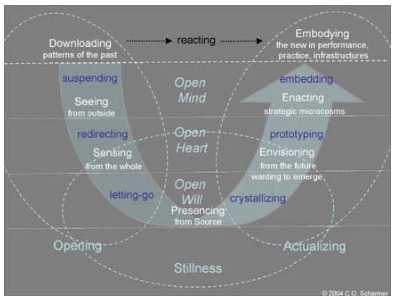
Fieldnotes

Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges

THE SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY OF PRESENCING



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We live in an era of intense conflict and massive institutional failures, a time of painful endings and of hopeful beginnings. It is a time that feels as if something profound is shifting and dying while something else, as the playwright and Czech President, Václav Havel, put it, wants to be born: "I think there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today, many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully being born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself—while something else, still indistinct, were rising from the rubble."[i]

Facing the Crisis and Call of Our Time

Because our thin crust of order and stability could blow up at any time, now is the moment to pause and become aware of what's rising from the rubble. The crisis of our time isn't just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country, or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms.

Frontline practitioners—managers, teachers, nurses, physicians, laborers, mayors, entrepreneurs, farmers, and business and government leaders—share a sense of the current reality. They can feel the heat of an ever-increasing workload and pressure to do even more. Many describe this as running on a treadmill or spinning in a hamster wheel.

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Recently I participated in a leadership workshop with one hundred leaders of a well-known U.S. Fortune 500 company. The speaker before me had a great opening. He reminded us that only twenty years ago we were having serious discussions about what we should do with all of the *extra free time* that we would soon gain through the use of new communication technologies. Laughter erupted around the room. Painful laughter—for the reality that has come to pass is very different.

As we perceive our own rising pressures and diminishing freedoms, we cross the street to meet the other side of the same system in which several billions of people are born and raised in conditions that will never, ever, give them a chance to participate in the our global social-economic system in a

meaningful and fair way. Poverty and exploitation still exist, but the primary issue of this century is that our current global system only works for a relatively small elite minority of us, while in many parts of the world it doesn't work at all for the vast majority of the population. We all know the basic facts and figures that prove this point:

- We have created a thriving global economy that yet leaves 850 million people suffering from hunger and three billion people living in poverty (on less than two dollars per day). The poor of the world—about 80% of mankind—live on 15% of the world's total GNP. [ii]

- We invest significant resources on our agriculture and food systems only to create non-sustainable mass production of low-quality junk food that pollutes both our bodies and our environment, resulting in top-soil degradation of a territory as large as India (the equivalent of 21% of the present arable land in the world). [iii]

- We spend enormous resources on health care systems that merely tinker with symptoms and are unable to address the root causes of health and sickness in our society. Our health outcomes aren't any better than those in many societies that spend far less.

- We also pour considerable amounts of money into our educational systems but we haven't been able to create schools and institutions of higher education that develop people's innate capacity to sense and shape their future, which I view as the single most important core capability for this century's knowledge economy.

- In spite of alarming scientific and experiential evidence for an accelerating climate change, we, as a global system, continue to operate the old way—as if nothing much has happened.

- More than half of the world's children today suffer conditions of deprivation such as poverty, war, and HIV/AIDS. [iv] As a result, 40,000 children die *every day* from preventable diseases.

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Across the board, we collectively create outcomes (and side effects) that nobody wants. And yet, the key decision-makers do not feel capable of redirecting this course of events in any significant way. They feel just as trapped as the rest of us in what often seems to be a race to the bottom. The same problem affects our massive institutional failure: we haven't learned to mold, bend, and transform our centuries-old collective patterns of thinking, conversing, and institutionalizing to fit the realities of today.

The social structures that we see currently decaying and crumbling—locally, regionally, and globally—are built on two different sources: pre-modern traditional and modern industrial structures or forms of thinking and operating. Both of them have been successful in the past. But in our current age, each disintegrates and crumbles.

