Presencing: Learning From the Future As It Emerges

On the Tacit Dimension of Leading Revolutionary Change[1]

Presented at
the Conference On Knowledge and Innovation
May 25-26, 2000, Helsinki School of Economics, Finnland,
and the MIT Sloan School of Management, OSG, October 20th, 2000

Claus Otto Scharmer
MIT Sloan School of Mangement
Society for Organizational Learning

scharmer@MIT.EDU

---

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1999 Academy of Management, Chicago. The paper represents work in progress and draws together the results of three different research projects with my colleagues at the Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge, MA, Generon Consulting, and the McKinsey Leadership and Organization Practice, Europe. My special thanks to the participants of the Boston Conversation on leadership and knowledge with Brian Arthur, Jonathan Day, Joseph Jaworski, Michael Jung, Ikujiro Nonaka, and Peter Senge for inspiration and feedback. Special thanks for their helpful comments also to Bill O'Brien, Goran Carstedt, Adam Kahane, Ekkehard Kappler, Katrin Käufer, Nina Kruschwitz, Reola Phelps, Edgar Schein, Tobias Scheytt, Bill Torbert, John Van Maanen, and Ursula Versteegen.

Presencing: Learning From the Future As It Emerges

Abstract

This paper looks at the impact of the emerging new business environments – often referred to as the "new economy" – on the basic concepts of organizational learning and change. While organizational learning related activities during the 1990s were largely focused on the incremental improvement of already existing processes, most leadership teams are now facing a new set of business challenges that can rarely be successfully addressed with the traditional methods and concepts of organizational learning. Classical methods and concepts of organizational learning are all variations of the same Kolb (1984) based learning cycle: learning based on reflecting on the experiences of the past. However, several currently significant leadership challenges cannot be successfully approached this way because the experience base of a team often is not relevant for the issue at hand. In order to do well in the emerging new business environments, organizations and their leaders have to develop a new cognitive capability, the capability for sensing and seizing emerging business opportunities (Arthur 1996, 2000). Organizations and their leaders can develop this capability by engaging in a different kind of learning cycle, one that allows them to learn from the future as it emerges, rather than from reflecting on past experiences. I suggest calling this evolving new learning capacity "presencing." The term refers to the capacity for sensing, embodying, and enacting emerging futures. Drawing on a number of recent experiences in action research and studies in neurophenomology, the paper articulates the concept of presencing and articulates its underlying process, practices, principles, and inflection points as an important tacit territory in the leadership of revolutionary change.

Introduction: Facing The New Leadership Challenge

Leaders from around the world are facing a new kind of challenge: coping with the various waves of disruptive, revolutionary change that redefine the context of business. One wave has to do with the rise of the Internet-based "new" economy and its driving force, the process of *digitization* (Castells, 1998; Kelly 1998). A second has to do with the rise of new relational patterns and their underlying driving forces: the processes of *globalization* (of markets, institutions, products), *individualization* (of products, people, and their careers), and increasingly *networked structures* and web shaped relationship patterns (Castells, 1996). For example, the "war for talent" that most companies deal with is a typical challenge that arises from the interplay of the above four driving forces.

A third and more subtle dimension of change has to do with the increasing relevance of experience, awareness and consciousness and their underlying driving force, the process of *spiritualization* (Conlin 1999) or, to use a less distracting term, the process of becoming aware of one's more subtle experiences (Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, 1999). An example is the recent growth in interest in topics like "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) or personal mastery (Senge, 1990) both inside and outside the world of business.

These three contextual changes present today's leaders with a fundamentally new world in which they must be innovators and radical revolutionaries rather than agents of improving the status quo (Hamel 1997, 2000). The more the world of business moves into environments of increasing returns, the more the primary challenge for business leaders becomes developing a "precognition" for emerging business opportunities before they become manifest in the market place (Arthur, 1996).

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

In order to operate successfully in this new business environment, business leaders will need to master a new capacity: the capacity to sense, enact, and embody the future *as it emerges* (Jaworski and Scharmer 2000). Inspired though discussions in circle of senior researchers and consultants in the Society for Organizational Learning – particularly with Bill Torbert (2000) and Peter Senge – I have come to refer to this capacity as the emerging discipline of *presencing*. The term presencing means to use your highest Self as a vehicle for sensing, embodying, and enacting emerging futures.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the concept of presencing as a leadership discipline for operating in emerging business environments. Section One discusses three issues and puzzles that illuminate the phenomenon of presencing from the perspectives of (a) learning, (b) change, and (c) cognition. Section Two discusses seven principles of presencing. Section Three concludes with three tools that may be helpful to leaders in coping with the challenges outlined above.

I. Three Issues and Puzzles

The following three issues arose in two different contexts: during action research projects in member companies of the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) (between 1995 and 2000) and from a global interview project with 80 eminent thinkers in the fields of leadership, organization, strategy, and knowledge creation (sponsored by McKinsey & Company).

Issue # 1: Tapping a Second Source of Learning

An important insight gained from some of the more recent projects in member companies of the Society for Organizational Learning has led to the distinction between two different sources or processes of organizational learning: one that is based on *reflecting the experiences of*

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

the past (Type I) and a second source, one that is grounded *in sensing and enacting emerging futures* (Type II). Each of these processes is based on a different *temporal source* of learning and requires managers to work with fundamentally different learning cycles.

The temporal source of Type I learning is *the past,* or, to be more precise, *the coming into presence of the past*—learning revolves around reflecting on experiences of the past. All Kolb-type learning cycles are variations of this type of learning (Kolb 1984). Their basic sequence is action, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and action again (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Kolb Type Learning Cycle (Learning From the Experiences of the Past)

The temporal source of Type II learning is *the future,* or to be more precise, the *coming into presence* of the future. Type II learning is based on sensing and embodying emerging futures rather than re-enacting the patterns of the past. The sequence of activites in this learning process is seeing, sensing, presencing, and enacting (see Figure 2).

Fig. 2: The Other Learning Cycle (Learning From Emerging Futures)

While OD and organizational learning have been mainly concerned with how to build, nurture, and sustain Type I learning processes (Argyris, 1992; Schein, 1987; Senge et al, 1994), some more recent experiences suggest that today's business environment presents most companies with challenges that require a new source and process of learning. These challenges are concerned with how to compete under the conditions of

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

the new economy—that is, how to learn from a reality that is *not yet embodied* in manifest experience.

In dealing with the new economy challenge, Type I learning is no longer effective as the single source of learning, because the previous experiences embodied in the leadership team are no longer relevant to the challenges at hand. And the experiences that would be of relevance are not yet embodied in the experience base of the leadership team. The issue for management is how to learn from experience when the experience that matters most is the *not-yet-embodied experience* of the future.

Issue # 2: Managing the Complexity of Large-Scale Change

Large-scale change, particularly transformational change, always plays out on multiple levels. Figure 3 offers a distinction among five different levels of change that are mapped along the lines of the classical Lewinian insight that change is situated in a pre-stage ("unfreezing") and a later stage that puts the respective changes into behaviorally embodied routines and practices ("refreezing").[2]

Figure 3: Five Levels of Behavior in Response to Change

Figure 3 depicts five levels of organizational reality and, accordingly, of coping with change. The five levels of organizational reality are

[2] Until today, most approaches to managing change have followed that basic sequence (Lewin 1952, Schein 1989). Although different names and numbers of steps have been used in various approaches to change management, the underlying logic has remained the same. These steps are discussed below as *uncovering common will* (unfreezing), *regenerating* (redefinition), and *enacting/incorporating* (refreezing).

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

similar to an iceberg, in which most reorganization takes places "below the waterline." The *action* (at level 0) is "above the waterline" and is embedded in four underlying or contextual levels of reorganization and change. The four underlying levels of reorganizing are *restructuring* (level 1), *redesigning* core processes (level 2), *reframing* mental models (level 3), and *regenerating* common will (level 4).

When leaders in an organization face a challenge (figure 3, top left), they must choose whether (1) to react directly to the issue (level 0) or (2) to step back, reflect, and reorganize the underlying contextual levels that gave rise to the challenge in the first place. Accordingly, we can distinguish among five different responses to change: reaction (the response on level 0), restructuring (the response on level 1), redesigning (the response on level 2), reframing (the response on level 3), and regenerating (the response on level 4).

Level 0 Change: Reacting

The first response to a challenge caused by change often occurs on level 0, where the change has occurred. Once a problem becomes known, the logical response is to *react*. Although reaction is appropriate in some cases, in many circumstances reaction does not address the underlying issue. The context that *gives rise* to the issue has to be taken into account as well. Thus, the focus needs to be on the underlying levels of organizational structure, processes, mental models, and identities.

Level 1 Change: Restructuring

Structure consists of a set of variables that drive behavior. *Restructuring* occurs when the problems and issues raised by level 0

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

change are seen as the manifestation of the underlying contextual reality called *structure*.

Level 2 Change: Redesigning

Often neither reacting nor restructuring can truly address the real issues of change, in which case a third level of response may be appropriate. In this approach, often referred to as *redesigning* or business re-engineering, *manifest action* and *structure* are conceived of as part of an underlying reality called *core processes*. Core processes are at the center of what drives corporate behavior. Core processes represent the stream of value creation as perceived from the point of view of the *customer* (Hammer and Champy, 1994). Everything that directly contributes to that is part of the core process; everything else is not. Focusing on core processes allows companies to be more flexible with respect to structure and action. Both structure and action can be adapted to local conditions. Thus, at this level, dealing with issues or problems involves changing both behavior and structure (levels 0 and 1) by redesigning core processes (level 2).

Level 3 Change: Reframing

About 70% of all corporate re-engineering attempts fail (Strebel 1996). Many practitioners argue that these failures are usually connected to the fact that the underlying mental models used to develop the core processes did not change. Thus, corporate re-engineering requires yet another approach and level of corporate change: one that focuses on the mental models and cultural assumptions that guide managerial action. In these approaches, which are often referred to as organizational learning, the problems on levels 0, 1, and 2 (action, structure, and process) are conceived of as the function of yet another set of underlying context variables referred to as “mental models” (Senge 1990; Argyris and Schön 1996) or culture—i.e., taken-for-

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

granted assumptions (Schein 1992). Companies that use dialogue to focus on shared mental models and cultural assumptions are believed to be more flexible in respect to other key variables like action, structure, and processes. Hence, level 3 reframing focuses on changing action, structure, and process (levels 0, 1, and 2) by focusing on new mental models and deep taken-for-granted assumptions.

Level 4 Change: Regenerating

Why do change initiatives based on culture and learning sometimes also fail (Wyer et al. 1997)? One explanation is that the rhetoric of change was in disconnection to what really matters most to local line leaders and business managers. Thus a fifth approach to coping with change is to focus on deep intention, purpose, and will. Now the responses of levels 0, 1, 2, and 3 (action, structure, process, and mental models) become part of an even more subtle set of contextual variables, which are referred to as purpose (Hock 1999), shared vision (Senge 1990), or common will (Scharmer 1999). Focusing on purpose and principles allows companies to be more flexible in situating action, structure, processes, and mental models according to local conditions. Hence, level 4 regenerating means allowing for flexibility in action, structure, processes, and mental models (levels O, 1, 2, and 3) by focusing on redefining purpose and uncovering common will.

An Organizational Breathing Cycle

The horizontal axis in Figure 3 depicts the process of unfreezing-change-refreezing, or to use a less static terminology, uncovering-redefining-enacting. If we imagine the organization as a living system, we can think of "uncovering" or unfreezing as the organization *inhaling*: taking the current reality into its consciousness ("breathing in"). Likewise, we can think of *enacting* as an interior-out process of

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

converting a changed consciousness into practices and actions ("breathing out"). Accordingly, the Lewin-Schein model of unfreezing–change–refreezing can be seen as *one sequence* within an ongoing process of *organizational breathing*.

The breathing metaphor can be related to the different levels of corporate reorganization as outlined above. For example, we can compare an organization that is acting primarily in the first two levels of change (reacting and restructuring) to an organism that predominantly engages in *shallow breathing.* Likewise, an organization that engages primarily in level 3 and 4 activities (redesigning and reframing) can be compared to an organism that *breathes deeply.* Carrying the metaphor further, we should expect an organization that engages only in level 1 and level 2 types of change to suffer serious respiratory distress from a lack of oxygen. An organization that engages only in level 3 and level 4 types of change will probably suffer serious respiratory distress from too much CO_2 (hyperventilation).

