

CONSCIOUS
YOU: BECOME
THE HERO OF
YOUR OWN
STORY

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You can not have
exterior development
without **interior**
development
to hold it
in place

— Ken Wilber



CHAPTER 4

The Transformation Map

‘What are you unhappy about?’ I ask my client.

Alistair looks at me puzzled, as if this question has caught him by surprise. ‘Well, that is a good question. Actually, I find it hard to say, right now; everything seems like a mess. Let me vent for a moment. Our organisation recently went through a change process. We paid a lot of money to have all of our processes overhauled and streamlined. The leadership team received feedback, which was supposed to make us more efficient leaders. But somehow, since the change initiative started, everything is worse than before. The atmosphere throughout the organisation is tense, everyone is dragging their feet and is moaning and complaining about anything they are asked to do differently. And frankly, I can’t blame them.

‘Part of the change initiative was to strengthen leadership within the organisation. Which is great in theory – and so I also received feedback about my leadership style and what I need to change. But I don’t think the process was fair, and they simply dumped all the data on us and left us to our own devices to make sense of it. As a result, I mainly feel put upon and right now I have absolutely no

motivation to figure out how to turn myself into the *inspirational leader* they want me to become. And on top of everything, I am frustrated with how my team is resisting the change. Even when it comes to steps that actually do make sense.’ His voice trails off... ‘I sure as hell don’t like how things are right now, but I wouldn’t even know where to start to fix it.’

The dance between the individual and the collective

Whenever life feels stuck, somehow not in flow, it can be helpful to understand the location and nature of the blockage before rushing to change random aspects of our life that may or may not be the cause of our unhappiness. Instead, we can hit pause and enquire as to where we experience the biggest gap between our current and our desired reality. If we were in possession of a map, we could even systematise our exploration and conduct a thorough diagnosis. Then, once we had identified *where* something appears to be stuck, we could proceed to investigate *what* seems to be stuck, and eventually create some ideas about *how* we might be able to fix it. With this deepened understanding of the situation, we could focus our efforts and energy in the right direction and identify the lever that would result in the biggest shift towards the desired direction. That would all be wonderful.

Half of the time, however, we feel bad but either have only a vague idea about the origin of our unease, or else mistakenly suspect a source in the wrong place. This is why buying a Ferrari and getting a 23-year-old girlfriend is, at best, a temporary fix for a midlife crisis. Now, I am not saying that this wouldn’t bring joy to your life on some

level, but it is unlikely to resolve the issues that might be at the root of your dissatisfaction. The model I will share with you in this chapter has proven to be a very useful map in understanding more about the territory I am interested in: the landscape of the human experience.

We human beings are social animals, each of us embedded in a number of different collectives or groups. A *collective* is hereby defined as any number of individuals who interact in order to form a whole and share an identity, whether temporarily or permanently. Some of the different collectives we belong to might include our relationships, our family, the team we work with, the team we do sports with, an interest group we attend, the organisation we work for, the nation we were born into, and humanity at large.

Human experience unfolds in the constant dance between the individual and the collective. As individuals, we are part of a nearly infinite number of more or less permanent collectives. These include, for example: my family of origin, my religion, my nationality, the relationship I am in, my gender, whether I am a stamp collector, artist, or train conductor. In every moment, I am simultaneously separate (I am me, distinct from anyone else) *and* a part of different collectives/groups (me in interaction with one or more other individuals).

individual



collective



There are aspects about each perspective – the individual and the collective – which are observable, measurable, and/or quantifiable. Because we can observe them, let's call them *exterior*. At the same time, the individual and collective perspectives each have aspects that are experiential (they are experienced internally) and mostly intangible. These aspects are much harder to observe, and we will call them *interior*. When we combine the individual/collective and exterior/interior perspectives we get a four-quadrant matrix that can serve as our map for transformation.¹

	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
EXTERIOR	can be seen OF THE INDIVIDUAL = OBJECTIVE REALITY	can be seen OF THE COLLECTIVE = INTEROBJECTIVE REALITY
INTERIOR	is experienced BY THE INDIVIDUAL = SUBJECTIVE REALITY	is experienced BY THE COLLECTIVE = INTERSUBJECTIVE REALITY

The Transformation Map

The *top-left quadrant* allows us to relate to what can be known of an individual through observation: their behaviour (what they do) and their physical body (their *objective reality*). The *bottom-left quadrant* encompasses what is mostly invisible to the outside observer, yet known to the individual: reality experienced and expressed through thoughts and feelings (their *subjective reality*).

