

Sensing

The Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum • The Field Structure of Sensing • Sensing in Belitung, Indonesia • Principles • Opening the Heart • The Grail Question • Sensing in Action • Two Types of Wholeness • Epistemological Reversal • Field Notes

When moving from seeing to sensing, perception begins to happen from the whole field. Peter Senge believes that this turn is at the heart of systems thinking. It's about closing the feedback loop between people's experience of reality ("what the system is doing to us") and their sense of participation in the whole cycle of experience. When that happens, he said, people say something like "Holy cow! Look what we're doing to ourselves!"

The Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum

As you recall from the previous chapter, we had asked the forum participants to vote. Each participant could place two dots onto the iceberg: a blue one to mark where they believed the current health care system operated and a white one to mark the level of their desired future health care system. It was time to review the voting. Figure 10.1 shows the results.

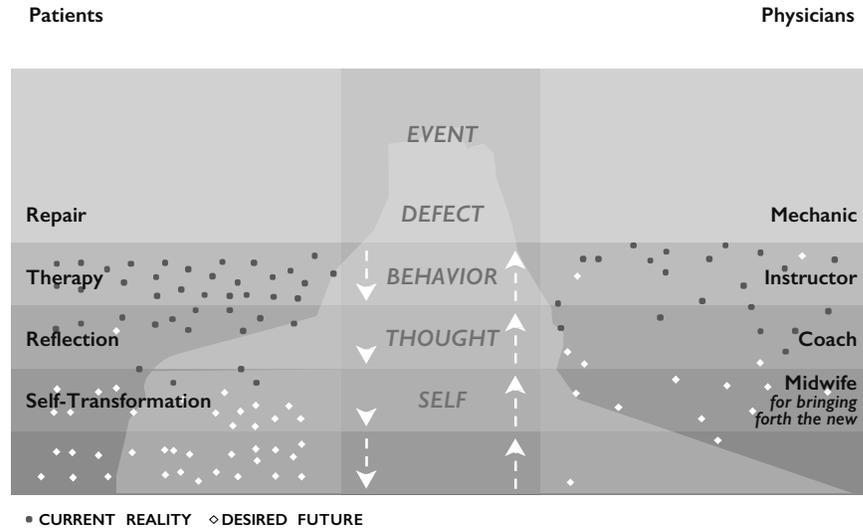


FIGURE 10.1: ICEBERG MODEL OF PATIENT-PHYSICIAN RELATIONSHIPS

More than 95 percent of the participants—both physicians and patients—put their dark dots on level 1 or 2; that means that more than 95 percent of them experienced the focus of the current health care system as mechanical reengineering. And about 95 percent of the participants put their white dots on levels 3 and 4, expressing their wish that the main focus of the system were on dealing with health issues through development, self-transformation, and inner growth.

“You all seem to agree,” I began, “that the current system operates on levels 1 and 2, while at the same time you also agree that the future system should shift to operate from levels 3 and 4. So, given the fact that you are the patients and the physicians of this system and this is something you all agree on, what keeps you from operating that way? Because, after all, you are the system. The system is not ‘them’ in Berlin; it’s not ‘them’ in Brussels. The system is right here in this room. The system is created through the relationship among you—nowhere else.”

You could have heard a pin drop. Then, after the silence, a different kind of conversation emerged. People were more reflective and began asking thoughtful questions of others and of themselves. Something had shifted. Before the break, the conversation had been more like an exchange of state-

ments between patients and physicians. But now people were relating directly to one another and reflecting more deeply. “Why,” some of the participants asked, “do we collectively produce results that nobody wants?”

After the physicians openly told of the hardships, pressures, and frustrations they experienced, one man stood and introduced himself as the mayor of the town. “What we see in our health care system is the same as in politics and government. We always operate on levels 1 and 2. All we do is react to issues and crises, just as we’ve always done it in the past. But if we operated from those deeper two levels, maybe we could make something different happen.” A brief silence followed after the mayor sat down. Then a woman at the other end of the room stood up. “I am a teacher, and I teach in a school nearby, and you know what?” She paused and looked at the mayor and the whole group. “We are facing exactly the same problem. All we do in our schools is to operate on these first two levels.” She pointed to the wall with the white and black dots and continued, “We organize our school around mechanical methods of learning. We focus on memorizing the past, on testing old bodies of knowledge, instead of teaching kids how to access their intellectual curiosity and their capabilities for creativity and imagination. We are reacting to crises all the time. And we never succeed in moving our learning environments toward there [pointing to levels 3 and 4 of the iceberg chart], where our kids could learn how to shape their future.”

