



## Overview of Integral Communication

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The objective of “integral” communication is multidimensional exchange. That is, communication sourcing from all dimensions of being – physical, emotional, rational, spiritual, and so on – and intended for reception by as many dimensions as possible in as many different people as possible. Integral communicators use inclusive approaches and language that spring from a clear understanding of their audience. Gaining that understanding is a first priority. One approach is reflecting on how different people with different experiential and developmental dispositions receive, process and express multidimensional information. Here are five categories to consider in generating integral communication:

1. Level of moral development, which directly impacts how communication is interpreted, how relevant it is perceived to be by the recipient, and how reactions and responses will be prioritized.
2. Educational breadth, cultural exposure and decision-making style, which influence both the ability to understand and process disparate worldviews, as well as the language and conceptual framework available to interpret and communicate complex ideas.
3. Thinking and learning style, which tends to formulate each person's native communication style and receptivity to different forms of information.
4. Levels of self-awareness and self-esteem, which strongly correlate with how well we tolerate concepts that challenge our worldview, how well we can integrate new information, and our capacity for compassion.
5. The circles of intimacy where each exchange takes place, which can profoundly alter the context of multidimensional communication.

On the following page is a chart characterizing different features and phases within these five categories. Carefully evaluating where we and others are in this matrix can greatly assist attempts at integral communication, especially in how we package information. At a minimum it can reveal key assumptions on both sides of a given exchange, around which clarifying questions and explanations can then be tailored.

In integral thinking, a primary assumption is that the common ground we so frequently and earnestly seek preexists all exchanges. Our questions, ideas, feelings, intuitions and beliefs spring from the rich earth of our common humanity; at the most fundamental level, we are really one and the same. Conflict could therefore be equated to tension between different emanations from the same *ground of being*, rather than between Self and Other, and all resolution could be viewed a healing and harmonizing of a fractured or estranged Self. However, regardless of how our shared ground is defined, the commonality principle has been embraced by very few. There is instead a strong tendency to differentiate and categorize people. So in my own attempts at integral communication, one objective is to encourage this universalizing perspective.

In a more general sense, integral communication celebrates the diversity of existence. It excites and absorbs the profound creative force of every heart, mind, body, soul, spirit, will and community. It evokes a neutral field of exchange where all concepts, emotions and experiences are relevant, but where no single meme or worldview dominates. In essence: to communicate integrally is to accept, love and celebrate what is – in all its complexity – so that *what could be* is a natural synthesis of the greatest in all of us.

