

Theory U

SECOND EDITION



Leading from the Future as It Emerges

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Foreword by Peter Senge

**Revised and Updated with New Preface,
Case Stories, and Full-color U Journey Drawings**

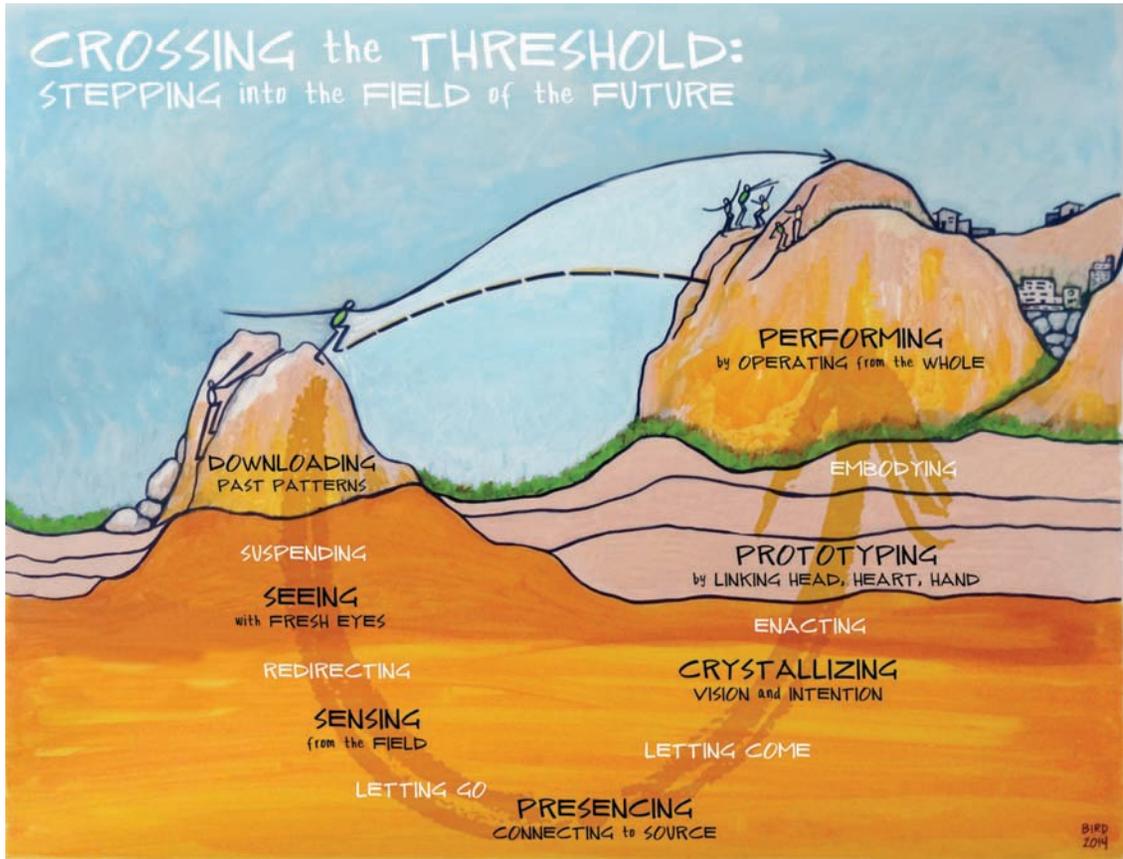


FIGURE INSERT 1: CROSSING THE THRESHOLD
 Imagine a leap from our current self to our emerging future Self. We are facing that threshold, gap, chasm or abyss on all levels of scale: as individuals, groups, organizations, and as a global community. How can we activate our deeper levels of humanity in order to bridge and cross that divide? This is the organizing question and journey of this book.

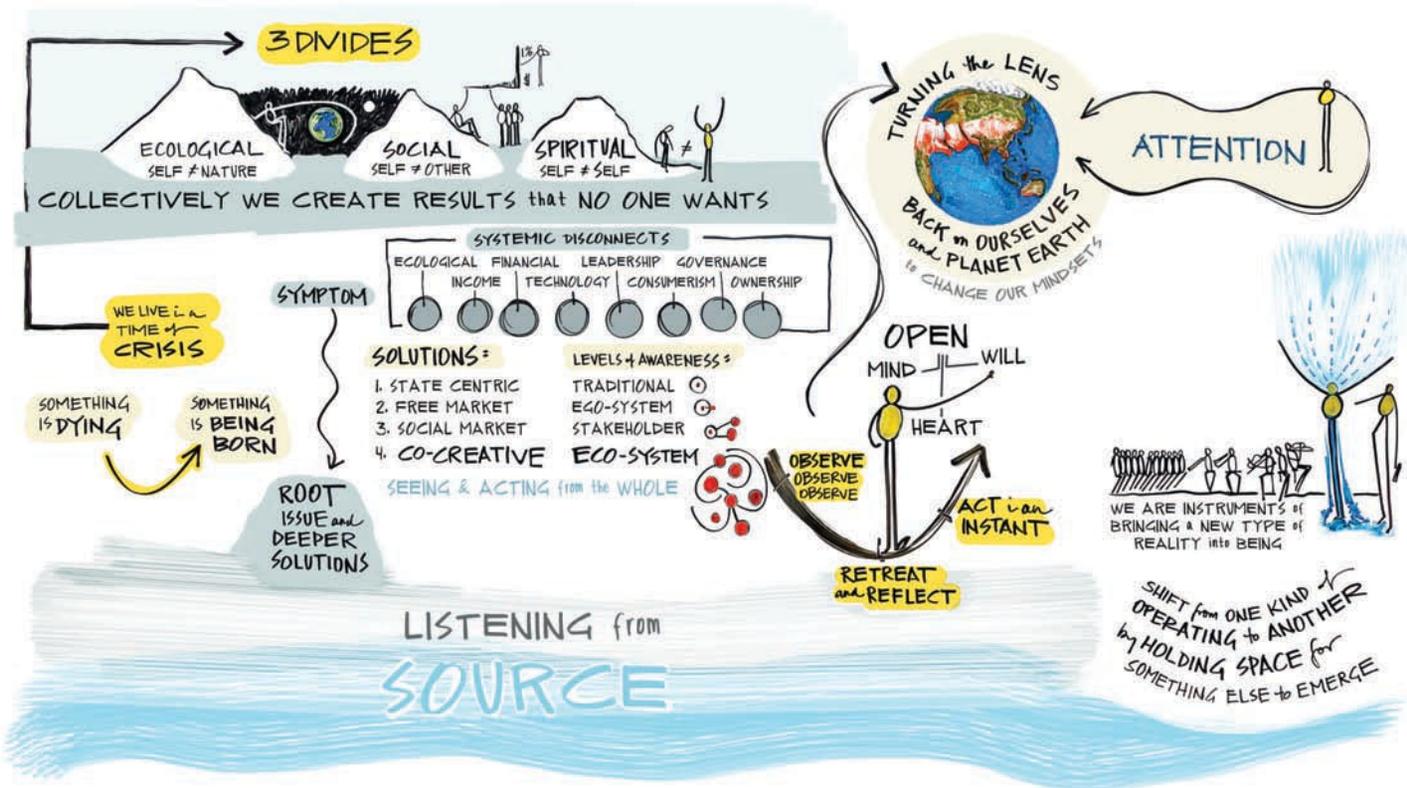


FIGURE INSERT 2: THE ICEBERG MODEL

On the surface, three divides: ecological, social, and spiritual. In the middle, systemic disconnects that keep us reproducing results that nobody wants. On the deepest level: the root issues—the mindsets, paradigms, and Source from which we operate. Through each level, we “turn the lens back at ourselves” to shift our level of awareness from “ego” to “eco”, from me to we . . .



FIGURE INSERT 3: DISRUPTION

The issues outside are a mirror of the issues inside. During the u.school ecology gathering in Berlin 2015, a conversation bubbled up on the shadows of society, as if disruption itself knocked on the door of our attention, almost forcing inquiry into darkness. To navigate and hold the breakdown, we engaged the discomfort by opening the mind-heart-will . . .