Then the man next to me stood up and said, “I am a farmer, and we are wrestling with exactly the same issue. All we do in conventional agriculture today is tinker with the mechanical issues on levels 1 and 2. We use chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and all kinds of stuff that we drum into the earth, just as you drum a dead body of knowledge into the head of your students. The whole industrial way of doing agriculture is focused on fighting symptoms and issues with the mechanical solutions of the past. We fail to conceive of our farms and our whole earth as a living organism—as our collective and communal holding space.”

Each person spoke from a much more authentic place, from the true “I” and with deep sincerity. Then one woman leaned forward and, looking at the physician, whom she had just listened to deeply, said in a gentle voice, “I feel very

concerned about you. I don't want our system to kill you and our best physicians. Is there something that we could do to help you?" Silence followed.

The Field Structure of Sensing

Everyone who participated in the conversation that morning felt the presence of a deeper connection. It was no longer like most other conversations. Instead of expressing opinions and making statements, people started to ask genuine questions. People were not just talking together—they were thinking and feeling together. Time seemed to slow down; the space around us seemed to thicken and open up. People talked more slowly, punctuated by silence. The structure of how people related to one another had changed. Something had moved them beyond the usual state where people argue as separate individuals, as captives inside their own brains.

When this happens, the place from which our perception arises (white dot, figure 10.2) moves from inside individual heads (looking at the field) to

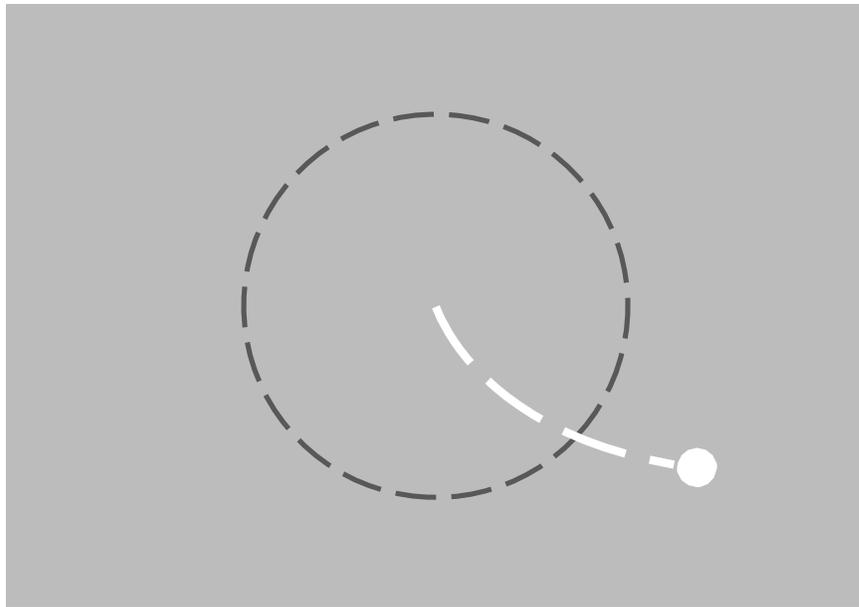


FIGURE 10.2: THE FIELD STRUCTURE OF SENSING

outside the organizational boundaries of the observer (blue circle, figure a0.2); that is, the perception begins to happen from the field.

When this shift happens, the boundary between observer and observed collapses, and the observer begins to see the system from a profoundly different view: a view that includes himself as part of the system. The system is no longer something that's out there ("what they are doing to us"); it's also something in here ("look what we are doing to us").

When a group starts to operate from such a place, its participants also begin to see their relationship to the system and how they collectively enact it.

Sensing in Belitung, Indonesia

In 20ã3, I visited Belitung, a beautiful island off the coast of Sumatra that is famous for being the home of the Rainbow Warriors: a group of ten marginalized schoolchildren and their inspirational teachers. Their story was documented in Andrea Hirata's bestselling novel *The Rainbow Troops* (which was subsequently made into a film). I was in Belitung with the IDEAS Indonesia Fellows for a sensing journey and to review the five prototype initiatives that were emerging from our tri-sector group.