The rise of fundamentalist movements in both Western and non-Western countries

is a symptom of this disintegration and deeper transformation process. Fundamentalists say: "Look, this modern Western materialism doesn't work. It takes away our dignity, our livelihood, and our soul. So let's go back to the old order."

This reaction is understandable as it relates to two key defining characteristics of today's social decay that peace researcher Johan Galtung calls *anomie*, the loss of norms and values, and *atomie*, the breakdown of social structures. [v] The resulting loss of culture and structure leads to eruptions of violence, hate, terrorism and civil war, along with partly self-inflicted natural catastrophes in both southern and northern hemispheres. It is, as Václav Havel put it, as if something is decaying and exhausting itself.

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What then is *arising* from the rubble? How can we cope with these shifts? What I see rising is a new form of presence and power that starts to grow spontaneously from small groups and networks of people. It's a different quality of connection, a different way of being present with one another that moves us beyond the patterns of the past. When groups learn to operate from a real future possibility that is seeking to emerge, they begin to tap into a different social field that manifests through an altered quality of thinking, conversing, and collective action. When that shift happens, people can connect with a deeper source of creativity and knowing. One they don't normally experience. They step into their real power, the power of their authentic self. I call this change a shift in the *social field* because that term designates the totality and type of connections through which the participants of a given system relate, converse, think, and act.

When a group succeeds in operating in this zone once, it is easier to do so a second time. It is as if an unseen, but permanent, communal connection or bond has been created. It even tends to stay on when new members are added to the group. The following chapters explain what happens when such shifts occur, and how change then manifests.

The shift of a social field is more than a memorable moment. When it happens, it tends to result in outcomes that include a heightened level of individual energy and awareness, a more authentic personal presence, a clearer sense of direction, as well as profound professional and personal accomplishments. As the debate on the crisis and call of our time begins to unfold, proponents of three distinct positions can be heard:

1. Retro-movement activists: "Let's return to the order of the past." Some retromovements have a fundamentalist bent, but not all of them. Often, this position comes with the revival of an old form of religion and faith-based spirituality.

2. Defenders of the status quo: "Just keep going. Focus on doing more of the same by muddling through. Same old same old." This position is grounded in the mainstream of contemporary scientific materialism.

3. Advocates of individual and collective transformational change: "Isn't there a way to let-go of the patterns of the past and tune into our highest future possibility that wants to emerge—and to begin to operate from that place?"

I personally believe that the current global situation yearns for a shift of the third kind, which in many ways is already in the making. We need to let go of an old body of institutionalized collective behavior in order to meet the presence of our highest future possibility.

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The purpose of this book, and of the research and actions that led to it, is to uncover a social technology of transformational change that allows leaders in all segments of our society, including within our individual lives, to meet their existing challenges. In order to rise to the occasion, leaders often have to learn how to operate from the highest possible future, rather than being stuck in the patterns of our past experiences. Incidentally, when I use the word *leader*, I refer to all people who engage in creating change or shaping their future, regardless of their formal positions in institutional structures. This book is written for leaders and change activists in corporations, governments, not-for profit organizations, and communities. I have been often struck by how creators and master practitioners operate from a deeper process, one I call *the U Process*. This process pulls us into an emerging possibility and allows us to operate *from* that altered state rather than simply reflecting and reacting to past experiences. But in order to do that, we have to become aware of a profound blind spot in leadership and in everyday life.

The Blind Spot

The blind spot is the place within or around us where our attention and intention originates. It's the place from where we operate when we do something. The reason it's *blind,* is because it is an invisible dimension of our social field, of our everyday experience in social interactions.

This invisible dimension of the social field concerns the *sources* from where a given social field arises and manifests. It can be likened to how we look at the work of an artist. At least three perspectives are possible: We can focus on the *thing* that results from the creative process—say a painting; we can focus on the *process* of painting; or we can observe the artist as she stands in front of a *blank canvas*. In other words, we can look at the work of art *after* it has been created (the thing), *during* its creation (the process), or *before* creation begins (the blank canvas or source dimension).

