

Integration: the new wave for futures

Practical futuring work around the world is at risk from superficial thinking, dated methods and redundant paradigms, says Professor Richard Slaughter of the Australian Foresight Institute at Swinburne University. The good news is that new approaches now offer the opportunity to lift standards and improve results.

"There are still gaps between the complex, embedded, nature of futures problems and the capacity of the resources that have been devoted to dealing with them," he said. "While a great deal of futures work has been very successful -- especially in raising awareness of the future and our ability to influence it -- we now have the opportunity to deliver even better results by taking advantage of new thinking, new methodologies and new attitudes."

The Institute has used the body of work by Ken Wilber called Integral Theory as the basis for its new approach, Integral Futures. The subject, as the first course unit of its kind anywhere in the world, is now being offered as part of the Institute's group of science degree and postgraduate courses in Strategic Foresight.

"We found that most, if not all, of the standard futures methodologies were aimed at dealing with change processes in the outer world, so the field had been heavily one-sided from its inception," Richard Slaughter said. "Critical futures work originally developed in response to this and drew attention to the way personal and social factors affect the way we perceive and interact with the world -- an area that had been widely overlooked. Soon tools and methods (such as Causal Layered Analysis, the Transformative Cycle, Metascanning and Anthropological FS) developed within this domain of human and social interiors. And now Integral Future Studies provides an even larger framework that opens up new directions."

Professor Slaughter argues that far too many people have begun practising futures without fully understanding its foundations. Many of them are

using inappropriate, one-sided methods. His response to this is to suggest the attainment of 'professional literacy' as a necessary prerequisite for practice -- as in other professions. If that were to happen, he believes, the links between understanding and practice would become much clearer, and the clients of futurists would be assured of competent, quality services.

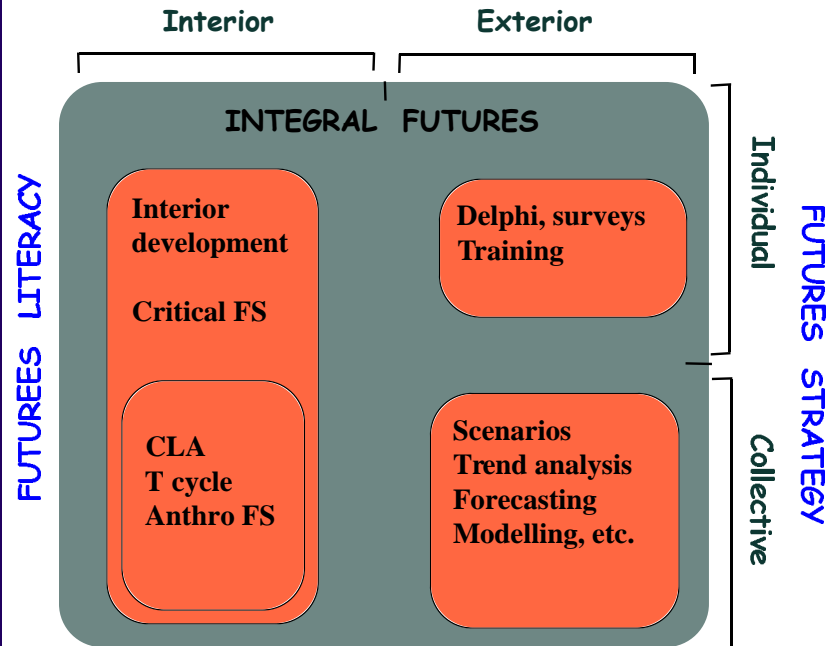
"In adopting Integral Futures as a foundation for both theory and practice, those who are currently teaching the next generation of futures/foresight practitioners can begin to represent the field in ways that are more coherent, well-grounded and useful than before."

He emphasises that integral futures work is not simply an alternative to more limited and partial approaches. Rather, it is a way of bringing together work from many different streams and traditions of inquiry.

"An integral futures approach allows us for the very first time to balance external phenomena with internal ones: that is, futures work that takes as its main focus the study of continuity and change in the external world can now be balanced by and with some very sophisticated frameworks for understanding the inner worlds of people and cultures.

"The upshot is that futures tasks can now be approached more systematically -- and more successfully -- than ever before."

LITERACY, STRATEGY & METHODOLOGIES IN FS



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Of the many positive outcomes of this move, Richard Slaughter especially welcomes the opportunities for innovation and development in futures methodologies.

"We will see quite new methods emerging from the inner domains," he said. "At the same time, the more traditional methods will also gain a new lease of life. What has most centrally emerged in this perspective is that it is depth within the practitioner that evokes depth and capability in whatever method is being used." *ff*