

# Proposal for a Body of Knowledge for the Profession of Structural Integration

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## Introduction

The intention of this article is to reach out to the Structural Integration community and invite your participation in defining a Structural Integration Body of Knowledge (SI-BOK). Individual practitioners and multiple stakeholders will be asked to join in this process, including schools, research organizations, and accrediting bodies.

The purposes that can be served in this process are:

- Providing the SI community with a living document, including core competencies
- Defining the boundaries of what is, and is not, Structural Integration
- Giving regulatory bodies, local governments, state boards, reliable information about SI
- Providing other professions with consistent information about the SI profession

A more important function, perhaps, than all of these is the possibility of bringing our diverse practitioners, instructors, researchers, and accrediting bodies together in a common effort of defining our profession and creating our future. It is an unprecedented opportunity for us to really get under the same umbrella, an umbrella defined by our common philosophy, the foundation that distinguishes SI from all other practices

As discussed below, the AMTA convened a massage therapy body of knowledge (MT-BOK) initiative in order to define the massage therapy profession, and was joined by a number of other organizations. The first draft of that document is online at [www.mtbok.org](http://www.mtbok.org). It is an impressive effort, and has served partly as inspiration for this proposal.

In the following paragraphs, I hope to begin a conversation among fellow practitioners about the role that a formal body of knowledge (BOK) might play in the evolution of Structural Integration.

Initially, I will explore with you the definition of profession and the meaning of Body of Knowledge. In so doing, we will see that a body of knowledge already exists for the profession of Structural Integration, but has not been formally articulated and developed as living document that serves the entire body of our profession.

Next, I will outline the elements of our existing body of knowledge. Finally, I will present some reasons why the SI profession needs to establish a more formal BOK, and outline some beginning steps that we can take in this initiative.

## What Is a Profession, and What Is a BOK?

First of all, what is a profession? Here are several definitions from some familiar sources:

*Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary*

1. a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation
2. the whole body of persons engaged in a calling<sup>1</sup>

*Dictionary.com Unabridged*

1. a vocation requiring knowledge of some department of learning or science: the profession of teaching. Compare learned profession.
3. the body of persons engaged in an occupation or calling: to be respected by the medical profession.<sup>2</sup>

And from WordNet®

1. the body of people in a learned occupation.
2. an occupation requiring special education (especially in the liberal arts or sciences).<sup>3</sup>

Wikipedia provides this explanation of Body of Knowledge:

*“Body of Knowledge (BOK) is a term used to represent the complete set of concepts, terms and activities that make up a professional domain, as defined by the relevant professional association.*

*While the term body of knowledge is also used to describe the document that defines that knowledge—the body of knowledge itself is more than simply a collection of terms; a professional reading list; a library; a website or a collection of websites; a description of professional functions; or even a collection of information. It is the accepted ontology for a specific domain.”<sup>4</sup>*

Working from these definitions, we could say, “The profession of Structural Integration is a vocation that requires the use of a body of specialized knowledge; it is also the body of people, Structural Integrators, who use that knowledge.” The rest of this article is my proposal that we as a profession move toward compiling, reviewing, and formally documenting the body of specialized knowledge that already exists for our profession. Doing so will help us to more securely establish our profession, and provide a meeting place for the diversity of our practitioners.

### ***On Becoming a Profession***

I was inspired while attending a Body of Knowledge gathering convened by the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) in July, 2008. The profession of Massage Therapy has undertaken the enormous project of defining itself.

There has been steady growth in that profession, but no central repository of knowledge that any practitioner can use that will be understood and accepted by other practitioners, and provide a reliable, consistent representation to other professionals such as doctors, physical therapists, etc., as to what can reasonably be expected of a massage therapy professional. What is the minimum knowledge and skill required to become a massage therapist? What standards of practice are generally accepted as best practices in the profession? What code of ethics is pro-

vided for the protection of clients? Is there a set of definitions that can be understood both within and outside the profession? How does a massage therapist convey, in a few words, the essence of the profession? These are but a few of the relevant questions involved in becoming a profession. The same questions apply to the Structural Integration profession. A working draft of the MT-BOK is online at [www.mtbok.org](http://www.mtbok.org).

