

EXCERPT:

**SOCIETY 4.0: FROM EGO-SYSTEM
TO ECO-SYSTEM ECONOMIES**

Presencing a Profound Shift in Society and Self

CHAPTER ONE

DRAFT – NOT FOR CIRCULATION - NOT FOR QUOTATION.

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I. Through the Eye of the Needle

We live in a time of endings and beginnings, death and rebirth. What is ending and dying is an old economic logic, an old way of building societal institutions and organizing work and life. And what is beginning and wanting to be born is a new awareness and economic logic of collaboration, a new quality of relating to another, and to ourselves. That new quality is grounded in a deep human capacity to link to our sources of self. What we are witnessing in our age is the *death* of one civilization and the *birth* of another. And we—in our institutions, economies, networks, communities, and personal situations—we know both sides of this transformation journey firsthand. We experience and live through that death and rebirth every single day.

In 1996, I (Otto) interviewed our MIT colleague Peter Senge. In this interview, Peter shared an experience he had had in Hong Kong: “I had an interesting conversation with Mr. Nan, the Chinese Zen master who lives in Hong Kong. In China he’s considered an extraordinary scholar because of his integration of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. I asked him if he thought that the industrial age was going to create such major environmental problems that we would destroy ourselves and whether we had to find a way to understand these problems and change industrial institutions. He didn’t completely agree with that. It wasn’t the way he saw it. He saw things on a deeper level, and he said,

There’s only one issue in the world. It’s the reintegration of mind and matter.

That’s exactly what he said to me, the reintegration of mind and matter.”

With those words, I felt I had pierced a veil that had kept me from seeing reality. Time slowed down, and in a flash I sensed a vibrant social field that on its surface displayed all the current *symptoms* of social pathology, and that, beneath the surface contained the *sources* from which these symptoms emanated. Sensing that image, I wondered: What if all symptoms of pathology that we know in society today are a *function of a split* on a *source* level? And if that was true, what was that split at the deeper source level really about?

What does “reintegration of mind and matter” mean when we are talking about the *social field*, that is, the micro, meso, macro, and mundo level of collective behavior

that we enact as a global community? Does it mean that we need to shift that field to reintegrate the split between *behavior* and the *awareness* of a system in order to address the challenges of our time? Does it mean that we need to *close the feedback loop* to enable us to deal with these challenges?

I still remember the almost earth-shattering power of these questions in my whole body. It felt like waking up to a whole new level of awareness and thinking.

These questions about this shift in awareness have been essential for the development of the action research program that we refer to as Theory U or presencing.

The essence of Theory U is the observation that *form follows awareness*. The quality of results in any kind of socio-economic system is a function of the awareness that people in the system are operating from. As we discuss in detail below, Theory U differentiates between four structures of awareness and consciousness that people, groups, and systems can operate from. And these four levels of awareness differ in their mind-matter split; or, to put it differently, they differ in how the self is positioned relative to the boundary of the system in which it operates. For example, the quality of my listening influences how a conversation unfolds. When I apply deep listening, the other person tends to open up. When I apply judgmental listening, the other person will not open up to the same degree; i.e., the conversation will unfold differently.

The first of these four levels is called downloading. Downloading describes habitual behavior and thought and is characterized by a complete disconnect between habitual action and awareness. For example, a team that operates using old assumptions about how to run a project is not able to see important changes in the current context. By contrast, level 4, called *presencing*, represents a state of the social field in which collective behavior and shared awareness emerge from the same source. As the presence of such a heightened state of attention deepens, a different quality of connection, consciousness, and action begins to emerge. Mind and matter, or awareness and action, are no longer separate but one. A team or a group operates with the same intention. They are capable of connecting to the reality they share. A good example of this fourth state of a social field is a great jazz ensemble playing *in the groove*.

But the purpose of this book is not to compare a social field that is characterized by fragmentation and a behavior-awareness split with one that is characterized by coherence and integrated awareness and action. Our purpose here—and the biggest

challenge of our time—is to illuminate the journey from one to another: *what does it take to shift from a mindlessly operating social field to a mindful state of operating?*

This shift occurs at all levels of our society, from micro to macro and mundo, from the individual, group, and organizational level to the regional and the global. And on this journey the traveler inevitably encounters a threshold where, in order to progress, it is necessary to pass through *the eye of a needle*. The term *eye of the needle* refers to a gate in ancient Jerusalem, where, according to the Bible, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”¹ For a man to fit his camel through Jerusalem’s gate, he would have to remove all the bags from the camel’s back. Likewise, if we want to go through the eye of the needle at the bottom of the U, we have to let go of everything and offload all the baggage that isn’t essential. Doing that allows us to reconnect with the essential part of our Self and to operate from a heightened state of connection and presence.

We refer to this journey as the U process because of the “shape” of the journey. In order to get to this deep point of transformation (at the bottom of the U) it is necessary first to “go down the U” (the left-hand side) by opening our minds, hearts, and will, and then, after passing through the eye of the needle at the bottom, “go up the U” (the right-hand side) to bring the new into reality (see Figure 1).