According to the Lewin-Schein model, the highest leverage point is located at the stage of unfreezing (Schein 1989). The key challenge to leaders at this stage of the change cycle is how to enable teams and organizations to uncover the layers of organizational reality that will move them from level 3 (new mental models and cultural assumptions) to level 4 (deep purpose and common will). Shifting from level 3 to level 4 involves shifting from reflective learning (Type I: learning from the experiences of the past) to generative learning (Type II: learning from emerging futures). The primary issue at this stage is the need for a sound methodology that takes a team from the reflective space (level 3) to the space of deep intention of will (level 4).

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Issue # 3: Accessing the Deep Levels of Knowing

The third issue concerns what it takes to compete in the new economy. Brian Arthur (1996, 2000) emphasizes that in order to do well in the new economy managers have to deepen their ways of knowledge creation and knowing. Says Arthur (1996): "If knowledge-based companies are competing in winner-takes-most markets, then managing becomes redefined as series of quests for the next technological winner."

In a subsequent interview project on the foundations of cognition and leadership the focus was on understanding the different levels of cognition and knowing. The essence of this study turns out to be in some respects isomorphic to the levels of change presented above. Figure 4 differentiates among four levels of cognition (see also Jaworski and Scharmer, 2000).

Figure 4: Four Levels of Cognition and Social Reality Formation

Level 1 Cognition: Downloading Mental Models

On level 1, cognition involves immediately jumping from paying attention (perception) to projecting one's (habitual) judgment. Cognition on this level means to re-enact one's old mental models and habits of thought. All deeper and more profound cognition and knowledge creation require the *suspension* of this habitual judgment, thus opening a space that allows for a more deep and profound encounter with the phenomenon (Husserl, 1985; Varela 2000, Bortoft, 1996).

Level 2 Cognition: Reflection and Reinterpretation

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Level 2 cognition is based on a higher quality of paying attention, i.e., on seeing, reflecting on the phenomenon and allowing the appropriate structure (i.e., judgment) to form. On this level, cognition does not operate by simply downloading mental models but rather by modifying and adapting existing mental constructs according to the perceived situation and its reinterpretation at hand (Arthur, 2000).

Level 3 Cognition: Imagination

The first two levels of cognition both merely scratch the surface of the real phenomenon. Level 3 cognition is based on a deeper quality of attention that allows one to sense the phenomenon from *within*. The switch from "seeing" (level 2) to "sensing" (level 3) is referred to by Depraz/Varela/Vermersch (1999) as *redirecting* attention from the object to the source, as we will discuss in more detail below. Level 3 cognition does not focus on objects, as the prior two modes of cognition do, but on the coming-into-being of these objects (Varela, 2000; Bortoft, 1999).

This mode of cognition is based on three traditions of methodology: phenomenology, introspection, and the contemplative methodologies of the East. One example would be the phenomenological method that Goethe (1985) referred to as a

> delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age.

Goethe suggests that

> The ultimate goal would be to grasp *that everything in the realm of fact is already theory.* … Let us not seek for something beyond the phenomena – they themselves are the theory.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Goethe's approach—*let us not seek for something beyond the phenomena – they themselves are the theory*—focuses on enhancing the quality of cognition toward imagination. His view suggests a science that transcends the duality of subject and object, knower and known, res extensa (matter) and res cogitans (mind) to a consciousness in which the knower actively participates in bringing forth the world of which he is a part (Bortoft, 1998).

Level 4 Cognition: Primary Knowing (Presencing)

At level 4 cognition, the quality of attention is at its highest and most subtle level, which allows it to become one with the intention of the emerging whole. This level of cognition is what Rosch (forthcoming) refers to as *primary knowing of wisdom awareness*. The discipline here is to become aware that mind and world are not separate but arise together as aspects of the same informational field (Rosch, 1999). "Mind and world are not separate" says Rosch (1999), "since the subjective and objective aspects of experience arise together as different poles of the same act of cognition—are part of the same informational field—they are already joined at their inception. If the senses do not actually perceive the world, if they are instead participating parts of the mind-world whole, a radical re-understanding of perception is necessary."

Rosch uses the term of "field" in order to specify the nature of primary knowing. "That knowing capacity actually is the field knowing itself, in a sense, or this larger context knowing itself. … If you follow your nature far enough, if you integrate and integrate, if you follow your nature as it moves, if you follow so far that you really let go, then you find that you're actually the original being, the original way of being. The original way of being knows things and does things in its own

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

way. When that happens, or when you get even a glimpse of it, you realize that we don't actually act as fragmented selves the way we think we do. Nothing you do can produce this realization, can produce the original way of being. It's a matter of tuning into it and its way of acting. It actually has a great intention to be itself (so to speak) and it will do so if you just let it." When acting on this level of knowing, continued Rosch, action appears "without conscious control—even without the sense of 'me' doing it." (Rosch, 1999)

Knowing on such a level differs from our standard way of cognition, by knowing through "interconnected wholes (rather than isolated contingent parts) and by means of timeless, direct, presentation (rather than through stored re-presentations). Such knowing is 'open,' rather than determinate; and a sense of unconditional value, rather than conditional usefulness, is an inherent part of the act of knowing itself. Action from awareness is claimed to be spontaneous, rather than the result of decision making; it is compassionate, since it is based on wholes larger than the self; and it can be shockingly effective." (Rosch, forthcoming)

Awareness and Will: The Process of Social Reality Formation

Most cognition research on methods of introspection and contemplation end here. However, every leader or management practitioner knows that even when a group or an individual has gone through the sequence of the first three stages—seeing, sensing, and presencing—the "job" of entrepreneurial leadership is at best only half completed. The first half of the cycle shown in Figure 4 concerns what Varela calls "the process of becoming aware." The second half of the cycle—when viewed from a management and social sciences perspective—is about following the flow and enacting that what wants to emerge (Buber 1970). The "gift" or insights received during the

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

stages of sensing and presencing are only fully realized when embodied in action. In Figure 4, the first half of the cycle involves accessing experience and becoming aware, and the second half of the cycle involves forming, inspiring, and enacting will.

The second part of the cycle, which reflects the primacy of will in the process of generative reality formation, is less obvious and more difficult to observe for disciplines like phenomenology, neurophenomenology or cognitive psychology that focus primarily on individuals. Action researchers in the field of management usually have much better access to the data needed to describe the latter part of the cycle of social cognition and social reality formation as indicated in Figure 4.

Three aspects of will formation are briefly sketched below:

- *Envisioning*: Enhancing the quality of aspiration, vision, and intention has always been at the heart of entrepreneurial leadership and Senge's (1990) disciplines of Personal Mastery and Shared Vision. The capacity to develop a clear vision and a "laser focus" for implementing this vision involves operating from a cognitive space that is different from the three spaces mentioned above (seeing, sensing, presencing).

- *Enacting*: Social reality only exists insofar as it is enacted by people. Seeing, sensing, presencing, and envisioning will not make a difference unless they translate into action. Brian Arthur sees the way to operate in the new economy as a sequence of (1) observe, observe, observe, (2) allow inner knowing to emerge, and (3) act in an instant. Says Arthur: "In oriental thinking, you might just sit and observe and observe—and then suddenly do what's appropriate. You act from your inner self. Traditionally, Chinese and Japanese artists sit and look at a landscape. They'll sit on a

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

ledge with lanterns for a whole week just looking, and then suddenly say "oooohh" and paint something very quickly" (Arthur 2000).

_ *Embodying*: In an age dominated by globally acting organizations and institutions, social changes become sustainable only as they become institutionally embodied in organizational routines.

Inflection Points: Shifting the Quality of Attention

The sequence of seeing, sensing, presencing, envisioning, enacting, and embodying gives a surface description of the process at issue, i.e., the process of knowledge and (social) reality formation. It tells us what is going on, but not how. It does not show us the deeper structure of this whole territory.

For that we have to "double-click" on Figure 4 and focus on the underlying territory of inflection points, or redirections of attention, that allow people to move across the cognitive spaces outlined above (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Inflection Points of Cognition and Social Reality Formation

Figure 5 draws on the neurophenomenological studies of Varela and Shear (1999) and Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch (1999). Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch talk about three distinct gestures in "the process of becoming aware": *suspension*, *redirection*, and *letting go*. These subtle shifts in the quality of attention can be considered the gates that allow one to cross the boundary from one cognitive space to another. For example, in order to see, one first has to *suspend*

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

assumptions; in order to move from seeing to sensing, one first has to *redirect* one's focus of attention; and so on.

Inflection Point 1: Suspension

The first inflection point concerns the suspension of judgment. Suspension of judgment is the *sine qua non* of observing and seeing. Instead of projecting mental models and judgments onto the world, one opens up to what is actually happening in the world. By taking off one's self-created filters, one can see differently (Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, 1999; Husserl, 1985).

Inflection Point 2: Redirection (turning inward)

The second inflection point means redirecting one's attention *inward* toward the source rather than the *outward* toward an object. However, this does not mean reflecting on oneself. Says Varela (2000):

> Now when you say you turn inwards, it's not like you're going in. No, you keep whatever is going on in your mental process, but you follow the trail of the tendency that will move it out, that it will make you completely go with the trend of fixating an object.

Bortoft (1999) describes something similar when he talks about encountering the living, dynamic movement of plants. Without redirecting one's attention, he says, it will not be possible to truly sense the essence of another living being. One redirects one's attention from the current reality ("objects") to an emergent reality (the "coming-into-being of objects"). Commenting on the relationship between the first and second inflection point, Varela (2000) says:

> By redirection we mean that suspension will lead to very early emerging events, contents, patterns, gestures, whatever. Then you can actually redirect your attention to them. That's where the new is.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

> So the suspension creates a space, the new comes up, and then you can redirect. Redirection is a specific gesture.

Inflection Point 3: Letting Go

The third inflection point is about letting go. Other descriptions of this particular threshold are "surrendering" (Arthur 2000), "surrendering into commitment" (Jaworski et al, 2000), or "emptiness" (Varela, 2000). Says Arthur (2000):

> I think that in some strange sense the absolute key to living a very active life is surrender. As Martin Buber says, "You are not surrendering to your own will but to a higher, deeper will." In some sense I think that one has to say, "Look, I'm here. I'm willing to do whatever is necessary. Give me the chance to do it, and the means, and I'm willing."

Without surrendering there can be no presencing. One switches from *looking for* to *letting come,* "to receive that which manifests itself there, or rather that which I am capable of letting manifest itself there" (Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch, 1999).

Inflection Point 4: Crystallizing (Letting Come)

The fourth turning point is mentioned by Varela above as part of letting go. Although closely connected with letting go, the gesture of letting come points in a different direction. The switch here is from *emptiness* and *surrender* to *quickening* and *crystallizing* the emerging new. Without this reversal of attention there can be no envisioning and broadcasting of intention.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Inflection Point 5: Bringing Forth (Turning Outward)

The fifth and sixth inflection points are not mentioned by Depraz, Varela, and Vermersch but are well known to organizational change leaders around the world: having co-created a shared vision, how do you follow the flow and move into instant enaction? How do you bring forth what wants to emerge? How do you actually deliver?

Without turning outward there can be no enactment. Just as the fourth reversal (crystallizing, or letting come) mirrors and inverts the third (letting go), the fifth reversal (turning outward) mirrors and inverts the second (turning inward).

Inflection Point 6: Embedding (Institutional Embodiment)

The sixth inflection point (embedding) finally mirrors and inverts the first inflection point. While the first inflection point, suspension, focuses on *suspending* habitual routines, the sixth inflection point focuses on institutional embodiment, i.e., on *creating* new organizational routines. Here, one's focus shifts toward creating the organizational contexts, and infrastructures that will allow the new to continually unfold. Nonaka's notion of *ba* (place) (Nonaka and Konno 1998) and Senge's notion of learning infrastructures (1994) are examples of this stage.

Let us briefly illustrate these rather esoteric sounding considerations on cognition with two examples. Hamel (2000) has referred to the "dirty little secret of the strategy business," which he says is this:

> We all know what a strategy is once we see one. However, what we do not know is how this strategy got created in the first place. We do not have a theory of strategy creation.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

In the terminology introdcued above, the lack of a theory of strategy creation means that we are not aware of the coming into being of a particular strategy (level 3); all we can do is to recognize it as a thing (levels 1, 2), but we cannot see the process or the field that gave rise to that strategy in the first place (levels 3, 4). Thus the blind spot Gary Hamel is pointing at is the blind spot of cognition 3 and 4.

