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A Values-Based and Integral Perspective on Strategic Management

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This article seeks to apply the work of Ken Wilber's integral theory to the strategic management of organizations. A Model for Integral Strategy is introduced which uses three tiers of strategic planning: internal, competitive, and external. Traditional strategic models address competitive and exterior components; however, interior individual values are missing from these models. The Integral Strategy Model helps combine economic, social, and environmental imperatives with values, social responsibility, and sustainability. This approach can be implemented now in order to balance short-term with long-term objectives, economic and non-economic concerns, and to understand the change that is needed at a strategic level in order to address the sustainability challenges facing organizations. The main contribution to strategy and organizational change literature is to demonstrate the application of integral theory in order to overcome the impasses to unifying economic with ethical, ecological and mind-body-soul considerations as organizations face the sustainability challenge.

A VALUES-BASED AND INTEGRAL PERSPECTIVE OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Introduction

This article draws upon the work of Ken Wilber's (1995, 1996) integral theory, in order to develop a model applicable to strategic management and organizational development and change. Our application creates a model that shows how the incorporation of personal ethics, values, and corporate culture are the building blocks for the development of what we will term an integral strategy, an approach we deem necessary for organizations to balance short- and long-term sustainability challenges. Wilber's work (2000, 2001) integrates several schools of psychology, philosophy (Eastern & Western), science, and religion from many cultures into one model containing four quadrants. While integral theory has been applied to organizational development and strategic change (*see* Cacioppe & Edwards, 2005a, 2005b; Landrum & Gardner, 2005; Paulson, 2002; and, Young, 2002 for detailed descriptions), it has not been applied to strategy. Historically it has been argued that one cannot simultaneously apply economic and ethical considerations to strategy (Windsor, 2006). Despite the success of companies such as Ben & Jerry's (Unilever), Whole Foods, and Patagonia, (and many others), there is still an argument that economic and ethical considerations are incommensurate. Our contribution is to overcome this impasse by incorporating both economic and ethical/values considerations into an integral model that informs strategic planning.

Strategic management research has recently moved toward a synthesis of theories beyond economics, yet the field is still primarily dominated by economic theory (Dobbin & Baum, 2000). A review of publications over a twelve-year period in *Strategic Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and *Academy of Management Review* reflects publications with a predominately economic orientation although an upward trend was observed in publications examining a broader range of issues typically associated with sustainability (Landrum & Edwards, 2011), such as social performance (Brammer & Millington, 2008; David, Bloom, & Hillman, 2007; Hull & Rothenberg, 2008; Karnani, 2007) and corporate governance (Ramaswamy, Ueng, & Carl, 2008). The current research literature has also suggested approaches of sustainability (Etzion, 2007) and a shift toward holistic and multidisciplinary approaches are needed which go beyond economics (Ahonan, 2004) and should be incorporated into strategic management research. Emotional, social, spiritual, ethical, moral, philosophical, psychological and other *interior individual values* are missing from traditional strategic models, such as those of Porter, Mintzberg, Miles and Snow, and other models of strategic competitive positioning.

A *value* can be defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rockeach, 1973, p. 5). Values guide an individual's behavior, actions, and judgments (Rockeach, 1973) and, therefore, are important in understanding strategic decision-making. Not only are values fundamental in understanding individual behavior, but also in understanding organizations (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Values drive organizational culture (Schein, 1992).

Wilber's integral theory allows integration of economic-oriented industrial organizational theories of strategic management with human, interaction-oriented, sociological theories of strategic management. By extending the configuration strategy (Mintzberg's 1979, 1990; Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999; Mintzberg, Lampel, Quinn, & Ghoshal, 2003), we can expand the identity of the organization beyond the archetypes we now use – such as integrators – to include social, spiritual, and environmental practices. Strategy can become a narrow configuration of ideal archetypes that are one-dimensional.