If we applied this artist analogy to leadership, we can look at the leader's work from three different angles. First, we could look at *what* leaders do. Tons of books have been written from that point of view. Second, we could look at the *how*, the processes leaders use. That's the perspective we've used over the past fifteen or twenty years in management and leadership research. We have analyzed all aspects and functional areas of the managers and leaders work from the process point of view. Several useful insights have resulted from that line of work. And yet, we have never systematically looked at the leaders' work from the third or the blank canvas perspective. The question we have left unasked is: what *sources* are leaders actually operating from?

I first began noticing this blind spot when talking with the former CEO of Hanover Insurance, Bill O'Brien. He told me that his greatest insight after years of conducting organizational learning projects and facilitating corporate change was that "the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the

intervener." That observation struck a chord. Bill helped me understand that what counts is not only *what* leaders do and *how* they do it, but their "interior condition," the inner place from which they operate or the *source* from which all of their actions originate.

"If we were to ask the question, 'From what *source* does our action come?' most of us would be unable to provide an answer."

The blind spot at issue here forms a fundamental factor in leadership and the social sciences. It also affects our everyday social experience. In the process of conducting our daily business and social lives, we are usually well aware of *what* we do and what others do; we also have some understanding of *how* we do things, the processes we and others use when we act. And yet if we were to ask the question, "From what *source* does our action come?" most of us would be unable to provide an answer. We can't see this source from which we operate; we aren't aware of the place from where our attention and intention originates. Having spent the last ten years of my professional career in the field of organizational learning, my most important insight has been that there are *two different sources* of learning: learning from the experiences of the *past* and learning from the *future* as it emerges. The first type of learning, learning from the past, is well known and well developed. It underlies all our major learning methodologies, best practices and approaches to organizational learning.[vi] By contrast, the second type of learning, learning from the future as it emerges, is still by and large unknown.

A number of people to whom I proposed the idea of a second source of learning considered it wrongheaded. The *only* way to learn, they argued, is from the past. "Otto, learning from the future is not possible. Don't waste your time!" But in working with leadership teams across many sectors and industries, I realized that leaders could not meet their existing challenges by operating only on the basis of past experiences. Sometimes, the experiences of the past aren't exactly that helpful in dealing with the current issues. Sometimes, you work with teams in which the experiences of the past are actually the biggest problem and obstacle for coming up with a creative response to the challenge at hand.

When I started realizing that the most impressive leaders and master practitioners seem to operate from a different core process, one that pulls us into future possibilities, I asked myself: How can we learn to better sense and connect with a future possibility that is seeking to emerge?[vii]

I began to call this operating from the future as it emerges, *presencing*. [viii] Presencing is a blending of the two words "presence" and "sensing." It means to sense, tune in and act from one's highest future potential—the future that depends on us to bring it into being.

This book describes the process and the result of a ten year journey that was only possible through the support and collaboration of inspirational colleagues and friends.[ix] The question that underlies that journey is "How do we act from the future that is seeking to emerge? How do we enter the deeper layers of the social field?"

Entering the Field

A field, as every farmer knows, is a complex living system—just as the earth is a living organism.

I grew up on a farm near Hamburg, Germany. One of the first things my father, one of the pioneers of biodynamic farming in Europe, taught me was that the living quality of the soil is the most important thing in organic agriculture. Each field, he explained to me, has two aspects: the visible, what we see above the surface, and the invisible, or what is below the surface. The quality of the yield—the visible result—is a function of the quality of the soil, of those elements of the field that are mostly invisible to the eye.

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My thinking about social fields starts exactly at that point: that fields are the *grounding condition*, the living soil, from which grows that which only later becomes visible to the eye. And just as every good farmer focuses attention on sustaining and enhancing the quality of the soil, every good organizational leader focuses attention on sustaining and enhancing the quality of the social field—the "farm" in which every responsible leader works day in and day out.