Another example comes from analyzing the data of a large interview project. A team of about a dozen internal managers had interviewed 100 key managers across their organization as part of a transformational change initiative. The conversation on analyzing the data began with some level 1 remarks (habitual judgments) such as: "Yeah, I knew that they would not know much about strategy reinvention." At the next level the team spent considerable effort to share the data that they had gathered throughout the organization. During this part of the conversation, which took many hours, the participants described the experience and viewpoints of their interviewees in great detail, often by reading out their key quotes loud. Cognition here was still at level 2 insofar as a number of individual patterns began to take shape, but there was nothing that seemed to connect these individual and often contradictory patterns. Several hours later, almost momentarily, a switch occurred that allowed the whole team to see the relationship among the individual patterns that were identified before. With this switch it became clear how the system operated as a whole and why the system continued to reproduce the events and symptoms that most individuals were complaining about. At that point, the conversation switched from level 2 cognition (seeing objects) to level 3 cognition (sensing the field out of which the objects and behaviors are enacted). Later, when we tried to advance from the level 3 cognition to level 4 (presencing), we did not quite succeed; but the comment that almost got us into that space was made by a woman who said, summarizing her experience of working in

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

the company: "We are living in two worlds. On the one hand, we operate as part of a big and abusive machine. One the other hand, there is this world of future possibility, reinvention, and change. We are torn in two by the split between these two worlds." This woman spoke from her heart. Ultimately, all level 4 cognition is about using one's heart as an enhanced source of intelligence and knowing (Childre and Cryer 1999).

Thus, the issue here is the same issue we faced above: What theories, methods, and tools will help leaders switch from the surface levels of cognition to the deeper sources of knowing (sensing and presencing)?

II. Principles of an Emerging Discipline: Presencing

The three examples above illuminate the same issue from the perspective of learning, change, and cognition. The issue is how to access the level 4 dimension of knowing and change that allows new patterns to emerge. I call this level 4 phenomenon *presencing*. Presencing is as much a collective or organizational phenomenon as it is an individual or personal one. While the above section on organizational change illuminated more the collective aspect, the section on cognition dealt more with the individual dimension of what essentially is the same phenomenon. Presencing signifies the process of coming-into-being of emerging futures. Presencing in the context of organizations and large systems is contingent upon and embodied in the following principles:

_ Primacy of praxis

_ Reversal of container and content

_ Inversion (*Umstülpung*)

_ Micro/macro switch (Going through the eye of the needle)

_ Systems sensing (the power of mindfulness)

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

_ Common will (the power of intention)

_ The fragile self (the power of love)

Principle 1: Primacy of Praxis

Primacy of praxis focuses on creating practice fields or environments that allow learning to follow the flow of innovation and change, rather than organizing for learning around a fixed set of workshops, exercises, and infrastructures. In terms of workshop design, the principle of primacy of praxis supplements and amends classical organizational learning workshop designs in two respects: (a) agenda flow and (b) architecture.

(a) In many traditional workshop models, participants focus on "vision" first and "current reality" second. Working with leadership teams in workshops led by Generon Consulting we have found that reverse progression is often more productive: begin with "current" and "emerging realities," and then move to images, inspirations, and intuitions about the future (Scharmer, Versteegen, and Käufer forthcoming).

(b) The agenda architecture of traditional workshops revolves around practicing and hinges on tool teaching. The practical know-how of managers is usually elicited through *exercises* that use these tools. Again, it is often most effective to begin by focusing on the participants' real work challenges and relating the teaching of tools to the managers' current issues and challenges. Primacy of praxis avoids the traditional activity of experts lecturing novices, and instead focuses on helping participants perceive the process by which they continuously recreate and reenact the reality in which they operate.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Primacy of praxis shifts the focus of practicing from the context of "doing exercises" to the context of "coping with real world" or, as Schein (2000) has put it recently, as "rising to the occasion."[3]

Principle 2: Reversal of Container and Content

While moving through the cognitive spaces of paying attention, seeing, sensing, presencing, envisioning, enacting, and embodying, at each threshold to the next cognitive space the same phenomenon occurs: a switch or reversal from one container and content of cognition to the next. During the first switch, which Varela refers to as *suspension*, the old mental models are moved from the center to the fringes, thereby opening up another cognitive space, the space of seeing. Then, while moving from seeing to sensing, another switch occurs: this time the content of seeing moves from the center to the periphery of attention, thereby opening up a space for the sensing of emerging patterns. Then, the content of sensing moves from the center to the fringes of attention, opening up a cognitive space for presencing the not-yet-embodied world of possibilities, and so forth.

Principle 3: Inversion (*Umstülpung*)

The next evolutionary principle is called *inversion* or *Umstülpung*, to use the term of twentieth-century avant garde artist Beuys (1992). *Umstülpung* literally means turning a whole field upside-down and inside-out. An example is the U-shaped process of transformation in

---

[3] The Greek term praxis means action. Aristotle distinguished between two types of action: (1) action that we perform in order to make something (poiesis), such as a pair of shoes and (2) action we perform for its own sake (praxis), such as playing music. Thus, primacy of praxis has a double meaning. On the one hand, it simply means that practitioners (clients) define and own the agenda. On the other hand, it means the pursuit of activities that are a goal in themselves.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

which everything happens twice. The upward journey of the second part of the U-shaped process reverses the themes and gestures of the downward journey during the first part of the U-shape process. For example, the gestures of suspending, turning inward, and letting go of the first part of the process are reversed in the second part by the gestures of letting come, turning outward, and embedding (more on this principle below).

Principle 4: Micro/Macro Switch (Going Through the Eye of the Needle)

Going through the eye of the needle is a threshold experience that happens at the bottom of the U at "point zero" between the downward and the upward path. The eye-of-the-needle experience has been described as "birth" or "breaking through a membrane." Going through the eye of the needle is better understood in terms of what it does to the nature of the individual-collective relationship. The essence and, to some extent the mystery, of the eye-of-the-needle experience is a very subtle switch in how individuals relate to the collective whole of the community (or team or organization) they are part of. For example, in a recent workshop with 30 managers from different organizations within the same multinational company, the managers complained a lot about the structure, strategy, and culture of their company. The conversation among the group was by and large characterized by a pattern of victimization: the managers perceived themselves as victims of the current reality of their company. After the threshold experience, the whole discourse was completely reversed: nobody talked like a victim; instead, they spoke from a place where the individuals and the group as a whole thought of themselves as

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

creators of the emerging future and a vehicle for bringing it into reality. For example, one could frequently observe the phenomenon that individuals create a much higher sense of their true self while at the same time acting much more "selfless" as a vehicle for bringing the collective new into reality. These people feel that they operate at their highest and that they may have been never more closely aligned with both their true self and the intention of the emerging whole.

Thus, the essence of the U-shaped process is a transformation of social substance—of the old social body of relationships. The old social reality was imposed on individuals, constraining them and even making them feel abused and victimized. Going through the transformative U-shaped process allows individuals and groups to operate from a different place, where their Self becomes an *open gate* through which new social substance flows into being. The transformation of the old social substance, —i.e., switching from re-enacting the patterns of the past to sensing and embodying emerging futures—can only work if the eye of the needle is at the center of this metamorphosis. It is as if the old social body goes through a death-like transformation that allows for a different quality of social substance to reemerge. The emergence of the new social substance is a truly collective phenomenon. But it can only occur when individuals, at the eye of the needle, succeed in turning themselves into instruments of the emerging new.

The transformational "switch" not only applies to the individual-collective relationship, as outlined above, but also to the self–world relationship, as outlined by Goethe:

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

> 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.[4]

What then, we may ask, is the new organ that contemplating social reality can open up within us? I believe that there are *two* types of cognitive capacities ("organs") that individuals and communities can open up for themselves. The first one contemplates a reality that is already enacted, as in Type I learning cycles that focus on reflecting the enacted reality of the past (reflective mind). The other type of cognitive capacity is accessing the generative sources of co-creating something entirely new (intuitive mind). That is what presencing is about. Presencing is a birth-giving activity. It is about bringing one's Self into being as one accesses the sources of one's highest creativity. The experience of presencing is twofold: co-creating and giving birth to a new reality and, at the same time, being transformed and born into a new world by the very same process.

Principle 5: Systems Sensing: The Coming-into-Presence of the Whole

At the heart of systems sensing is a shift of place from which cognition operates. This shift alters the external perspective of "spectator consciousness" (cognition levels 1 and 2) toward sensing and dwelling within the phenomenon of a "participatory consciousness" (cognition levels 3 and 4).

---

[4] Goethe 1823, quoted in Crotell 1998.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

How is it possible to sense the emerging whole in a world when our perception is usually limited to seeing parts? Says Bortoft (1998, p. 285):

> We cannot know the whole in the way in which we know things because we cannot recognize the whole as a thing. … The whole would be outside its parts in the same way that each part is outside all the other parts. *But the whole comes into presence within its parts, and we cannot encounter the whole in the same way that we encounter the parts.* We should not think of the whole as if it were a thing.

Bortoft claims that we cannot know the whole in the same way that we know a thing, for the whole is not a thing. Thus, the challenge is to encounter the whole as it *comes into presence* in the parts. Says Bortoft (1998, p. 284):

> If the whole presences within its parts, then a part is a place for the presencing of the whole. … a part is special and not accidental, since it must be such as to let the whole come into presence. This specialty of the part is particularly important because it shows us the way to the whole. It clearly indicates that 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.

What struck J. Jaworski and me during a recent study of leadership in the new economy was that many Silicon Valley entrepreneurs seem to operate on exactly the principles outlined above (Jaworski and Scharmer 2000). Recall that Brian Arthur says that in order to

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

compete successfully in the new economy one must first "observe, observe, observe." One must become fully immersed in and one with the environment. The next step is to retreat and reflect and to allow "the inner knowing to emerge." The final step is then "to act in an instant" (Arthur, 2000).

Principle 6: Common Will (The Power of Intention)

A common will is formed and accessed when a group uncovers the layers of their present reality and develops a shared image and sense of future and purpose. The process of uncovering and accessing common will includes more than what is generally known as "visioning." Common will evolves only *after* the process of uncovering the layers of reality. In agriculture, the success of the sowing season is not only a function of the seeds used, but also of the quality of the soil. In the same way, the success of will-formation is not only a function of vision, but also of sensing emerging futures and passing through the deep layers of present reality *before* the activity of visioning. To paraphrase Clausewitz (1989), who claimed that war was the continuation of politics by other means, we can say that the formation of will is the continuation of self-awareness by other means.

Typically, forming a common will follows the U-shaped process as outlined in Figures 4, 5. The process starts with the surfacing of individual questions, stories and experiences (cognition level 2). It continues with tapping into the emerging new environments, for example, by visiting the most interesting new economy companies (cognition level 3: sensing emerging patterns). The next stage is to use the external experiences as a body of resonance for listening to the source of the inner music: Where does my, or our, commitment come from? Who is my Self? What is my Work? This stage is about

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

connecting the emerging futures with the essence of both the individual and the collective selves (cognition level 4: presencing the highest Self and Work). The last step is to turn all of this into tangible action.

In practice, the process of accessing common will is a deep transforming journey. At the heart of this journey is the crossing through the eye of the needle that was described above. But the principle of intention and will adds another dimension: as intention and will quicken and crystallize, the result is a transformation of one's identity from *victim* to co-*creator* through whom new worlds are being brought to the fore.

Principle 7: The Fragile Self (The Power of Love)

William O'Brien, the former CEO of the Hanover Insurance Company, has summarized his experiences in leading change as follows: "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor" (private conversation). In other words, the success of a tangible move in a particular situation depends on the intangible "interior condition" of the intervenor. The capacity to create such an interior condition is becoming one of the most significant topics for future research and practice. Says Jaworski: "When you open your soul and when you bring your whole heart into the room, it changes the structure of the room." The question though remains: What interior conditions allow us to access this mode of presencing? The principles of micro-macro switch (shift of relationship), systems sensing (shift of mind) and common will (shift of intention) outline three critical conditions of presencing. Bill O'Brien has touched on a fourth condition--maybe the most important. He says there is only one source that allows this to happen: *love*. He does not mean love as

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

an emotional phenomenon, but love as the source of knowledge and will (Nishida, 1990). According to O'Brien, the essence of love is "to help others to complete themselves." Joseph Jaworski (1999) made almost the same observation. When I asked him what the single most important insight he had had since publishing his book *Synchronicity*, he responded, "The key to all of this is love."