We already have some hallmarks of a profession:

#### *Professional Membership Organization*

IASI was formed as a professional membership organization representing the diversity of SI professionals from a variety of training programs. IASI has established minimum training requirements for the profession, a professional code of ethics, and continuing education requirements.

#### *Certification*

A psychometrically valid certification exam has been developed by the Certification Board for Structural Integration<sup>SM</sup>. A job task analysis was conducted as part of the development process, surveying several distinct areas of expertise needed for entry level practitioners, including client relations, assessment, strategy, the work, and ethics and professional issues

#### *Recognition by Regulatory Agencies*

Exemption from massage licensing laws has been established in some states. One state, NH has passed legislation to establish a licensing board for Structural Integration, Reflexology and Asian Bodywork Therapy. Each profession will establish rules by which license is granted. All three are recognized as professions that have achieved maturity as evidenced by national certifying bodies, established standards and ethics, and continuing education requirements.

#### *Public and Professional Recognition*

The profession is recognized by a variety of names in public and professional circles. Some insurance providers reimburse SI practitioners.

### ***On Defining the Body of Knowledge for a Profession***

The BOK of a profession can be thought of as a structure, or container, that holds all of the known aspects of the profession. It is a living document, which is adaptable and evolves as the profession itself changes and develops. Stewardship of the BOK is the responsibility of the profession as a whole.

Defining the entire scope of a profession is an ongoing project, one that should continue over the life of the profession. That is beyond the scope of this paper, but something that is implicit in the process. It is up to the profession to decide if, and how, development, documentation and review processes for a Body of Knowledge will be conducted.

Here is an example of how a Body of Knowledge can be envisioned, based on the Massage Therapy Body of Knowledge (MTBOK) project:

*“Our vision for the MTBOK initiative is to develop and adopt profession-wide a common BOK for the profession, defined as: A living resource of competencies, standards and values that inform and guide the domains of practice, licensure, certification, education, accreditation and research.”<sup>5</sup>*

The scope of an SI BOK will likely be different, but that scope will be determined and implemented by the collective of SI practitioners who engage in the process.

#### **BOK Elements**

##### *Core Curriculum*

A start has already been made with the faculty meetings sponsored by IASI. Representative faculty members from a variety of schools have met three times in the last year and a half, with progress made toward defining core curriculum for the profession, an integral part of a Body of Knowledge. Work is continuing via conference call and future face to face meetings are planned.

##### *Consistent Identity*

What message can we offer the public that will summarize, in as few words as possible, the definition of Structural Integration? As a profession, we will gain legitimacy partially through a consistent identity, within and outside our own ranks. Can someone in the medical or chiropractic community feel comfortable referring to a qualified SI practitioner? Can they have some assurance that their patient will be given a treatment consistent with their expectations of the profession?

##### *Definition of Terms*

It would be useful to have consistent terms that facilitate understanding between practitioners from different schools, and between the profession as a whole and other professions.

##### *Founder’s Legacy/Philosophy*

The profession of Structural Integration (SI) already has a core BOK defined. It was left to us by Ida P. Rolf, Ph.D and further developed by her students. In particular, the ten session approach to alignment in the field of gravity and reorganization of the whole human being was delineated, and evolved, by Dr. Rolf. There are notes from lectures, audio recordings, video, and of course, the book she authored, “Structural Integration.” The core Body of Knowledge resides within the people that studied directly with her, and who have continued to teach the work. It also resides within SI practitioners who continue to evolve the work in their private practices. There are practitioners trained by those original teachers, who pass the work, and core BOK along to subsequent generations of practitioners and teachers.