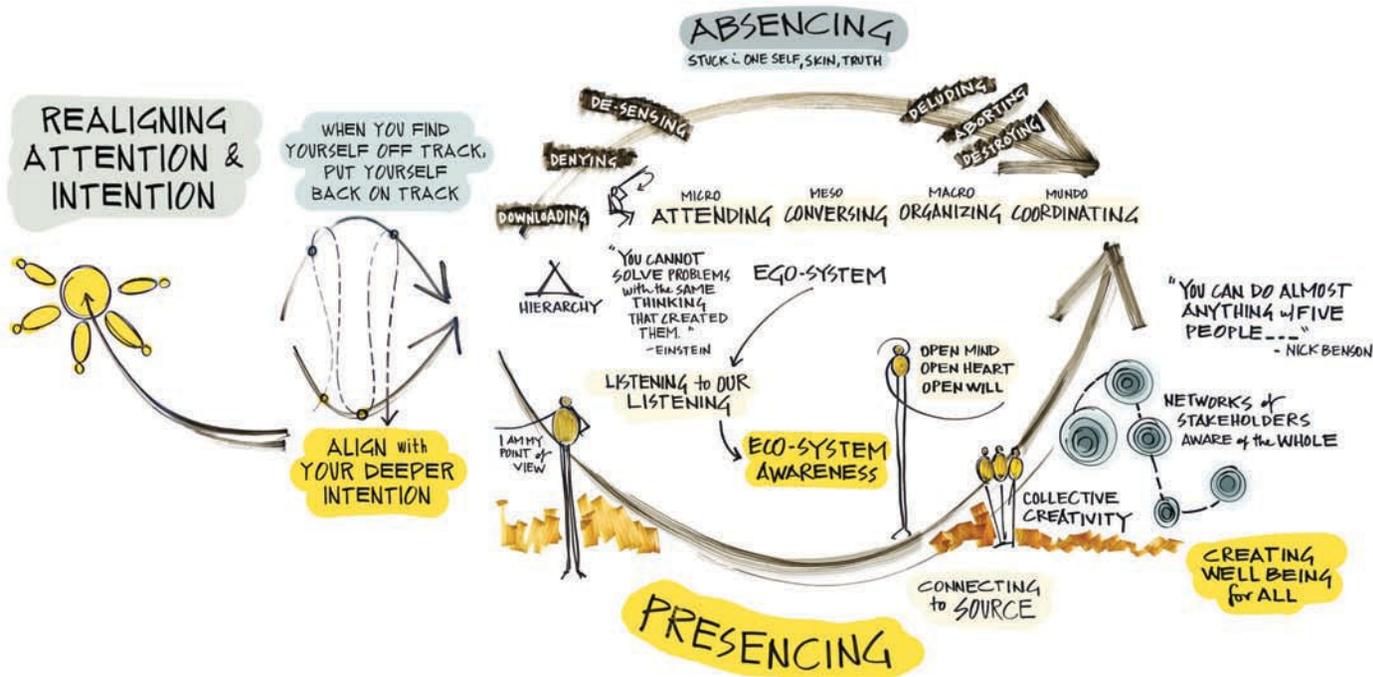


FIGURE INSERT 4: INTENTION

In response to disruption, we muddle through, move apart from one another, by move together. The two curves—absencing and presencing—simply do not exist without each other. It is the constant stitching between the two, not a vacillation but an integration, that realigns our attention with our deeper intention . . .

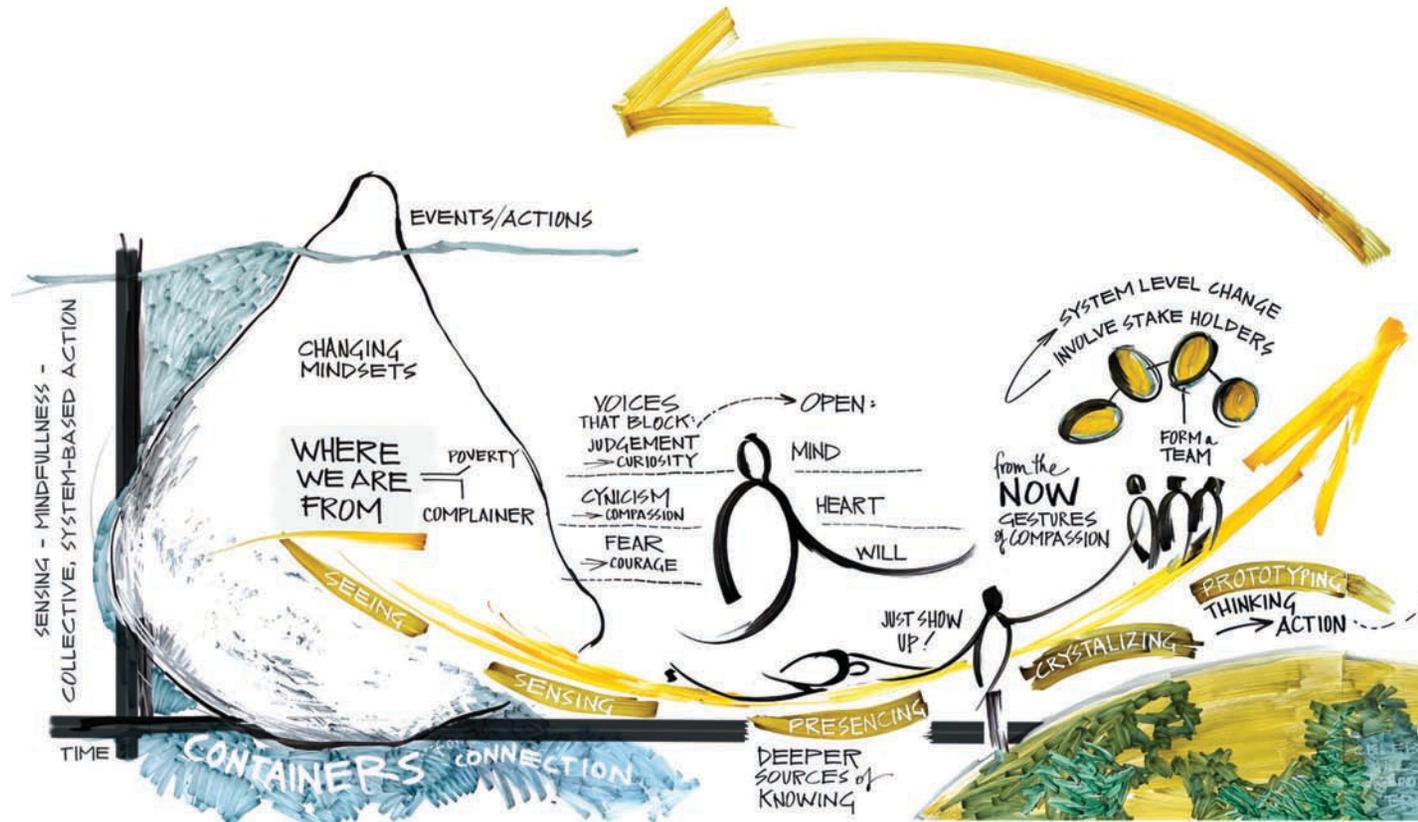


FIGURE INSERT 5: INVERSION

“Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception within us.” Goethe knew about the deep connectedness between the inner and the outer. In order to become instruments for real transformative change, we have to bend the beam of attention back onto the observing self, thus, help the system to sense and see itself . . .