Every Sunday my parents took me and my brothers and our sister on a *Feldgang*—a field walk—across all the fields on our farm. Once in a while my father would stop and pick up a clump of soil from a furrow so that we could investigate and learn to see its different types and structures. The quality of the soil, he explained, depended on a whole host of living entities—millions of organisms living in every cubic centimeter of soil—whose work is necessary for the earth to breathe and to evolve as a living system.

This book invites you to take a field walk across the social landscape of our contemporary global society. And just as we did during the *Feldgang*, once in a while we will stop at a furrow and pick up a little piece of data we want to investigate in order to better understand the subtle territory of social fields. As McKinsey's Jonathan Day once noted about his experience helping global corporations through the process of transformational change: "What's most important is invisible to the eye."[x] But how do we begin to see, more consciously and clearly, this hidden territory?

The Archimedean Point

What is the strategic leverage point for intentionally shifting the structure of a social field? What could function as the *Archimedean point*—the enabling condition—that allows the global social field to evolve and shift?

For my father, it was quite clear. Where do you put your "lever"? On the soil. You concentrate on constantly improving the quality of your topsoil. Every day. The fertile topsoil is a very thin layer of a living substance that evolves through the intertwined connection of two worlds: the visible realm above the surface and the invisible realm below. The words *culture* and *cultivation* originate from practicing this very activity. Farmers cultivate the topsoil by *deepening* the connection between both worlds—that is, by plowing, harrowing, and so forth.

So where is the leverage point in the case of a *social* field? At precisely the same place: at the interface between the visible and invisible dimension of the social field. The organization's fertile "topsoil" exists where these two worlds meet, connect, and intertwine.

What then, in the case of social fields, is the visible matter? It's what we do, say and see. It's the social action that could be captured and recorded with a camera. And what is the invisible realm? It's the *interior condition* from where the

participants of a situation operate. It's the originating and emanating *source* of all we do, say and see. According to Bill O'Brien, that's what matters most if you want to be an effective leader. It's the blind spot or the place from where our attention and intention is happening.

In Part One of this book,"Bumping Into the Blind Spot," I will argue that across all levels, systems, sectors we basically face the same problem: the challenges we face require us to become aware and change *the inner place* from where we operate. As a consequence, we need to learn to attend to both dimensions simultaneously: *what* we say, see and do (our visible realm) and the *inner place* from where we operate (our invisible realm in which our sources of attention and intention reside and operate from). I call the intermediate sphere that links both dimensions the *field structure of attention*. It's the functional equivalent of the topsoil in agriculture by linking both dimensions of the field.

Collectively seeing our field structure of attention—that is: collectively becoming aware of our inner places from where we operate in real time—may well be the single most important leverage point for shifting the social field. It represents the *only* part of our common consciousness that we can have complete control of. Each of us creates the structure of attention ourselves so we can't possibly blame it on someone else. Hence, when we can *see* this point we can use it as the lever for practical change. It enables us to act differently. To the degree that we *see* our attention and its source, we can change the system. But to do it, we have to shift the inner place from where we operate.

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Shifting the Structure of Our Attention

The soil in my father's fields ranges from shallow to deep. Likewise, in our social fields, there are fundamentally different layers of attention also moving from shallow to deep. The field structure of attention concerns the relationship between observer and observed. It concerns the quality of how we attend to the world. That quality differs depending on the *place* or position from where our attention originates relative to the organizational boundary of the observer and the observed. In my research that led to this book, I found that there are four different places or positions that each give rise to a different quality or field structure of attention. They are: (1) *I-in-me*: what I perceive based on my habitual ways of seeing and thinking, (2) *I-in-it:* what I perceive with my senses and mind wide open, (3) *I-in-you:* what I tune in to and sense from within with my mind and heart wide open, and (4) *I-in-now:* what I understand from source or the bottom of our being, that is, from attending with my mind, heart and will wide open. The four field structures differ in the *place* from which attention (and intention) originates: habits, open mind, open heart, or open will, respectively. Every action by a person, a leader, a group, an organization, or a community can be enacted in these four different ways.

