

## The Four Quadrants Model

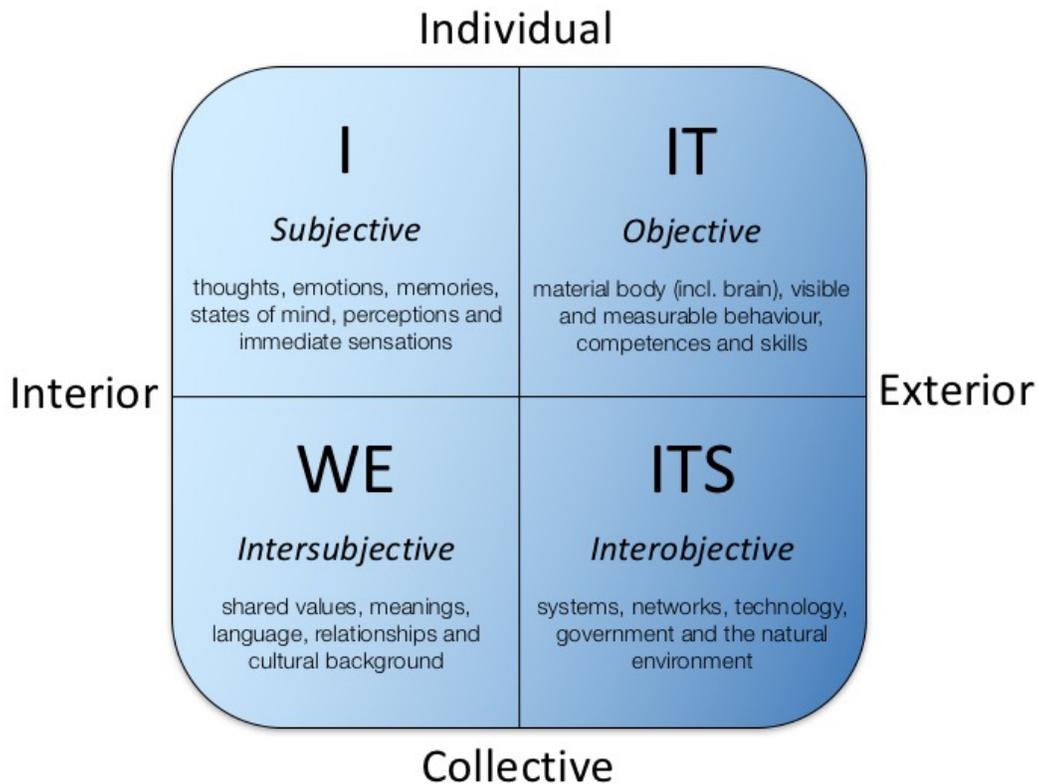
The Four Quadrants Model was developed by philosopher Ken Wilber<sup>1</sup> as part of his Integral Theory (an evolutionary metatheory which brings together multiple disciplines). The model illustrates the fact that everything in life has an inside and outside and a singular and a collective and show us the many ways we can use this knowledge to understand and act in relation to self, others, objects, and institutions.

Wilber developed the model in the process of assimilating the work of multiple philosophers and psychologists, each of whom seemed to have something valuable to say but each of whom seemed regularly to dispute the value of each other's contributions. Wilber organized them on his living room floor and noticed that they fell into four piles. It was clear that each philosopher was correct but simply speaking about different aspects of existence! One offered truth from the perspective of internal experience, another looked at concrete behavior, another emphasized the importance of cultural influences and mutual understanding, and another was focused on systems theory.

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail on Ken Wilber, the quadrants, and the evolution of our individual selves, see [integrallife.com](http://integrallife.com).