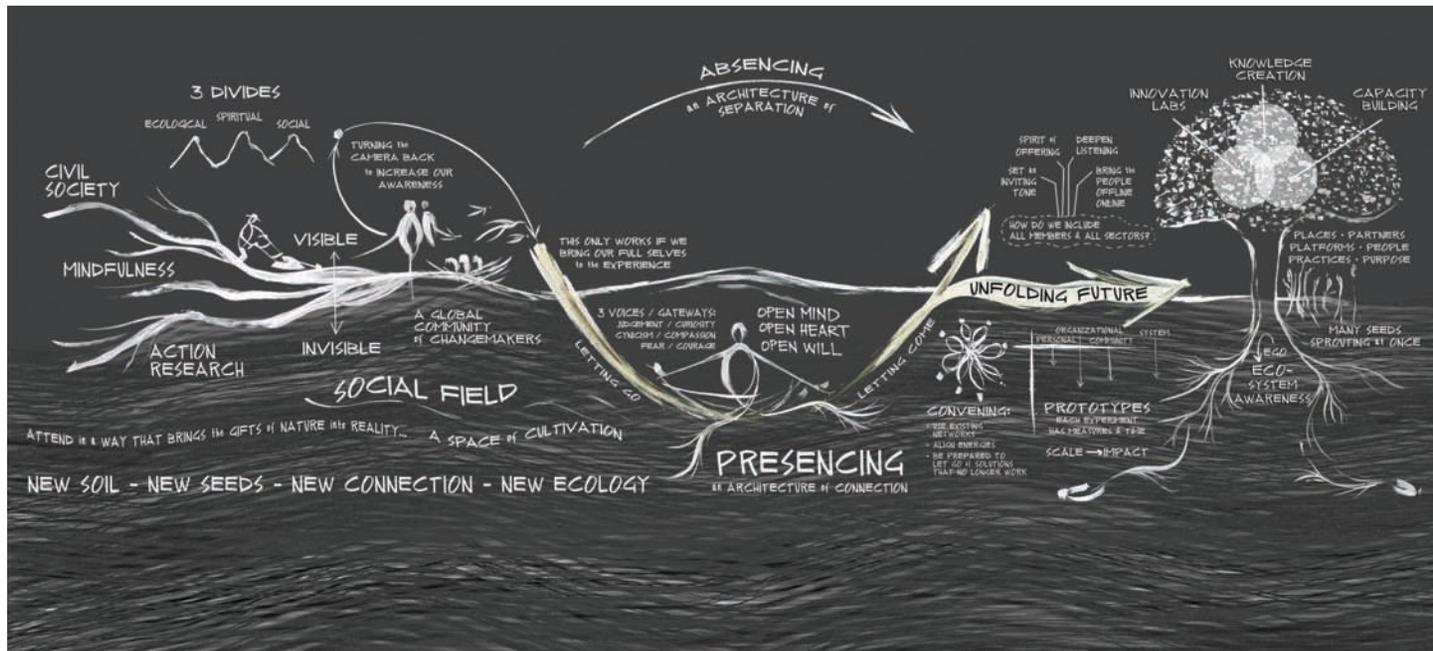


FIGURE INSERT 6: SOCIAL FIELDS

We are part of a global movement that brings together the streams of civil society, mindfulness, and action research while cultivating the soil of the social field, awakening an ego-to-eco shift in awareness and consciousness at its root. In this image we can see ourselves through the eyes of the whole. merging key themes from the online and offline experiences, we have turned the camera back on our own process and u.lab journey . . .

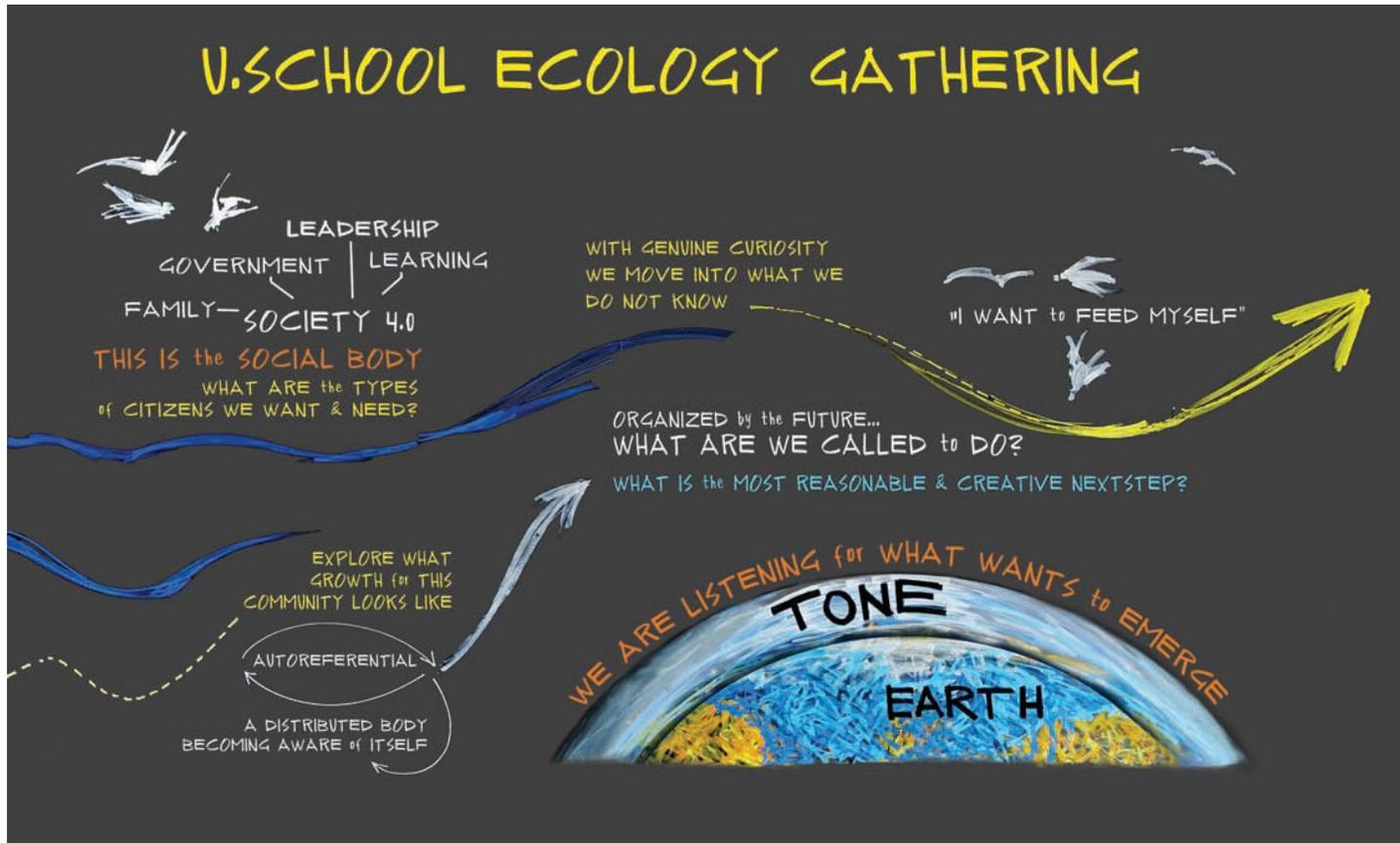


FIGURE INSERT 7: Earth rising

as we sense and feel the future, we cannot see and specify precisely what it is. Yet real-time connection to that space is the guiding lifeline. During a Social Presencing Theater practice, with 40 global representatives of the u.school ecology engaged, the person embodying the role of Earth spoke to us: "I am, and I will be," representing a shift of our awareness in listening to the tonality of the planet and what it calls on us to do . . .



FIGURE INSERT 8: U.SCHOOL ECOLOGY
 here we see the footprints and essence of the ecology gathering in Berlin. What stands out most clearly is the flow of the blue, as if the water of the three streams merges into a delta of the open mind-heart-will, moving out into an unknown place of calling, as gestured or conducted by Earth herself . .

a note on these images: all the pictures you see here, and described in the new introduction in this book, were originally created in live social contexts as real-time container-building and reflective devices, onto walls ranging from 8 to 30 feet, with dry erase or chalk markers. For more about the context and journey that gave rise to these images, and for high resolution versions:

visit us at www.presencing.com/theory/images
 For more on Kely Bird and her work: www.kelybird.com

Preface to the Second Edition: Ten Years On, Earth rising

When this book was first published (in 2007), our daughter, Hannah, was nine years old. When this second edition comes out, she will have turned nineteen. Reflecting on this past decade and on the decade prior to it that it took me to write the first edition makes me aware of the magnitude in changes that we have seen over the past twenty years. The world has crossed—and is still crossing—a profound threshold.