One night the Bupati (the directly elected regent of a large community) invited about thirty stakeholders from the community to join our group, including governmental department heads, NGOs, religious leaders, business leaders, and others, to learn about the current situation in the community. It was 8:30 p.m. when we all arrived at the venue, and everyone was exhausted from a long day that had started for many at 5 a.m. There was also a considerable amount of tension in the room stemming from frustration over the lack of progress in Belitung.

People were tired, noise and music from next door made it difficult to focus, and it looked for a moment as if the meeting could easily fall apart. But then, slowly but surely, the evening took a remarkable turn. Before we knew it, it was aa p.m. and no one wanted to leave.

Briefly, here is what happened.

1. The Bupati, as the host, opened the meeting. I made a few remarks about the three divides and the universal leadership challenge faced by all communities and civilizations today.
2. Then we showed a ten-minute inspirational video taken by astronauts from space. It included amazing and stunningly beautiful pictures taken by the astronauts who had “turned the camera” back onto planet Earth.^ã
3. We divided the attendees at the meeting into small groups and asked them to “turn the camera back onto planet Belitung” and share with each other what they saw. What is ending and dying? What wants to be born? The small groups were a mixture of community members and participants in the IDEAS program (change-makers who, with the exception of the Bupati, all came from other parts of Indonesia).
4. Next we asked them to reassemble in a large circle. Inside the circle we had placed fifteen sheets of paper, each one labeled with the identity of a key stakeholder in the community: the Bupati, the city administration, the legislature, religious leaders, teachers, fishermen, Mother Nature, children, youth, mining companies, oil companies, central government, police, and others. We asked them to add the names of any stakeholders that were missing (which they did). And then I asked them to enact the voices, views, and concerns of all those stakeholders as if they were being filmed for a “current reality movie.” Anyone in the group was invited to stand up and step into one of the stakeholder roles (except his or her own role) and “to speak from the ‘I’ voice of the other role.” Within minutes the energy in the room was transformed and everyone was fully engaged.
5. Then we asked them to reflect on what they had seen and heard. “Review the tape: Does the current reality movie you see illuminate important aspects of the current system? What did you notice?”

In the moments of silence that followed, you could hear a pin drop. Then the first person spoke up:

“I noticed that at first everyone was blaming the Bupati for all the problems. We thought the big leader is the one source and solution to all our problems. Later we realized that we all had a role to play. That we need to change the way we communicate.”

What ensued was a sharp and precise sequence of reflections in which they recognized that all of their problems were not the fault of the Bupati or the other stakeholders. Some of their deeper problems could be blamed on a mind-set and awareness that they all shared.

“Nobody takes responsibility,” said a second person. “Instead of blaming the Bupati, people should be asking themselves what they can be doing and assuming responsibility for and what they can do to solve the problem.”

A third person said: “We need to improve communication between stakeholders. This role-play exaggerated how we could be doing more. By exaggerating these roles and placing them in little boxes, it’s clear how communication can be improved.”

Finally, someone said: “Every stakeholder only spoke from their own ego. But we were unable to really think together as a community.”

Near the end of the evening, one of the youngest participants posed a question to the facilitators and the whole group. “The problem is,” he said, “that we never had such a conversation before because we normally have no space to hold the kind of conversation that we saw tonight. What can we do to create such a space?”

The group decided to form a small team that reflected the diversity of the larger group and to give them the responsibility for co-creating a space where the dialogue process could continue.

To me, this small group of citizens was a microcosm of the general “stuck” situation that countless communities and systems experience today. What was most intriguing was that, with little input, they recognized how to begin creating an infrastructure (what I have called a “holding space” elsewhere in the book) all by themselves. They figured out how to transform the old pattern. And you could feel how energized they were. It is a small but hopeful beginning to a long, long journey.

Principles

Four main principles come into play when entering the collective field of sensing: charging the container, deep diving, redirecting attention, and opening the heart.