Thus, the four quadrants were born:

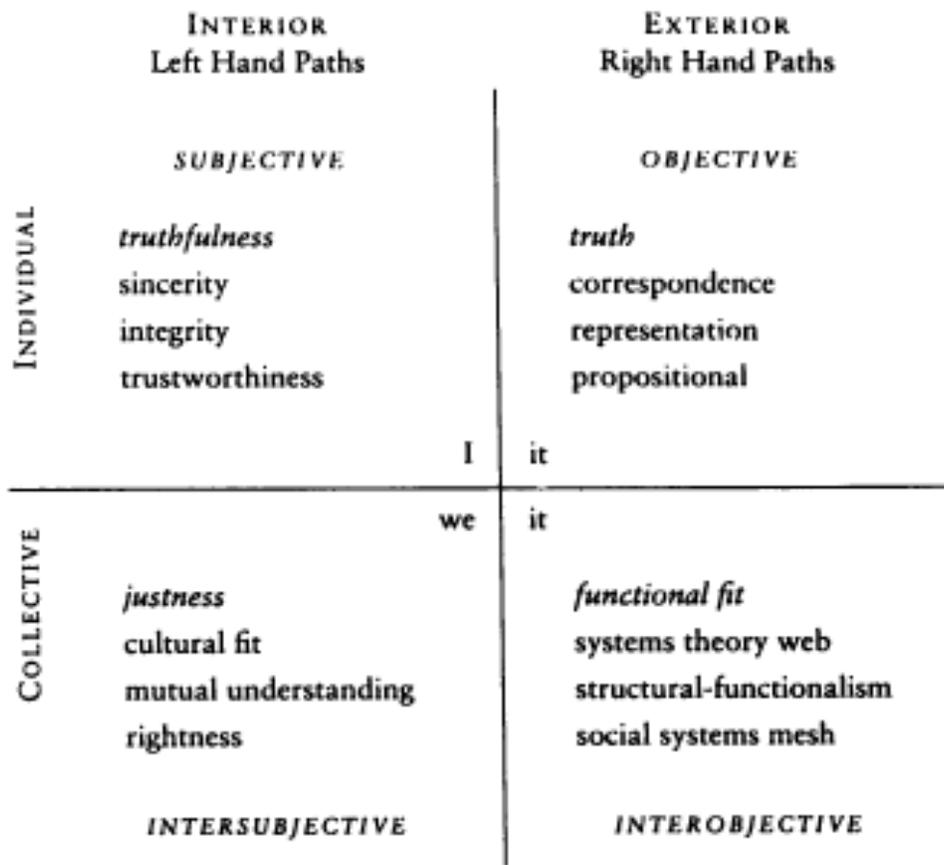


The left side of the model is about interiors. We have an individual interior which is our thoughts, states of mind, emotions, etc. We also have a collective interior which is our shared experience with other people – our shared values, our cultures, our relationships, etc. These experiences are invisible unless we tell others about them or our behavior expresses them.

The right side of the model is about exteriors, the visible things and processes in our lives. The upper right is about individual things: a computer, a car, a body, a behavior. The lower right is about collective things – institutions, the economic system, the weather, and so on.

## Truth claims in each quadrant

People focused in each quadrant make claims about what is true, but they are actually talking about different kinds of truths. If you offer an individual truth from your interior what matters is sincerity or trustworthiness — being truthful (I am feeling happy). When you offer a truth about an individual exterior objective event or thing, what matters is empirical measurable fact (the plank is 7 feet 4 inches long). When you offer truth about social interaction, what matters is consensus (e.g. everyone should have equal rights under the law). When you offer truth about institutions or systemic interactions, what you are talking about is whether it the claim is functional within that environment (e.g. an organizational chart mapping the functions of an organization).



## What can be seen

Each quadrant deals with different subject matter.

The two left hand quadrants deal with the "inside" of our world (individually and as a culture) and the two right hand quadrants deal with the "outside" (our bodies and the physical objects we have created, as well as the institutions that organize them). What are we examining when we look through each window?



- The Upper Left quadrant is about what is *inside you*: what you feel, what you believe, what you want.
- The Upper Right quadrant is about *what you have and do and use*: your abilities, your activities, and the objects in your world.
- The Lower Left quadrant is about invisible things between people: shared understandings about what matters, beliefs about how to relate, and influences from the culture – memes, norms, advertising, etc.
- The Lower Right quadrant is about the systems within which you live your life. If you drive a car, you are part of the traffic system and the road system. If you go to a hospital, you are part of the medical system. If you buy or sell something, you are part of the system of commerce. If you serve on a jury or get involved in a lawsuit, you are part of the legal system.