What threshold am I talking about? It is personal. Relational. Institutional. Global. You can probably feel it too. My colleague and co-founder of the Presencing Institute, Kely Bird, who created the wonderful drawings at the beginning of this book, has captured the crossing-the-threshold state (image 1).



In image 1 we see a chasm, an abyss. One part of our self is on the left side—in the current reality, looking into the abyss. Another part of our self, our

emerging Self, is already operating on the other side—the side that connects to the future that wants to emerge. We are both of these selves: the one that is terrified, staring into the abyss; and the one that is already operating from the field of the future—for the future is already there.

and in between these two selves? The void. Nothing. No thing. The journey of connecting these two selves and getting them to listen to each other is the essence of Theory U—and the essence of this book. The old self must cross the divide, cross a bridge over the abyss—a bridge from self to Self, a bridge that activates the deeper levels of our own humanity, the deep dormant levels of our emerging Self.

We face that abyss wherever we go, as individuals, teams, and organizations, and as global systems—every single day. Theory U describes a method—a path—that helps us on all levels, in all situations, to keep leaning into and crossing that divide.

Something profound and subtle has happened between the late 1990s—when I first started writing this book—and now. This book traces some of the early beginnings of a global awakening—a movement of people, connections, and consciousness.

But what exactly has shifted between then and now? Let me try to answer that question by sharing five observations that I believe embody five dimensions of a deeper shift that continues to reshape our world.

rise of mindfulness and Spirituality

The first observation concerns the rise of mindfulness. Over the past two decades we have seen mindfulness move from marginal to fairly central in four areas of professional application:

- Cognitive science: The discovery of brain plasticity has made mindfulness a more common focus of research in neuroscience and neurophenomenology, as exemplified in the pathbreaking work by Tania Singer on compassion and Richard Davidson on neuroplasticity.
- Health: The development of MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) by Jon Kabat Zinn and his colleagues has provided a powerful method to

assist people with pain and conditions that are difficult to treat in traditional settings. Since its origins in 1979, mBSr has been used by many thousands of instructors in over thirty countries worldwide. The number of research publications on mindfulness increased from virtually zero in 1980 to 15,000 in 2013.

- **Education:** a new understanding of social emotional learning (SEL), which applies Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence in schools, is helping students to manage emotions, develop empathy, and build relationships.
- **Leadership:** mindfulness practices in leadership development work are being applied not only in tech communities, but also in most forward-leaning global companies. I have been using mindfulness (and presencing) practices in traditional industries (the automotive industry), technology companies (Google, alibaba), multilateral organizations (the UN), governments (the Chinese government), and huge state-owned enterprises (ICBC, a Chinese bank). It is striking how wide open the door is for the use of mindfulness and presencing practices in organizations today. The lack of pushback is almost shocking. If you do it right (which means promoting mindfulness not as an ideology but as a tool), the positive response is strong, particularly among the next generation of leaders.

mindfulness is the capacity to attend to your experiences, while also paying attention to your attention. It requires a shift in your awareness to a higher level: seeing yourself from the whole.

In a world of ever increasing cultural **adhd** (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), supported by our various apps and electronic devices, which at first we love and then (when we fail to use them intentionally) are tyrannized by, the capacity for self-awareness is ever more mission-critical. In spite of all the talk about multi-tasking, scientific evidence shows that multi-tasking doesn't exist. What does exist, however, is the shortening of the attention span.

and to quote a line from the Matrix movie, when Neo is introduced to "the system": "That's the enemy!" all real creativity, all profound innovation,

and all deep civilizational renewal are based on the same source: the capacity for sustained attention—the capacity to immerse ourselves in something, stay with it, and then finally, when we are lucky, catch the spark of inspiration and move with it, in order to “bring the new into reality as it requires,” to paraphrase martin Buber.

Image 2 (iceberg) captures this deep territory of change in the form of a model that depicts the symptoms of the problem at the surface, and underneath them the deeper root issues and sources that give rise to them. To address the pressing challenges of our time at the level of source requires us to “turn the lens back at ourselves,” by going through the U process—that is, by shifting the awareness that we are operating from.

rise of Disruption

The second observation concerns the rise of disruption. Technology. Terrorism. Trump. Climate chaos. Conflict zones. refugees. Polarization. We live in an age of disruption. any review of the underlying driving forces will convince us that the rate of disruption will continue to go up, not down. It’s too late to reverse several of these forces and trends. So if we cannot control the rate of exterior disruption, what, if anything, can we control?

The only thing we can really control or shape is our interior response: how we show up when disruption hits. Do we freeze and hold on to existing patterns (muddle through)? Do we close down and revert to old, instinctual behaviors (move back)? Or do we open up and lean in to what wants to emerge (move forward)?

The future of our social systems, societies, and the planet as a whole depends in no small way on the choices we make in these moments. The first response (muddling through: same old) creates more chaos, breakdowns, and suffering. The second response (moving back: closing down) creates even worse outcomes, such as racism or fascism. Only the third option (moving forward: open up) creates a space for co-sensing what is going on, a space for letting go of the old and co-creating the new.

Image 3 (disruption) depicts this situation. So what is the key? What determines whether we respond to a situation of disruption by (1) muddling through, (2) moving backwards, or (3) moving forward?



The key lies in understanding the words at the top of the drawing: The issues outside mirror the issues inside. That sentence sums up the leaders' and change makers' new work—and it also sums up the territory that we will investigate throughout this book. The leaders' new work is about developing an interior holding space—a space that allows them to navigate in the midst of conflicting information and interests, in the midst of institutional failure and systemic breakdowns, in the midst of confusion that makes people turn to anger, fear, and despair.

The rise of absencing

The third observation concerns the phenomenon of absencing, any approach or societal framework that doesn't account for the massive rise of fundamentalisms and absencing in our world today is out of touch with the forces that co-shape our reality.

One surprise to me from the past ten years is that, although many, many people picked up on the concept of presencing (which the first two parts of this book introduce), almost no one picked up on the corresponding concept of absencing (which Part III develops). It's really not possible to understand one without the other. Our current reality is filled with powerful examples of both presencing and absencing. Let me explain.

Figure P.1 shows two clashing mind-sets, each of which gives rise to a different dynamic and social field: presencing—the state of co-sensing and co-shaping the emerging future by opening our inner instruments of knowing; and absencing—the state of disconnecting from others (denial, de-sensing) and from ourselves (absencing), which leads to the destruction of others and, finally, of ourselves. In the state of presencing, we operate based on the

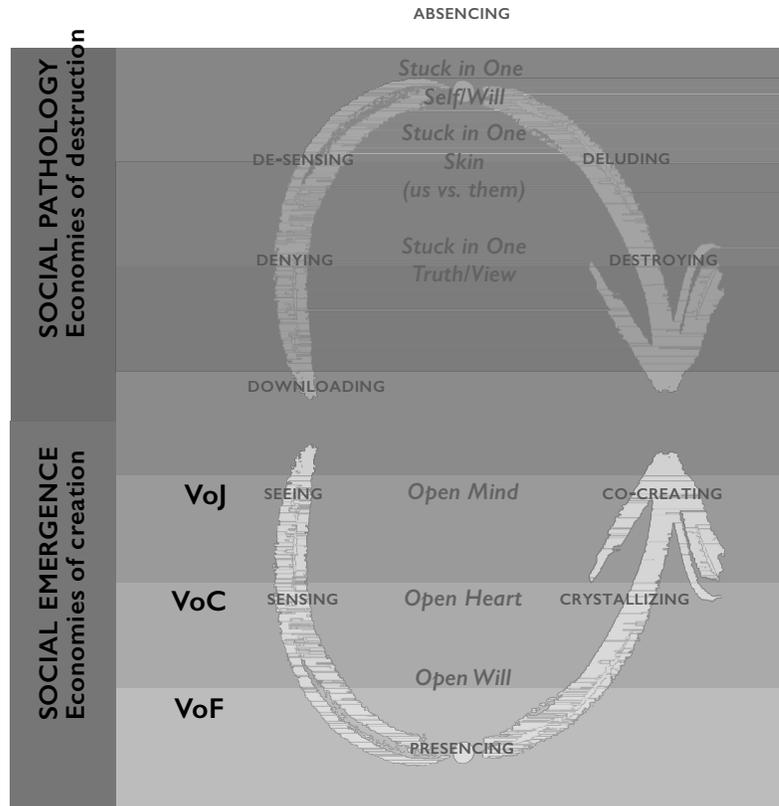


FIGURE P.1: TWO CYCLES, TWO SOCIAL FIELDS: **ABSENCING** AND **PRESENCING**

opening of the mind, heart, and will. By contrast, in the state of absencing, we operate with the opposite inner conditions: stuck in One Truth, stuck in One Collective Skin, and stuck in one Fanatical Will.