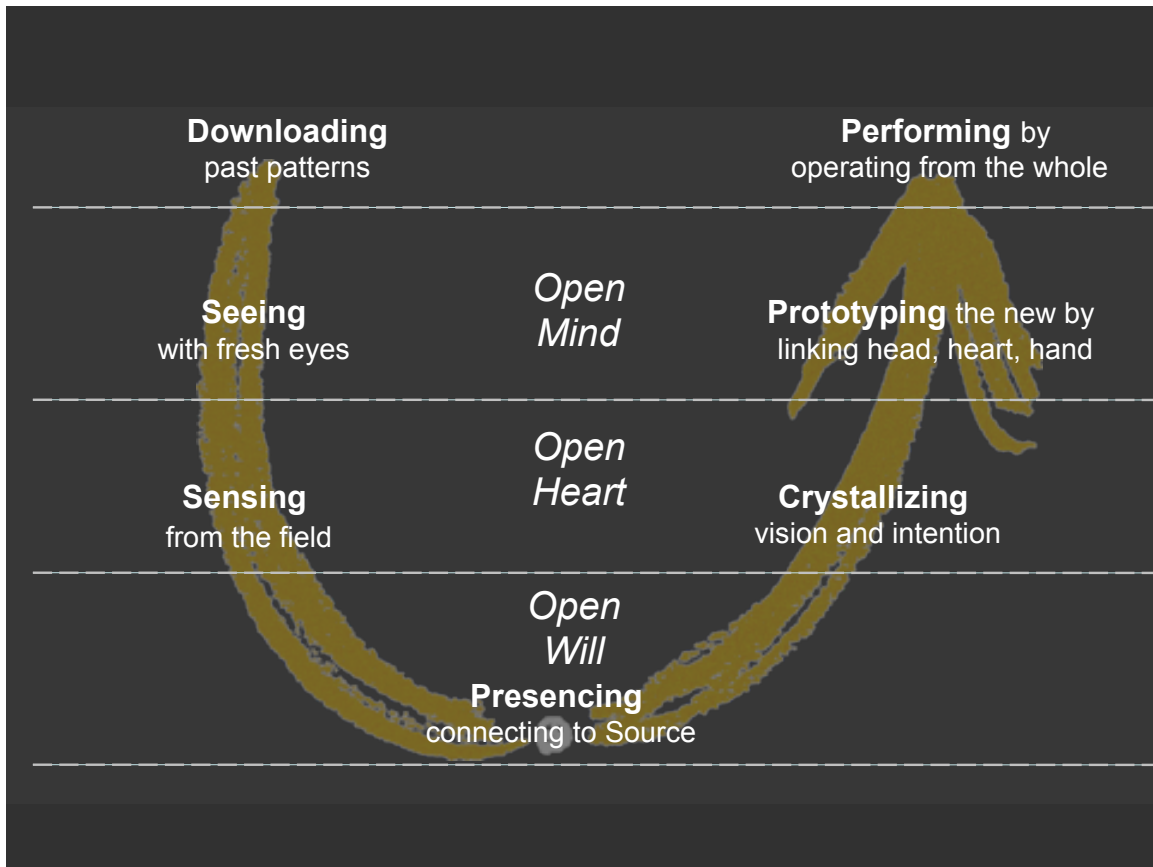


Fig. 1 about here (placeholder figure)

The start of this process on the left-hand side of the U requires us to engage with the habitual body of social behavior around us. Opening our minds, hearts, and will requires us to break with habitual behavior of the past, including patterns of downloading. Let's call this habitual old body the "Social Body 1." As we move through the eye of the needle, the primacy of Social Body 1 disappears, all nonessential baggage is dropped, and a new field of awareness-based connections and action begins to flow into a reality that we call the Social Body 2.

We believe that our three great challenges—the ecological, social, and spiritual divides—all result from the same root issue: the mindless and disconnected way in which our economic logic and operating system navigates the global economy. Addressing these challenges at the root level means to rethink the essence of our economic concepts and institutions.

This rethinking has already started but so far it hasn't included the level of source that Master Nan was talking about. At the root of our economic problems today is a deep split or disconnect between mind and matter in our economy. Put differently, our fundamental economic concepts are out of synch with reality—disconnected. And so are our economic institutions. On one side of the split are the pressing economic, social, ecological, and spiritual challenges of our time. On the other side is the old body of economic thought that mostly originated with 18th-, 19th- and 20th-century economists, and a set of institutions that embodies these principles. And in between these two worlds is a yawning gap.

Yes, we do have discussions about economic reforms and have even seen some reforms and changes implemented. But the problem with most economic reforms to date is that they just tinker at the surface level of the problems. They merely repair some elements of a system that is broken on a much deeper level. They may change a policy here or regulate a few banks over there. But rarely do they go beyond a symptom-oriented rearranging of the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. What's missing today is a high-quality discourse on rethinking the design and evolution of the entire system from scratch.

And since that discourse is going to happen anyway, either as the result of disruption and breakdown, or as result of proactive thinking and intentional design, we would like to invite you to co-shape this journey and join the conversation through this book and its related websites. Together let's explore the evolution of the entire system from scratch—that is, from the perspective of the mind matter split in our economy and civilization today—and what we can do to move from a largely mindless to a much more mindful way of operating the global-local economy.

It's a journey to some of the most interesting hotspots of economic and societal innovation across the planet, and to the depths of societal evolution and economic thought. The purpose of this journey is to illuminate the global crisis today as a painful but also joyful process of transitioning to another state in our economic and social evolution. We refer to this goal as Society and Economy 4.0. As we envision it, Society and Economy 4.0 will be an advanced operating system or economic logic based on the real-time reintegration of mind and matter (presencing).

Einstein told us that “we cannot solve our problems with the same level of thought that created them.” Yet that still pretty much describes what is going on when we look at our current attempts to address the pressing issues of our time. This book's journey is about a path and a method of dropping the baggage of old economic habits of thought and then crossing through the gate to an economy that operates more consciously, inclusively, and collectively.

1. Tumbling of Tyrants

In the fall of 1989, two weeks before the Berlin Wall crumbled, we took an international student group to East Berlin and met with activists in the civil rights movement in the basement of a church. At one point the professor who was with us, peace researcher Johan Galtung, put a prediction on the table: "The Berlin Wall will come down before the end of the year." Everybody doubted that he could be right, including the people who were organizing the resistance against the East German regime. And of course we were all wrong. The wall came down and the cold war came to an end within months after that meeting.

Nineteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in the fall of 2008, the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers sent shock waves around the globe and within hours brought the financial system of the United States and Europe to the brink of collapse. Today, the remaining Wall Street mega banks and their European counterparts survive because of massive taxpayer-financed bailouts from their governments. In the United States, 15 banks failed in 2008. On October 11 of that year, the head of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that the world financial system was teetering on the "brink of systemic meltdown."²

In January 2011, another shift shook the world. On January 18, a 26-year-old Egyptian activist, Asmaa Mahfouz, posted a video online urging people to protest the "corrupt government" of Hosni Mubarak by rallying in Cairo's Tahrir Square. In that video she sparked and inspired an uprising among the Egyptian population. A week later, on January 25, thousands joined her in Tahrir Square. Within days, the movement counted millions. At first, the Egyptian police responded with brutality. But on February 11, 2011, less than four weeks after Asmaa posted her initial video, President Mubarak resigned.

One month on, on March 11, 2011, a 9.0 Earthquake struck off the coast of Japan, generating a massive tsunami that killed more than 20,000 people. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was protected by a seawall designed to withstand a tsunami of 19 feet (5.7 meters). Minutes after the Earthquake struck, a tsunami of 46 feet (14 meters) arrived, easily crossing the seawall and knocking out the plant's emergency power generators. As a consequence, the radioactive fuel began overheating and put the plant on a path toward catastrophic meltdown.

Then, a few months later, we saw the Arab Spring movement going global, inspiring both the *Occupy Wall Street* movement against the economic status quo in more than 1,000 cities and the toppling of additional tyrants like Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Mubarak and Gaddafi regimes, the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, and the near-meltdown of the Western financial system all share some common features:

- i. The end of an old, hardened, centralized structure, one that was previously considered indestructible (unsinkable, like the *Titanic*)
- ii. The beginning of a spontaneous, decentralized, grassroots movement of people who suddenly let go of their fear and wake up to another level of awareness
- iii. Some significant cracks in the old system open and widen, followed by its crumbling and eventual collapse.
- iv. With the old system gone, people look at each other and ask: *Now what?*

We wrote this book because we believe that these kinds of events will keep coming. They mark the beginning of a new era that we have entered as a global community, an era with significant and ongoing ecological, social, economic, and cultural disruption. As we discuss later in the book, in many cases it's already too late to preventing the disruptions. But we can control how we respond to the impact that they will have on how we work and live.

A disruptive meltdown or change affects not only our outer world but also our inner self. Such moments bring our world to a sudden stop. With our eyes open and our minds still in disbelief, the images of the disruptive change start slowly to sink in.

These moments may be terrifying, but they also hold a great blank space that can be filled in one of two ways: one, by freezing and reverting to the patterns of the past, holding on to ideas and solutions that make us feel secure but that repeat the mistakes that led to the breakdown in the first place; or two, by opening up to the *highest future possibilities* that are embedded in such moments. The second response—leaning into, sensing, and actualizing one's emerging future—is what this book is about: How can we sense and bring into being our highest future potential as individuals and institutions, and as a global community?

The Blind Spot

We came to the United States in 1995 to work with the MIT Center for Organizational Learning. It had been founded by Peter Senge and his colleagues at MIT together with a group of global companies in the early 1990s. We were surprised to learn that Senge and his organization were part of the same MIT research group that had produced the influential *Limits to Growth* study, which had shaped our awareness of environmental issues in the 1970s and helped spark the global environmental movement.³

In his work with many Ph.D. students, Senge had noticed how sophisticated and deep their skills were in mapping and analyzing the broken systems of our current society. But their practical impact on changing these systems was almost zero. Why was that, he wondered? Based on that puzzling observation, Senge became interested in the behavioral dimension of managing change.

Senge blended two streams of work. One was systems thinking, in which he drew on the work of his mentor Jay Forrester, the mastermind of the *Limits to Growth* study. The other one was organizational learning and change, in which he drew on the work of Chris Argyris, Don Schoen, and Ed Schein. The blending and synthesis of these two streams resulted in the book *The Fifth Discipline* and in the initial concept for the MIT Learning Center.⁴ What emerged from this synthesis was an initial set of methods and tools developed by this small group of action researchers at MIT.

After a few years, Senge noticed that the tools worked very well in the hands of some practitioners and enabled them to effect significant innovation and change in their organizations. But he also noticed that in other cases the application of the same tools resulted in no significant change. Why would that be? Why are the same tools effective in the hands of some and ineffective in the hands of others? That was more or less the question on the table when we arrived at the MIT Learning Center in the mid-1990s.

Since then we have investigated that question in our research, including 150 interviews with leaders, entrepreneurs, and innovators, as well as by observing and leading change processes in companies, governments, and communities in different countries and sectors.⁵ The result of this 15 years of work is a “2.0” framework for learning, leadership, innovation, and systems change. We call this framework “presencing” or Theory U (for the shape of the drawing used to depict it). It has been fully described in Otto’s book *Theory U* and in the book *Presence* that Otto co-authored with Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers.⁶

The gist of this framework is simple: the quality of results produced by any system depends on the quality of awareness from which people in the system operate. The

formula for a successful change process is not “form follows function,” but “form follows consciousness.” It is the structure of awareness and attention that determines the pathway along which a situation unfolds.

