Analysis:

- **Objective:** Compare the current state with the target state.
- **Discussion Questions:**
  - What can we learn about the gap between the current and future states?
  - Where are we already investing significant energy?
  - Where are the blind spots in our current approach?
  - How can activities in one quadrant support improvements in the other quadrants?

By following these steps, you will create a comprehensive and nuanced picture of your organization's sustainability landscape, identifying areas for growth and development.

## Description of the quadrants

### Individual-Interior (Subjective, top-left quadrant)

This quadrant focuses on the internal experiences, values, and mindsets of individuals within the organization.

- **Awareness and Commitment:** Personal commitment to and individual reasons for sustainability efforts; alignment of personal values with the organizational goals.
- **Leadership development:** Are leadership programs oriented towards the development of inner skills needed to better navigate in complex problems?

### Individual-Interior (Objective, top-right quadrant)

This quadrant focuses on the internal experiences, values, and mindsets of individuals within the organization.

- **Skill building:** Skills needed for implementing sustainable practices. This involves skills like energy efficiency, waste reduction and sustainable supply chain management.
- **Performance metrics:** Performance metrics and incentives that encourage sustainable behavior (and discourage non-sustainable behavior).

### Collective-Interior (Intersubjective, bottom-left quadrant)

This quadrant involves the shared values, culture and worldviews within the organization.

- **Sustainable culture:** Alignment of organizations shared values with sustainability. Influence of agreed upon values in collaboration, internal and external communication and storytelling. Authenticity of sustainability efforts.
- **Engagement with stakeholders:** Dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, owners and community) for creating a shared vision for sustainability.

### Collective-Exterior (Interobjective, bottom-right quadrant)

This quadrant focuses on the systems, processes and structures within the organization.

- **Systems and Processes:** Sustainable practices in development and operations, supply chain management, eco-friendly product design and green building/heating/cooling practices.
- **Engagement with stakeholders:** Dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, owners and community) for creating a shared vision for sustainability.

### Want to learn more?

This is just one of many ways to apply the integral model to sustainability initiatives. If you're interested in exploring more ideas on **Regenerative Organizational Development**, I would be delighted to have an informal discussion with you. Please feel free to reach out!



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