With those ideas in mind, let's revisit the three responses to disruption in the context of the inner conditions depicted in figure P.1. Whether in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, or Europe, the public debate over all major issues—including climate change, the refugee crisis, terrorism, and many others—tends to fall into the following three categories of response:

1. **Muddling through**—I often call this response downloading. Everything proceeds the way it always has. more meetings. more declarations. more empty words. Think about the summits on refugees, poverty, war

in the middle East, climate change, and most other matters concerning the global commons.

2. **Moving apart**—In the space of absencing, we recognize that the system is broken and that we can't continue on the same old path. But we see the problem as “them,” not “us.” So we build a wall around us to keep “them” out. Building a wall that separates us from them is literally what most of the candidates for the republican presidential nomination in the United States and all the extreme right-wing leaders in Europe have argued for in recent history (2015–16). historically, the Bush administration's response to 9/11 is another example: bomb them to hell. The results, twelve years and four trillion dollars later, after hundreds of thousands of deaths and the descent of an entire world region into chaos, will keep haunting us, as ISIS and other agents of terror are firmly grounded in the field logic of absencing.
3. **Moving together**—In the space of presencing, however, the walls come down and a new architecture of collaboration and connection takes shape. In dealing with any of the complex challenges of our time, very soon you realize that there is nothing any company or country can do alone, so sustainable solutions must include an entire global eco-system of partners and players. To do that well, we must become aware of our own role in co-generating the problem and then step up to co-create different ways of operating. In the case of the European refugee crisis, for example, Angela Merkel of Germany, Stefan Löfven of Sweden, and many citizens and NGOs have taken courageous steps in that direction. Yet, as the domestic backlash shows, reality is full of contradictions and keeps challenging all of us as the situation unfolds.

Reality cries out for the third view, for presencing. The first view, downloading, tries to deny that the system is broken. The second view, absencing, says OK, the system is broken, but it has nothing to do with us. Only presencing offers a viable way to engage with the full disruption that we face.

I remember interviewing a field rep for a global car company in the United States whose job was to handle customer calls about repairs and recalls. I

asked him to tell me how it worked. He said, “Well, it’s always the same.” The same what? “There are always the same three stages,” he said. “Stage 1: the engineers in the company basically deny the problem. They claim that the customers have got it wrong. Then, a lot more data flows in. When it becomes impossible to keep denying the problem, they switch to stage 2, in which they accept that the problem exists but blame it on another department. Then, after another extended period, when the problem gets worse and the media reports become devastating, finally people are ready for stage 3. In stage 3 people stop blaming each other and say, ‘Okay, we’ve got a real problem on our hands, we’ve got to fix it aSaP, how can we do it? Who can do what?’”

That sequence of stages, 1 to 3, is playing out not only in car companies, but also in our large public systems. Virtually all of the world’s major challenges are handled in this way. But given the urgency of these challenges, how can we speed up the process of getting to stage 3? how do we get from denial and absencing to presencing?

The starting point is to realize that the line between presencing and absencing does not run between “us” and “them.” It runs right through every single one of us; it represents the abyss that we face every day at all levels, from micro to mundo. Facing the abyss requires us to stop and look in the mirror, where we realize that the issues outside are a reflection of what is inside us. We must therefore shift the inner place from which we operate.

how do we do that? By facing the mirror and realigning our attention with our real intention. Image 4 (intention) depicts how some of this realignment takes place.

Institutional Inversion

The fourth observation concerns the phenomenon of inversion. Table P.1 summarizes the entire book in one page. I call it the matrix of Social Evolution (thanks to my colleague and friend Claudia madrazo for the term). In essence it traces the unfolding of evolutionary inversion.

Understanding the matrix of Social Evolution could save you from reading the rest of the book. I believe that all people who are paying close attention

to their experience could fill in this table. The essence of the book has nothing to do with a single person; it is about making visible the deeper social grammar of our time, making visible the evolutionary grammar and trajectory of the collective fields that we enact as individuals, groups, institutions, and larger systems. If I were courageous, I wouldn't ask you to read this almost unbearably thick book, but would hand you this one empty matrix without any text and ask you to fill it in yourself.

Of course, as you can tell from the size of the book, I am not that courageous. But you could do it as an exercise now: look at the table and read the headings of the two main axes. Then take a blank piece of paper, add the headings, and fill in the blank matrix. If you attended carefully to all the subtle dimensions of our own experience, I am sure you would come up with something very similar to table P.1. The reason I am so sure is that I spent ten years of my life doing just that: hanging out with innovators and change-makers in the trenches, on the frontlines of social, economic, and cultural change, and asking questions, listening to stories, and trying to make sense of it all.

I never intended to invent anything. I just wanted to decipher what was already there—making visible what's hidden in plain sight or hidden by the layers of habitual conventional behavior. Some very experienced practitioners, after first seeing the U, grew silent and then said to me: "This is amazing, but it's not entirely new. I just didn't know that I know."

I just didn't know that I know. That's why I believe that most people with deep change or creative life experiences can fill out this matrix themselves—but many doubt they can do it because they don't know that they (already) know. For that reason I won't end the book right here.

Let's start with the two axes. The horizontal axis depicts four different levels of systems: micro (individuals), meso (groups), macro (institutions), and mundo (eco-systems), along with the four types of action that correspond with these levels: attending (micro), conversing (meso), organizing (macro), and coordinating (mundo).

The vertical axis spells out the level of awareness or consciousness from which each of these actions can be performed. The quality of results (and

Field: Structure of Attention	Micro: <i>Attending</i> (Individual)	Meso: <i>Conversing</i> (Group)	Macro: <i>Organizing</i> (Institution)	Mundo: <i>Coordinating</i> (Global System)
1.o: habitual awareness	Listening 1: downloading habits of thought	Downloading: speaking from conforming	Centralized control: organizing around hierarchy	Hierarchy: commanding
<i>Suspending</i>				
2.o: ego-system awareness	Listening 2: factual, open-minded	Debate: speaking from differentiating	Divisionalized: organizing around differentiation	Market: competing
<i>Redirecting</i>				
3.o: stakeholder awareness	Listening 3: empathic, open-hearted	Dialogue: speaking from inquiring others, self	Distributed/networked: organizing around interest groups	Negotiated dialogue: cooperating
<i>Letting Go</i>				
4.o: eco-system awareness	Listening 4: generative, open-presence	Collective creativity: speaking from what is moving through	Eco-system: organizing around what emerges	Awareness-based collective action: co-creating

TABLE P.1: THE MATRIX OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION

outcomes) in any kind of system is a function of the quality of awareness (or consciousness) used to perform these actions. *Form follows consciousness*. In other words, the quality of results is a function of the *vertical* positioning in the matrix.