Charging the Container

Weaving the collective body of co-sensing happens in places. In the case of the Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum, this place was intentionally created by designing the:

- Physical space: Throwing out all “stuff,” emptying the place except for the walls; bringing in simple and minimal elements of design such as light and Steelen, a set of large pillars of cardboard on which we posted photographs and displays depicting the story of the ANR (Arzt-Notruf, or emergency call) initiative.^é
- Time space: creating an energetic timeline in which the preparation and the agenda facilitated a natural flow through the U throughout the day (morning: moving down the left arm of the U—co-sensing; afternoon: moving up the right arm of the U—co-creating).
- Relational space: establishing (a) a personal relationship with each of the participants prior to the meeting, (2) clear roles (such as greeters at the door of the meeting place), (3) process (managing the details, such as delivering a great presentation or reading the interview quotes), and (4) infrastructures (beverages, food, and so forth).
- Intentional space: clarity and quality of purpose within the full core group: Why are we doing all of this? What future possibility do we want to serve? What are we trying to create?^ö

Deep Diving

The gateway into the field of sensing and co-sensing is total immersion in the particulars of the field—in the living presence of the phenomenon. It is

becoming one with the phenomenon you study. It is not studying your customer. It is not creating dialogue with your customer. It is becoming, being your patient or customer. It is living in the full experience of that world—and becoming one with it.^ü

In the Dialogue Forum, we did that by reading first-person accounts aloud, presenting key quotes from interviews, and then asking people to share their own stories in response to these trigger quotes.

As a facilitator in charge of moving a whole group through this collective field shift, part of your strategy should be to keep people from entering a debating/downloading behavior and mind-set. You intervene at the moment when people start issuing their usual debate-style statements. And you try to move people toward focused and nonjudgmental observation that will allow them to open up and connect with other viewpoints. The gateway to the deeper territories is immersion and direct, sensual encounter with the particulars of a living field.

Redirecting Attention

As you move through examples and manifestations of a living field—such as the different experiences of patients and physicians—you try to redirect people’s attention from the “object” (the individual stories) to the formative field, or “source.” In other words, you invite people to enter the place from which those examples emanate. In practical terms, you try to move into the field of each example that you study, you stay with it, and, as you do this, you hold the earlier examples in your mind. You do that with one example after another. You listen deeply to one view after another. As your listening deepens, you also begin to pay attention to the space in between the different views. You stay with it, and then, when you are just about to follow the next examples, suddenly a shift takes place that allows you to see the collective pattern that gives rise to all of the specific examples in front of you—you sense the formative forces that are connecting them.

One simple test will help you judge whether you have successfully redirected your attention: the picture of the whole you see should include yourself—

the observer—as part of the system you are trying to fix. When I said, “You are the system—but why do you collectively enact results that nobody wants?” people began to shift. Participants began actually to see themselves as part of the picture. The breakthrough happened when the mayor, the teacher, and the farmer stood up and said that they faced exactly the same issues as the patients and physicians.

UC Berkeley cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch describes this shift as moving from seeing the system “out there” to seeing the system from the field. I asked Rosch what she meant by the term “field.” “In a field,” explained Rosch, “intention, body, and mind become integrated together. You start to be aware of perception happening from the whole field, not from within a separate perceiver. The notion of field was the closest I could come to this sense of integration in our current sciences.”⁸

Opening the Heart

Then I asked Rosch, “So what is the nature of this whole field, and how do you connect or relate to it, or nurture it?” She looked at me, paused, and said, “Through the heart. The heart in any contemplative tradition is not a sentimentality or an emotionality but a deep yogic centerpoint.”

Opening the heart means accessing and activating the deeper levels of our emotional perception. Listening with the heart literally means using the heart and our capacity for appreciation and love as an organ of perception. At this point, we can actually see with the heart.

Almost always, when such a deeper field shift happens, we observe a little previous incident that creates the crack or opening for such a deeper shift. That little spark is often connected with a moment of deep silence and/or a question that comes straight from the heart. It happened when the patient said to the physician in the example of the patient-physician network, “I feel very concerned about you. I don’t want our system to kill you and our best physicians. Is there something that we could do to help you?”

The Grail Question

To further explain this particular turn and opening, let me tell you a story that I first read when I was a young kid. The story begins with a boy living in the twelfth century. He was the son of a woman named Heart Sorrow. Her husband and two older sons had met their deaths as brave knights, so she decided to raise him in a distant place in order to prevent him from becoming a knight and meeting the same fate. His name was Parsifal. Parsifal means “innocent fool,” but he didn’t learn his name and real identity until later in his life, when he was able to open his heart.

One spring day, young Parsifal rode out to throw his javelins—something he did very well—when suddenly, from out of nowhere, five magnificent knights in full armor rode by on their huge war horses. “They must be gods—or angels!” he thought. He nearly fainted when they actually stopped to talk to him. He asked them question after question about who they were and what they did with their lances and shields, and then raced home to tell his mother. “I’ve met the most wonderful knights! And I’m going to join them.” This was her worst nightmare, but since he couldn’t be dissuaded, she said, “All right. Go. But promise me three things: go to church every day, be respectful of all fair maidens, and don’t ask questions.”