Our contrasting view is best described by Waddock (2006), "A company's level of awareness or consciousness represents a wholly different domain of development, which can generally be characterized as how progressive the company is" (p. 104). We suggest that progressive companies increasingly incorporate numerous strategic approaches which transcend economic considerations. Such companies supplement economic views of strategy and competition with an awareness or consciousness that human development and strong corporate values are a critical component of competitiveness. Similar to Collins (2010), our view of strategy allows for the inclusion of ethical behavior and spiritual transcendence as contributors to superior financial performance.

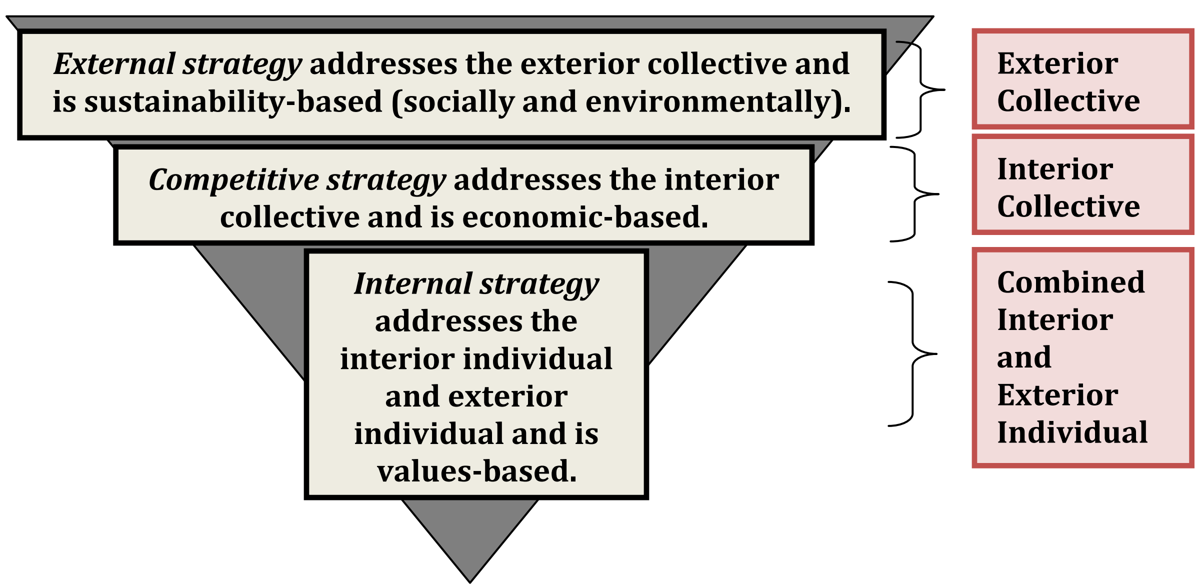
Finally, Landrum and Gardner (2012) argue that an integral theory of the firm will draw upon theories in strategic management, organizational behavior, human resource management, organizational theory, economics, political science, sociology, moral philosophy, and other disciplines to help us understand firm performance. Landrum and Gardner challenge the field of strategic management to explore the development of a synergistic and holistic four-quadrant integral model to help guide organizations toward the achievement of sustainable competitive advantage. This article seeks to answer that call by contributing to the trend toward publications with an emphasis beyond economics and by broadening mindsets to include values, ethics, and corporate culture alongside economics as important considerations in strategic management literature and as a path toward achieving sustainable competitive advantage. We offer an integral strategy model, developed from integral theory that integrates Wilber's quadrants into strategic management.

Integral Strategy Model

While many organizations are addressing these three tiers of strategy— internal, economic, and external—it is necessary to view them as interrelated and as one larger initiative to create sustainable competitive advantage. The model we propose (Figure 1, below) reflects three tiers of strategy-making, providing a model of an integrally-in

Figure 1

Model for Integral Strategy



formed approach to the strategic management of a firm. The inverted pyramid reflects the scope and reach of each particular tier of an integral strategy. Consistent with the ideal of Wilber's integral theory, an integral strategy seeks to unite the work of previous strategy research into a comprehensive and interrelated picture. It should be noted that in both the inverted pyramid and the three tiers of integral strategy, the base of all strategies is built upon the interior individual quadrant and an intense incorporation of values throughout the organization.