Varela's (2000) notion of the fragile self, or the virtual self, which operates from a distributed periphery rather than from a center, and Ohashi's (2000) notion of the alien element in the self, both point at the same sphere of emergence, where I and Other are not separated, are not two. In this deep sense, love may not be the single source of social reality formation today. But it certainly is the only source of operating in that emerging way that I have seen many people operating in and that this paper attempts to describe.

III. Tools

To better situate and integrate these principles, let us briefly discuss three tools as they are used in the process of presencing. These tools map some different qualities of attention on the individual level (tool 1: listening), the collective level (tool 2: languaging), and the organizational level (tool 3: leadership laboratories).

Tool 1: Listening

Figure 6 maps four different places from which any system can operate.

In *listening 1* the place of attention is within myself (I-in-me). What I hear is what I already know. Thus, listening 1 is is simply the activity of downloading and reconfirming my old mental models and

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

prejudices. I know that I am using my listening 1 skills if a situation confirms all my mental models and prior assumptions.

In *listening 2* the focus of attention moves from myself to the *periphery* (I-in-it). I pay attention to every word that is said. I pay attention to everything that might differ from my expectations and mental models. This level of listening corresponds to the level 2 cognition referred to earlier as *seeing* (see Figure 5) While listening to another person, I experience the other person as an "it," a thing, an entity that is separate from myself. I know that I am operating using my listening 2 skills when I hear something that surprises me, when I am discovering something new "out there.".

Figure 6: Shifting the Locus of Listening

In *listening 3* the experience of the other person shifts from being an "it," a thing, to being a "you," a human being (I-in-you). All dialogue experiences include this subtle switch from seeing the world through my own eyes to suddenly seeing the world through somebody else's eyes (Buber, 1970; Isaacs, 1999). In terms of cognition the shift is from level 2 cognition (seeing) to level 3 (sensing). I know when I am operating using my listening 3 skills when I have gone outside the boundaries of my organization and become one with another person, even if only briefly.

In *listening 4* the source of attention moves yet another step upstream to the ultimate source through which the Self and you (thou) come into being (I-in-now). At this level, the separation between I and you fully collapses into the self-transcending experience of flow and spherical expansion. In terms of cognition the switch is from sensing

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

to presencing. The difference between the two is that sensing taps into emerging futures in one's environment while presencing uses one's highest self to sense and embody what is about to emerge. I know that I am using my listening 4 skills when the boundaries between myself and the other person have collapsed and when my locus of listening has shifted towards listening from the whole–or, to use a more tangible criteria, when after the conversation I have become a different person (being more who I truly am).

While most organizations and individuals are pretty good at listening 1 (downloading), and many companies have mastered listening 2, few organizations and groups are really skilled at listening 3 (inquiry) and rarely reach listening 4 (presencing).

And yet, the more we move into an innovation-driven economy, the more the capacity to operate from at levels 3 and 4 will become a major source of competitive advantage. Great artists know that the key to their creative performance is deeply connected to their ability to listening. The violinist Miha Pogacnik told of his first concert in the cathedral of Chartres:

> When I gave my first concert in Chartres I felt that the cathedral almost kicked me out. For I was young and I tried to perform as I always did: just playing my violin. But then I came to realize that in Chartres you actually cannot play your small violin, but you have to play the macro violin. The small violin is the instrument that is in your hands. The macro violin is the whole cathedral that surrounds you. The cathedral of Chartres is entirely built according to musical principles. Playing the macro violin requires you to listen and to play from another place. You have to move your listening and playing from within to beyond yourself. (Pogacnik, personal conversation)

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

This account captures a critical challenge that most leaders of organizational change l face today: learning to shift from *playing the small instrument* (i.e., operating from listening 1 and cognition 1, which are bounded by what we already know) to *playing the macro violin* (i.e., operating from listening and cognition 4, which go beyond the current boundaries and tap into the sources of emergence). From this view, the essence of leadership is the capacity to switch the place from which a system operates (Scharmer, forthcoming).

The challenges that leaders face in improving the quality of their attention are related to the cognitive inflection points discussed earlier. Figure 7 shows how the inflection points correspond to the different modes of listening. Moving from listening 1 to listening 2 involves passing over the threshold of *suspension*: suspending the politeness of habitual talk. Moving from listening 2 to listening 3 involves passing over the threshold of *redirection*: redirecting one's attention from exterior (things) to interior (the coming-into-being of things), from listening to exterior statements to listening from the inner place where speech acts are first articulated, or to put it in a little more radical way, to listening from inside the self of another. Finally, moving from listening 3 to listening 4 involves passing over the threshold of emptiness: letting go and surrendering to what wants to emerge.

Fig. 7: Inflection Points Between the Four Levels of Listening

Let us now switch the perspective on presencing from the individual (listening) to the collective (languaging).

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Tool 2: Languaging

Many change processes fail because they are unable to sufficiently uncover the current and emerging realities of a system. Often, the quality of conversation is unable to capture the system's complexity. Without adequate dialogue, teams are unable to express their tacit, taken-for-granted assumptions about how the system really works or doesn't work.

Figure 8: Languaging - Four Fields of Conversation

Figure 8 outlines a process archetype developed through many consulting, action research, and community-building experiences (Scharmer, forthcoming; Isaacs, 1999). The model is based on four generic stages and fields of languaging:

- Field I, talking nice: reproducing or "downloading" an existing language game.
- Field II, talking tough: adapting the language game to what is really going on in the minds of the participants; addressing and debating the real issues.
- Field III, reflective dialogue: redirecting one's attention to the assumptions that underlie our points of view; inquiring into the underlying assumptions of current reality and sensing emerging realities.
- Field IV, generative dialogue: going through the space of emptiness and arriving at a timeless sphere and source that reconnects us with our highest potential, both individually and collectively; presencing.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Conversation moves through the four fields. In each quadrant, the speech acts (Searle, 1969) differ in how they relate to the rules of the language game in which they operate. Rule-repeating (talking nice), rule-adapting (talking tough), rule-intuiting (reflective dialogue), and rule-generating speech acts (generative dialogue) produce different kinds of conversations, each of which allowing the conversational field to operate from a different place.

Regarding our discussion of change, we might say that each level of unfreezing or uncovering reality requires a particular language mode. For example, uncovering the third level of reorganization (reframing) requires using reflective dialogue (field III). And uncovering the fourth level of organizational reality (common will) requires using generative dialogue (field IV).

Thus, the challenge in leading change is to help teams and organizations get "unstuck" from the first field (*talking nice)* and to develop the capacity to move with ease across all four fields of conversation as needed in a particular situation. However, the question remains: What sorts of interventions or speech acts allow a system to shift the place from where it operates?

Leadership = Shifting the Place from Which a System Operates

Shifting from politeness (field I) to reconnecting what we *think* with what we *say* (field II) requires *suspending* the old ways of communicating (see Figure 9). In other words, say what you think; confront other actors with obvious contradictions between what they say and what they do.

Figure 9: Inflection Points For Shifting The Locus of Conversational Fields

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Moving from a field II conversation (debate) to a field III conversation (reflective dialogue) again involves shifting the tacit field structure of conversation. In a debate, each individual advocates his or her own point of view. In contrast, in a reflective dialogue participants shift from advocating their own pinions to inquiring into the assumptions that underlie them. That shift involves *redirecting* the collective attention from exterior to inner sources and assumptions. The works of Argyris and Schön (1996), Schein (1992, 1999), Isaacs (1993), and Srivastva and Cooperiders (1990) address this reflective turn by focusing on "double loop learning" (Argyris and Schön), "taken-for-granted assumptions" (Schein), "suspending assumptions" (Isaacs), or "appreciative inquiry" (Srivasta and Cooperider). The principal leverage for the facilitator/intervenor is to reconnect what people think and say with what they *see* and *do*. It does not help to say: "I just noticed that everybody seems to be engaged in blaming others rather then reflecting on their own responsibility. Why don't we try to use reflection and inquiry." This intervention will almost certainly fail because it only *talks* about reflective inquiry. Instead of reflecting on his own impulses, the intervenor blames others.

Moving from reflective to generative dialogue again involves a shift. This time, the shift involves moving across the threshold of emptiness and surrendering to the flow of the emerging new (generative dialogue or presencing). In presencing, the place where *I* operate is identical to the place where *we* operate. It emerges from the presence or the coming into being of the larger whole. Sometimes, this level of conversation occurs after many days of common work, as intentional quietness or sacred silence (Isaacs 1999). When it happens, the experience of time slows down, and the speech acts change from speaking based on reflection to speaking from what emerges in the here and now. Jaworski (1996), referring to Buber (1970), describes

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

this level of reality experience as *synchronicity*, in which the boundaries between I and thou seem to completely disappear. Thus, like reflective dialogue, generative dialogue is based on reconnecting what we think and say with what we do and see. The difference is that in field III one acts first and reflects second, whereas in field IV the two happen *synchronistically* (action = reflection).

The drama of dialogue plays out according to these four types of conversation. They differ in the degree of complexity that they are able to capture and represent. The more easily teams and companies are able to move across the four fields of conversational action, the more they will succeed in unfreezing and accessing the deeper and more subtle levels of learning and change.

The essence of moving from fields I, II, and III to field IV (I-in-now) is not only to shift from Type I learning (reflection) to Type II learning (presencing) but also involves a profound aesthetic experience. At the heart of this experience is a spheric expansion and enhancement of one's own experience of self. When Pogacnik speaks of playing the macro violin, what he means is that the source of his playing is the surrounding larger whole, rather than his smaller self. Consider another example, the case of the legendary basketball player Bill Russell. Says Russell:

> Every so often a Celtic game would heat up so that it became more than a physical or even a mental game, and would be magical. That feeling is very difficult to describe, and I certainly never talked about it when I was playing. When it happened, I could feel my play rise to a new level. It came rarely, and would last anywhere from five minutes to a whole quarter or more. … It would surround not only me and the other Celtics, but also the players on the other team, even the referees.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

> At that special level, all sorts of odd things happened. The game would be in a white heat of competition, and yet somehow I wouldn't feel competitive – which is a miracle in itself. I´d be putting out the maximum effort, straining, coughing up parts of my lungs as we ran, and yet I never felt the pain. The game would move so quickly that every fake, cut and pass could be surprising, and yet nothing could surprise me. It was almost as if we were playing in slow motion. During those spells, I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would be taken. … My premonitions would be consistently correct, and I always felt then that I not only knew all of the Celtics by heart, but also all the opposing players, and that they all knew me. There have been many times in my career when I felt moved or joyful, but these were the moments when I had chills pulsing up and down my spine."

Russell and Pogacnik both talk about the same phenomenon—about operating from an enlarged and enhanced field of self. They do not talk about first observing themselves from outside (reflection) and then performing an activity (action). This sequence would be classic field III behavior (reflection). Field IV actions, in contrast, are based on instantaneous learning with zero feedback delay—i.e., one operates from two places or spheres simultaneously: (1) from the peripheral sphere of one's own organization, sensing what is about to emerge ("playing the macro violin;" "my premonitions would be constantly correct"); and (2) from within one's organization as Pogacnik played the violin and Russell made his moves and shots at the very same moments that they perceived their actions from outside. During these instances of high performance the self operates both outside and within one's own organization.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Tool 3: Leadership Laboratories

The third tool, the leadership laboratory, helps to make this way of operating work in the context of large organizations (Jaworski and Scharmer, 2000). The key idea of the laboratory is to provide leaders with an opportunity to explore and nurture three interrelated and interwoven environments or spaces of thought and action.

The first environment is about seeing and sensing and taking the paraticipants outside the boundaries of their organization. For example, one might conduct field visits to new economy companies or other places where people can sense and experience the emerging new.

The second environment is about retreat and reflect: an elevated space for thinking, where the point is to enhance the quality of thinking together, specifically, to advance from sensing to presencing. For example, the laboratory might arrange to take managers on a multi-day retreat in Santa Fe. There, they would begin by crystallizing the learning from field visits, put the different images of emerging realities together, and use this as a body of resonance for presencing the emerging new, both individually and collectively.

The third environment is a kind of business incubator designed to help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into powerful innovations and embodied actions.

Thus, the Leadership Laboratory is a tool that helps managers to deeply connect to the emerging futures outside (space I), and within (space II) and to bring them forth into reality (space III).