## Applications of the model

You can use the quadrants as a way of separating out some of the tangles of your life. If you have a problem you want to solve or a direction you want to proceed, it helps to examine it in each quadrant.

For example, you need to be thinking about all of the quadrants to know how to manage your money well. A blind spot in one quadrant can hamper you significantly.

So, when you think about your finances, you may want to consider (a) your attitudes towards money (Upper Left), (b) your behavior with money (Upper Right), (c) how your relationships help or interfere with your ability to manage your money (Lower Left), and (d) whether you understand how to use the financial system to save money or earn money (Lower Right).

Another example: If you want to buy a car, you will have a feeling about which kind of car you like (UL), you will want to examine concrete information about the car available from the dealer or over the internet or via direct examination (UR). You will likely be affected by the views of

your social group about types of cars (LL). And you will need to think about systemic issues such as what kind of traffic you will be in, whether certain safety regulations are pertinent, or even if you can park it easily in your preferred locations (LR).

A third example: When you think about a relationship, you can consider what your feelings are for the other person (UL), how you behave when you are around that person (UR), whether the person fits in with the other people in your life (LL), and whether the relationship will mesh well with the systems in which you are involved such as work, education, and so on.

**A detailed example:** The following is a more complex analysis using the example of illness, something which often presents as just one big complex problem.

The quadrants describe the landscape of illness:

- the interior world of the person - your thoughts, feelings, emotional development, and spiritual attitudes that are affected by your illness or the illness of someone you know
- the objective medical world of tests, treatments, and the environment of your home, work and elsewhere
- the social world of the person – the attitudes, beliefs, and customs of your family, friends, care providers, employer, etc.
- the institutional world of insurance, employment, school requirements, hospitals, and other players in the healthcare world

To fully understand illness and its impact, you need to be sure to look at each of these aspects.

- The upper left quadrant (UL) helps you to understand your inner experience when you or someone you care about is ill: how you feel, what you think, how you interpret what you see, and what you value. It involves your spirituality and your psychology, your thoughts and your emotions. You might feel angry, sad, overwhelmed, or at peace. You might have thoughts about what has happened or about what to do. You might interpret something that was said by a doctor or a friend as being condescending or

accurate or meaningless (or all three). You might value honesty over tactfulness (or vice versa) when receiving information about your illness. You might have specific religious views about what illness means or doesn't mean. You might develop depression as a result of the changes in your life. All of these experiences take place within you whether generated by the outside or not.

- If you are caring for someone else with illness, you will have our own feelings and thoughts about it. Medical professionals have their own upper left; so do administrators. Everyone in the system has a personal experience with illness.
- The upper right quadrant (UR) is about you as an object. When you go to the doctor, he or she will examine your physical self – your lung capacity, your heartbeat, your thyroid levels, and so on. You can look at yourself as an object as well: you can observe how your body functions – how fit am I, does eating dairy give me problems, should I be getting more sleep, how long can I sit up, do I have a headache or other pain? All of these experiences are something you can look at objectively. They are not dependent on your inner self even if they involve the interior of your physical body. They can be measured in some way. A medical professional will focus a lot of attention on this area.
- This quadrant is also about your physical environment. Is it chaotic or serene? Is it functional for your needs? What changes might need to be made?
- The lower left quadrant (LL) is about your relations with others: family, friends, community, culture. Illness can lead to major changes in relationships. The people involved may agree or differ as to how to relate to illness. They may vary in how much understanding they have of each other's feelings and needs. They may agree or disagree on appropriate treatment possibilities and many other things, all of which need to be negotiated.
- This quadrant is also about group attitudes and behaviors, cultural norms, and media messages about illness. The culture as a whole sends messages about illness: ads may push certain medications, for example, or they may ignore people with illness by

making it seem that the whole world is one big happy Pepsi generation. There are also more subtle messages: some “blame the victim” by describing illness as a punishment, insisting on a psychological cause, or telling people they are not spiritual enough. Other messages may marginalize ill people. Others may promote the idea of the “heroic disabled,” raising unrealistic expectations of most people with illness at the same time as they praise a few. There can be conflict between the cultures of alternative and conventional medicine.