This model of integral strategy allows us to theoretically incorporate all three variables (i.e., economic, social, and environmental) into the strategic management of a firm. Pursuit of a triple bottom-line requires a triple-business management strategy: an internally-focused values-based strategy, a competitively-focused economic strategy, and an externally-focused sustainability strategy. As in the traditional strategy pyramid, the tiers of the integral model must also build upon each other and be interrelated to create the most effective strategy.

Key to an integral vision is the acceptance and appreciation of the diversity of all individuals, organizations, societies, and systems and to seek commonalities to further develop and aid interdependent growth. Within the quadrants, it is realized that each individual (both interior and exterior) and each collective (both interior and exterior) are currently at differing stages of development and that each progresses at a different rate. Furthermore, there is an appreciation of the vast variety of current states of individual, organizational, economic, cultural, societal, and worldwide development. This is a discussion for future research, but as we move into a time of rapidly-growing corporate social responsibility initiatives, integral theory suggests values should not be forced onto others.

Tier 1: Internal Strategy: Values-Based Strategies

We refer to Tier 1 of the integral strategy as the *internal strategy*. When we combine interior and exterior individual quadrants to create a focus on the internal development of individual employees, we have effectively created the first tier of a three-tiered integral strategy.

The internal strategy of an organization is built upon a strong values system and incorporates Wilber's interior and exterior individual quadrants. Several authors have advocated values-based management (Anderson, 1997; Blanchard & O'Connor, 1997; Fernandez & Hogan, 2002; Pruzan, 1998; Schnebel & Bienert, 2004). Companies built on strong values were born out of a desire to create a company that made a difference and often created an organizational environment from which employees benefited from personal satisfaction — regardless of their monetary gain (Beck-Dudley & Hanks, 2003). Aristotle in Nicomachean ethics proclaims happiness as an ethical virtue, and happiness as wealth or pleasure is not part of virtue. "Happiness is a virtue" (p. 20) is the "most choiceworthy of all goods" (p. 15). Striving for a life of pleasure is "a life for grazing animals" (p. 7). "The money-maker's life is, in a way, forced on him [not chosen for itself]; and clearly wealth is not the good we are seeking, since it is [merely] useful, [choiceworthy only] for some other end" (p. 8). Examples of such environments are well described by Meyerson and Scully's (1995) concept of tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2001, 2003); Ray and Anderson's (2000) concept of cultural creative; and Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow. All of these authors demonstrate there are employees who serve as agents of positive social change within their organizations.

While profit is a measure of achievement, it is not a corporate value. Rather, corporate values allow employees to develop their mind, body, and soul, creating an environment and culture which nurtures the employee to aid in personal growth and fulfillment. A corporate values system, strategically planned, implemented, and perpetuated – just as any other part of the strategy–can effectively aid in seeking a sustainable competitive advantage. Companies historically well-known for corporate cultures defined by strong value systems include TOMS Shoes, LJ Urban, Nau, Inc., Tom's of Maine, and Whole Foods Market (WFM).

The ideas included in the values-based management approach of today have evolved from deep skepticism 20 years ago to growing acceptance and awareness today. We feel values-based management approaches are on the verge of being embraced in contemporary management practices. Rather than the majority of companies rejecting values-based strategies, companies are growing more accustomed to such multi-faceted philosophies.

