

Dr. Whitney McIntyre Miller and Integral Peace Leadership

By Omar Zuwayed

Despite the surge in conflicts, there is a compelling reason for optimism. A new wave of peace leaders is emerging, armed with an innovative framework called integral peace leadership, sparking hope for positive change. The integral peace leadership framework, developed in 2015, is a framework for peacebuilding that aims to create positive systems and structures by challenging violence and aggression. This summer, I interviewed Dr. Whitney McIntyre Miller, Associate Professor of Leadership Studies at Chapman University and the lead co-creator of the integral peace leadership framework, to learn more about the framework and her ongoing work to improve and learn from the application of the framework.

What was the inspiration for developing the integral peace leadership framework?

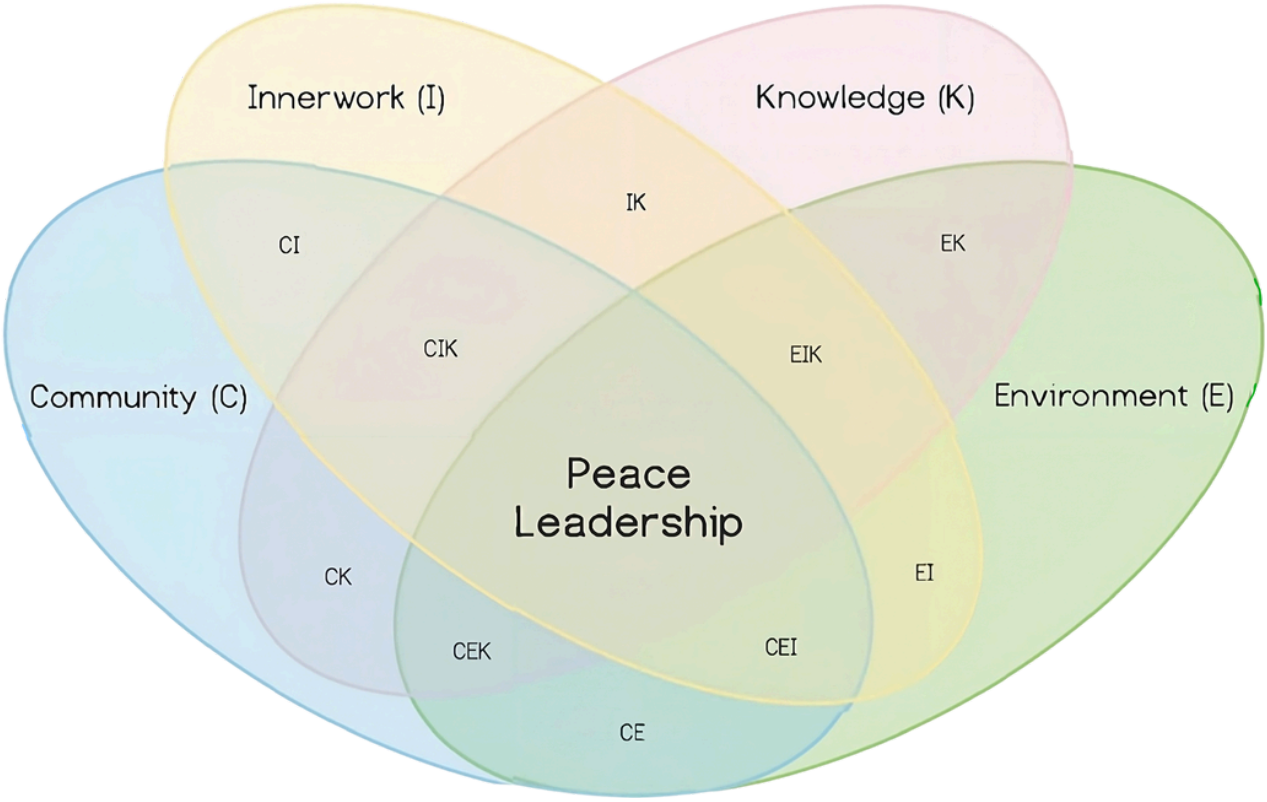
According to McIntyre Miller, the initial idea for the integral peace leadership framework began during a conversation with the co-author of the original article, Zachary Gabriel Green, nearly a decade ago. McIntyre Miller shared, "I realized that there wasn't anything out there that aligned leadership studies and peace studies. So, the two of us mapped it out on a napkin during lunch one day. We were able to put together the first piece on integral peace leadership, published in 2015, which spawned from that conversation."

Inspired by the work of Ken Wilber, the integral peace leadership framework takes a holistic approach to providing a structure for individuals and organizations working to create a more peaceful and just world. Wilber's understanding of reality is divided into four quadrants: individual interior, individual exterior, collective interior, and collective exterior. "Wilber's idea is that for us to be effective in getting anything done, we need to do things in all four areas. So, the idea was to think about how to bring this all together and make it a comprehensive way of thinking about peace and leadership in the world," McIntyre Miller explained. Over the last ten years, the framework has been refined by utilizing existing research and through conversations with peace leaders working in communities the world over. The hope is that it will continue to evolve by regularly integrating feedback from practitioners, allowing it to remain relevant and adaptable to diverse audiences.