The *top-right quadrant* relates to what can be seen or measured about a collective: its structure, systems, and processes (their social or *interobjective reality*). The *bottom-right quadrant* encompasses that which is experienced collectively: culturally shared values, norms, and ways of communicating (their *intersubjective reality*).

	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
MEASURABLE QUANTIFIABLE EXTERIOR	<u>BEHAVIOURAL</u> BODY PHYSIOLOGY BEHAVIOUR SKILLS INDIVIDUAL OUTPUT	<u>S O C I A L</u> ENVIRONMENT SYSTEMS STRUC- TURES PROCESSES COLLECTIVE OUTPUT
INTERIOR EXPERIENTIAL	<u>INTENTIONAL</u> PSYCHE MINDSET CONSCIOUSNESS	<u>CULTURAL</u> CULTURE RELATIONSHIPS SHARED VALUES NORMS COMMUNICATION

If you wanted to study me, Nadjeschda, you could quantify and measure my body and physiology, track my behaviour and the results I produce, the skills I master and those I don't. By doing so, you would create a report of my top-left quadrant (the exterior-behavioural quadrant).

However, what happens inside of my consciousness, my feelings and thoughts, is not directly accessible to you as an outside observer (the bottom-left quadrant). What is going on in this quadrant determines how I experience others and myself. For me as an individual, the bottom-left quadrant is the centre of my subjective reality; what is created here is my concept of 'I', my thoughts and feelings – the way I experience the world.

If you now want to investigate any particular collective I am a part of, you could, for example, zoom in on a project team I work with. Through observation, you could quantify the top-right quadrant of this project team: how are we structured, the systems and processes we use, and what the output of our combined actions appears to be (exterior-social quadrant).

To you as an observer, my team's bottom-right quadrant is equally as elusive as my individual-interior quadrant. Within my team we experience a shared reality that is called *culture*. This culture is expressed through our shared norms and values and the way we communicate with each other (interior-cultural quadrant).

If this explanation of the four quadrants feels a bit dry and theoretical, consider how each of the four perspectives allows you to explore another aspect of your own world. Every quadrant brings light to another fragment of your reality. The contents of each individual quadrant can also change

depending on which of your different collectives you look at. For example, if you look at yourself in the context of your family you might see habitual ways of feeling, thinking, and behaving which are very different from those you experience when in the context of your organisation.

Enquiring into the four quadrants within the specific context of one collective allows you to gain a different perspective on your life. You may feel stuck at work because you are lacking a skill that you need (upper-left, behavioural), or because you feel isolated in your team and at a loss how to create more meaningful connections with your co-workers (bottom-left, intentional). Or, possibly, you feel upset that your team doesn't have the right systems and processes in place to work effectively (upper-right, social) or because the culture of your team, the way you communicate, is lacking mutual appreciation and respect (bottom-right, cultural).

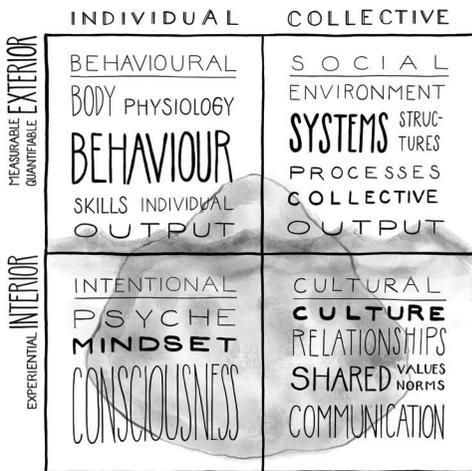
When working with Alistair, the frustrated manager you met at the beginning of this chapter, looking at the four quadrants of the transformation map helped him to resolve his confusion. We first looked at his team and identified which structures and processes were effective and which he felt were missing, or even hampering the team. We went on to identify what the current shared culture was and what needed to shift, on a values level and in the team's shared communication, to improve the general atmosphere. Eventually, Alistair was ready to look at his individual two quadrants, and it became clear to him how the mindset he was holding was causing his frustration.

In this way he identified a behaviour of his that was contributing to the problem – and that he subsequently committed to changing. The

four quadrants allowed Alistair to deepen his understanding of the situation before designing a strategy that considered all, not just one, of the quadrants. Encouraged by the results this approach created in his own team, Alistair brought the four quadrants as a perspective to the leadership team of his organisation. The transformation map guided their analysis of where and why the recent change initiative had worked and where it had failed.

What lies beneath

Let's imagine our four-quadrant map as one giant iceberg.



Only about 10% of the actual mass of an iceberg is visible above the waterline. The iceberg as a metaphor brings to our awareness just how much there is lurking below the surface. Because the bottom quadrants are less accessible they are too often overlooked as the root cause of the sinking ship.