Tier 2: Competitive Strategy: Economic-Based Strategies

In Tier 2, a strategically-integrated model of operations begins to emerge which incorporates the competitive strategy in the traditional strategy-making pyramid with the values strategy. The Tier 1 values-based strategy becomes a tool strategically used to create sustainable competitive advantage. At this tier of strategy formulation, organizational leaders create new competitive standards within an industry that fall within the theme of "doing well by doing good." Within the middle tier of an integral strategy is the economic-based *competitive strategy*. The competitive strategy is comprised of the traditional strategy-making pyramid with which strategy has been historically concerned through the works of Gary Hamel, Raymond Miles and Charles Snow, Michael Porter, Henry Mintzberg and many others as well as through the corporate strategies, business strategies, functional strategies, and operational strategies of a company. While the mindsets of corporate business executives are economically-driven within the realm of these competitive strategies, their Tier 2 approaches deeply embed their Tier 1 values to set a standard and example within the industry. Tier 2 strategies allow the company to compete in a way that showcases its strong values system and raises the standards within its industry. Leading companies are replacing traditional corporate citizenship practices with a more strategically integrated model operationalized throughout the organization (Porter & Kramer, 2002; Rochlin & Googins, 2005).

We see WFM as the leading example of a publicly-traded company that has worked its way to the top of its industry by following an integral approach to business since its humble beginning. As an example of a Tier 2 integral strategy, John Mackay, the company's founder, supports the small local farmers in his community and organic and natural methods of growing food. Initially, John Mackay called his first market "SaferWay"– clearly a swipe at the local Safeway store he felt did not take planetary concerns into its grocery selling strategy. WFM's competitive economic strategy is to differentiate the company from other grocers. "We create store environments that are inviting, fun, unique, informal, comfortable, attractive, nurturing and educational. We want our stores to become community meeting places where our customers come to join their friends and to make new ones" (Whole Foods, 2007). WFM has followed a differentiation strategy as interpreted in its motto: Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet.

Tier 3: External Strategy: Social & Environmental Sustainability Strategies

Within the top tier of an integral strategy exists the *external strategy*, driven by both social and environmental sustainability factors. Tier 3 external sustainability strategies require systemic change. The social sustainability strategies seek to address the impact a company has in resolving pressing social issues thus improving quality of life for humankind. Social impact strategies can address global issues (for example, poverty, HIV/AIDS, population growth, healthcare, education, peace); industry issues (such as forced labor or genetically-modified foods); national issues (such as obesity); or regional and local issues (such as literacy or job skills). The environmental sustainability strategies seek to address the impact a company has in resolving issues related to natural resources and the natural environment (such as resource consumption and depletion). The desired outcome is to engage individuals, companies, and societies beyond the traditional economic industry boundaries and enlist them in creating systemic change for the betterment of human and natural world (Hart, 1995; Hart & Milstein, 2003; Prahalad, 2005; Prahalad & Hart, 2002).

A management view that incorporates social and environmental sustainability is also shared by others, such as the World Wildlife Fund and SustainAbility reports which state the need to "transform the system governing markets so that they work for, rather than against, sustainability" (World Wildlife Fund, 2007: 4). Also, The Global Compact Challenge addresses the need to focus initiatives on "achieving critical mass across all industry sectors, and (which) are connected to wider public policy efforts that address the root cause of the problems" (SustainAbility, 2004: 1). In developing Tier 3 strategies, companies move beyond checkbook philanthropy and target causes that are relevant to the company's competitive context (Porter & Kramer, 2002).

Tier 3 strategies are proposed to be the most difficult tier to achieve. Tier 3 external sustainability strategies require companies to work toward creating systemic change at a societal level and to make it happen through social and environmental sustainability strategies. WFM is making headway in this tier. While the first two tiers of the Whole Foods Markets integral strategy are highly developed, the third tier oriented toward systemic change is more difficult to achieve, but we believe WFM is making progress at this level. Examples of its progress are: the donation of 5% of after-tax profits to nonprofit organizations, the support of sustainable agriculture (the reduction of harmful environmental pesticides in agriculture), the quest to reduce waste and consumption of non-renewable resources, and, the support of environmentally-friendly cleaning and store maintenance.