Parsifal began his life’s adventure by traveling to King Arthur’s court, for he had heard that the king could make a boy a knight. On the way, he passed a magnificent warrior, clothed completely in scarlet. Unknown to Parsifal, this Red Knight had been terrorizing King Arthur and his court, and none could better him. The innocent fool went right up to him and said, “I plan to take your armor, your weapons, and your horse, once I’ve been made a knight.” The Red Knight wryly replied, “Okay. That sounds like a good idea. Hurry back after you become a knight and have a try.”

Nearly everyone in Arthur’s court scoffed when the bumpkin Parsifal arrived and announced, “Make me a knight!” But a young woman who hadn’t smiled for six years approached Parsifal, looked him in the eyes, smiled, and reassured him, “You will be the best and bravest of all knights.” Parsifal left the court ready to challenge the Red Knight.

When they met again, the Red Knight said, “Oh, it’s the innocent fool come back.” Parsifal sent his javelin right through the knight’s head, killing him. Then Parsifal put the Red Knight’s armor on, over his rough country clothing, mounted the Red Knight’s horse, and rode off.

He had many adventures after that, including a stay at a nobleman’s castle, who taught him the skills of knighthood ... and to speak less.

Parsifal traveled on until he came to the castle of Anfortas, the Fisher King, the keeper of the Holy Grail. The wounded king was carried on a pallet into the great banquet hall. He was in such pain caused by a spear to his groin that he could barely lie still. The room glistened with expectation. A court jester had prophesied that he would be cured only when a true innocent came to the court. Moreover, this innocent had to ask the question “What ails you?” Everyone was waiting for Parsifal. But did he ask the question? No. He wanted to cry out, “What ails you, Uncle?” but he had been cautioned and taught not to ask so many questions. So the Fisher King was carried off to bed and Parsifal went to sleep, thinking that he’d be sure to ask the king what ailed him in the morning.

But, alas, in the morning the castle was empty. He had missed his chance. Dejected, he and his horse rode off across the drawbridge; it closed behind him, and the castle disappeared.

Parsifal then set off at a gallop in a vain search for the inhabitants of the castle. At one point he came upon a maiden sitting under a tree who asked him his name, and for the first time in his life he uttered his name: “Parsifal.” She was holding the dead body of her lover. “Where have you been?” she asked him. When he told her that he hadn’t asked the question at the Grail Castle and, as a result, he had brought misery to many, she informed him that his mother, too, was now dead—of a broken heart.

Saddened by that news, he left her after promising to avenge the death of her lover. Parsifal searched in vain for many years, until eventually, after a long road of trials and tests, he did find his way back to the Grail Castle, where he managed to bring his full presence to the situation. He asked the Grail Question, “What ails you?” and restored the health of the king as well as the kingdom.

Parsifal's challenge was to act from the authentic presence of his open heart, rather than following what "good education" and social norms expected him to do. Similarly, when the woman at the Dialogue Forum expressed concern for the doctor, she asked the Grail Question: "Physician, what ails you?" That question transformed the usual conversational pattern between doctor and patient. The power of such a question from the heart lies in its authenticity. It operates from the opening of a "crack" in the situational script, from the present moment, the now.

Sensing in Action

The Circle of Seven

I first came across the Circle of Seven when co-facilitating a workshop with Beth Jandernoa. Of all the facilitators I know, she is probably the best at standing in front of a group and, while seeming to do nothing, in an instant establishing a heart-to-heart connection with the whole room. For normal folks like me, it takes hard work and at least two or three days to arrive at such a relationship. But Beth simply gets up, looks at the audience, and smiles with her eyes and her heart; within a few moments everybody is drawn in.

I once asked her point-blank, "How do you do this?"

"It's really very simple," she responded. "Before I go up front, my practice for over thirty years has been to open my heart and consciously send unconditional love to everyone in the room. It creates a field or surround of love. What has helped me to deepen my capacity to be present is meeting with a circle of women called the Circle of Seven over many years."

Circle of Seven? "Who are they?" I wondered. She told me, "It's a circle of good friends; we meet three or four times a year for three days to support and hold one another in our journeys. We started as six women, meeting first in Santa Fe in 1995." She told me the others were Anne Doshier, Barbara Coffman-Cecil, Glennifer Gillespie, Leslie Lanes, and Serena Newby.