I would like to emphasise that the focus of this book is on personality development and thus on the inner reality of individuals. In this chapter, therefore, I pay special attention to the lower quadrants. This does not mean, however, that important and necessary changes do not have their roots, as well as their solution, in the upper right quadrant, in the change of systems and social structures.

People faced with any form of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, age, disability, social background or religion are entitled to structural solutions to systemic problems. The message of this book is not: 'If you feel disadvantaged or persecuted (because of one of the above criteria), just develop a different mindset and everything will be fine'. Rather, I postulate that a great deal becomes easier with a stable self-awareness. When I know who I am, what has shaped me and what I want, it becomes easier to defend myself against injustice and to channel my anger constructively. And it is easier to develop creative solutions with other self-aware people than with those who are driven by diffuse fears and prejudices.

When I am called into organisations which are undergoing change processes, I often observe how the lower sections of this map have been forgotten entirely. There seems to be a belief, stemming from the industrial age, that all it takes to make a company more successful or productive is to optimise its systems or structures (eg introduce better software or re-arrange who is reporting to whom), and to train people in new skills so they can be more effective at their job. Organisations that are narrowly focused on improving the two exterior quadrants (everything above the iceberg's waterline) eventually produce employees with severe change fatigue. Employees are tired of being rushed through one new system after the other and often

develop resistance to new structures and procedures – even if they are sensible. I have heard countless complaints from employees who feel that new is not better but worse, because it does nothing for them but add to their confusion and sense of being overwhelmed.

Obviously, it makes sense to influence and optimise the upper quadrants, but as the management consultant Peter Drucker famously pointed out, ‘Culture eats strategy for breakfast’. Unless we consider what lies below the waterline (the interior quadrants), sustainable structural change in individuals and collectives is unlikely. Change is more peaceful and takes less of a toll when driven by individuals operating from a higher level of personal awareness or consciousness.

As much as I believe it to be necessary to affect social change, to invest ourselves in creating social justice, gender equality, and affirmative action, I believe that these endeavours are more successful if we are able to acknowledge our part in having co-created the very system we seek to change. Social change leaders such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Luxemburg, or Rosa Parks are all examples of the power of consciousness in action. The bottom quadrants of our four-quadrant iceberg (our individual mindsets and our shared mindset expressed through culture and communication) are at the heart of individual and collective transformation. They deserve a lot more attention than we typically grant them.

Some leaders believe that the saying ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’ expresses how resistant to change their employees seem to be. And they are right to a certain extent; humans will continue to do what they have always done unless they are touched at a deeper

level, unless the new is embraced as sensible and meaningful, unless their thinking shifts profoundly. I believe most people are very much capable of learning new tricks and are willing to do so – if the new trick makes sense to them.

The ripple effect

Each of us holds the power to exercise true choice for one person and one person alone: ourselves. Beyond this chapter, I will therefore concentrate my attention on the individual and interior experience, the lower-left quadrant. What we think and feel – what happens in our internal reality – is the key for personal transformation. But since none of us is an island, disconnected from other people, collectives, or groups, I want to at least demonstrate how being mindful of the right-hand quadrants of our map can help to fundamentally shift our understanding of life.

For some time Andreas, a retiring CEO of an automotive supply company, had been plagued by recurring nightmares. Andreas was in his early seventies, and had been brought up during post-war Germany. In his dreams, he was haunted by images of his early childhood; he saw himself wandering anxiously through his destroyed hometown of Dresden or having unsettling interactions with his overwhelmed and disconnected mother or his angry and violent father. It was evident to me that much of what Andreas had experienced was shared by a whole generation of post-war children. To give context to the memories that haunted him, I recommended he read a book called *Die vergessene Generation: Kriegskinder brechen ihr Schweigen* (The Forgotten Generation: Children of the War Break Their Silence), which is about children born during or shortly after World War II.

During our next session, Andreas shared how reading the book had touched him deeply. ‘For many years I have been so incredibly angry with my parents and how they had brought me up. I was angry at my dad’s uncontrollable rage and how he beat me and my siblings, I was angry with my mother for her inability to communicate and connect with us, I was angry about how emotionally unavailable they both were and that the only thing that ever gained their acknowledgement was my success.

‘But when I read this book, I was absolutely dumbstruck by how many of my most personal feelings about experiences I had with my parents were reflected in the stories of others. I realised that what I thought had just been my parents’ ineptness at raising children was actually the experience of a whole generation. After all this time, I can read these stories and I feel deep grief for the life my parents – and all these parents – had. I suddenly understand that they really didn’t know any better. They simply tried to make the best of an awful situation.’