To clarify this distinction, let's take the example of listening. In my years of working with groups and organizations I have identified four basic types of listening.

"Ya, I know that already." The first type of listening is *downloading*: listening by reconfirming habitual judgments. When you are in a situation where everything that happens confirms what you already know, then you are listening by downloading.

"Ooh, look at that!" The second type of listening is *object-focused listening*: listening by paying attention to factual and to the novel or disconfirming data. In this type of listening you pay attention to what differs from what you already know. You attend to ideas about reality that differ from your own rather than denying them (as you do in the case of downloading). Object-focused or factual listening is the basic mode of good science. You ask questions and you carefully observe the responses that nature (data) gives to you.

"If that happens, we feel a profound switch; we forget about our own agenda and begin to see how the world unfolds through someone else's eyes."

"Oh, yes, I know how you feel." The third and deeper level of listening is *empathic listening*. When we are engaged in real dialogue, we can, when paying attention, become aware of a profound shift in the place from which our listening originates. As long as we operate from the first two types of listening, our listening originates from within the boundaries of our own mental-cognitive organization. But when we listen empathically, our perception shifts from our own organization into the field, to the other, to the place from which the other person is speaking. When moving into that mode of listening we have to activate our empathy by connecting directly, heart to heart, to the other person. If that happens, we feel a profound switch; we forget about our own agenda and begin to see how the world unfolds through someone else's eyes. When operating in this mode, we usually feel what another person wants to say before the words take form. And then we may recognize whether a person chooses the right word or the wrong one to express something. That judgment is only possible when we have a *direct sense* of what someone wants to say *before* we analyze what she actually says. Empathic listening is a skill that can be cultivated and developed, just like any other skill in human relations. It's a skill that requires us to activate a different source of intelligence—the intelligence of the heart.

"I can't express what I experience in words. My whole being has slowed down. I feel more quiet, present and more my real self. I am connected to something larger than myself." This is the fourth level of listening. It moves beyond the current field and connects to a still deeper realm of emergence. I call this level of listening *generative listening*, or listening from the emerging field of the future. This level of listening requires us to access our open heart and *open will*—our capacity to connect to the highest future possibility that wants to emerge. On this level our work focuses on getting our (old) *self* out of the way in order to open a space, a clearing that allows for a different sense of presence to manifest. We no longer look for something outside. We no longer empathize with someone in front of us. We are in an altered state—maybe *communion* or *grace* is the word that comes closest to the texture of this experience that refuses to be dragged onto the surface of words.

You'll notice that this fourth level of listening differs in texture and outcomes from the others. You know that you have been operating on the fourth level when you realize that, at the end of the conversation, you are no longer the same person you were when you started the conversation. You have gone through a subtle but profound change. You have connected to a deeper source—to the source of who you really are and to a sense of why you are here—a connection that links you with a profound field of coming-into-being, with your emerging authentic Self.

Theory U: Leading from the Highest Future Possibility

Each of us uses, in any action we take, one of these four different ways of paying attention. We access one of these layers of consciousness whether we act alone or in a large group. I suggest we call these ways of acting our *field structures of attention*. The same action can result in radically different outcomes *depending on*

the structure of attention from which a particular activity is performed. Put differently: *"I attend* [this way]—*therefore it emerges* [that way]. This is the hidden dimension of our common social process, not easily or readily understood.

Therefore, I have devised *Theory U* to help us better understand these *sources* from which all social action constantly comes into being.