While the horizontal levels are easily spelled out (micro to mundo), the vertical dimension of development seems at first slightly less straightforward. But when you get into the literature, from phenomenology to developmental psychology, from Husserl to Kegan, Graves, Beck, Cook-Creutzer, Wilber, and Torbert, and when you monitor your own experience, then you see that across all these traditions and lines of inquiry, people have come up with the same basic distinctions and markers of vertical development. Vertical development refers to the evolving self. In the Matrix of Social Evolution I have simplified the stages of development and states of consciousness to four basic modes that play out in front of our eyes, day in and day out. They are (the words in parentheses indicate the corresponding stages of the spiral dynamics framework):

1. habitual awareness: enacting patterns of the past—the universe as my mental projection (amber: traditional)
2. ego-system awareness: subject-object consciousness—the world as a set of things that are separate from myself (orange: achievement)
3. stakeholder awareness: the universe as a set of relationships that I can connect with (green: pluralist)
4. eco-system awareness: the universe as a field that is sensing and seeing itself and continues to emerge—through me (teal: evolutionary)

Looking into the matrix is like looking into a mirror of the collective. It shows the patterns that we create collectively when we enact the social field, moment to moment.

as we move down the matrix (micro to mundo), what actually happens? We see two things. On the one hand we see a profound opening process: the opening of our attention (open mind, open heart, open will), of our conversations (from downloading to debate, reflective dialogue, generative dialogue), of our ways of organizing (from centralized to divisionalized, to networked, to eco-system), and of our ways of coordinating (from hierarchy and competition to dialogue and awareness-based collective action). That profound opening process makes the boundary between system and self—which seems so impenetrable on level 1 or 2—permeable (level 3) and collapsing (level 4).

The other thing we see on all levels is a profound process of interiorization. This process includes how we attend (bending the beam of attention back onto the observing self), how we converse (moving from blaming others to dialogue—that is, making the system see itself), how we organize (from command and control to seeing ourselves through the eyes of our stakeholders), and how we coordinate (from the visible and invisible hand to making the system sense and see itself).

Taking these two things together, the process of opening and the shift in awareness toward interiorization, what do they add up to? What really happens to you when you move down the matrix? In one word: inversion. You go through a process of individual, relational, institutional, and systemic inversion.

Inversion is the process of turning something inside-out and outside-in. Both can happen at the same time. The inside-out part is the opening: open the boundary and move what used to be inside, out. The outside-in part is the interiorization: becoming aware of our deep interconnectedness with the world around us. If you do one without the other, if you open up to the outside without enhancing your capacity to interiorize, you generate stress and backlash that can result in absencing (for example, the refugee situation in Germany and Europe).

If you read the matrix of Social Evolution vertically, you see the process of inversion in all four columns: Individual inversion is about the opening of the mind, heart, and will as a process of accessing the deeper and dormant levels of human intelligence. relational inversion is about conversations that make a system sense and see itself (dialogue). Institutional inversion is about the journey of opening up our institutions and linking them to the intelligence that is embedded in the larger eco-system system around us (ego to eco). and systemic inversion is about evolving our governance from the old mechanisms (centralization and competition) to the new (making social fields to sense and see themselves).

Take a moment to contemplate where you see the inversion happening in your own context by looking at image 5 (inversion), including the quote in the caption from Goethe: “Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ of perception within us.”

activating Global Social Fields

The fifth observation concerns the phenomenon of activating global social fields. Until last year, the number of students enrolled in my MIT class called “u.school” numbered 75 or so. a few months later, in late 2015, the u.lab course had 75,000 registered participants from 185 countries. Together they co-generated more than 400 prototype initiatives, more than 560 hubs, and more than 1,000 self-organized case clinic circles.

What explains the growth in group size from 75 to 75,000? One factor was moving the class from an MIT classroom to the open-access edx platform as

a mOOC (massive open online course). The other and more important factor is the connection and alignment of that platform with a larger movement of awareness-based change that is popping up in many places across the planet. Over the last ten years we have supported a number of these profound change initiatives that are part of this movement. (See this preface for some recent case studies.)

according to a survey we conducted at the end of the course, 93% of respondents found their experience “inspiring” (60%) or “life changing” (33%); and 62% of those who came into the u.lab without any contemplative practice developed one.

One-third of the participants had “life changing” experiences? how is that possible in a mere seven-week online course? The answer is: it’s not. The u.lab isn’t just an online course. It’s an o2o (online-to-offline) blended learning environment that co-evolves with a movement in the making. It works only because it is embedded in a larger global movement that already exists. But: that movement is still dormant in many ways—it doesn’t fully know that it knows it exists.

and that’s where the u.lab (and Theory U) comes in. I have been blessed with many profound experiences in my life—and many of them are captured in this book. But of all these experiences, the recent launch of the u.lab is something special, because it’s more collective, more global, and more radical in terms of connecting to highest future possibilities than anything I have experienced before. This book begins with a story about the fire on our family farm (chapter 1). The story of the u.lab really brings that whole journey, which started with the fire on the farm, full circle.

Let me explain by using image 6 as my reference point.



In image 6, (social field) Kelyv captures the final u.lab live session on December 17, 2015, which was co-staged from mIT in Cambridge, ma, Edinburgh, Scotland, and São Paulo, Brazil, and attended by hub communities around the world. The drawing captures the journey we are on—it’s the journey of u.lab, but it’s also the journey of this book and the movement it reflects:

Left side: where we are coming from—bringing together different movements and streams, including civil society, mindfulness, and action research, in order to jointly address the deeper challenges of our time (the three divides);

Center: our current work—cultivating the soil of the social field, which in essence is about speeding up the process of moving from (1) denial to (2) debate, then finally to (3) dialogue by cultivating the inner place from which we operate;

right side: where we are going—the emerging field of the future, with an awakening ego-to-eco movement at its root.

If you look more closely at the left side of the image, you will see the merging of three rivers into a single stream (civic engagement, mindfulness, action research) and a farmer using his plough to cultivate the soil of our planet (which is what I saw my parents doing their whole lives).

In the center of the drawing is the social field. my job—and the job of all leaders, facilitators, movement builders, and citizens of this earth—is to cultivate the soil of the social field. But how do we do that? What is the functional equivalent of the farmer’s plough?

The plough tills the soil of the farm. But what tills the soil of the social field? It’s the capacity to turn the camera around and to look into the mirror of the collective—to see yourself through the eyes of the whole. That pivotal entry point is depicted between the farmer and the beginning of the U-shape.

On the right side of the drawing you see an arrow labeled “unfolding future.” The existence of a field of the future is not just an extension of our past actions. In fact, it has nothing to do with extending the past. It is a field of future possibility that opens up possibilities in the here and now. That’s how it feels anyway. and that’s why the subtitle of this book is “Leading from the Future as It Emerges.”

Earth rising

Very often our sense of future possibilities is vague and amorphous. We can feel the future. But we cannot see it and specify precisely what it is. Yet the

real-time connection to that space is the lifeline that guides us. That condition is wonderfully depicted in image 7, which captures a global u.school ecology meeting in Berlin during the summer of 2015. We used that meeting to make sense of the u.lab mOOC prototype and to set the intention for the way forward.



having grown up on a farm, I still remember what it feels like in the spring. One day you look at a field and see nothing, and the next day suddenly the same field is covered with sprouts that have just pierced the surface. That is what the launch of the u.lab mOOC felt like to me. Before 2015, I and my colleagues were busy with plenty of projects and programs all over the world. But were they connected? Not really.

Then, during the launch of the u.lab mOOC, something happened. Katie, a u.lab hub host from Australia, put it this way: “It felt as if something got inverted. Something that wasn’t visible before suddenly showed up and became visible to everyone. A vibrant field of connections among people, circles, and initiatives—head to heart, heart to heart, and heart to hand. All of it!”

We learned that it is possible to link two elements in a new way: (a) massive democratization of access to free education, methods, and tools, and (b) the activation of a deep learning cycle that combines a shift of awareness through concrete projects and local work. Given that mOOCs operate at a marginal cost that is close to zero, this blend offers unparalleled opportunities for impact on a multi-local, global scale in mobilizing collective change that is based on cultivating the inner sources from which we are operating.

Image 8 shows the footprints and essence of that u.school ecology gathering in Berlin. It shows:

- on the left side: where we are coming from
- in the center: our current work of cultivating the social soil
- on the right side: where we are heading, a sphere of possibility—earth rising.