Level of Moral Development	Educational Breadth, Cultural Awareness & Decision-Making Style	Thinking/Learning/Communication Style <sup>1</sup>	SASE <sup>2</sup>	Circle of Intimacy
Pre-Ego ( <i>Other-Centric</i> ) – Governed by superstitious ritual, tribal behaviors, animism, and basic survival.	<b>Naïve Anarchistic</b> – Disengaged from society, self-isolating, willfully ignorant, fearful and unreceptive. Irrational, impulsive and reactive responses. Fierce denial of commonly observable realities.	<b>Concrete Sequential</b> – Process tasks and information in ordered, sequential, linear ways; enjoy practical applications and clearly defined tasks; <i>direct, specific, role-accepting, orderly and conflict-avoidant communicators.</i>	IV – Unaware and insecure.	<b>Convenience</b> – Cooperative goals for limited duration.
Ego-Centric – Focused on personal power, conquest and self-assertion.	<b>Tribal</b> – Group conforming, ethno-centric orientation as an expression of homogenous, enculturated beliefs and identity. Isolation from and ignorance of other cultures, histories and analytical methods. Selective (propagandized) education. Tendency toward emotional reasoning. Tribal leadership is final authority.	<b>Concrete Random</b> – Experiment and act creatively; enjoy less structure and definition and more hands-on exploration and experience; <i>deliberately vague, role-questioning, structure-resistant communicators.</i>	III – Insecure but self-aware.	<b>Compassionate</b> – Unconditional acceptance and desire to relieve suffering ( <i>often initially one-sided</i> ).
"Us"-Centric ( <i>tribe/family/group</i> ) – Guided by rules, hierarchical principles, absolutism and rigid authority structures.	<b>Formalized Tribal</b> – Outward, fear-based conformism, often accompanied by nationalistic attitudes. Isolation from and general ignorance of other cultures. Broader base of education, but selective reinterpretation of history and misuse of analytical methods to reinforce worldview. Rules-based decision-making. Reflexive rejection/criticism of opposing viewpoints.	<b>Abstract Random</b> – Flexible, feelings-oriented; thrive in unstructured, people-oriented, cooperative environments; multitasking and emotional validation; <i>indirect, personalizing, collaborative, emotional, process-resistant communicators.</i>	II – Over-confident and unaware.	<b>Companionship</b> – Comfortable closeness, frankness and mutual trust.
Humanity-Centric – Pointedly pragmatic and achievement oriented; then able to respond to human needs, assessing each situation, collaborating and sharing success.	<b>Rational Collaborative</b> – Curiosity about and broad understanding of cultures and historical lessons. Diverse education base with non-conforming worldview. Inclusive, collaborative process orientation geared toward practical outcomes and principle-based assessment. Welcoming of other viewpoints, but still intrinsically authoritative and biased toward narrowly realist, strictly rational methods (analytical, scientific, concrete, pragmatic, etc.).	<b>Abstract Sequential</b> – Enjoy the world of theory and abstract thought; work independently; enjoy learning for learning's sake and being highly informed; <i>combative, discursive, exploratory, independent, emotionally neutral communicators.</i>	I – Healthy, confident self-aware, realistic.	<b>Soul Friends</b> – Profound openness, sharing and mutual support. Deep spiritual connection and trust.
World-Centric – Rooted in connectedness, a sense of responsibility to the whole, fitting into a living system, global thinking.	<b>Dynamic Consensus</b> – Continuous, multi-level re-education and reassessment of all information in light of new empirical data. Insistent cross-cultural exchange and inclusion of disparate viewpoints. Consensus-based process and reasoning with an expectation of fairness. Presumed equality of worth and participation for contributors. Assumption that all data and analysis is incomplete, so all conclusions and systems must be dynamic and flexible.			<b>Devotional</b> – Wide open passionate worship that knows no bounds.
All Being-Centric – Holistic, all-inclusive, transpersonal, interdependent orientation.	<b>Integral</b> – Continuous openness, investigation and absorption of multidimensional data. Invested in cross-cultural immersion and shared experience. Presumed common ground of being for all. In addition to rational and empirical methods, intuition, empathy and spiritual cognizance are valid input streams for data assessment. Profound commitment to inclusiveness, compassion, harmony and equitable outcomes that advance the whole.			
All Existence-Centric – Unitive orientation and processing.				
Non-Centric – Nondual orientation/processing.				

<sup>1</sup> Where the other four categories reflect progressive development, these styles do not.

<sup>2</sup> These are scoring quadrants from the ILC Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness evaluation.

## Communication as Nourishment

What is the purpose of multidimensional exchange? In **Integral Lifework**, the underlying purpose is nourishment. What I share from each essential facet of my being is synthesized within a specific intention: to feed, enrich, inspire, inform and encourage dimensions within and beyond myself, including any dimensions that are receptive in others. So ideally this nourishing exchange is always mutual, even when only one party is deliberate in communicating integrally. When I engage in creative activities, for example, I nourish my need for self-expression, but I can also evoke reflection, a spectrum of emotions and aesthetic empathy in someone else. When I teach a class, I can naturally deepen my own understanding and humility even as others benefit from the material. When I share a humorous story with a friend, mutual joy and laughter can be synthesized and amplified by the exchange. When someone shares a new horizon of knowledge or insight with me, my acceptance – my willing openness, recognition and astonishment – can invite satisfaction and affirmation for both of us, broadening our awareness and deepening our social bond. So integral communication is seldom unidirectional; as we will see in the following suggested guidelines, anyone committed to integrally being tends to train their senses to receive as many different frequencies as possible. Without that fundamental curiosity and openness, there is little opportunity for deep and lasting nourishment to occur.

## The “R.S.V.P.” and “M.Y. P.A.L.” Processes

Beyond considering how to package multidimensional information, the following are some general guidelines for an effective integral communication process. When engaging in any exchange, on any level, these steps enhance interpersonal connection and tailor content to specific situations. Eventually, with disciplined practice, these principles can be integrated into all patterns of interaction.