Theory U addresses the core question that underlies this book: What is required in order to learn from the future as it emerges? In Chapter 2, we will take this "Journey to U" and follow this key question in order to learn to deepen our leading and learning cycles from Levels 1 and 2 (reacting and quick fixes) to Levels 3 and 4 (profound renewal and change). The turbulent challenges of our time force all institutions and communities to renew and reinvent themselves. To do that, we must ask: Who are we? What are we here for? What do we want to create together? The answers to these questions differ according to the structure of attention (and consciousness) that we use to respond to them. They can be given from a purely materialistic-deterministic point of view (when operating on Levels 1 and 2), or they can be given from a more holistic perspective that include the more subtle mental and spiritual sources of social reality creation (Levels 3 and 4).

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A New Science

This book is intended to do more than just illuminate a blind spot of leadership. Rather, it seeks to uncover a hidden dimension in the social process that each of us encounters in our everyday life, moment to moment. To do this, we need to advance our current form of science. As psychologist Eleanor Rosch from the University of California at Berkeley likes to put it: "Science needs to be performed with the mind of wisdom." Science as we know it today may still be in its very infancy.

In 1609 Galileo Galilei devised a telescope that allowed him to observe the moons of Jupiter. His observations suggested strong evidence in support of the heretic Copernican view of the heliocentric universe. Sixty-six years prior, Nicolaus Copernicus had published a treatise that put forth his revolutionary idea that the Sun was at the center of the universe, and not—according to the view by Ptolemy—the earth. In the half-century since its publication, however, Copernicus' theory was met with skepticism, particularly by the Catholic Church. When Galilei looked through his telescope, he knew that Copernicus was right. But when he put forth his views, first in private conversations and later in writing, like Copernicus, he met his strongest opposition in the Catholic Church who claimed his view was heresy and summoned an inquisition. In his attempts to defend his view, Galilei urged his Catholic counterparts to take a look through the telescope and to convince themselves of the evidence with their own eyes. But the church leaders refused to take that daunting look. They didn't dare to go beyond the dogma of Scripture. Although the Church succeeded in intimidating Galeilei during the inquisition trial (forcing the seventy year old Galileo to renounce his views), the real victory was his and today he is considered the father of modern experimental physics. Galileo Galilei helped pioneer modern science by not backing off, by looking through the telescope and by letting the data that emerges from observations teach us what is true and what isn't.

And now, 400 years later, we may again be writing another break-through story. Galileo transformed science by encouraging us to use our eyes, our senses to

gather external data. Now we are asked to broaden and deepen that method by gathering a much more subtle set of data and experiences from within. To do that, we have to invent another type of telescope: not one that helps us only to observe what is far out, but one that enables us to observe the observer's blind spot by bending the beam of observation back upon its source: the self that is performing the scientific activity.

This transformation of science is no less revolutionary than Galileo Galilei's. And the resistance from the incumbent knowledge holders will be no less fierce than the one that Galilei met in the Catholic Church. And yet, when looking at the global challenges of our time, we can recognize the call of our time to come up with a new synthesis between science, social change, and the evolution of self (and consciousness). While it has been a common practice for social scientists and management scholars to borrow their methods and paradigms from natural sciences such as physics, I think it is now time for social scientists to step out of the shadow and to establish an advanced social sciences methodology that integrates science (third person view), social transformation (second person view) and the evolution of self (first person view) into a coherent framework of consciousness based action-research.

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Such a framework is already emerging from two major turns in the field of social sciences over the period of the last half century. The first one is usually referred to as the *action turn* and has been pioneered by Kurt Lewin and his followers in a variety of approaches to action science throughout the second half of the 20th century.xi The second one followed in the late 20th and early 21st century and is often called the *reflective turn*, but probably should be better referred to as self-reflective turn towards patterns of attention and consciousness. This new synthesis in the making links all three of these angles: science (let the data speak), action research (you can't understand a system unless you change it), and the evolution of consciousness and self (illuminating the blind spot).