Andreas and I worked on helping him release the emotional charge still connected to his memories. Very quickly, the nightmares subsided. Andreas had realised how powerfully the living conditions present at the time had influenced his personal experience. Our individual reality is embedded in a collective reality, and this reality is shaped by the existing living conditions. Whether we live in peace or in war, whether there are enough resources or not, if there is a balanced climate or natural disasters strike – the living conditions we experience will influence the systems and processes and will affect the culture, the way people interact. Every change in one quadrant has a ripple effect in all other quadrants.

If you, like me, are among the privileged few (globally speaking) to have been born during a time of peace in a democratic country, your

experience may not have had the same intensity as the one that had continued to influence Andreas. But even then it can be informative or even freeing to understand the interconnection between our own internal experience, our behaviours, and the collectives we belong to and interact with – whether they are our family, our team, our organisation, or our nation.

The four-quadrant map can not only guide our understanding of a current situation, but it can also help us to articulate what change we would like to effect in the future. As stated previously: no quadrant is in itself more important than any of the others, and change in any quadrant will reverberate in all other quadrants. In order to start somewhere, we can enquire: What are the challenges I am experiencing at the moment, and therefore, what is the perspective I need to pay particular attention to?

In the following real-world example, I will share with you how one of my clients, headmistress of a secondary school, used the four quadrants to guide her inquiry into her current and her desired reality for herself and the school she leads.

Real-world example

My client, Mrs Schiller, is the headmistress of a 400-pupil high school. During our coaching, she had repeatedly expressed her frustration with her faculty. To organise her thought process, we designed questions for each of the four perspectives that helped her to deepen her understanding of herself, and of herself in relationship to her faculty team:

INDIVIDUAL

COLLECTIVE

EXTERIOR

Behavioural Quadrant

1. What is my measurable contribution within the team?
2. What behaviours do I see in myself that I experience as positive and that I believe contribute to success?
3. How are my core strengths and values reflected in my current behaviour?
4. What could I do to integrate my strengths even more?
5. Which behaviours do I want to stop (what feedback have I previously received from others)?
6. How well am I taking care of my body/health in the context of my team?

Social Quadrant

1. What do I assume we want to achieve together?
2. Which systems, structures or processes are supporting or enabling us?
3. Which processes, rituals or structures do I believe would strengthen us (what is missing)?
4. Which processes or structures do I believe we should let go of (because they are limiting us)?

The Transformation Map

	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
INTERIOR	Intentional Quadrant <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is my dominant emotion in the context of my team?2. What do I believe/what assumptions do I have that are leading to this emotion?3. What positive or empowering mindset (beliefs) do I have about my colleagues and myself?4. Which of my need(s) do I want to focus on more, moving forward (see 'Needy Icebergs')?5. What is important to me, what do I value?6. What do I want to create?	Cultural Quadrant <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How would I describe our 'culture' based on how we choose to communicate with each other?2. What do I experience as positive?3. What do I experience as negative?4. How do we feel when we are together (positive and negative emotions)?5. What do we seem to believe/assume that leads to this feeling?6. Which values do we share?7. What do I believe we want to create together?8. Which 'rules of engagement' (behaviours and communication we commit to) do I believe would support us in creating this?

Mrs Schiller wrote her answer to each of the questions into an empty four-quadrant sheet and began to create some *Froms* (what is our current status quo?) and *Tos* (where would I like us to be instead?). Through the coaching, Mrs Schiller had learned to distinguish between instances where she had created problems in her mind and blown them out of proportion with her own thinking, and instances that presented tangible challenges, to be jointly addressed by her team.

She decided to share her reflections during the next faculty meeting and began to explain to her team how she felt, the things that made her happy, and those that kept her up at night. She talked about the unproductive behaviours she noticed in herself: the tendency to complain and blame others, the focus on the negative or the lack of sufficient resources, but also the sense of being overwhelmed, as well as her thoughts about the state of the faculty team. She spoke about realising that she wanted to work less, but with more joy. She shared her intention to focus her life on what worked instead of putting all her energy into what didn't work. Finally, she declared her wish to work as part of a team which would take joint ownership to create a school they felt excited to enter each morning.

Throughout the coaching, Mrs Schiller had learned to distinguish between instances where she had created problems in her mind and blown them out of proportion with her own thinking, and instances that presented tangible challenges, to be jointly addressed with her team. She painted a powerful vision of the school she wanted to lead, and the team she wanted to be a part of.

Her faculty team was touched by her openness and her willingness to be vulnerable, especially since the previous head teacher of the

school had fostered a culture in which any form of personal sharing amongst colleagues felt inappropriate. Inspired by her vision, the team decided to use the four-quadrant map for a collective reflection and invited me to facilitate the process.