We stumbled onto this deeper territory of leadership research when we interviewed Bill O’Brien, the late CEO of Hanover Insurance. Summarizing his most important insights from leading transformational change in his own company, O’Brien said: “The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor.” We might say it this way: the success of our actions as change makers does not depend on *what* we do or *how* we do it, but on the *inner place* from which we operate. (See Figure 1.1)

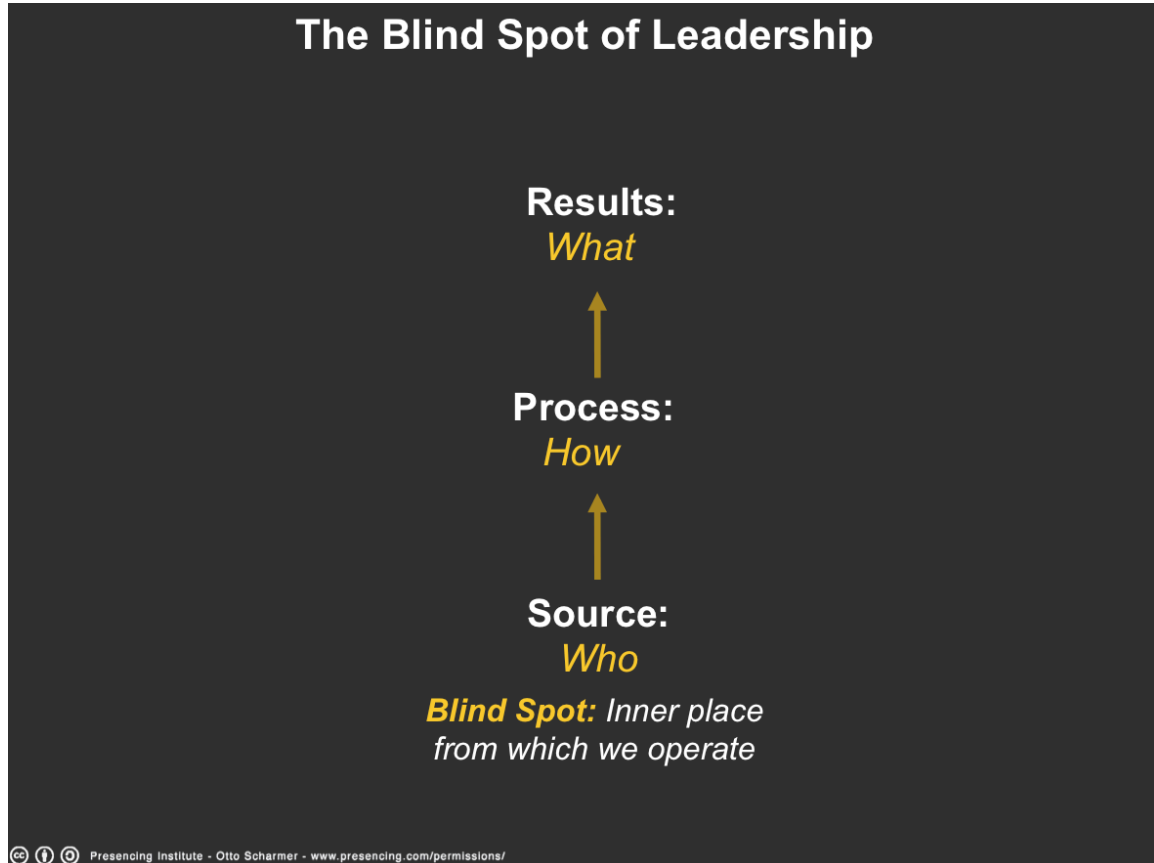


Fig. 1.1: The Blind Spot of Leadership: Source

When I (Otto) first heard Bill O'Brien say that I thought, "Boy, what do I really know about this inner place? I know nothing! Do we have *one* or *several* or an *infinite number* of these places?" I didn't know because that place is in the *blind spot* of our everyday experience. We can observe *what* we do and *how* we do it. But the quality of the source (or inner place) from which we operate in "the Now" tends to be outside the range of our normal observation, attention, and awareness.

That insight into the deeper source level of social reality creation set us on a new path of integrating leadership, management, economics, neuroscience, and systems change. The essence of that view is that we cannot transform the behavior of systems unless we transform the quality of consciousness that people apply to their actions within these systems, both individually and collectively.

The more we explored this territory, the more we realized that most of the existing learning methodologies relied on learning from the past, while most of the real leadership challenges in organizations seemed to require something quite different: *letting go* of the past in order to sense, tune into, and actualize future possibilities.

We realized that this second type of learning—learning from the emerging future—not only had no methodology; it also did not have a real name. And yet innovators, entrepreneurs, and other highly creative people all express an intimate relationship with this deeper source of knowing. Otto found the word "presencing" to refer to it. Presencing is a blended word combining "sensing" (feeling the future possibility) and "presence" (the state of being in the present moment): presencing means to act from a heightened state of awareness "to sense and actualize one's highest future possibility."

Theory U and presencing signify three different things: (1) a *theoretical framework* for looking at social systems and leadership from the perspective of "the source," that is, the structure of awareness (Fig. 1); (2) a *practical method*, a how-to, for effecting change by cultivating the inner place from which we operate; and (3) a *state of awareness* and *being* that, in the face of disruptive change, allows us to directly connect with what wants to emerge through us.

Presencing is a critical tool as individuals, organizations, and societies contend more often with moments of disruption and meltdown. We live in an era where these moments of meltdown and disruption just keep coming. They keep coming for us as individuals, as communities, as organizations, and as larger systems. The question that we are interested in is not really how to avoid them. In many cases it is already

too late for that. Given that these moments will keep coming, we are interested in how to best and most effectively *respond* to them. What does it take to turn a moment of meltdown into a moment of *presencing*, rather than into an experience of “absencing,” into a social field of creation rather than destruction?

Presencing the Emerging Future

At the moment we reach the point of meltdown we have a choice: we can revert to our deeply ingrained habits of the past, or we can stop and lean into the space of the unknown, lean into that which wants to emerge.