That was the first time I had heard of such a circle. Since then, I've heard many other stories about similar groups that meet on a regular basis in order to just listen to each other and to collectively support each of their friends as

their lives unfold. What I find remarkable about the members of these groups is that they appear to have a tangible impact on one another's lives even between their physical meetings. Beth, for example, uses her experience with the circle as a conscious gateway for opening her deeper capacities of relationship, allowing her to act with much more presence and effectiveness in both her professional and her personal life.

I became interested in learning more about her circle's story. I asked Beth if I might join them so I could interview the whole group. They graciously agreed, and on September 25, 2003, I flew out to Ashland, Oregon, and spent the next two and a half days with them.

I learned that their initial plan had been to develop a program for women who were going through changes in their professional and personal lives. After their first meeting, however, they gave up their noble purpose of helping others. No matter how hard they tried to create an event for other leaders, they kept being redirected to their own lives. Though each was dedicated to serving others, they realized that their own needs for healing at that time overshadowed what they sought to do for others. They decided to find out what it would be like to unfold the next phase of their lives from deep within themselves and the field of their circle.

Later, the Circle of Seven did create programs for emerging leaders, allowing them to share the benefits of their experience. This also coincided with a maturing of their professional lives. Satisfaction for them had ceased to lie in the heroics of changing organizations; they found it more fulfilling to pass on the sensitivities and orientation toward leadership they had learned in their work to the next generation of women who carried a dream for a healthy and integrated world.

Charging the Container by Diving into Experience

The first ten or fifteen minutes of my interview with the Circle illustrate the principles discussed above. I started by asking, "When you begin the Circle work, what do you do first?"

"We always rediscover together how to begin," responded Barbara. "It's not as though we do exactly the same thing every time. Having said that, our first concern is to create a charged container in which we can work."

“For example, look at what we did at the beginning of this interview,” Glennifer explained. “We lit a candle, rang a Tibetan bowl, and went into silence together.” During the silence, they may be doing different things internally, she explained. Some listen to what’s inside; some listen to the silence. “Our practice is meant to drop us more fully into the field together. Then we move into a deep check-in, giving each other all the time we need to fully bring what each of us is working with in our lives. This charges our space more and more.” Listening to these opening remarks, I realized that what they described as “charging the container” is quite different from how people normally start a meeting. Usually meetings start with a “head” presentation or by following a set agenda. By contrast, this group started with a “heart” element of shared experience.

Opening the Wisdom Intelligence of the Heart

“One of our Circle practices consists of inventing processes on the spot that seem to address whatever an individual might be wrestling with or how this fits with what is going on in the larger world,” began Beth. “A particular process we invented for me was to have people play different parts of me so that I could keep stepping back to discover a part of myself I was not familiar with. During that session, I discovered what I would call my inner wisdom figure.

“It felt so present, so real, as though it were in a cave inside me, as if there were a special place inside me from which insight and understanding came. It was opened in the Circle gathering, and I stood in that place and came from that place myself. ... Because of the collective, I was able to discover a place in myself that, ever since, is the place I go to when I’m looking for wisdom.

“Since this process, I find that I make wiser choices. I have a larger perspective. For me, that’s a story of a powerful thing that’s come out of our work and continued in my life and lives with me all the time.”

I mentioned to Beth that when she talked about that other place, her hands were pointing to her heart. And when she talked about her “self” she also pointed to the same place. “Can you describe some elements of that experience?” I asked. “How do you know whether you’re operating from a

normal identity or from this deeper authentic place? How does it feel different?”

“Well, I slow down a lot when I’m in the place of deeper knowing,” she responded. “I try to be aware of my bodily sensations. My breathing is slower; the world seems to slow down, and so do I. The sensation is in my heart region. It feels like a deep, open, dark, yet illuminated place. It also feels strong, yet fluid, and different from the normal place from which I operate.”

Holding the Container

Just as the story of Parsifal and the circle of knights symbolizes collective and feminine presence, the Circle of Seven also functions as a gateway into the deeper journey and sources of creativity for each of its members. In order to collectively create this holding space, the members of the Circle of Seven consciously design and shape the space (physical environment), the time (three to four times a year), and the relational and intentional space.

Beth continued, “One commitment we’ve had is to keep the field clear in all of our one-on-one relationships when we’re not together. We work at it. I assume it’s like being in a marriage. If you’re really doing the relationship well, you work at it. Very few collectives commit to that.