### “R.S.V.P.”

#### *R - Reviewing Motivations*

This is really about developing self-awareness. What are our communication objectives? Why is it important to us to engage in this exchange? Are we somehow invested in the outcome? Do we care if this exchange is inclusive and not exclusive? Are we genuinely curious about new ideas, perspectives and experiences? Are we showing off our knowledge or insight in some area? Are we reacting defensively? Do we want to express support or empathy? Are we trying to rescue someone? Do we feel self-righteous? Do we feel wounded, angry, excited, or happy? Do we enjoy arguing for argument's sake? Do we feel spiritually connected? What is this communication really about for us? Does it stem from healthy and productive impulses?

Reviewing our own motivations requires honesty and courage, but when we have clarity about our communication goals, we will express ourselves with much more wisdom and effectiveness. We will also become more receptive. One way to achieve both conditions is to relax into a neutral, unattached, compassionate disposition before we communicate in any way.

### ***S - Seeking Understanding before Agreement***

Communication breaks down quickly when we are too concerned about being understood, and resist being open and attentive to someone else. Creating a receptive space inside ourselves for another's passions, insights and beliefs can move the mountains of misunderstanding, confusion and indifference. This may mean asking clarifying questions, or defining terms, or reiterating another's viewpoint and experiences to verify we understand it. In whatever way possible, we demonstrate a sincere interest in what we might first perceive as Alien Otherness, knowing this will really help us understand ourselves and the world in which we live. Consequently, any agreement that arises from our exchange becomes serendipitous rather than insistent, which transforms communication from a wrestling match into an exciting adventure.

### ***V - Validating Alternative Worldviews***

Although in our certainty we sometimes have little affinity for the information being offered to us, we can still understand and appreciate it as someone else's truth. And, as with our own opinions, that truth will usually be rooted in deeply held values and beliefs. This is why a careless or flippant remark can wound so deeply, and why being ignored or misunderstood can be so frustrating. Validating another's values, feelings and viewpoints takes us outside of ourselves into a neutral field of ideological exchange. It enhances communication with basic fairness, which in turn diffuses frustration and argumentative impulses. So how is this accomplished? By affirming someone else's perspective; by expressing sincerely that their opinion has merit, regardless of whether we agree; by summarizing how someone's ideas conforms to their own stated worldview; by recognizing and agreeing with well-meaning intent and the value of another's contribution, without necessarily embracing their specific beliefs, emotions or methods.

### ***P - Permitting Ambiguity***

All language is imperfect. What we try to communicate may be so abstract and intangible that it short circuits all attempts to convey it. Sometimes we will be misunderstood or will misunderstand others, regardless of our earnestness and quality of attention. This is where permitting ambiguity becomes crucial. On some levels, we can only understand another human being through the filter of our own experience. We can also relate to others with superficial constructs far removed from core beliefs. And we may not always share the same definition of certain words or terms. All of this adds up to inherently incomplete communication. When we resist ambiguity, we tend to confine our views and anyone else's to an inflexible framework of one-sided or black-and-white thinking. By permitting ambiguity, we are simply accepting that this inefficient and incomplete *exchange reality* is okay. Along the lines of "agreeing to disagree," incremental or imperfect understanding can be more productive than trying to enforce specificity of language or clarity of concepts – to the detriment of an open exchange.

## **"M.Y. P.A.L."**

These principles are part of a broader philosophy of healthful self-nourishment and creating constructive relationships. Here they are offered as additional tools to enhance integral communication.

### ***M - Meeting People Where They Are***

This is really about including rather than excluding. It is especially relevant between people with different value systems and worldviews. But even those with similar values and beliefs may have arrived there through different educational and cultural experiences. We cannot assume that our language, ideas, or the emotional context of any perspective is widely understood. Nor can we assume we have correctly interpreted someone else's views, experiences or motivations. So we must meet people where they are – that is, where they perceive themselves to be. To do that, we must be willing to explore and appreciate their view of Self and the world. Although there are many helpful assessment techniques to shorten this process, in most cases it simply takes time, interaction in different contexts, a little intuition, and a sincere interest in how people think, feel and live. Then it is up to us to tailor our interactions based on what we have learned. Once we have identified someone's worldview and most cherished values, we can relate and communicate on their terms and in their values language, instead of inadvertently imposing our own.