Possible Misinterpretations of Integral Strategy

We propose that the most successful companies of this new era of conscious capitalism will be those embracing all four quadrants. All quadrants are to be realized in order to become an integral strategy. When considered individually, neither sustainability nor corporate social responsibility initiatives are adequate to be termed an integral strategy. If a firm's strategy does not incorporate all four quadrants, it is not an integral strategy.

Past research has viewed corporate social responsibility (an exterior collective initiative) from a resource-based view (RBV), but only viewing the particular corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative as a bundle of resources (Hart, 1995; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Russo & Fouts, 1997). Corporate social responsibility and sustainability strategies comprise only a single piece of the puzzle in the company's bundle of resources. From a resource-based view, the CSR effort is transparent and can be easily imitated (Reinhardt, 1998); therefore, CSR alone should not be misinterpreted as the bundle of resources.

An AQAL (all quadrants, all levels) integral approach looks at all four quadrants and the complete and interrelated set of interior individual, exterior individual, interior collective, and exterior collective initiatives in place within a firm. An AQAL approach requires a tight linkage from the internal values-based strategy, to the competitive economic-based strategy, to the external sustainability-based strategy; it is this tight linkage and alignment that defines an integral strategy and which can be viewed as the complete bundle of resources being managed toward a common goal.

The inimitability of an integral strategy lies within the individual quadrants, and, to some degree, in the internal collective and the internal actions and changes that are unseen to outsiders. The integral theory application is relevant to the resource-based view because of the added emphasis on the two internal quadrants which lack transparency and thus, allow for social and economic synthesis.

As shown in Wilber's theory, becoming integrally informed is built upon personal development and values – within the individual quadrants – to create a higher level of awareness and consciousness and then sharing those values throughout the collective. It should be noted that simply adopting a sustainability strategy in the exterior collective quadrant continues to be an economically-driven approach. It would not constitute an integral strategy, if there is not also *a strong values-based strategy in place which incorporates and engages the individual quadrants*.

In keeping with the spirit of integral theory, there is appreciation for the role that each individual and company plays and its contribution to the movement of corporate America toward a fully integral strategy. For example, Wal-Mart (Gunther, 2006) and Nike (Raths, 2006; Zadek, 2004) have been praised for the corporate environmental sustainability strategies they have recently adopted, but the sustainability approach alone does not suggest they are integrally-informed if each business is not built upon a strong internal values system in the individual quadrants.

Conclusion

We have suggested that organizations can start an integral journey in any of the quadrants. Our main contribution has been to provide a model that allows a company to consider the creation of an integral strategy. We suggest that until fully-integrated companies are interacting with more fully-integrated companies, the four-quadrant AQAL model will not be realized. Perhaps to see a model of AQAL, we would begin by seeing an industry or cluster of companies participating in a fully-integrated model. Rather than being solely economically-driven, the integral strategy incorporates individual, social, and ecological orientations. Each organization would expect vendors to also allow individuals (employees) to realize their values, including those that are spiritually-based.

Wal-Mart has added a sustainability initiative to its economic focus. The company is using its vast power in the industry to influence environmental sustainability and is requiring all of its suppliers to become engaged in environmental sustainability. One would argue that Wal-Mart has made great strides in environmental sustainability strategies, but has yet to address social sustainability issues. Nike has made similar transitions to incorporate environmental sustainability, but has yet to incorporate social sustainability. In contrast, WFM owner John MacKay has studied integral theory and has organized his company's operations using Wilber's model. WFM works at all levels, but, as previously noted, we cannot say that it has effectively realized a four-quadrant AQAL integral strategy.

We acknowledge that realizing all four quadrants in a three-tiered integral model of strategy can be very difficult and will constitute a major shift in strategic mindsets. The external collective quadrant is a difficult level of integrated strategy to achieve. It is our hope to see more organizations working to integrate all four quadrants of AQAL into a 3-tiered fully integral strategy. There is a need for a critical mass of organizations to work toward or achieve integral strategy in order to realize an integral strategy model which encompasses all of Wilbur's quadrants.

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