This second possibility, through which we lean into and connect to our highest future potential, we refer to as presencing. Presencing emerges from a mindful way of connecting with one’s inner emptiness, one’s space of not knowing. As we connect with this deeper space, our attention field goes on a transformational journey. It is a journey that follows its own social grammar, including: *stopping, suspending, redirecting, letting go, letting come, crystallizing, enacting, and embodying* the new (Fig. 1.2). Sometimes, in martial arts, we go through this sequence in an instant. At other times, such as in journeys of institutional transformation, going through this cycle is a matter of years. Many of our everyday experiences are right in between: not a fraction of a second, not multiple years, but maybe over the course of a half day or three day workshop – or over the course of a one or two hour experience of deep dialogue.

Going through this process of presencing is essentially a process of opening up, of allowing something new to land in us, and of bringing the new into reality.

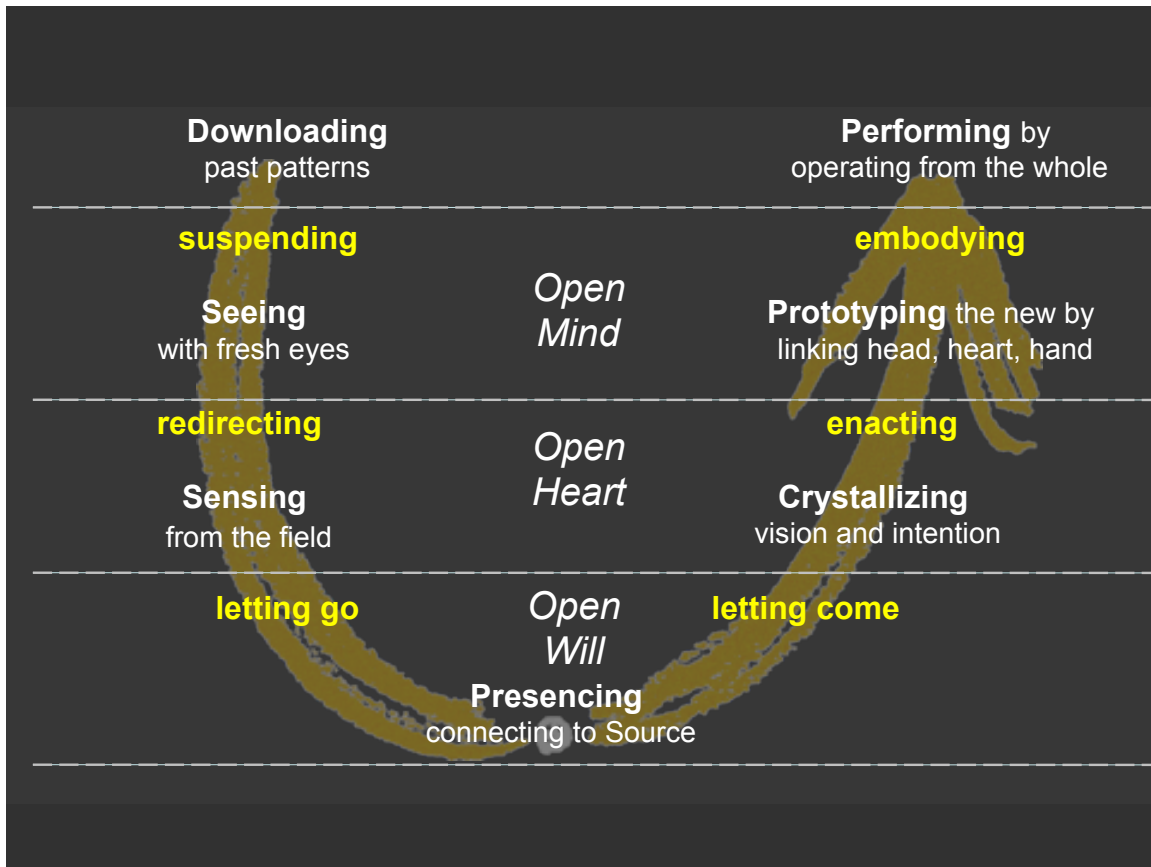


Figure 1.2: The process of presencing

If you want to see a beautiful example of this, watch the video that Asmaa Mahfouz posted on January 18, 2011, which generated a spark that inspired not only her country but people around the world to stop and wake up:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgIgMdsEuk>

She speaks from a place that transcends the three primary obstacles that prevent us from connecting to our source of deeper presence and authenticity: doubt, cynicism, and fear. Instead of doubt, which the government propaganda tries to perpetuate, she speaks with great clarity. Instead of cynicism, which would distance her emotionally from others, she speaks from a state of deep connection and empathy.

And instead of fear, which would isolate her, she speaks from a place of vulnerability, commitment, and courage. Here is an excerpt from her video blog:

Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire to protest humiliation and hunger and poverty and degradation they had to live with for 30 years. Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire thinking maybe we can have a revolution like Tunisia; maybe we can have freedom, justice, honor and human dignity. Today, one of these four has died, and I saw people commenting and saying, "May God forgive him. He committed a sin and killed himself for nothing."

People, have some shame.

I posted that I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone. And I'll hold up a banner. Perhaps people will show some honor. I even wrote my number so maybe people will come down with me. No one came except three guys—three guys and three armored cars of riot police. And tens of hired thugs and officers came to terrorize us. They shoved us roughly away from the people. But as soon as we were alone with them, they started to talk to us. They said, "Enough! These guys who burned themselves were psychopaths." Of course, on all national media, whoever dies in protest is a psychopath. If they were psychopaths, why did they burn themselves at the parliament building?