Based on the team's perception of their current reality, we jointly formulated questions to help them define an appealing vision of the future of their school and their team. The questions allowed them to bring to the surface what they currently experienced as positive, to determine aspects they desired to integrate, and to identify things they needed to change.

After reflecting on these questions, the next step was to define what they felt they wanted to continue in each quadrant (because it worked), what they wanted to stop (because it was limiting) and what they wanted to start (because it was missing). Each team member began to share around the question of continue, stop and start. Soon some common themes began to emerge and they recorded what felt most relevant to the process of moving forward.

The faculty team decided to use their description of their desired future during a school event at which students, teachers, and parents worked together on expanding the vision of the school they wanted to learn and be in. Their school now applies the lens of the four-quadrant map regularly to assess progress and define the next steps in their development journey. My client, Mrs Schiller, continues to base her self-reflection on the four quadrants to discover what works and to delineate actionable steps for what she wants to achieve in all areas of her life.

	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
EXTERIOR	<p>Behavioural Quadrant</p> <p>Continue: Being supportive and offering help, being friendly, asking solution-oriented questions, expressing appreciation.</p> <p>Stop: Complaining, nagging, taking over what someone else started, making our own contribution small.</p> <p>Start: Letting others speak uninterrupted, making time for personal or deep conversations.</p>	<p>Social Quadrant</p> <p>Continue: Monthly big team meetings.</p> <p>Stop: Delegating problems or conflicts upwards.</p> <p>Start: Creating smaller teams dedicated to one cohort of students (instead of teaching subject). Weekly small team meetings. Introduce listening circles into team meetings. Assign rotating meeting roles (moderator, scribe, pacer) for every meeting. Regular exchange with teachers from other teams. Invite students and parents to participate in meetings on regular basis.</p>

	INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
INTERIOR	<p>Intentional Quadrant</p> <p>Continue: Investing in my personal growth in order to be more content and successful in this team.</p> <p>Stop: Limiting mindsets: I don't have the time. It's because of lack of resources that I am unhappy. 'The glass is half empty.'</p> <p>Start: Strengthening mindsets: I have the potential to change. You have the potential to change. I mean well. You also mean well. We have the potential to be awesome. Working together energises.</p>	<p>Cultural Quadrant</p> <p>Continue: Sense of humour & frequent laughter. Our shared values of learning, creativity, empathy, humour, respect.</p> <p>Stop: Interrupting each other, not listening/allowing ourselves to be distracted.</p> <p>Start: Greet each other with eye contact every morning. Sharing more about our feelings and wishes. Taking time to truly listen to each other.</p>

The chapter in a nutshell

Human experience unfolds in the constant dance between the individual and the collective. As individuals, we are part of numerous collectives (for example, relationship, family, family of origin, team, organisation, sports club, nation, humanity).

There are aspects about individuals and collectives that are observable, measurable, and/or quantifiable; they are *exterior*, and elements that are experiential (they are experienced internally) and mostly intangible; they are *interior*.

The *top-left quadrant* allows us to organise what can be known of an individual through observation: their behaviour (what they do) and their physical body.

The content of the *bottom-left quadrant* is mostly invisible to the outside observer, yet known to the individual: reality experienced and expressed through thoughts and feelings (their subjective reality).

The *top-right quadrant* relates to what can be seen or measured about a collective: its structure, systems, and processes (their social or interobjective reality).

The *bottom-right quadrant* encompasses that which is experienced collectively: culturally shared values, norms, and ways of communicating (their intersubjective reality).

Every quadrant brings light to another fragment of our reality. There is a ripple effect: change in any quadrant triggers change in all of the

other quadrants. The contents of each individual quadrant can also change, depending on which of our different collectives we look at.

Inquiring into the four quadrants within the specific context of one collective allows us to gain a different perspective on our life. The four quadrants can serve as a map for the transformation we would like to bring about.

ENDNOTE

1. The four quadrants depicted here are a simplified variation of the four quadrants developed by integral philosopher Ken Wilber (2001, 2007). Integral theory offers other highly valuable models that go beyond the scope of this book.

REFERENCES

- Bode, S. (2010). *Die vergessene Generation: Die Kriegskinder brechen ihr Schweigen*. Klett-Cotta
- Wilber, K. (2001). *A Brief History of Everything* (2. ed.). Shambhala.
- Wilber, K. (2007). *The Integral Vision: A Very Short Introduction to the Revolutionary Integral Approach to Life, God, the Universe, and Everything*. Shambhala.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Download a PDF of the 'Transformation Map' here:
<https://tinyurl.com/TransformationMap>