Social Presencing Theater

While image 1 (threshold) depicts the chasm that we collectively face before crossing it, images 6 (social field) and 8 (u.school ecology) show the mid-process view—and what is emerging now, the earth rising ...

The difference between these perspectives sums up the shift that happened between then (1996, when I started writing this book) and now (2016). That shift is not just about the rise of mindfulness, disruption, absencing, inversion, and social fields. all these observations are just pointers. What do they point to?

They point to a greater capacity to connect to our deeper sources of knowing and being, not only individually, but also collectively. The contribution of this book is (a) that it spells out the framework of consciousness-based systems change (matrix of social evolution) and (b) that it provides a path, a “social technology” that allows us to operate from the entire spectrum of the matrix, rather than being confined into subsets of it.

These methods and tools in the form of principles and practices are reviewed and updated in the closing part of the book.

One of the most important advances that we have made with methods concerns Social Presencing Theater. Under the leadership of my colleague and co-founder of the Presencing Institute, arawana hayashi, we have developed Social Presencing Theater from a mere idea into a powerful methodology that more and more practitioners are using in many different forms and applications. You can learn more about it when you join the u.lab¹ or visit the Presencing Institute website.²

Social Presencing Theater is key for our practical work (see for example the more recent case studies that are summarized in this preface) because it makes the system sense and see itself in ways that are fast and deep and provides a concrete language for the deeper evolutionary dynamics of the field.

reintegrating mind and matter

Three meta-narratives run through this book—and through my life.

The first one is the meta-narrative of the field walk. On Sundays as I was growing up, my parents often took me and my siblings on a walk through

the fields on our farm. This book is about a walk through the social field where, as we did on the farm, we investigate the conditions of the soil.

The second meta-narrative is the reintegration of matter and mind. Early in the book I tell a story about master Nan in China, who claimed that there is only one real issue in the world: the reintegration of matter and mind. Theory U investigates that question: if the challenges that we can observe on the surface (the three divides) are the result of a split on a much deeper level, how can they be reintegrated? Can we actually reintegrate “matter” and “mind” in the context of collective social fields?

The third meta-narrative is the story of the fire in chapter 1. It’s the story of a profound experience of disruption, of letting go of one world and reality in order to let come another one and step into it. That story now plays out on many levels of disruptive change, from local to global.

how do these three meta-narratives connect? They are not three but one—three different aspects of the same deeper shift. The cultivation of the social field aims to reintegrate matter and mind on the level of the collective (see level 4 in the matrix of Social Evolution). at the heart of the process we go through the bottom of the U, that is, through an experience of letting-go of old ways of operating and letting-come an emerging future that stays in need of us in order to come into reality.

action research

Through action research initiatives, we continue to learn about the conditions and capacities necessary to lead profound change as documented in the book co-authored with Katrin Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future*. here are a few examples, many of which are still unfolding as of this writing in early 2016.

Scotland

The Scottish government is using the U process—and specifically, the u.lab mOOC—to pioneer a new, more participatory approach to community empowerment and improving outcomes. In January 2015, five Scottish civil servants enrolled in the u.lab mOOC and found it transformational. Using the principles of the U process, they organized public events designed to co-initiate the next u.lab journey (see chapter 21 for details on co-initiation), to

equip citizens in communities across the country with U-based methods and tools for turning their ideas for change into action.

The small core team in the government first held an information session with civil servants, followed by three full-day community events open to the Scottish public. as a result, 1,000 Scottish citizens participated in the u.lab mOOC in September 2015. Participants self-organized into at least seventy action learning hubs, each of which brings together communities of place or interest, all across Scotland, supporting a diverse range of change activity: from efforts to tackle global climate change to improving services and creating jobs in specific localities.

Brazil

Two years ago, Denise Chaer, a young Brazilian entrepreneur, attended a week-long foundation program on the U process in São Paulo. afterward she said, “during that week, an idea that I could feel but not articulate started to take shape.” her vision was to shift the patterns of consumption and social relations in cities in Brazil, and to do this using the U process.

Today, Denise heads up a cross-sector dialogue platform to promote social innovation called Novos Urbanos that to date has focused on one aspect of consumption behavior—sustainable food and nutrition—for São Paulo, rio de Janeiro, and other parts of Brazil. Novos Urbanos has brought together forty organizations and people from all sectors in the food system, including major multinational food companies, academics, grassroots organizers, and representatives of city and national government, to co-create new prototype initiatives to address this complex systemic challenge.

Two of the prototypes are located in Capão redondo (around 275,000 inhabitants), which in the past was considered one of the world’s most violent neighborhoods. They are focused on food sovereignty and helping to eliminate “food deserts,” which are especially prevalent in vulnerable communities. another prototype is an advocacy campaign that seeks to motivate consumers to buy more fruits and vegetables in the markets. Novos Urbanos created a video about healthy eating for children that was viewed 120,000 times in its first five days online.³ as of early 2016, the biggest retail chain in Brazil, Grupo Pão de açúcar, is promoting this campaign in 195 stores in

rio and São Paulo, and Novos Urbanos is part of Brazil's National Food Communication Network, a group hosted by the ministry of Social Development that includes representatives from civil society and federal government who think about the role of communications in food security and sovereignty in Brazil.

Finance Lab: Just Money — Banking as if Society Mattered

as intermediaries in our economy, banks play an essential role in society. as we saw during the financial crisis of 2007–08, banks do not always fulfill this role in a responsible way. Their failure can pull down the entire economic system, and with that, society as a whole. The allocation of capital is one of the strongest determinants of what our future society will look like. Decisions about who gets a loan and who doesn't, or who earns equity and who doesn't, affect the future that we are creating.

Guided by Presencing Institute co-founder Katrin Kaufer, the Finance Lab is a collaboration among the MIT Community Innovators Lab (CoLab),⁴ the Global alliance for Banking on Values, and other partners in the field of socially responsible investment and banking. Using the U process, the Lab supports banks that operate with this awareness and make their loan and investment decisions in consideration of the triple bottom line: people, planet, and profit.

In 2015, the Finance Lab's work included a year-long, U-based company-wide strategy reinvention process for values-based banks in Europe. One of the banks involved, GLS Bank, created prototypes around new financial products for refugees, launched an initiative for quality journalism, and held a forum for social entrepreneurs. These initiatives reflect the new strategic role for socially responsible and green banks that moves beyond financing and includes identifying lead social innovators and help them to come to scale. The Finance Lab also created learning communities between young leaders of socially responsible and green banks around the work.

China

Facilitated by Lili xu Brandt, the Chinese u.lab community grew in less than a year from nothing to over 8,300 u.lab participants, over 100 hubs in 25

cities, and organizational participation that includes major global companies such as alibaba, major state-owned enterprises such as ICBC, as well as provincial government agencies and highly innovative civil society organizations such as a-Dream. much of the growth was driven by the u.lab mOOC.

Ongoing work for 2016 includes:

- a year-long cross-sector innovation journey on reinventing Shanghai (sponsored by the Shanghai provincial government)
- a year-long cross-sector innovation journey on co-shaping the Jingjinji vision, a major sustainable megalopolis initiative with 110 million inhabitants (sponsored by the central government)
- a year-long cross-sector innovation journey on reshaping the role of philanthropy and civil society in China

The Bronx

The mIT Community Innovator's Lab (CoLab) is housed in the mIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning. It uses Theory U methods and tools to empower urban renewal initiatives such as the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative (BCDI). Taking its inspiration from the mondragon Corporation in Spain's Basque region, BCDI focuses on a local economy that generates shared value and well-being for all people in the Bronx.

By virtue of its location next to manhattan, the Bronx is awash in some types of wealth. It has intelligent, creative, and ambitious people. Local museums, universities, and hospitals spend billions each year on procurement, hiring, and facilities. many social, cultural, and community organizations enliven the community. But despite all of these assets, the Bronx is the poorest urban county in the US as measured by household wealth. and it has some of the nation's worst health and educational outcomes.