I'm making this video to give you one simple message: we want to go down to Tahrir Square on January 25th. If we still have honor and want to live in dignity on this land, we have to go down on January 25th. We'll go down and demand our rights, our fundamental human rights.⁷

The first time she went to Tahrir Square she was joined by three young men. The next time, a week after posting this video blog, she was joined by over 50,000 protesters, and a week later, on February 1, over 1 million people protested peacefully. On February 11, the supposedly "unsinkable" regime was finished and Mubarak resigned.

This way of co-creating disruptive change is not as unusual as it may seem. What has struck us in working with community leaders, grassroots activists, social entrepreneurs, and business entrepreneurs is that this deeper way of operating is actually quite familiar to many of them. They just don't talk about it because there is no widely understood or accepted language for it.

In our work we have explored change-making from a slightly different angle by asking: *Where does the new come from?* What allows change-makers to break through patterns of the past and connect to the emerging future? When we talk about the ideas depicted in Figure 2, we often hear that change-makers and line leaders in most organizations and cultures recognize this process. Many of them say, “Yes, I know this process. And I know highly creative people who work exactly that way. I even have had special moments in my own life when I operated that way.” But then when we ask whether their current organizations operate that way, very few people say yes.

Asmaa Mahfouz is not a singular case. But she is a very visible figure at the tip of an iceberg that may represent, in the words of Paul Hawken, “the biggest global movement that this planet has ever seen.”⁸ It includes grassroots civil society movements that have brought down the tyrant-led regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, the Communist-led regimes in Eastern Europe, and the apartheid regime in South Africa. The movement is fueled by millions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have been created over the past two decades. The movement also includes a new breed of business entrepreneurs who create “hybrid” business enterprises that aim for a double or triple bottom line, combining profitability with a social mission or an environmental objective. We have found that leaders too—particularly younger leaders—in business and government aspire to be part of this movement and its worldwide webs of inspired connection and collaboration. And in fact they increasingly are.

This new global movement has no name, no leader, no ideology, no single program, no single center. Instead people are sharing a new interior field, a new consciousness, a collective awareness of and concern about the well-being and evolution of all living systems, including our planet.

“Absencing” by Getting Stuck

Of course, presencing doesn’t happen when we are on autopilot. When confronting a moment of meltdown, instead of leaning into the future, we can choose to revert to habitual patterns of the past. Mubarak did that on February 10, 2011, when he refused to step down. Erich Honecker and the East German Politburo did it in the early fall of 1989, when they were still holding on to their crumbling system. Many pictures come to mind. It’s not just the Wall Street banks who, on the brink of collapse, still couldn’t resist further expanding their power through, in the words of former IMF Chief Economist Simon Johnson, “a silent coup.” It’s also the Catholic Church, which even in the face of the most heart-wrenching cases of child abuse, holds on to its institutional routines. It’s also not just about *them*. We all do this,

when we refuse to let go of what worked well in the past but in the present no longer does.

Whenever we respond to the inner space of emptiness by downloading the old rather than by leaning into the new, we are embarking on a journey of social pathology that looks roughly like this: downloading, denying, de-sensing, absencing, deluding, destroying, and (eventually) self-destroying.