### ***Y – Your Choice***

Involuntary reflexes aside, there is nearly always a moment, however brief, when we become cognizant of our intentions and choose to act or react a certain way. If we find ourselves unable to choose in some situation, it is probably wise to exit that situation and reevaluate the nature of our involvement. Over time, we can learn how to widen the gap between impulse and volition wherever we are. One way to describe this is self-control, but it shouldn't be confused with suppressing needs or stifling impulses. It is, rather, learning how to compassionately manage Self. This requires particular attention to self-awareness, self-esteem and self-discipline, and of course involves self-nourishing every dimension of our being.

### ***P - Practicing Compassion***

Compassion for someone else cannot be forced. It is a natural outgrowth of compassion for Self. If we have not nourished or nurtured ourselves on some level, then we demonstrate incomplete compassion for that part of ourselves, and in turn will lack compassion for others in that area. So when we are judgmental and impatient because someone is being inconsiderate in some way, we likely have not given ourselves adequate consideration in one or more of our own dimensions of nourishment (emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, etc.). And if we become angry when someone else won't listen to us, we are acknowledging that some part of ourselves – a part we may not fully be aware of – is longing for recognition and healing. Slowly, as we come to accept, integrate and love all dimensions of Self, we will cease trying to control externals that reflect our own incompleteness.

## A - Accepting What Is

There are many roads to accepting what exists and occurs around us, and some take longer than others. For one person, acceptance grows from spiritual conviction. For another, it is simply a matter witnessing change as the only constant. One of the shortest roads to acceptance is cultivating a sense of humor – about the opinions we hold dear, the spontaneous convolutions of every moment, the endless variety of challenges we will inevitably encounter, and that sometimes silly person we call “I.” Without acceptance, we will tend towards perpetual frustration, grief and longing. With acceptance, we can still realize our loftiest ideals, but our efforts are imbued with patience and hope rather than anger, angst or distress. When applied to communication, *accepting what is* makes integral principles much easier to practice.

## L – Learning to Let Go

One way to describe this is “spontaneously releasing focused energy.” Whatever the form of energy – mental, emotional, physical, spiritual – releasing it expands the neutral field required for open and inclusive exchange. This energy won’t necessarily dissipate entirely – it may still be present, but it becomes more malleable and creative, with the potential of coalescing as conscious acts rather than reflexive habits. *Letting go* is the mechanism behind forgiveness, resolving grief, generosity of spirit, healing pain, and to some degree even falling in love. How is it achieved? There are many approaches to letting go, each one uniquely suited to different situations and personalities, and usually associated with a vital form of self-nourishment. For one person meditation is key; for another regular exercise; for another creative self-expression. We must each discover our individual triggers to aid release, but however we get there, *letting go* promises to take us past *accepting what is* into realms of lasting tranquility and contentment.

As applied to communication, in many cases this letting go means relinquishing our attachment to specific ideas or outcomes. Sometimes this manifests as a comfortable silence, sometimes as a kind word spoken at just the right moment, and sometimes receiving and incorporating a difficult truth.

In conclusion, integral communication is a skill, an art, a state of mind, and a state of being. To be authentic, an integral exchange sources from the very depths of who we are. Then it reaches across the expanse of imperfect language, different styles of thought, different levels of moral development and cultural exposure, and different levels of self-awareness. And finally it is received in that same center of Self in someone else. And of course this works the same way on the receiving end. Our own receptivity and ability to navigate other styles of thought, other worldviews and other levels of development is dependent upon our own commitment to integrally being. That is, being grounded in a whole and balanced Self, where every dimension is fully nourished. And this is evidenced not only in the skill with which we navigate diverse exchanges, but also in the quality of our patience, acceptance and compassion.

Integral communication crosses all boundaries to connect us with others on every level. And in integral thinking, each of those connections is founded on *love-consciousness*. What is love-consciousness? In brief, it is a state of heart, mind and spirit where the interdependence, sacredness and joy of all existence become ever-present ingredients in both our awareness and how we process our experience. Love-consciousness is the backdrop for holistic insight and understanding, and it is the carrier wave for every type of meaningful exchange. To whatever degree we can give and receive with love-consciousness, our communication will be that much more integral, and that much more complete.