- Everyone has a LL collective. In addition to our family, friends, coworkers, colleagues, advisors and so on, you are related to a culture - or maybe more than one. You may have an ethnic collective, a religious collective, an alumni collective and many others. All will influence you to some degree.
- The lower right quadrant (LR) is about the systems with which you interact. If you have an illness, you will encounter the medical system. You will go to hospitals and clinics for tests and treatments. You will review online sites for information and advice. You will need to file insurance forms and keep records.
- You will also have to deal with the employment system: You may have questions such as: Can I work? Are my work requirements flexible? Can I get disability? Should I let my employer know I am ill? All these questions are relevant to this quadrant.
- You may encounter the legal system - laws may affect your right to get assistance or your ability to access certain places. You will be affected by the political system: Which candidates’ platforms support people with disabilities and which do not? You may have to deal with the educational system and the transportation system. Alternative medicine is a system of its own with a network of different options. All of these can impact the course of an illness.
- If you are a provider or an administrator, issues of this lower right quadrant will be paramount.

## Translating knowledge into action

Once you examine the quadrants with regard to your particular issue, you may find that you need to do something in each quadrant. For example:

UR – Get on top of medical records, tests, taking medications, physical symptoms.

LR – Get to know the systems: insurance, hospital, employment.

LL – Get to know how to work with others: family, friends, doctors, cultural messages. If you are a caregiver or a provider, learn how to listen well to the patient.

UL – Get to know yourself: grief, spiritual beliefs, meditation. Learn to listen to yourself.

## Cross quadrant effects

Each quadrant also affects every other one. For example, if you are prescribed a treatment (UR), and it conflicts with your religious views (UL), and your family says it won't work (LL), and you can't get insurance to pay for it (LR), it might as well not exist.

Or, using another example, if your culture (LL) treats your illness as imaginary there will be fewer research centers involved with finding a cure (LR). You might become depressed about this situation (UL) and be less likely to seek treatment (UR).

Looking through each of these windows helps you to see if you are actually covering each area.

*[The Man Behind the Framework](#)* by Lynn Royster (aka Lynn Fuentes) is an interview with Ken Wilber in which he describes how he applies the quadrants to ME/CFS. See also the following link in which Lynn relates the quadrants to chronic illness. <https://integrallife.com/koan-chronic-illness-2/><sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Note that to see beyond the first video, you will need to belong to [integrallife.com](http://integrallife.com)

## What are you not seeing?

Another question to ask is which quadrant gets the most play for you: Interior individual? Exterior individual? Interior collective? Exterior collective? Which quadrant(s) might need more attention from you?

If you are more involved in the objective side of illness, consider how learning more about the inner experience of individuals and about cultural attitudes toward illness might enlarge your view. If you are more involved with personal aspects of illness, consider how learning more about the political and administrative aspects might help you.