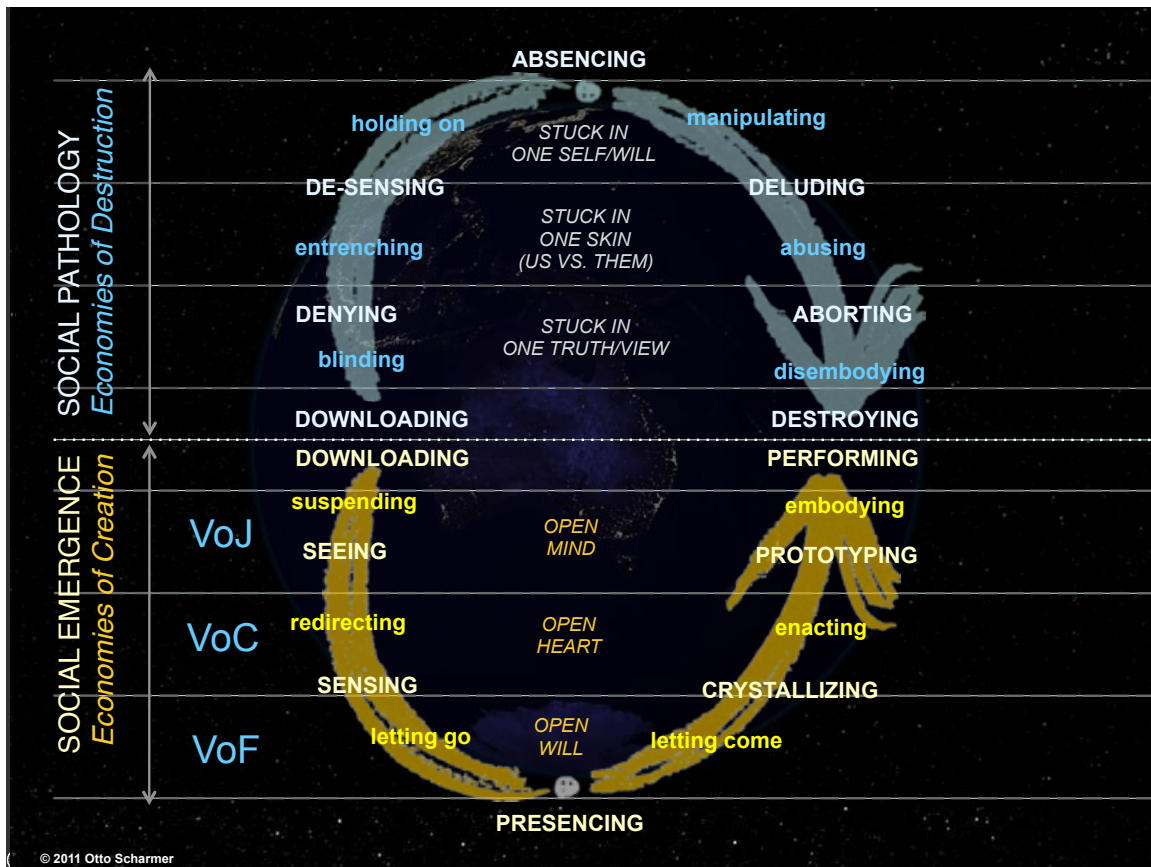


Figure 1.3: Two Social Fields: Presencing and Absencing

As shown in Figure 1.3, the absencing cycle depicts the inversion of the presencing cycle. Instead of opening the mind, heart, and will, the absencing cycle anxiously holds on to the past. It does not dare to lean into the unknown, the emerging future. The space of absencing throws us into a trajectory of denial (not seeing what is going on), de-sensing (a lack of empathy with the other), absencing (loss of the connection to one's higher self), delusion (guided by illusions), aborting (killing the

new instead of allowing it to come into being), and destruction (destroying others and ourselves).

A good illustration is what Hitler and the Nazis did to Germany and the rest of the world. Today, look at what we are doing collectively to our own planet. The fundamental pattern is the same.

Thus, being thrown into the space of absencing means getting stuck in the tyrannies of

- 1 Truth (ideology)
- 1 “Us” vs. “Them” (rigid collectivism)
- 1 Will (fanaticism)

The triple tyranny of *1 Truth, 1 Us, 1 Will* is also referred to as fundamentalism. It's the very structure that people rose up against starting with World War II. Whether we talk about the struggle for decolonization and independence in the global South, the struggles against the apartheid system in South Africa, the struggle against the tyrannical regimes in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and North Africa, the deeper struggle in all these places has always been the same: people keep rising and fighting against the same deeper tyranny that emerges from the fundamentalism of 1 Truth (a closed mind), 1 Us (a closed heart) and 1 Will (a closed will). That rigid worldview has led to social structures defined by three key features:

- communication: unilateral, linear
- transparency: low, exclusion-based
- intention: serve the well-being of a few

What people would like to see instead is not well defined, but could be sketched as the opposite of the old system, as follows:

- communication: multilateral, cyclical
- transparency: high, inclusion-based
- intention: serve the well-being of all

How to achieve the second model is less clear (and is a central topic of this book). But what is striking today is that probably most people on the planet would instantly reject the first model, which merely reenacts massive forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence.⁹

The fields of presencing and absencing are highly intertwined. In our everyday institutional reality, there is no shortage of absencing. Nor is there a shortage of

examples of absencing in recent history. Think about the Soviet tanks rolling into Prague in 1968. Think about Mubarak and Gaddafi shortly before their regimes fell. Think about the Western governments that kept installing, supporting, and holding on to anti-democratic, tyrant-led regimes in the Middle East in exchange for cheap oil. Look at our own behavior as producers and consumers, which has driven and held on to an oil-addicted pattern of economic development for too long. The deep dynamics of the social field of absencing are all about defending, entrenching, and holding on. They account for perhaps 80 to 90% of all conflicts in social, political, cultural, and economic life. We all know this pattern very well.

The battle over the fundamentalism at issue here is not the one with Al Qaeda. It's a battle for the future of our planet. It's taking place on a battlefield that we cannot reach by dropping bombs on other people. *The primary battlefield of this century is our own Self.* And that battle is between the self and the Self: between our existing, habituated self and our emerging future Self, both individually and collectively. It is a battle between absencing and presencing that plays out on all levels of our social systems today.

Moments of Madness and Mindfulness

What determines whether we as individuals, teams, institutions, and systems operate from the field state of absencing or that of presencing? What is the lever that allows us to move from one field state to another? What can we do to move from madness to mindfulness?

Let us look at a concrete example. On April 26, 1986, an accident happened at reactor number four of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. As the worst-case scenario started to unfold, the children and citizens of the city next door, Pripyat, received no warnings. Citizens of that region, Russian and European, were exposed to a cloud of nuclear radiation that first traveled north to Scandinavia and then covered almost all of Europe and its 500 million inhabitants.

Not only were Europe's citizens not warned about the potential threat, but even the top Soviet leaders in the Kremlin were in the dark. Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, who at the time was General Secretary of the Communist Party, recounts: "I got a call around 5 a.m. I was told there was some accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. The first information consisted of 'accident' and 'fire'. The information report was that everything was sound including the reactor . . . At first, I have been told there was no explosion. The consequences of this information were particularly dramatic. . . What had happened? A nuclear explosion, a cloud, serious contamination. It was Sweden that alerted us!"¹⁰

Gorbachev was told that the accident posed no problem to the surrounding environment and was under control. No one, according to Gorbachev, told him in these early days that a series of explosions had occurred in the core of the reactor and had blown the 12,000-ton cover of the reactor into the air, releasing a highly radioactive vapor into the environment. Later, high radiation levels set off alarms at the Forsmår Nuclear Power Plant in Sweden over 1,000 kilometers away. The Swedish government alerted its population about radioactive dust.

Although radiation was still emanating unchecked from the Chernobyl plant, the evacuation of citizens living next to the plant did not begin until more than 24 hours after the accident. Only after Gorbachev formed a commission of nuclear experts and gave them access to unlimited resources, people, and technology did a full-blown crisis response begin.

At the same time that this crisis response was being launched, many of the old patterns of downloading continued to play out—with disastrous consequences. The nuclear experts met in a hotel next to the damaged power plant in a city that had been fully evacuated, thereby exposing themselves to high levels of radiation that at least some of these experts must have been aware of. Even the traditional May 1st celebrations were held in the capital of Ukraine, Kiev, less than 100 kilometers away from the disaster area. Local high officials attended.