How do we tap into these repositories of our core Body of Knowledge, and then how do we articulate our common underlying philosophy, the thing that separates our profession from any other?

##### *Evolutions of the Work*

Within the SI profession there are many evolutions of this work that have been developed by individuals and schools. Each of these is a unique interpretation of, and contribution to, the Body of Knowledge. Hellerwork®, The Guild for Structural Integration, the Rolf Institute®, KMI, and others have added to the BOK through practice, teaching, research, and inquiry. Each contribution has deepened our understanding and brought new elements that further develop the work. This diversity enriches and enlivens the profession, and any effort toward establishing a common BOK must preserve these and support future inquiry.

##### *Research*

The Ida P. Rolf Research Foundation was launched in 2007. The Fascia Research Congress brought together clinicians and practitioners for the first time in 2007, and the second Congress was held in October, 2009.

##### *Other Resources*

There are libraries and private collections of publications including books, articles, DVDs, and class notes. Several schools publish periodicals on a regular basis. IASI publishes an annual Yearbook.

Underlying all these elements are the teachings of the founder, Dr. Ida P. Rolf. A great deal of her knowledge and expertise is not documented, but lives on through a primarily oral tradition, as we pass along from teacher to student what Ida Rolf taught. These first- and second-hand accounts have been a vital aspect of our professional SI training, and they need to be documented before they are lost.

### **Why does the SI Profession need to Establish a BOK?**

Establishing and developing a formal BOK will serve several important purposes:

First, a BOK will help to preserve the unique identity of the SI profession. The underlying philosophy of SI is different from any other profession. A BOK is one way to gather that knowledge into one place, and have it as a reference.

Secondly, a formally established BOK will help define what kind of training and practices are consistent with the teachings of Dr. Rolf. There are many massage schools and independent instructors who offer structural integration training with very few hours, and no lineage to Dr. Rolf's teachings. Having a BOK is one way to distinguish what is, and is not, SI.

Third, a BOK will help insure that regulation, if necessary, is appropriate for the profession. Many states regulate all professions that involve touch as though they are massage therapy. The requirements for licensure in some of those states demand that practitioners to go to massage school, take continuing education relevant for massage practitioners, and pass an exam designed for massage therapists. Having a well-defined BOK will support IASI's efforts to distinguish SI as a unique profession with legislatures and licensing boards through acceptance of SI standards and certification.

Finally, an inclusive process of developing a BOK will serve to strengthen our profession as a whole. We know that the SI profession will continue to grow, but presently, the number of practitioners and schools is relatively small, so it may be an ideal time to work together on defining our present boundaries and creating our future direction as a profession. The BOK initiative presents a unique opportunity to come together on common ground as we work to solidify our identity and forge cooperative relationships throughout the SI community. A unified profession will help us to provide other professions

with a consistent message about the identity of the SI profession.

### **Initial Goals**

Thus far, we see four goals to work toward in this BOK initiative:

*1. Develop a consistent, persistently applied message about SI for: the public, other professions, and regulatory bodies.*

A profession can help to establish an identity by developing a consistent message about itself. Some have referred to this as the "elevator speech". What do you tell someone who asks, "What is SI?" As a professional community, our power to reach the public, other professions whose referrals we desire, and regulatory bodies that we want to regulate us appropriately, is magnified by a consistent message about SI. Consistency in the message fosters recognition and validity much more so than the patchwork of descriptions now being used. What if we said, "SI is \_\_\_\_\_, and I do Hellerwork® SI. Our branch of SI is known for \_\_\_\_\_."

*2. Develop a common vocabulary for use inside and outside the profession. Consistency of message depends on use of common terminology.*

Many times practitioners describe the same event with such different terms that they cannot understand each other, nor can they present a professional image to the public and other professions. Developing common terms will facilitate our growth as a profession by facilitating communication with one another and presenting a consistent professional presence.