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Conclusion: Presencing—An Emerging Sixth Discipline?

The challenges of the three revolutions outlined above will require leaders to develop a new leadership capacity. Throughout this paper I have described this new capacity from the perspective of learning, change, and cognition, highlighting both the individual and the collective aspects of this emerging new capacity. The name I propose for this capacity is presencing. Presencing is both a collective/organizational and an individual/personal experience in which the Self becomes the gate through which the new comes into reality. It is the discipline of bringing one's full Self into presence and use one's highest Self as vehicle for sensing and bringing forth new worlds (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Organizational Learning Disciplines

During the 1980s and 1990s a number of learning disciplines emerged that today are used in the learning practices of many companies (Senge et al. 1994, 1999). They include the methods and tools of Systems Thinking, Personal Mastery, Dialogue, Parallel Structuring, Process Consultation, and others. Each of these methods and disciplines is grounded in a distinct body of principles and practices (Argyris and Schön 1996; Schein 1987, 1992, 1999; Senge 1990; Bohm 1990; Isaacs 1999; Senge et al. 1994, 1999; Nonaka and Konno, 1998; Kim 1992, 1994).

Figure 10 situates the emerging discipline of presencing in the larger context of organizational learning and change. If we consider the various learning disciplines as part of a larger whole, then Systems

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Thinking is related to conceptualization and other functions of the "head"; Process Consultation and Parallel Structures are related to being firmly grounded in business realities, i.e., the functions of the "feet"; and Dialogue, Personal Mastery, and Presencing are related to the middle sphere, which touches on what people really care about and where their commitment comes from (the heart). The power of presencing may be related to using the Self as the eye of the needle for transforming social substance.

The managerial implication of this is profound but simple. There is only one sustainable tool for leading change in the 21st century. This tool is the leader's Self. Your Self. It is the capacity of the "I" to transcend the boundaries of its current organization and to operate from the emerging larger whole (I-in-now) both individually and collectively. Building on Schein's (2000) definition of leadership as "the ability to rise to the occasion," we can conclude that the leader's real work is to create conditions that allow leaders – that is: *everybody* who rises to the occasion - to shift the place from which their organization or system operates.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

References

Argyris, C. (1992), *On Organizational Learning*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Argyris, C. and D. Schön (1996), *Organizational Learning II.* Theory, Method, and Practice, New York, NY: Addison-Wesley.

Arthur, W. B. (1996), Increasing Returns and the New World of Business, *Harvard Business Review*, July – August: 100-109.

Arthur, W. B. (2000), Sense Making in the New Economy. Conversation with W. Brian Arthur, Xerox Parc, Palo Alto, April 16, 1999, in: Scharmer, C.O. et al (eds.), Accessing Experience, Awareness and Will. 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundation of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Cambridge, MA, August 2000, Vol. IV: 541-576.

Beuys, J. (1992), *Kunst = Kapital*. Achberger Vorträge, editited by Rainer Rappmann, Wangen: Achberger Verlag.

Bohm, D. (1990), *On Dialogue*, Ojai, CA: David Bohm Seminars.

Bortoft, H. (1996), *The Wholeness of Nature.* Goethe's Way towards a Science of Conscious Participation in Nature. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press.

Bortoft, H. (1998), Counterfeit and Authentic Wholes: Finding a Means for Dwelling in Nature. In: Seamon, D. and A. Zajonc (Eds.), *Goethe´s Way of Science:* A Phenomenology of Nature. New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 277-298.

Bortoft, H. (1999), Imagination Becomes An Organ of Perception. Conversation with Henri Bortoft, London, July, 14, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Entering the Meditative Space of Leadership, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. III, December, 1999, Cambridge, MA: 405-411.

Brown, J. S. and P. Duguid (1998), Organizing Knowledge. In: *California Management Review*. Spring 1998, Vol 40, No. 3, 90-111.

Buber, M. (1970), *I and Thou*, New York, N.Y.: Simon Schuster.

Bushe, G.R. and A.B. Shani (1991), *Parallel Learning Structures*, Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley.

Castells, M. (1996-98), *The information age*: economy, society, and structure. vol.s 1-3. London: Blackwell.

Catford, L. and M. Ray (1991), *The Path of the Everyday Hero*. Drawing on the Power of Myth to Meet Life's Most Important Challenges. New York, NY: Tarcher/Putnam.

Childre, D. and B. Cryer (1999), *From Chaos to Coherence.* Advancing Emotional and Organizational Intelligence Through Inner Quality Management. Boston, MA: Butterworth Heinemann.

Clausewitz, C. von. (1989), *On War.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Conlin, M. (1999) Religion in the Workplace, The growing presence of spirituality in Corporate America, in: *Business Week*, New York, November 1, 1999. Issue: 3653

Cook, S. N. and J. S. Brown (1999), Bridging Epistemologies: The Generative Dance between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing, Organization Science, 10(4), 382-400.

Cook, S. N. and J. S. Brown (1993), Culture and Organizational Learning, Journal of Management Inquiry, 2(4), 373-390.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990), *Flow*. The Psychology of Optimal Experience. New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial.

Cusumano, M. A. and D. B. Yoffie (1998), *Competing on Internet Time*: Lessons from Netscape and Its Battle with Microsoft, New York: Free Press.

Day, J. (1999), What Is Important Is Inivisible To The Eye. Conversation with Jonathan Day, McKinsey & Company, London, July 14, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Entering the Meditative Space of Leadership, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. III, December, 1999, Cambridge, MA: 331-370.

de Geus, A. (1997), *The Living Company.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Depraz, N., F. Varela and P Vermersch (1999), The Gesture of Awareness. An account of its structural dynamics, in: M.Velmans (Ed.), *Investigating Phenomenal Consciousness*, Benjamin Publishers, Amsterdam.

Foster, R. (1999), Cocooning the Company with a Schumpetrian Field. Interview with Richard Foster, McKinsey & Comp. August 18, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Beyond Communities of Practice: Cocooning the Company with a Generative Field, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. III, December 1999, Cambridge, MA: 289-329.

Giddens, A. (1984), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structure,* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1990), *The Consequences of Modernity*: The Raymond Fred West Memorial Lectures. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Goethe, J. W. von (1985) Goethe's Scientific Studies. Translated by D. Miller. Edited by Al. P. Cottrell and D. Miller. Boston: Suhrkamp Insel.

Hamel, G. (2000), *Leading The Revolution.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Hammer, M. and J. Champy (1994), Reengineering the Corporation : A Manifesto for Business Revolution, N.Y: HarperBusiness.

Handy, C. (1998), *The Hungry Spirit.* Beyond Capitalism: A Quest for Purpose in the Modern World. New York, NY: Broadway Books.

Heidegger, Martin (1977/1993), "What Calls for Thinking?" in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings:* from Being and Time to The Task of Thinking, edited by David Farrell Krell, 2nd ed., San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.

Heifetz, R. A. (1994), *Leadership without Easy Answers.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Press.

Hock, D. W. (1999), *Birth of Chaordic Age.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Husserl, E. (1985), Die phänomenologische Methode. Ausgewählte Texte, Bd I-II, Stuttgart: Reclam.

Isaacs, W. (1993), "Taking Flight: Dialogue, Collective Thinking and Organizational Learning", in *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn: 24 - 39.

Isaacs, W. (1999), *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together*, New York, NY: Doubleday.

Jaworski, J. (1996), *Synchronicity:* The Inner Path of Leadership. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Jaworski, J. (1999), The Heart Is the Key to All of This. Conversation with Joseph Jaworski, Boston, October 29, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Entering the Meditative Space of Leadership, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. III, December, 1999, Cambridge, MA: 417-446.

Jaworski, J., and C.O. Scharmer (2000), Leadership in the New Economy: Sensing and Actualizing Emerging Futures, Working Paper, Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge Mass., and Generon, Beverly, MA.

Johnson, T. (1999), Goethe Meets Accounting: Seeing the Living Company at Work. Conversation with Professor Tom Johnson. Portland State University. August, 20, 1999. in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), The Invisible Workbench: Forming and Sculpting Mental-Emotional Fields, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. I, December 1999, Cambridge, MA: 67-100.

Jung, M. (1999), The Invisible Workbench: Forming and Sculpting Mental-Emotional Fields. Conversation with Michael Jung, Director, McKinsey & Company, Munich, March 18, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), The Invisible Workbench, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. I, December 1999, Cambridge, MA: 5-35.

Kao, J. (2000), The Seventh Career: Building An Innovation Keiretsu. Conversation I. with John Kao. The Idea Factory, San Francisco, April 12, 2000, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Accessing Experience, Awareness and Will, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. IV, August 2000, Cambridge, MA: 605-693

Kahane, A. (1999), Scenarios for Changing the World. In: P. Senge, A. Kleiner, C. Roberts, R. Ross, G. Roth and B. Smith (Eds.) *The Dance of Change.* A Fieldbook for Sustaining Momentum in a Learning Organization. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.

Kegan, R. (1994), *In over our heads:* the mental demands of modern life. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Kelly, K. (1998), *New Rules for the New Economy.* 10 Radical Strategies for a Connected World. New York, NY: Viking.

Kim, D. (1992), *Systems Archetypes I.* Diagnosing Systemic Issues and Designing High Leverage Interventions, Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communication.

Kim, D. (1994), *Systems Archetypes II.* Using Systems Archetypes to Take Effective Action, Waltham, MA: Pegasus Communication.

Kleiner, A. and G. Roth, “Perspectives on Corporate Transformation: the Oil Co Learning History,” SoL Learning History 18.009, 1998, available through SoL-ne.org. (forthcoming as book from Oxford University Press)

Kolb, D. (1984). Experiential Learning. Prentice Hall.

Lave, Jean C. and Etienne Wenger (1991), *Situated Learning:* Legitimate Peripheral Participation, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Lave, Jean C. and Seth Chaiklin, eds. (1993), *Understanding Practice*: Perspectivs on Activity and Context, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Leonard, Dorothy and Sylvia Sensiper (1998), "The Role of Tacit Knowledge in Group Innovation," *California Management Review*, 40(3), 112-132.

Lewin, K. (1952), Group decisions and social change. In: G.E. Swanson, T.N. Newcomb and E.L. Hartley (Eds.) *Readings in Social Psychology Rev. Ed.* New York, NY: Holt.

Mintzberg, H. (1987), Crafting Strategy, in: *Harvard Business Review*, July - August 1987, 66 – 75.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Mintzberg, H., B. Ahlstrand and J. Lampel (1998), *Strategy Safari.* A Guided Tour through the Wilds of Strategic Management. New York: The Free Press.

Nishida, K. (1987), *Last Writings,* Nothingness and the Religious Worldview. Translated with and introduction by D. A. Dilworth, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Nishida, K. (1990), *An Inquiry into the Good.* Translated by M. Abe and Ch. Ives, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Nonaka, I. (1991), The Knowledge Creating Company. In: *Harvard Business Review.* November-December: 96-104.

Nonaka, I. and N. Konno (1998), The Concept of "Ba": Building a Foundation for Knowledge Creation. In: *California Management Review.* Spring 1998, Vol 40, No. 3, 40-54.

Nonaka, I. and H. Takeuchi (1995), *The Knowledge-Creating Company, How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nonaka, I., R. Toyama and Akiya Nagata (2000), A Firm as a Knowledge-creating Entity: A New Perspective on the Theory of the Firm. In: *Industrial and Corporate Change,* Volume 9, No. 1, 1-20.

Ohashi, R. (2000), The Eye of The Hurricane, conversation with Professor Ryosuke Ohashi, March 18, 2000, Technical University of Kyoto, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Accessing Experience, Awareness and Will, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. IV, August 2000, Cambridge, MA: 577-600.

Orlikowski, W. (1996), Improvising Organizational Transformation Over Time: A Situated Change Perspective, In: *Information Systems Research,* Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1996: 63-92.

Orlikowski, W. (1999), Awareness is the First and Critical Thing. Conversation with Professor Wanda Orlikowski. MIT Sloan School of Management, September 7, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Beyond Communities of Pratice: Cocooning the Company with a Generative Field, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. II, December 1999, Cambridge, MA: 139-169.

Orlikowski, W. and J. Yates (1998), It`s About Time: An Enacted View of Time in Organizations. Working Paper presented at the 58th *Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management,* San Diego, CA.