Twenty-three hundred years ago Aristotle, arguably the greatest pioneer and innovator of Western thought, wrote in Book VI of his *Nicomachean Ethics* that there are five different ways, faculties or capacities in the human soul to grasp the truth. Only one of them is science (*episteme*).[xii] Science (*episteme*) according to Aristotle is limited to the things that cannot be otherwise than it is (in other words, things that are determined by necessity). By contrast, the other four ways and capacities of grasping the truth apply to all the other contexts of life. They are: art or producing (*techne*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*), theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), and intuition or the capacity to grasp first principles or sources (*nous*).

So far the primary focus of our modern sciences has been limited to *episteme.* But now we need to broaden our view of science to include the other capacities to grasp the truth including applied applied technologies (*techne*), theoretical wisdom (*sophia*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and the capacity to intuit the sources of awareness and intention(*nous*).

Our Field Journey: The Book

Its Organization

After "Bumping into Our Blind Spot" in Part One, we move on to "Enter the U Field" in Part Two, followed by Part Three: "Presencing: Leading Profound Innovation and Change."

The first part of this field walk deals with different aspects of the blind spot. I argue that the central issue of our time deals with hitting our blind spot—the inner place from which we operate—across all systems levels. On all these levels we are confronted with the same issue: we cannot meet the challenges at hand if we do not illuminate and change the blind spot—the source of our individual and collective attention and action.

In Part Two we will explore the *core process* of illuminating the blind spot—how is it possible to do this? The third part of our field walk focuses on summarizing this core process in terms of an *evolutionary grammar* that then is spelled out in two forms: as a new social field theory (Theory U) and as a new social technology (24 Principles and Practices of Presencing). The book concludes with an Epilogue: "Birthing a Global Action University." In it are ideas and a broad plan for a global action university that puts all the above principles into practice by integrating science, consciousness, and profound social change.

"Listen to what life calls you to do."

The following twenty-one chapters integrate the insights of eminent thinkers and practitioners in strategy, knowledge, innovation, and leadership around the world. You should know this book is also based on my own biography—recognizably that of a white, male, middle aged European now living in the US—together with my research at MIT and the results of numerous reflection workshops among colleagues and co-researchers. In addition, I have formed the *Theory U* on the results of consulting and "action research" projects with leaders of grass-roots movements and global companies and NGOs, among them Fujitsu, Daimler-Chrysler, GlaxoSmithkline, Hewlett-Packard, Federal Express, McKinsey & Company, Nissan, Oxfam, PricewaterhouseCoopers, and Shell Oil,.

I have always found major sources of inspiration in working with close colleagues from the field of the creative arts, for example, with Arawana Hayashi, who developed the embodied presence practices and who leads a project in which we work on co-creating a new artform called Social Presencing Theatre.[xiii] I also chose to include a number of handdrawn illustrations throughout the book along with many more professionally rendered figures, that visualize and bring alive some of the concepts much better than words can do. It is my hope that by including so many of them, some of the more challenging ideas of this book will be made a bit more accessible.

Its Purpose

This book sets out to do three things. It provides a social grammar of emergence that illuminates the blind spot (Chapter 15, 20). Secondly, it uncovers the grammar of four meta-processes that underlie all processes of organizing and change: thinking, conversing, institutionalizing, and global governance (Chapters 16-19). And lastly, it outlines a social technology of freedom that puts this approach onto its feet and into practice through the principles and practices of presencing (Chapter 21). The set of 24 principles work as a matrix and constitute a whole. That said, they can also be presented as five movements that follow the path of the U. These five movements are:

- *Co-initiating*: listen to what life calls you to do, connect with people and contexts related to that call, and convene constellations of core players that co-inspire common intention.

- *Co-sensing*: form a core team and take deep-dive learning journeys that

bring you to the places of most potential; observe, and listen with your mind, heart, and will wide open.