*3. Recognize various evolutions of the work within and outside the profession.*

Our profession has the responsibility, and I would say the honor, of preserving the teachings of its founder. At the same time, Dr. Rolf expected there to be evolution of the work. A diversity of schools and teachers has further illuminated her teachings and evolved new directions. As a community, we are all richer for that tradition, and benefit from knowledge those teachers have contributed, and continue to add to the field of SI.

*4. Foster ongoing communication and development of the profession and its members.*

This BOK effort will involve practitioners, teachers, researchers, and others who have a stake in the profession and its future. The process will require communication and collabora-

ration among the diversity of practitioners in the field, and will enrich the knowledge and experience of the individuals working on the project. These leaders in turn will share their new knowledge and experiences with their colleagues, further enriching the body of our profession.

#### ***Potential Barriers to Establishing a BOK for the Profession of Structural Integration***

We see several potential obstacles to establishing a BOK that will serve to unite and define our profession:

There are a number of massage schools that teach short courses on structural integration. Most of them do not have direct lineage to Dr. Rolf, or the knowledge base necessary to transmit an understanding of organization of the body in the field of gravity. The number of hours to earn a certificate from these schools is minimal, sometimes as little as a weekend. Some of those schools and practitioners may not welcome the establishment of training standards, certification, and other indicators of professional status.

There may be other professions that do not want to see SI become a profession. Physical therapists, in some states, have challenged efforts to establish massage therapy as a separate profession and may express concerns and/or opposition.

Some SI practitioners have expressed the desire to see SI as an advanced form of massage therapy.

Will there be future problems with regulatory bodies imposing restrictions on our practice? There is no way to predict this, as government agencies work in a manner that is generally incompatible with the healing arts. More research into this aspect of professionalization is needed in order to make more educated predictions leading to timely, appropriate interactions with regulatory bodies.

#### ***Developing Consensus***

Complete agreement will never be reached. However, as we articulate the various aspects of the body of knowledge that is SI, we will need to look to the broader vision of our collective future as practitioners, and as a profession.

Questions that must be asked in order to develop consensus:

- Where do we, as a profession, want to go?
- What kind of future would we like to envision and create?
- How can we best continue our professional identity, and be inclusive in the process?
- What are the questions that will lead us to that future?

This group of questions will serve as a starting point, with potential to evolve into an interesting and exciting journey as the process of developing this BOK unfolds.

#### ***An Invitation***

The first meeting for this BOK initiative is tentatively planned for May 5 and 6, 2010, immediately prior to the IASI Symposium in Denver. This initial meeting will focus on whether the profession is ready to take up the challenge of defining the SI-BOK, what areas of the BOK to develop first, and establishing task groups for each of those areas.

This initiative will include, in future phases, a means for the direct participation of a representative cross section of the profession, and will identify ways to reflect the "voice" of the entire profession.

Please contact IASI if you would like to participate in a BOK development and review effort, or if you would simply like to be added to a BOK email list. Structural Integrators who are not IASI members are welcome and encouraged to join the list. Opportunities to participate in this effort will be announced through the IASI website and newsletter, through the email list, and at the upcoming IASI symposium

#### **Notes**

- 1 "profession," Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary. Retrieved January 07, 2010, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/profession>.
- 2 "profession," Dictionary.com Unabridged, based upon the Random House Dictionary. Retrieved January 07, 2010, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/profession>.
- 3 "profession," WordNet® 3.0, copyright Princeton University, 2006. Retrieved January 07, 2010, from WordNet® online lexical database: <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>.
- 4 "Body of Knowledge," Wikipedia. Retrieved January 07, 2010, from Wikipedia.org online encyclopedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body\\_of\\_Knowledge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Body_of_Knowledge).
- 5 from the Stewards of the MTBOK—multiple stakeholder organizations who collectively represent and support the massage therapy profession. See <http://www.mtbok.org/>.