PineII, B. J. and J. H. Gilmore (1999): *The Experience Economy.* Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Polanyi, Michael (1966), The Tacit Dimension, Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co.

Rosch, E. (1999), When the Knowing of the Field Turns to Action. Conversation with Professor Eleanor Rosch, University of California, Berkeley, Dept. of Psychology, October 15, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Entering the Meditative Space of Leadership 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. III, August 1999, Cambridge, MA: 371-404.

Rosch, E. (forthcoming) Spit Straight Up - Learn Something!" Can Tibetan Buddhism Inform the Cognitive Sciences? In B. A. Wallace (Ed.) Meeting at the Roots: Essays on Tibetan Buddhism and the Natural Sciences. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Roth, G. and J. Wyer (1997), The Learning Initiative at Electro Components. Edited by V. O' Brian. Society for Organizational Learning Publication 18.007.

Scharmer, C. O. (1991), *Ästhetik als Kategorie strategischer Führung*, Stuttgart: Urachhausverlag.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Scharmer, C. O. (1999), Organizing Around Not-Yet-Embodied Knowledge. In: Krogh, G.v., I. Nonaka and T. Nishiguchi (ed.), *Knowledge Creation*: A New Source of Value, Macmillan.

Scharmer, C. O. (2000), Self-transcending Knowledge: Organizing Around Emerging Realities, in: Nonaka, I. and D. J. Teece (eds.): Managing Industrial Knowledge, New Perspectives on Knowledge-Based Firms, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Scharmer, C.O. (forthcoming), Presencing: Illuminating The Blind Spot. Leadership = Shifting The Place From Where A System Operates, Habilitation Thesis, Cambridge, MA.

Scharmer, C.O. and U. Versteegen, K. Käufer (forthcoming), The Pentagon of Praxis, forthcoming in *Reflections*, Cambridge, MA.

Schein, E. H. (1987), *Process Consultation.* Volume II. Reading: MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schein, E. H. (1988), *Process Consultation.* Volume I. Reading: MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schein, E. H. (1989), Planning and Managing Change. Teaching Material, Course 15.315. Cambridge: MIT-Sloan School of Management.

Schein, E. H. (1992), *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Second Edition, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. H. (1993), "On Dialogue, Culture, and Organizational Learning", in *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn: 40-51.

Schein, E. H. (1995), "Learning Consortia: How to create Parallel Learning Systems for Organization Sets," working paper, Organizational Learning Center, MIT Sloan School of Management, Cambridge, MA.

Schein, E. H. (1999), *Process Consultation Revisited.* Building the Helping Relationship. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schein, E. H. (2000), The many faces of leadership, in: *Reflections,* Volume 2, Number 1, 2.

Schön, D. A. (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner*, New York, NY: Basic Books.

Schumpeter, Joseph A (1947), *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. Third Edition, New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Searle, J. R. (1969), *Speech Acts.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Senge, P. M. (1990), *The Fifth Discipline*: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, New York, NY: Doubleday.

Senge, P. M. et al. (ed., 1994), *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization, New York, NY: Doubleday.

Senge, P. and K. Kaeufer (1999), Communities of Leaders or No Leadership at all, In: Chowdbury, S. *Management in the 21c.* London.

Senge, P. and C.O. Scharmer (forthcoming), Community Action Research. In: Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Sheldrake, R. (1999), Morphic fields. Conversation with Rupert Sheldrake, London, September 23, 1999, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Entering the Meditative Space of Leadership, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. III, December 1999, Cambridge, MA: 491-511.

Srivastva, S. and D. L. Cooperrider (1990), *Appreciative management and leadership*: the power of positive thought and action in organizations. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Strebel, P. (1996), Why do Employees Resist Change?, in Harvard Business Review, May/June: 86.

Torbert, W. 1991. The power of balance: Transforming self, society, and scientific inquiry. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Torbert, W. 2000. Is Time Money? The Spirit, Theory, Practice, and Effects of Timely Action. Working paper, Boston College.

van Maanen, J. and S. R. Barley (1984), Occupational Communities: Culture and Control in Organizations, in: Staw, B.M. and L.L. Cummings (eds.), Research in Organizational Behavior, Greenwich, CN: JAI Press.

Varela, F. (2000), The Fragile Self Deploying Itself, Interview with Francisco Varela, January 12, 2000, Paris, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Accessing Experience, Awareness and Will, 25 Dialogue-Interviews on the foundations of knowledge, awareness and leadership. Unpublished project report, Vol. IV, August 2000, Cambridge, MA: 513-539.

Varela, F. and J. Shear (1999), First-Person Accounts: why, what, and how, in: Varela, F. and J. Shear (eds.), The View From Within. First-person approaches to the study of consciousness. Thorverton, UK: Imprint Academic: 1-14.

Varela, F. (1996), Identity without substance. Interview with F. Varela, Paris, March 11, 1996, in: C.O. Scharmer et al. (eds), Crafting Theories: Leading Organizational Thought. 21 Dialogue-Interviews on Organization Studies, Strategy, Leadership & Controlling in the 21st Century. Unpublished Project Report, Vol. I, June, 1996, Cambridge, MA: 270-289.

Waldorp. M. M. (1992), *Complexity*. The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Wenger, E. (1998), *Communities of Practice*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wilber, K. (2000), *Integral Psychology*: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy. Boston MA: Shambala.

Wyer, J. and G. Roth, " The Learning Initiative at Electro Components," SoL Learning History 18.007, 1997, available through sol-ne.org.

Zajonc, A. (1998), Goethe and the Science of his time: An Historical Introduction, in: Seamon, D. and A. Zajonc (Eds.), *Goethe´s Way of Science:* A Phenomenology of Nature. New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 15-32.

© 2000 C.O. Scharmer

Fig. 1: The Conventional Learning Cycle (Learning From Experiences of the Past)

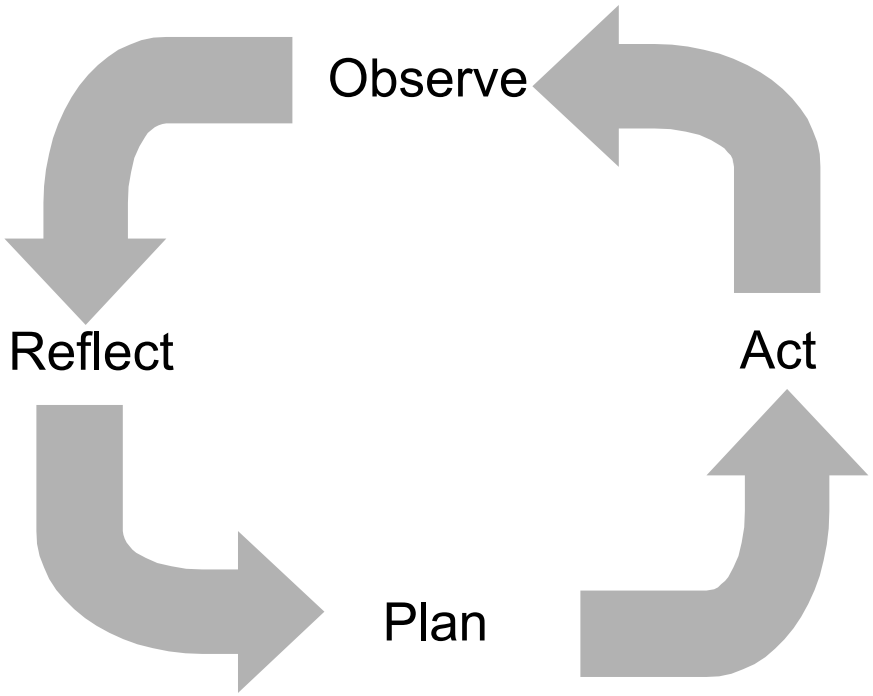
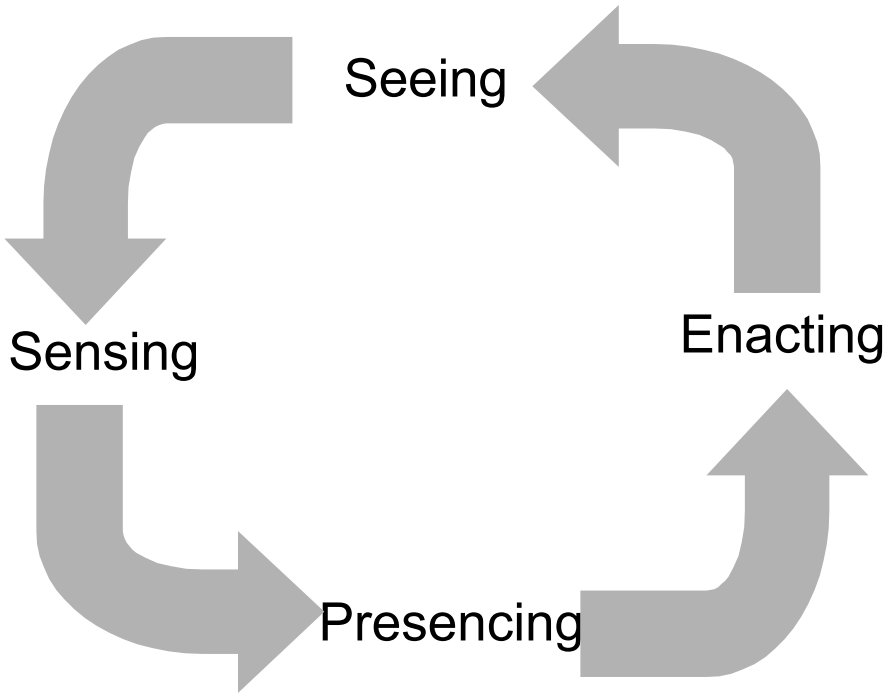
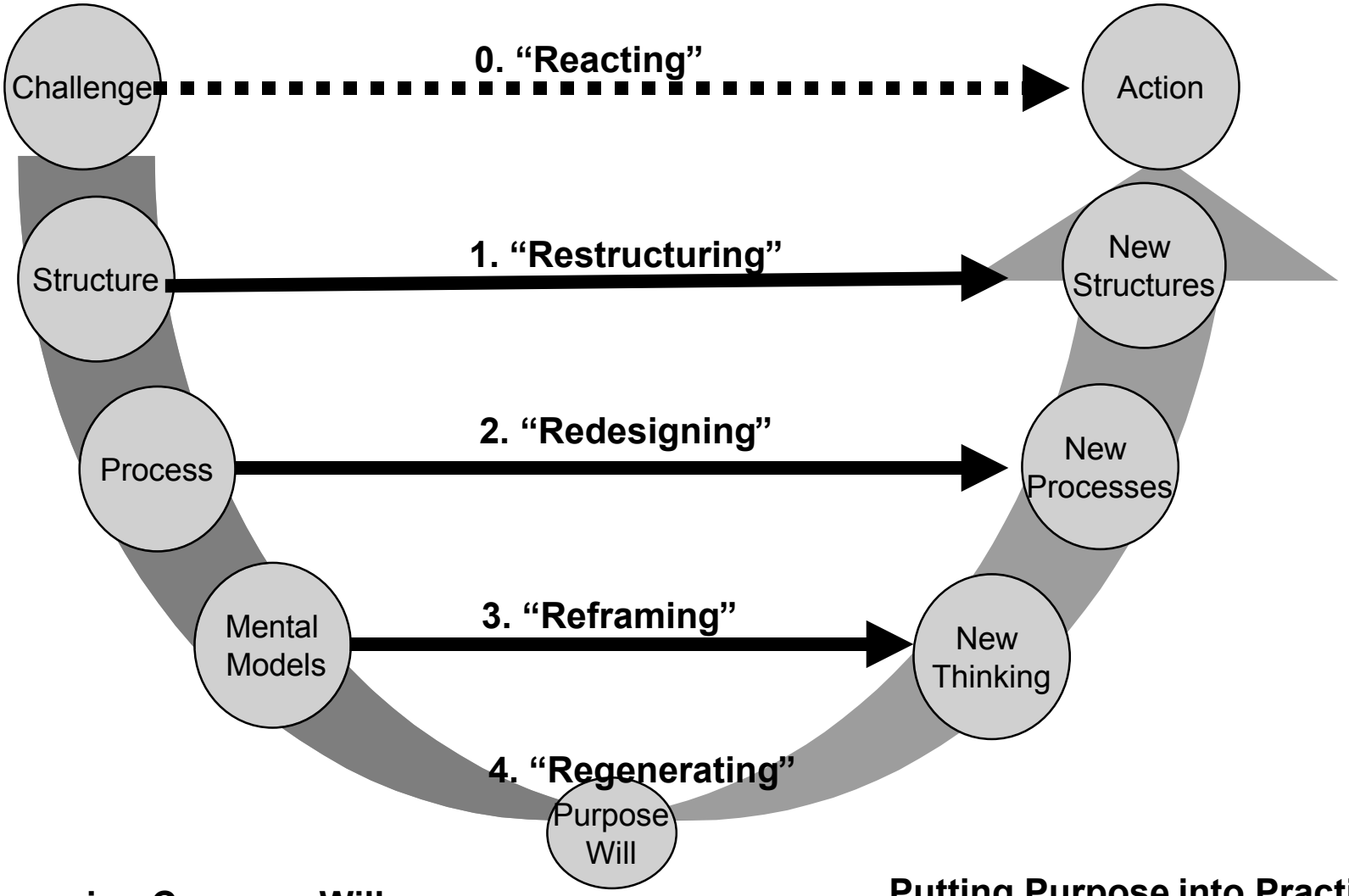