- *Co-presencing*: go to the place of individual and collective stillness, open up to the source of creativity and presence, and link to the future that wants to emerge through you.

- *Co-creating*: build landing strips of the future by prototyping living microcosms in order to explore the future by doing.

- *Co-evolving*: co-develop a larger innovation ecosystem that connects people and their actions across boundaries through seeing and acting from the whole.

Its Method

Our field walk incorporates three methods: phenomenology, dialogue, and collaborative action research. All three address the same key issue: the intertwined constitution of knowledge, reality, and self. And all of them follow the dictum of Kurt Lewin, the founder of action research, who observed, "You cannot understand a system unless you change it." But each method has a different emphasis: phenomenology focuses on the first-person point of view (individual consciousness); dialogue on the second-person point of view (fields of conversation); and action research on the third-person point of view (enactment of institutional patterns and structures).

"Leadership in this century means shifting the structure of collective attention at all levels."

You will notice that I don't refer in this book to primarily individual leaders, but to our distributed or collective leadership. *All* people effect change, regardless of their formal positions or titles. *Leadership in this century means shifting the structure of collective attention at all levels.*

Look around you. What do you see? We are now engaged in global leadership and this means we extend our attention from the individual (micro) and group (meso) to the institutional (macro) and global system level (mundo). The good news is that the *hidden inflection points* for transforming the field structure of attention are the same at all these levels. These turning or inflection points, which I discuss throughout this book, apply to systems at all levels.

But here comes the caveat. There is a price to be paid. Operating from the fourth field of emergence requires a commitment: a commitment to letting go of everything that isn't essential and to living according to the "letting go/letting come" principle that Goethe described as the essence of the human journey: "And if you don't know this dying and birth, you are merely a dreary guest on earth."[xiv]

The real battle in the world today is not among civilizations or cultures, but among the different evolutionary futures that are possible for us and our species. What is at stake is nothing less than the choice of who we are, who we want to be, and where we want to take the world we live in. The real question, then, is "What are we here for?"

I invite you to join me on this journey of discovery.

Notes

i President Vaclav Havel, specch in Philadelphia, July 4, 1994. I am indebted to Goran Carstadt for calling this speech to my attention.

ii "World Hunger Fact Sheet" published by the World Hunger Education Service: (http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world) "Working Out of Poverty: Making Jobs the Objective," World of Work Magazine (http//www.ilo.org/public/English/bureau/inf/magazine/48/poverty.htm).

iii Combining the world figures for strong and extreme degradation gives the best estimate of land that has been largely, and for most practical purposes irreversibly, destroyed by land degradation. This survey was conducted in the late 1980s. More current information can be found by Googling "land degradation assessments" to see various countries' assessments.

iv The State of the World's Children, 2005: "Childhood Under Threat" (http://www.unicefusa.org/site/)

v I owe this point to the peace researcher, Johan Galtung. see J. Galtung (1995) **On the Social Costs of Modernization: Social Disintegration, Atomie/Anomie and Social Development. Research Paper. UNRISD: Geneva.**

vi See, e.g, Argyris 1993; Argyris and Schön 1995; Senge 1990; Senge et al. 1990; Schein 1987.

vii Scharmer, 2000a

viii Scharmer, 2000b; Schamer, 2000c; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers, 2004.

ix Among those valued colleagues are Beth Jandernoa, Joseph Jaworski, Michael Jung, Katrin Käufer, Ekkehard Kappler, Seija Kulkki, Ikujiro Nonaka, Ed Schein, Peter Senge, and Ursula Versteegen.

x See the full interview with Jonathan Day conducted by Claus Otto Scharmer, July 14, 1999, at Dialog on Leadership (www.dialogonleadership.or/interviewDay.html).

xi Reason et al. 2001.

xii Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*; Book VI, Ch. 3.

xiii For more information: www.presencing.org

xiv *Und kennst du nicht dies stirb und werde, so bist du nur ein trüber Gast auf Erden.*

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