The key to collective positive impact lies in better social and economic coordination. Using U method-based stakeholder engagement strategies, BCDI is building a range of coordination mechanisms: an economic democracy training series to help residents understand how to take back the reins of the local economy; a community enterprise network that will drive local planning, coordi-

nation, resource sharing, and decision making; an online procurement platform that connects small and minority-owned enterprises to big institutions' procurement streams; an effort to reduce respiratory illness and cut health costs by identifying and remediating "sick buildings" that repeatedly send residents to hospital emergency rooms; and an energy efficiency effort targeting churches and multifamily homes that will provide business opportunities for local contractors. In the years ahead, these mechanisms will support local residents' efforts to reshape the local economy to produce well-being for all the borough's residents.

Eileen Fisher and the Global Wellbeing Lab

In 2013, Eileen Fisher, founder and chairwoman of Eileen Fisher Inc., a women's clothing brand in the United States, went on a U process journey through the "Global Wellbeing Lab."⁵ This journey convened 25 change makers from different sectors and countries who were interested in exploring, advancing, and co-creating new ways of measuring and generating well-being. The heart of the program is a U-based immersion journey to Bhutan that exposes participants to that country's gross national happiness (GNH) practices in government, business, and communities.

"Before the trip," Eileen said, "I knew I wanted to change something within my company. I just wasn't exactly sure what or how. The experience in Bhutan made me think about the true sources of individual creativity and its role in business, as well as about the role of business in society." Eileen teamed up with another participant from the lab, Marcelo Cardoso, then senior vice president of Natura, a Brazil-based leader in corporate sustainability, who helped her and the company to embark on a new journey of transformation, one that focuses on using personal transformation as a gateway to institutional and systems transformation.

at the beginning of their journey they focused on individual transformation and on exploring different approaches to transformation and change. For example, at Eileen Fisher, each team meeting starts with a moment of silence in order to focus on what's essential. Later in the journey they involved many stakeholders to re-imagine the purpose and vision of the company, linking it

essentially to the well-being of its members and the whole. From there they started to reframe the company's strategy and structure by making the well-being of the entire eco-system more central to the business practices. as a consequence, the company became a Certified B Corporation, thereby committing to a Triple Bottom Line philosophy within which, employee well-being became one of four KPIs, along with eco-materials, supply chain fair wages and overall revenues/profitability. This model affirmed the company's bold environmental and social goals for the year 2020 and beyond whereby Eileen committed to engaging with suppliers, brands and other stakeholders within the fashion industry for industry-wide transformation.

Eileen Fisher is a new type of business entrepreneur who sees the purpose of business in a different way: not only—or not even primarily—as a mechanism for generating profits, but essentially as a vehicle for movement building, as a vehicle for unleashing and realizing human creativity in order to make the world a better place. The U process methodology is part of the enabling operating system on that journey.

IDEAS

another powerful confluence of different streams has happened through the MIT IDEaS program. IDEaS is an acronym for Innovative Dynamic Education and action for Sustainability. Ten years ago, my colleagues Peter Senge and Dayna Cunningham and I set out to bring together a diverse group of young change makers and major institutional players from business, civil society, and government. The purpose of this nine-month experimental journey was not to solve problems but to organize around collaborative opportunities: by exploring the edges of our systems and of our selves in order to generate profound new ways of operating.

rather than telling people what to do and what to focus on, we tried something different: bringing people together and sending them on a journey that exposed them to some of the raw, unfiltered experiences in today's world. We offered them methods to process these experiences by listening with their minds and hearts wide open, and then offered them tools to address the two root question of creativity: Who is my Self? What is my Work? Then they started to co-create platforms of cross-sector prototyping to learn by doing.

Ten years on, I realize that this initiative, which was not single-problem-driven in any way, but was generated by a mix of aspiration and desperation (frustration with a lack of systemic change), has probably been one of the two most influential initiatives in my life to date.

Why?

Because it switched on a powerful field of inspired connections—people connecting with each other in new ways around real issues.

mIT IDEaS has generated a powerful global eco-system of projects, prototypes, living examples, and inspired networks that keep producing new initiatives and ideas. It doesn't show any signs of stopping. Two of the most powerful outgrowths of this generative eco-system are the mIT IDEaS Indonesia⁶ and mIT IDEaS China programs and communities of practice.

IDEaS China is still in the early stages, and emerging stories and impact can be found on my blog.⁷ In Indonesia, the current prototype initiatives include (1) a market-driven transformation of Indonesia's seafood supply chain for sustainable fisheries and (2) the co-development of ecosystem tourism on Kaledupa Island in the regency of Wakatobi with the new Directorate in Indonesia's ministry of Tourism. Both of these prototypes embody key goals of the CTI (Coral Triangle Initiative).

Namibia

Our work on the health care system in Namibia started as a partnership between the Synergos Institute, McKinsey & Company, and the Presencing Institute. In the fall of 2010, I conducted a three-day workshop with the cabinet of Namibia. On the first day one of the members of the cabinet explained to me the core issue they were confronted with, as he saw it: "We need to reconnect our political process to the real needs of the communities. right now our political process is largely disconnected from the real needs in the villages."

all of the government leaders in the room agreed that this was the most important disconnect they were dealing with: the disconnect between their government routines and services on the one hand and the actual needs of the village communities on the other hand. They described additional challenges: a disconnect between themselves and civil servants, and the pervasive

“silo” issue that fragments the work of government agencies in many places. “The silo issue starts right here, between us,” she said, and looked into the faces of her colleagues, “because we do not really talk straight with each other. It starts with us and then the same behavior gets replicated throughout our ministries.” The silo issue impedes communication between ministries, as well as inside the ministries.

Our work with the ministry of health and Social Services confirmed the existence of these divides. We started with a joint assessment of the situation. We identified weak leadership; work processes separated into silos; dysfunctional structures; no strategic planning; no proper data collection; no clear targets; off track to meet the millennium Development Goals (mDGs).

after four years of collaboration, several of these problems have been successfully addressed, though many will require further work, now supported by a local team that we trained. Throughout this process, however, something very important has changed. Namibia’s leaders have begun to recognize their own role in perpetuating the problems and are willing to work on innovative solutions.

moving Forward

as these examples illustrate, in the ten years since the first edition of this book was published, practitioners around the world have adapted and applied the U process to an amazingly diverse number of innovation projects in business, government, and civil society—as well as in contexts that bring key stakeholders from the various sectors together. Through these action research initiatives, we continue to learn about the conditions and capacities necessary to lead profound change as documented throughout this book. The epilogue provides more details about these more recent case studies. These stories are just a few of the many examples that have taken root and started to scale since the first edition of this book.

at the bottom of image 8 you can see eight words that sum up, more from a personal perspective, the journey of the past twenty years:

New Soil. New Seeds. New Connections. New Ecology.

many years went into cultivating the new soil. and then, when we got lucky, some small seeds sprouted. For many years we did just that. But then, more recently, we realized that all these initiatives and projects, often small in scale, are part of something larger, or part of a larger movement that was beginning to take shape. Connecting all of the seeds and initiatives became the new theme. The next step was to help bring all these different streams together in a larger ecosystem or movement. The result is a new ecology that is now starting to become more visible. It's a movement that creates social change by shifting the inner place from which we operate from ego to eco. how? By making the systems of which we are part sense and see themselves.

This brings us back to the end and the beginning—to our choice to look into the mirror—or not. I wrote this book to outline the method and framework that innovators across generations have used to connect with emerging possibilities and bring them into reality. I hope that reading it will help you align your own choices more fully with your deeper intention—and with those of our fellow travelers. The evolutionary inversion of our social fields is a reality today, even though not seen or recognized by many. This makes the earth rising a real possibility. But for it to happen, we have to wake up and rise in many ways first. That's the deeper intention of this book—and the global u.lab community of practice that's available for you to join.

For how to connect:

www.presencing.com

For how to read the book:

Quick essence and overview: Introductions, chapters 1–2, and Epilogue (core chapters),

Wanting to see the essence come alive: continue with chapters 8–14

Interested in consciousness-based social fields: chapter 15

Methods and tools: chapter 21

Way forward: Epilogue

Glossary

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