Figure 2: The Other Learning Cycle (Learning From Emerging Futures)



© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 3: Five Levels of Behavior in Response to Change



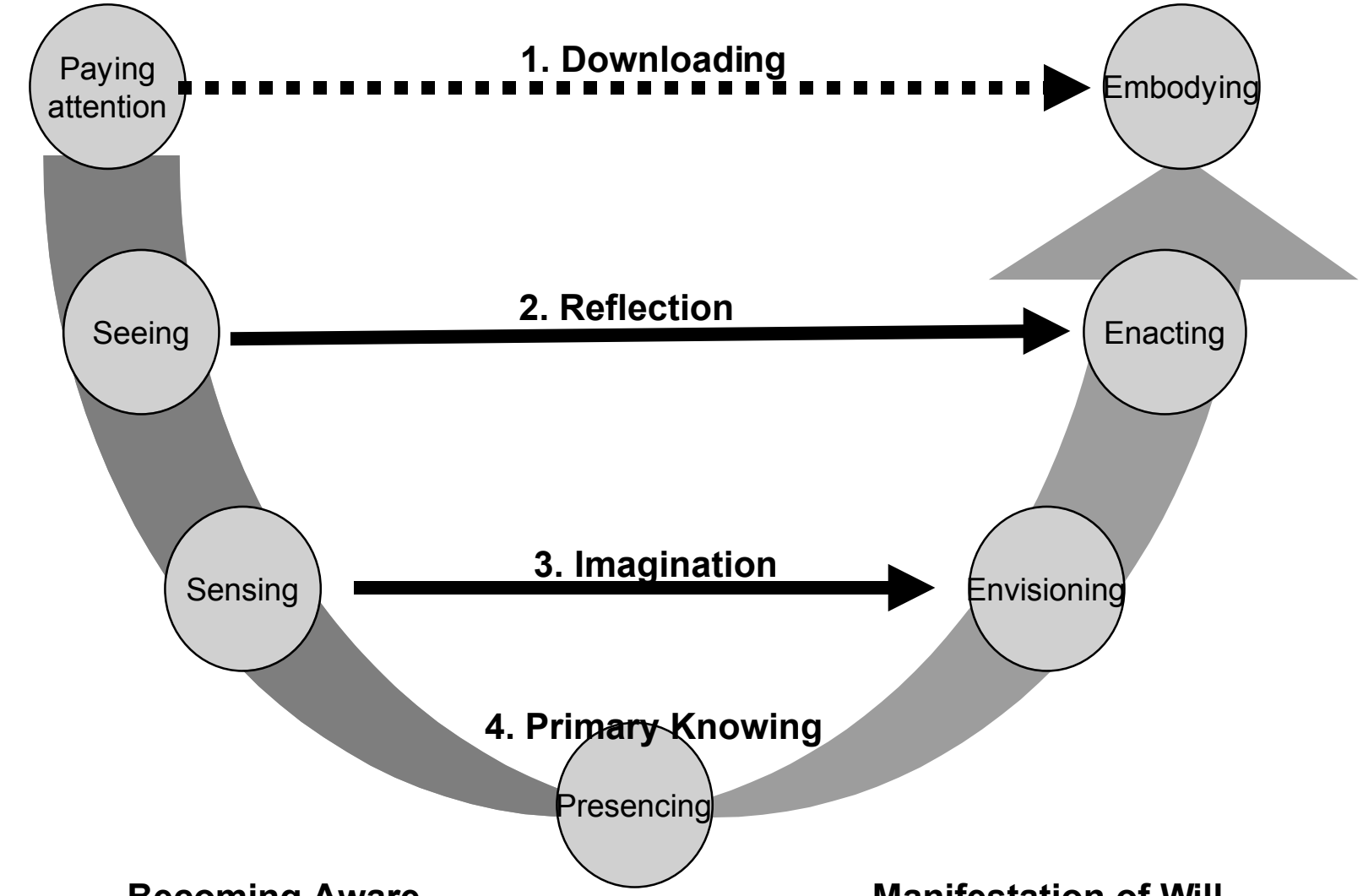
Uncovering Common Will

Where does our commitment come from?

Putting Purpose into Practice

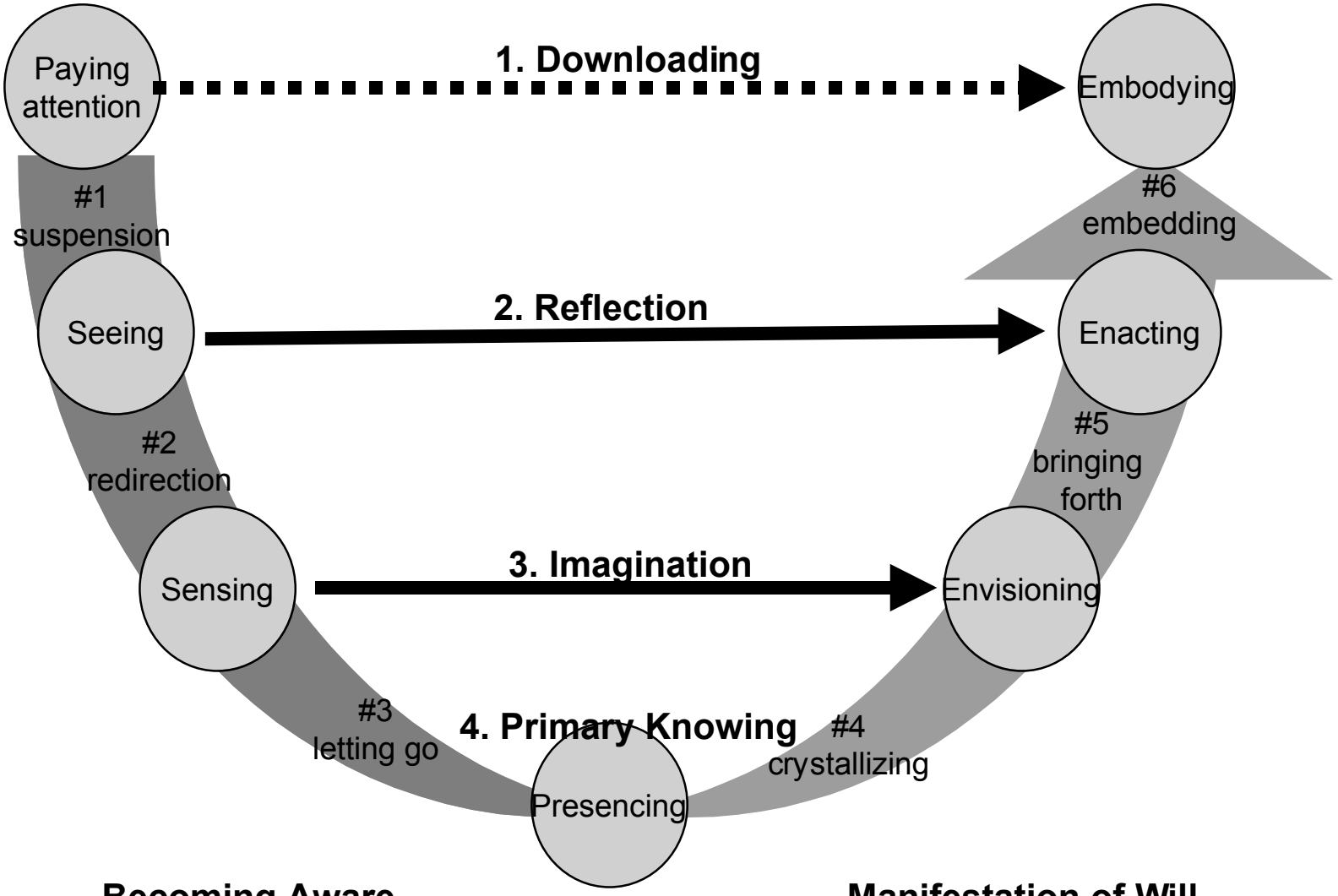
© 1997 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 4: Four Levels of Cognition and Social Reality Formation



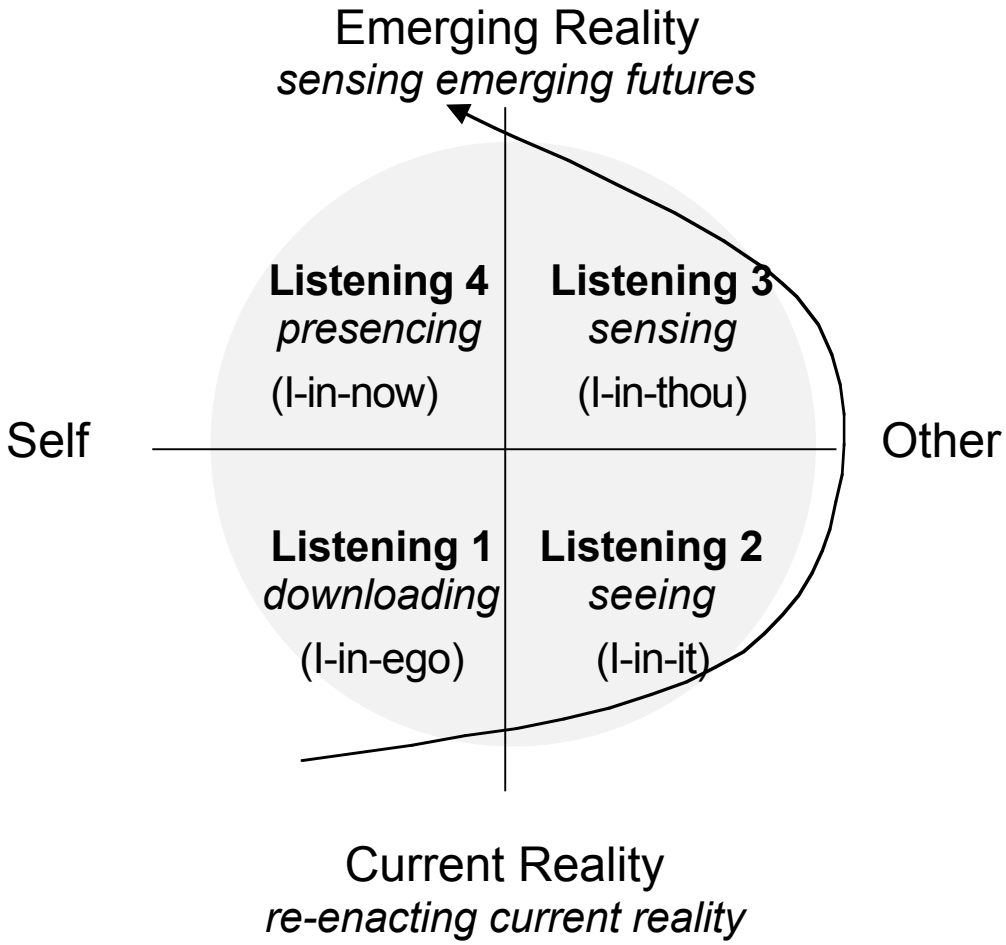
© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 5: Inflection Points of Cognition and Social Reality Formation