In a later interview Gorbachev reflected on the reaction of the nuclear experts:

These were outstanding people, specialists. I could not believe they would do something [so] irresponsible, suicidal. The experts underestimated the situation. The old criteria weren't any good anymore. There had been nuclear accidents before . . . [but] there had never been an accident of this scope. They [the nuclear experts] even though the power plant would be back in service—by May or June.¹¹

Then, finally, when the full gravity of the nuclear catastrophe had sunk in, the Soviet Union mobilized 500,000 people in the battle to prevent an even bigger catastrophe. The decontamination and cleanup efforts continue today, consuming 5 to 7% of annual government spending in Ukraine (2003–2005 figures).¹²

Valery Legasov, who at the time of the disaster was director of the Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, committed suicide on its second anniversary. He left an audiotape that the BBC referred to in a documentary about Chernobyl. The tape described how Legasov gave in to political pressure and altered his report to the

Vienna conference hosted by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1986, and later failed to disseminate information about the disaster within the Soviet Union.¹³ At the time of his suicide, Legasov, who had been exposed to radiation at the accident site, had begun to experience related health problems.

Another example of responding to a challenge by downloading old patterns of behavior was provided by the French Minister for Public Health and Social Security, Pierre Pellerin, who claimed that the cloud of nuclear fallout (which had reached all of Northern, Central, and Western Europe) had never crossed the borders into France. France, with its 50 nuclear power plants, derives over 75% of its electricity from nuclear energy, the highest percentage in the world.

The different attempts to determine exactly how many deaths resulted from the Chernobyl catastrophe provide another example of the consequences of absencing. Political and financial interests led to a process of covering up, withholding data, and not allowing for an independent and reliable collection of data. As a result, the Chernobyl Forum report (IAEA, WHO, UNDP, World Bank Group, and others) estimated that about 4,000 people died from causes related to the nuclear fallout.¹⁴ Twenty years after the disaster, Greenpeace estimated that there had been 95,000 related deaths;¹⁵ and more recently Alexej Jablokow, one of the founders of the Russian environmental movement, calculated that during the 25 years after Chernobyl 1.4 million people died of side effects from nuclear exposure.¹⁶

Whatever the correct number is, the Chernobyl catastrophe is a stark example of how downloading old behavior in a context in which it no longer fits, results in patterns of denial, data distortion, delusion, destruction, and self-destruction (see Figure 1.3).

But the story does not end here. Mikhail Gorbachev realized that if the melted nuclear core had reached the groundwater beneath the reactor, Europe might have become an uninhabitable wasteland. Says Gorbachev, "Chernobyl showed us the true nature of nuclear energy in human hands. We calculated that our most powerful missiles, the SS18s, were as powerful as 100 Chernobyls . . . And we had 2,700 of them, and they were intended for the Americans. Imagine the destruction . . . Chernobyl convinced everyone, Soviets and Americans alike . . . [of] the magnitude of the nuclear volcano our countries are sitting on. Not just our two countries, but the entire world!"¹⁷ A year and a half after Chernobyl, Gorbachev retired all nuclear warheads with a range of 500–5,000 kilometers.

Watching the catastrophic events of Chernobyl unfold, Gorbachev allowed his mind to slow down, become aware, let go (of the old military logic of MAD—mutually

assured destruction), and let the seeds of disarmament germinate and grow. These seeds ended up changing the course of world history for the better.¹⁸

This story raises the obvious question: *How should the current course of catastrophic events that is starting to shake our planet shift and change the collective mind of our global community today?*

¹ Matthew 19:23–24.

² Quoted in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stock_market_crash.

³ Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows, and William Behrens III, *Limits to Growth* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 1972).

⁴ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990).

⁵ Most of the interviews were conducted by Otto, many of them jointly with his colleague Joseph Jaworski. See P. Senge, C. O. Scharmer, J. Jaworski, and B. S. Flowers, *Presence: Human Purpose, and the Field of the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Society for Organizational Learning, 2004). See also: <http://www.presencing.com/presencing/dol>.

⁶ C. O. Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges: The Social Technology of Presencing* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

⁷ quoted from

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/2/8/asmaa_mahfouz_the_youtube_video_that. Accessed on April 14, 2012.

⁸ Paul O. Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming* (New York: Viking, 2007).

⁹ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. 197.

¹⁰ *Battle of Chernobyl*, A Film by Thomas Johnson, 2006. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiCXb1Nhd1o>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Chernobyl’s Legacy: Health, Environmental and Socio-Economic Impacts, and Recommendations to the Governments of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, “The Chernobyl Forum 2003–2005” (<http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Booklets/Chernobyl/chernobyl.pdf>).

¹³ For more details: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-77531679.html>.

¹⁴ See <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Booklets/Chernobyl/chernobyl.pdf>

¹⁵ See <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/news/features/chernobyl-deaths-180406/>.

¹⁶ Jablokow compares regions not affected with regions in the Ukraine and Belarus that were affected, and calculates that the death rate in the affected regions increased by 4%.

¹⁷ *Battle of Chernobyl* (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiCXb1Nhd1o>: minute 1:26).

¹⁸ In January 1986 Gorbachev proposed the elimination of intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe and outlined a strategy for eliminating all nuclear weapons by the year 2000 (often referred to as the January Proposal). He also began the process of withdrawing troops from Afghanistan and Mongolia on July 28. On October 11, 1986, Gorbachev and Ronald Reagan met in Reykjavík, Iceland, at Höfði to discuss reducing intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe. To the immense surprise of both men's advisers, the two agreed in principle to the removal of their countries' INF systems from Europe and to a global limit of 100 INF missile warheads each. They also agreed in principle to eliminate all nuclear weapons in 10 years (by 1996), instead of by the year 2000 as Gorbachev had originally proposed. In 1987, this would culminate in the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.