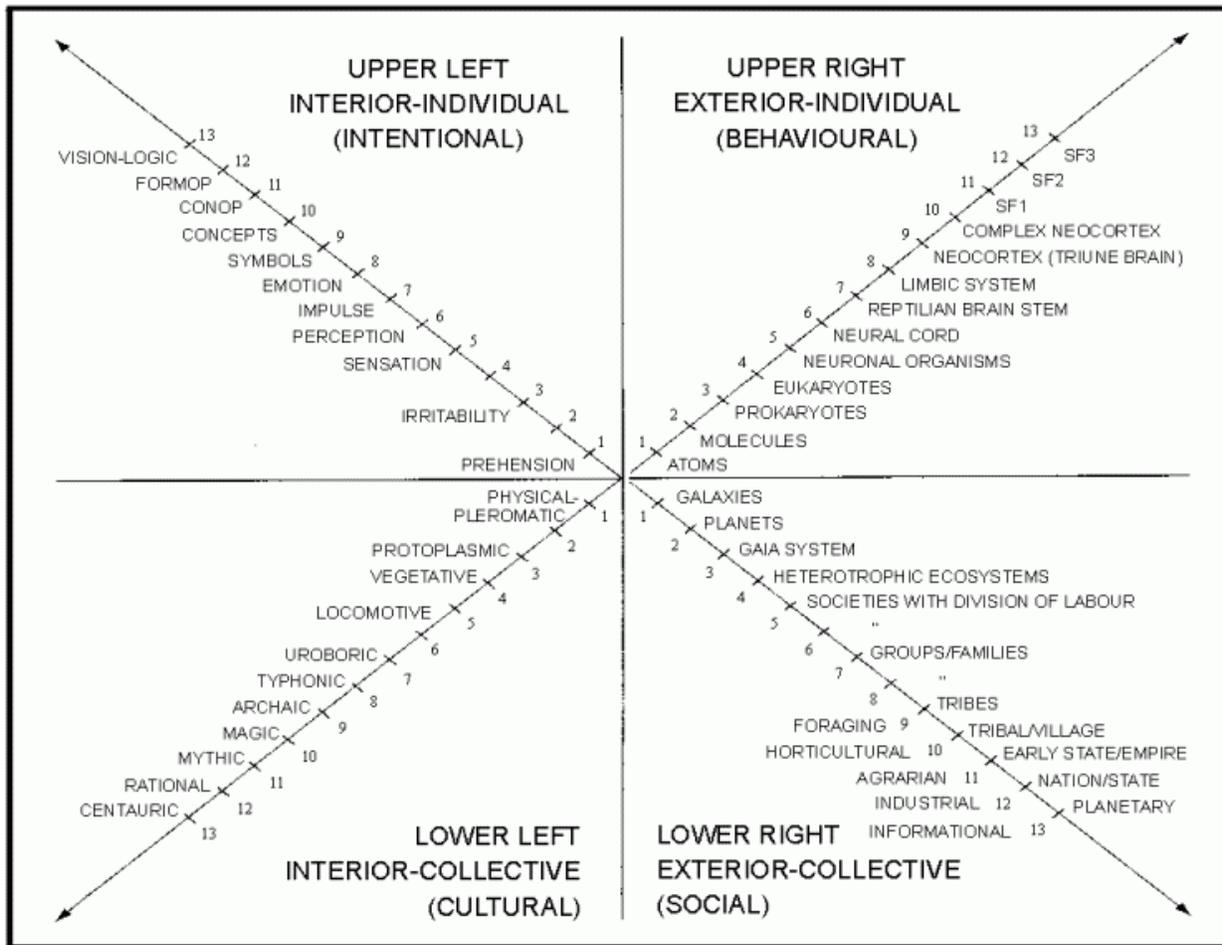
## A note on evolution

As you can see in the diagram below, the world evolves in each quadrant. We begin at the center and progress outward. In the upper left we grow our consciousness; in the upper right, we grow our physical being; in the lower left, we grow our cultures; in the lower right, we grow our systems. Don't worry about the specific names in each line below, just get a feel for the evolution of life in these different ways. For more information on our evolutionary selves see free videos on adult stages of development

[http://www.transformationteaching.com/transformation/?page\\_id=245](http://www.transformationteaching.com/transformation/?page_id=245)

The course *How to Grow Up and Wake Up* offers a deep dive into this evolutionary self.

<https://transformationteaching.mykajabi.com/pl/13433>



## Practice: Mapping the territory

You can take any area of your life that might be causing you difficulties and frame it through these windows. Would you like to improve your relationship? Is there something in your work situation that you are missing? Are you planning to look for a new home?

You can also use it to analyze the outside world. What does politics look like through these windows? What about environmental issues? Poverty? If we are involved in these areas in any way, it behooves us to take a full four quadrant view so that we will not be surprised down the road when action in one quadrant has an unintended effect in another.

The quadrants are a way of subdividing all of our reality so that we can better manage it, better understand the players in each aspect of life, and recognize the influences on us and others. Seeing the world through these windows activates previously unaware parts of ourselves and brings us into a richer experience of our world.