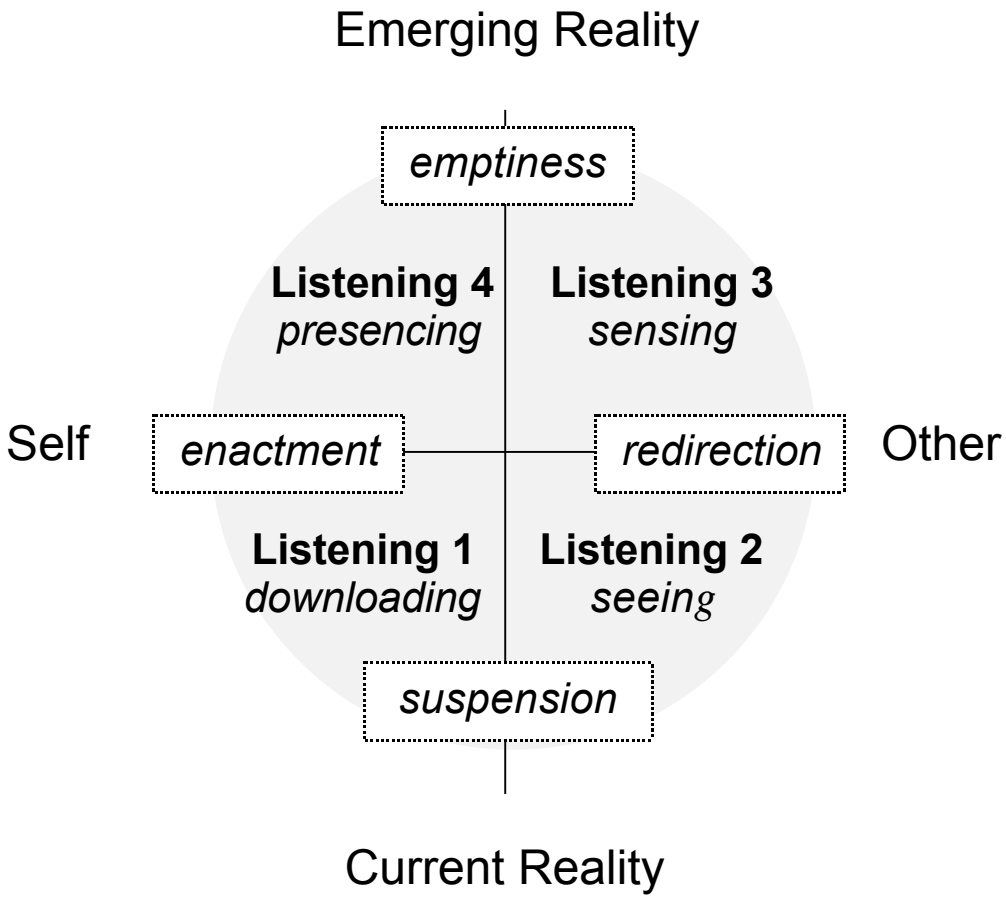
© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 6: Shifting the Locus of Listening



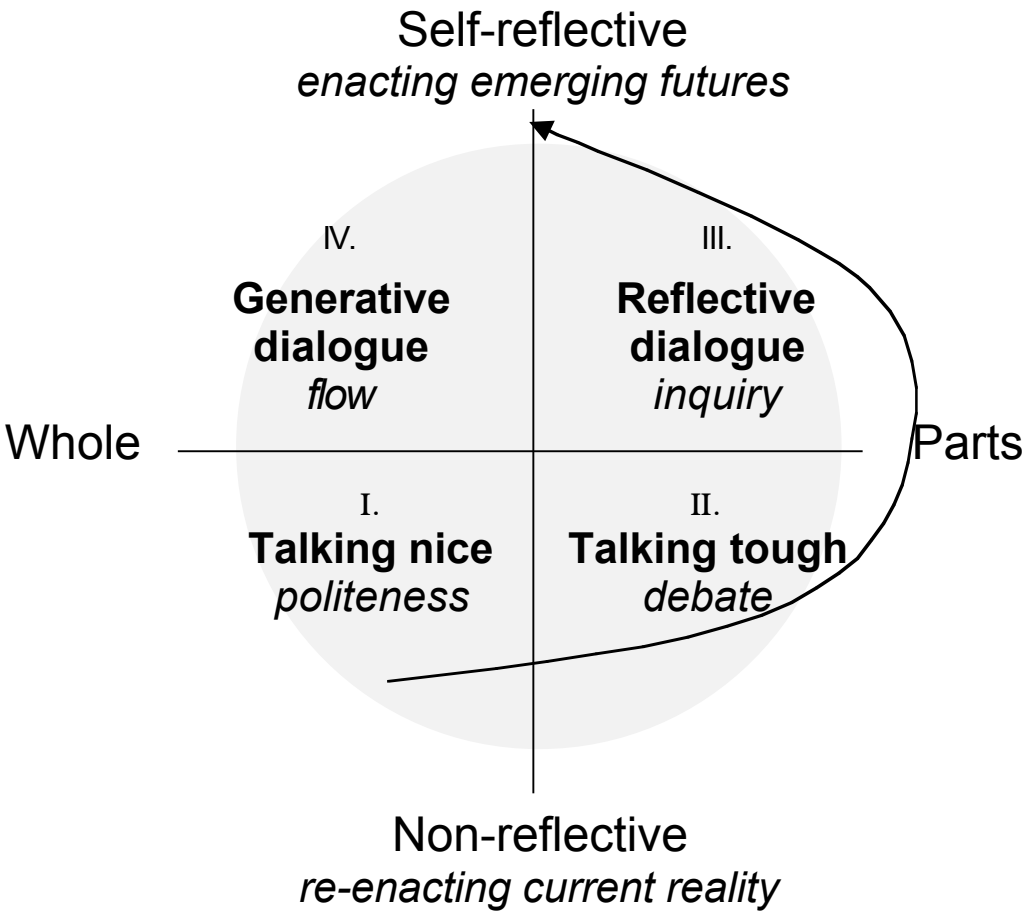
© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 7: Inflection Points Between the Four Levels of Listening



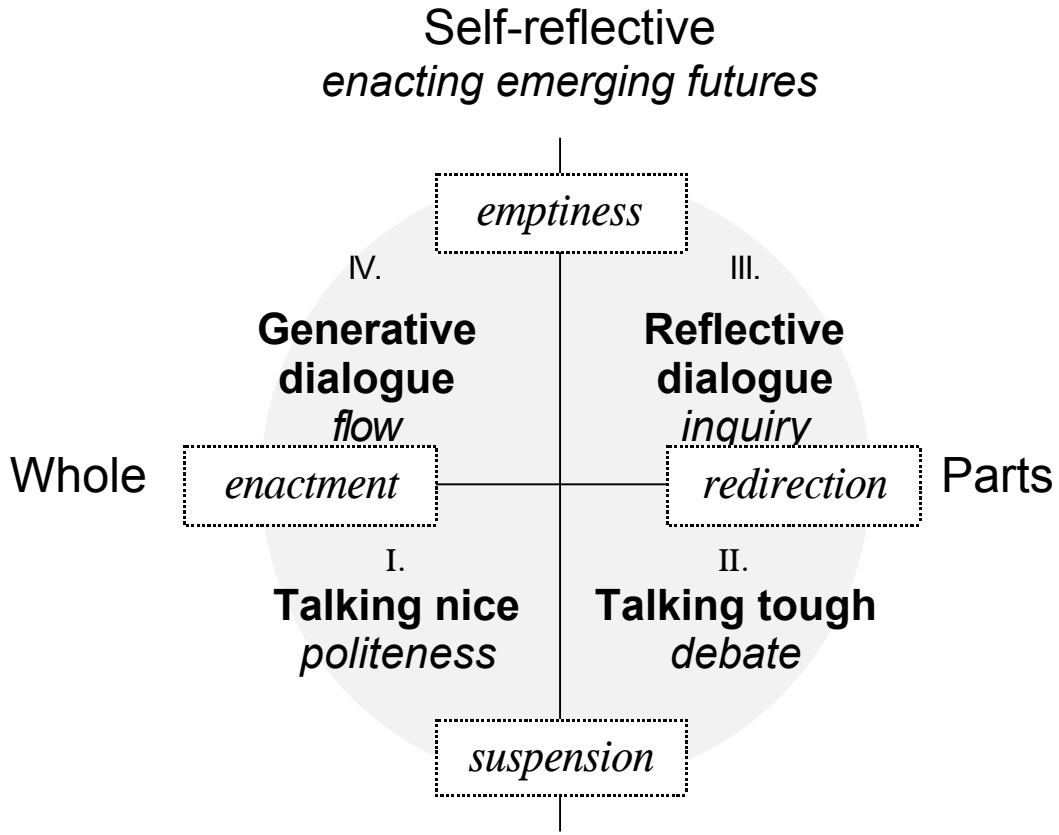
© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 8: Languaging - Four Fields of Conversation



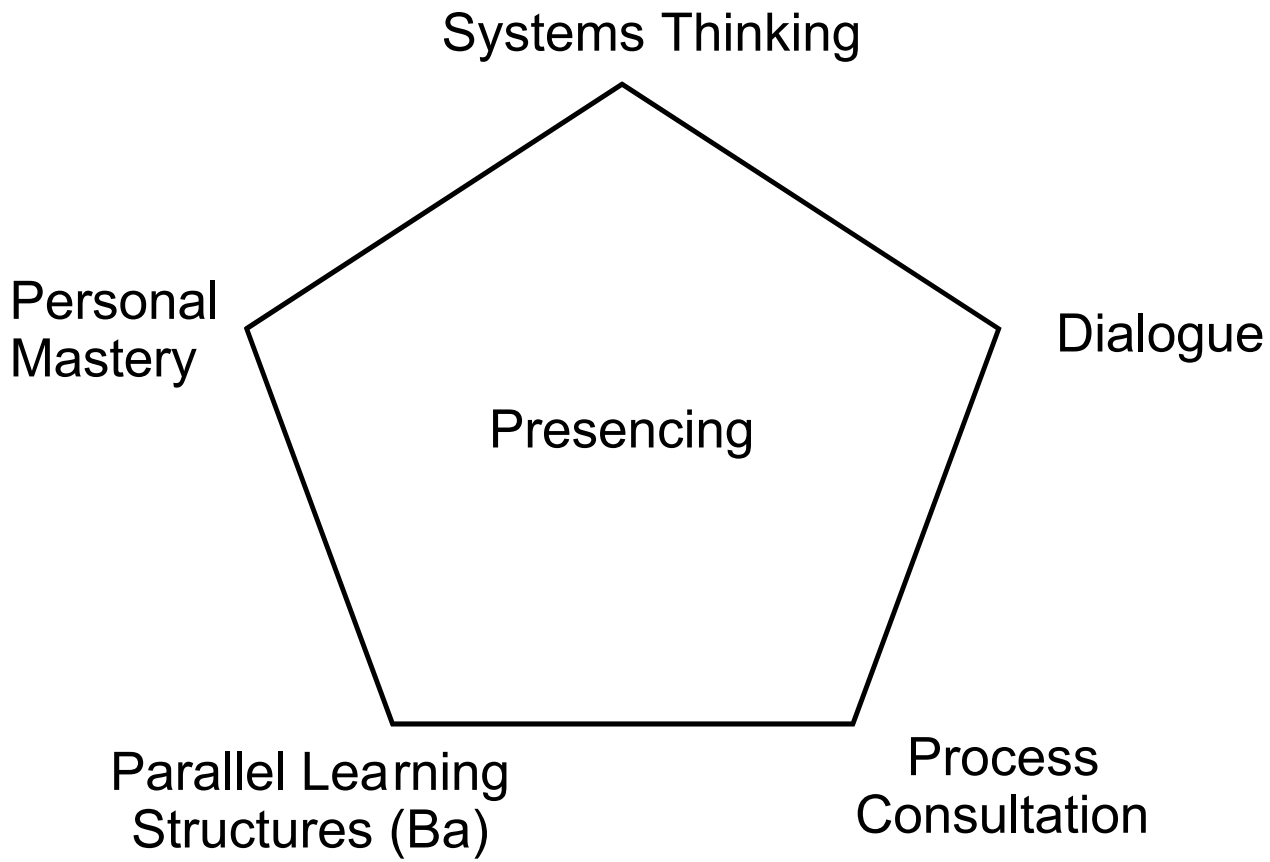
© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 9: Inflection Points For Shifting The Locus of Conversational Fields



© 2000 C. O. Scharmer

Figure 10: Organizational Learning Disciplines



© 2000 C. O. Scharmer