“It’s not that we’re so interested in the personality level in the end. My perception is that working the personality level is a prerequisite. ... But there’s commitment at another level that’s a big enabler for the collective field.

“If nobody gets in the way with their own agendas, then we see more possibilities. Once we get over the threshold, there’s a certain richness—a collective listening capacity that is humbling. It’s unimposing.

“It becomes obvious that the reason you do something, as opposed to just talking about it, is that doing it brings the energy of the situation into the room, as opposed to having an intellectual conversation about it. So it’s a way of making everything real time. That’s why we do it.”

I left that interview feeling very grateful to have been invited into their “sacred” Circle space. I realized that what I had witnessed was just a snapshot in time and that these women, through their careful attention, were con-

tinuously creating and evolving their practice field. They explained to me that they constantly find new ideas and let go of ways that once worked but are no longer appropriate or useful in a new time and space.

Two Types of Wholeness

Recently, the subtle shifts of seeing and sensing have attracted some interest among scientists who, in the light of twentieth-century physics, are wrestling with the phenomenon of wholeness. One of the best articulations of this emerging new view of science is Henri Bortoft's *The Wholeness of Nature*. Drawing on diverse sources such as Goethe's work on science and twentieth-century hermeneutics, phenomenology, and quantum theory, Bortoft suggests a post-positivistic way of doing science in which the observer actively and knowingly lives and participates in the phenomenon and its coming into being.

When I met him in London in July 1999, Bortoft began by telling me how the quantum physicist David Bohm, who was one of his teachers and advisers, had advised Bortoft to study Niels Bohr very carefully. Bortoft was very interested in the notion of wholeness, a term that Bohr had introduced in quantum physics. Bohr saw the whole as a limit to our thinking. But Bohm thought differently, Bortoft explained. "Bohm thought that you can understand wholeness. He used the hologram as a model. I found that very illuminating. It shows that the whole is present in its parts."

Bortoft distinguishes between two types of wholeness: the counterfeit whole and the authentic whole. Both notions of wholeness are based, he said, on different faculties of cognition. The counterfeit whole is based on the intellectual mind that is abstracting from the concrete sensual perception. When operating in that mode, the mind is "moving away from the concrete part" to get an overview. The result is an abstract and nondynamic notion of the whole.

By contrast, continued Bortoft, the authentic whole is based on a different cognitive capacity, the "intuitive mind"; that is, it is based on opening some higher qualities of perception. The intuitive mind, he continued, operates by

“moving right into the concrete parts” in order to encounter the whole—by diving into the concrete experience of the particulars.

When Bortoft came across Goethe’s work in his studies, he was struck by Goethe’s notion of a different kind of seeing, “a seeing that strives from the whole to the parts.” That, explained Bortoft, “was very close to Bohm’s hologram.”

Bortoft claims that we cannot know the whole in the same way that we know a thing, because the whole is not a thing. The challenge is to encounter the whole as it comes into presence in the parts. Bortoft says, “The way to the whole is into and through the parts. It is not to be encountered by stepping back to take an overview, for it is not over and above the parts, as if it were some superior, all-encompassing entity. The whole is to be encountered by stepping right into the parts. This is how we enter into the nesting of the whole and thus move into the whole as we pass through the parts.”

I asked Bortoft, “What does it take to develop that capacity of seeing?” He explained to me the Goethean notion of exact sensorial imagination. This term captures Goethe’s articulation of the principle of diving in.

“You have to cultivate a quality of perception that is striving out from the whole to the part,” said Bortoft, paraphrasing Goethe. “It takes time. You have to slow down. You see and you follow every detail in your imagination. You create the image of what you see in your mind, and you do that as precisely as possible. For example, you look at a leaf, and you create the shape of the leaf as precisely as possible in your mind. You are moving the shape of the leaf around in your mind, and you follow every detail. The phenomenon becomes an image in your mind. You have to be active with your mind.”

He added, “There is a huge resistance in ourselves against doing that. Most of us are way too busy downloading most of the time. If you want to do this, you have to slow down. “You do this with one leaf, with another leaf, and so on, and suddenly there is a movement, a dynamic movement, as you begin to see not the individual leaf but the dynamic movement. The plant is the dynamic movement. That is the reality.”