What are the key elements of the integral peace leadership framework?

In their integral peace leadership framework, McIntyre Miller and Green discussed the four areas of peace leadership as they saw them: Innerwork, which involves self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and a deep understanding of one's values and beliefs; the building of spaces for creating and maintaining Community; the Knowledge of the skills, behaviors, and practices to make this work come to life; and the ability to be aware of the systems and Environment which surrounds us. Although each of these areas is plotted separately in the framework, it is important to underscore the interrelationship and overlap between them, making the framework much more holistic than it appears when one looks at the four distinct areas separately.





Integral Peace Leadership Model, ©2022, Whitney McIntyre Miller

The framework shows that effective leadership is pivotal in the quest for peace. Leaders have the power to shape attitudes, behaviors, and systems, fostering a peaceful community. This underscores the empowering role of leadership in peacebuilding efforts. Therefore, the integral peace leadership framework provides peacebuilders with a common language and foundation to explain their efforts and intent to funders and collaborators.

The integral peace leadership framework stands out because it bridges the gap between theory and practical application, making complex ideas accessible to a broader audience, particularly at the community level. The framework emphasizes the importance of considering all aspects of a situation: the individuals, the communities, and the systems at play.

The goal for McIntyre Miller is to make the integral peace leadership framework available beyond academic circles through books and practical field guides. Making peace leadership more accessible for real-world application helps to ensure that the framework remains relevant and impactful in both academic and community settings.

How has the framework been applied and tested in real-life situations?

McIntyre Miller shared that there have been several ways that the framework has been applied and tested over the years. First, together with colleague Dr. Mizah Omair Alomair, they used the integral peace leadership framework as a means to analyze the narrative of women peacemakers around the world.

Based on the biographical stories written about participants in the University of San Diego's Women's PeaceMaker program, McIntyre Miller and Alomair were able to assess whether the initial version of the framework was inclusive of the women's personal experiences and then to update the key elements in each of the areas accordingly.

Second, since 2020, Euphrates Institute has implemented the Peace Practice Alliance (PPA), an annual 6-month leadership program influenced by the integral peace leadership framework (The PPA is highlighted in another article in this magazine). Through the program, peacebuilders are trained using integral peace leadership as an organizing framework and taught practical ways to implement peace leadership in their communities. Upon completion of the program, one of the peace leaders from Bosnia expressed her gratitude for the framework because it gave her the language and foundation to describe her efforts more effectively, making it easier to communicate the purpose and value of her work to funders and other stakeholders. When discussing the PPA, McIntyre Miller expressed her gratitude for her work with Euphrates Institute, stating the value of connecting with peace leaders from all over the world, "through our conversations with the participants in the program, we were able to further hone the categories in each of the four areas, and based on their experiences, we updated the framework."

Finally, McIntyre Miller and some of her Chapman University colleagues have been working to bring the ideas of integral peace leadership into local Orange County, California, USA schools.

As McIntyre Miller described it, "As many schools already use some of the principles and practices in the framework, integral peace leadership is often a natural organizing framework for schools. They are able to take what they do on campus and plot it into the four areas and then see where they might want to augment some programming." Through a grant from the Miner Anderson Family Foundation, McIntyre Miller and colleagues have been able to do this work with three schools already and will add additional schools to their program for the 2024-2025 school year.



Through the implementation and examination of the integral peace leadership framework within a variety of settings, it is clear that McIntyre Miller is committed to continuous improvement. She speaks of the ways in which she has been able to hone in on the key ideas of each of the four areas and the importance of viewing them as part of an integrated system. As McIntyre Miller described, "That has been my biggest challenge over the last couple of years. The first iterations of the framework were super heavy, academic, and not very practical.

So, having those conversations with peacebuilders allowed me to understand what pieces they used in reality – those standout pieces in each of the four areas, and how we can talk about them in a way that makes them more digestible." By being reflective and recognizing that pursuing peace requires ongoing learning and adaptation, the framework can remain relevant and useful as the next generation of leaders is ushered into a chaotic world.



What do you want others to understand or take away from your work?

To McIntyre Miller and many leaders worldwide, the integral peace leadership framework is more than just theoretical; it's a call to action. It reminds us that peace leadership is not passive by nature but rather an active pursuit that requires dedication to lifelong learning, adaptation to ongoing world conflicts, and a willingness to challenge existing systems in the name of peace. With McIntyre Miller leading the way, there is hope that integral peace leadership will continue to empower individuals and communities to create positive change in the world.

"There will be a book about integral peace leadership and the peace leaders who are engaging in this work, and I hope that serves as an entrée for some people, and then we can make a field guide that is less academic and more practitioner-based because I think that's what matters...having it be accessible," McIntyre Miller explained. As peaceful leaders' stories continue to be told, there's hope that these narratives will inspire others to embrace peacebuilding and contribute to a more just and equitable world.

To learn more about Whitney McIntyre Miller and her work, you can visit her website, whitneymcintyremiller.com. There, she has additional information regarding integral peace leadership and a list of all of her publications on the topic.