He continued, “This imagination becomes an organ of perception. You can develop it. I get the sense that when you do it, you are moving in another space,

an imaginary realm. It is a movement. And it seems more alive and real than the outer world. It is more real because you are doing it. You are active. Goethe had an enormous ability in that regard. The same is true for Picasso. The way he painted. When you look at his pictures, you see the metamorphosis.”

Bortoft’s description embodies all three principles of sensing that we earlier identified: first, diving into the sensory experience; second, redirecting your attention; and third, activating the deeper capacities of cognition.

Epistemological Reversal

Conventional science considers theory the container and facts the content. Goethe and Bortoft, on the other hand, consider sensory facts to be the container.’ Bortoft explained, “This transformation from an analytical to a holistic mode of consciousness brings with it a reversal between the container and the content. In the case of positivism, the theory is considered to be only the container for the facts. Now, if the theory, in Goethe’s sense, is the real content of the phenomenon, then it can be said that in the moment of intuitive insight we are seeing inside the phenomenon.â

“The unfolding of nature in itself is an epistemological reversal,” he continued. “The plant is a dynamic movement. You see its leaves as traces that embody and manifest certain imprints of this movement. That becomes so strong when you see it. That is the intuitive seeing from inside of the phenomenon. The dynamic movement is the reality.”

I told Bortoft that his distinctions resonated deeply with experiences that my colleagues and I had had in the field of leading profound organizational change. I explained that another aspect of that other way of seeing concerned the opening of the heart, the inversion of one’s emotions and feelings into senses for a deeper and much more profound relationship to the world. “This is exactly the core theme I have been recently working on,” he replied. We both regretted we didn’t have more time to explore this phenomenon of seeing and thinking with the heart.

Like Master Nan, Henri Bortoft (ã938–20ã2) passed away in 20ã2. I have always wished we had had more time together during or after the interview.

Still, it's remarkable how deeply our brief conversation in London has influenced the thinking and work of our Cambridge/MIT group over the years. It also strikes me how deeply his message about the "epistemological reversal" resonates with my observations on inversion in the preface to this (second) edition of the book.

Field Notes: Moving out of the Prison

When we get a glimpse of the sensing experience—seeing reality unfold from within—we realize that our normal way of operating—the view from outside—offers us, as Plato eloquently put it, nothing but a shadow (or secondary) reality, rather than the experience of primary reality. For that reason the image of being imprisoned inside a cave is not totally inaccurate.³⁰ As long as we are merely downloading, we are fully imprisoned. All we see are shadows on the wall, shadows produced by passing figures in our own mind.

As we have discussed, when we switch from the state of downloading (viewing from projecting past patterns) to seeing (viewing things from outside), we turn our head and realize that the shadows on the wall are actually our own projections and that the true reality is outside the cave. At this stage, three principles come into play: turning around (moving into context), realizing that there is something different than what we project (suspension and wonder), and wondering what the reality outside looks like (questioning).

At the moment we switch from the state of seeing (viewing from outside) to sensing (viewing from within the formative field), we emerge from the cave into the world outside. Again three principles come into play while going through this transition. First, we have to immerse ourselves in the concrete particulars (dive in). We cannot leave the cave by continuing to habitually download abstract thought. We cannot leave the cave on someone else's back (like Varela's upper cat, which remains blind). The only way out is to activate our own senses. Second, we redirect our attention and begin to grasp reality by sensing inside the formative field. And third, as we deepen this movement, we deploy a different cognitive capacity: a knowing that emerges from the intelligence of the heart. We grasp reality not only from

the perspective of the individual observer but also from the perspective of life and its source, the sun. The result is seeing with the heart.

Unless we make the effort to move, to use our senses to relate to the world outside our current boundaries, we will stay blind and remain stuck in our cave.

Goethe put it this way: “Man knows himself only to the extent that he knows the world; he becomes aware of himself only within the world, and aware of the world only within himself. Every object, well contemplated, opens up a new organ within us.”²⁵

Most cross-institutional change processes fail because they miss the starting point: co-sensing across boundaries. We need infrastructures or holding spaces to facilitate this process across system boundaries. And because they don't yet exist, organized interest groups go out and maximize their special interests against the whole, as if declaring war instead of engaging practitioners in the larger system in a process of sensing together. As long as we continue to organize our society on the backs of others, like Varela's upper cat, we will continue to get unsatisfactory results. Just as you can't expect the blind upper cat to operate in a dynamic environment, you cannot expect an unseeing society or social system to adapt and operate successfully in increasingly turbulent times.