

WELCOME! U.LAB: TRANSFORMING BUSINESS, SOCIETY & SELF



MITx: 15.523x U.Lab:
 Transforming Business, Society, and Self #ulab
 @kelvy_bird www.presencing.com 2015
(this version is a translation from a drawing on blackboard - www.kelvybird.com for the original)

Source: Kelvy Bird

The success of U.Lab

HOW INTERNET EDUCATION IS CHANGING THE WORLD

In the words of Albert Einstein: 'The bitter lessons of the past must ever be learned anew.' A wise lesson on which many a CEO or politician acts: whatever the crisis we should 'learn from the past'. But is that the only way to go forward? There are other ways: be aware of the future and you become proactive instead of reactive. Using the internet, U.Lab teaches tens of thousands of people how that is done.

By Jacqueline van Rijswijk

The internet offers endless opportunities, not only to share knowledge but also to start a movement. And that is precisely the goal of *U.Lab: Transforming Business, Society & Self*. And it is not a misplaced ambition, because no less than 28,000 participants from 190 countries followed the program at the beginning of this year. That makes U.Lab one of the most successful Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC's) worldwide. What is the secret?

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION

U.Lab is an initiative of Dr. Otto Scharmer, among others. As an economist, he is linked to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). U.Lab is based on his

book *Theory U. Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, where Scharmer introduces his vision on personal leadership. The principle: the world is being confronted with major economic, social, cultural and climatic issues. How can I, an individual, company or

community make a unique contribution that is in line with what the environment really needs? Scharmer advocates a shift from ego to eco. That means no more focusing on your own material needs. Instead, it is time for



a COURSE for CHANGEMAKERS, LEADERS, EDUCATORS, and STUDENTS...

a more holistic vision that takes the (living) environment into consideration. Scharmer: 'Wherever you go people tell you that how we operate the economy, the political institutions and our schools, is not sustainable and is out of sync with the call and needs of our time.'

In contrast with many other change processes, Scharmer does not recommend reflection on the past because that no longer works. It is more useful to be aware of the future and to translate that into opportunities today. That requires a new way of listening, thinking and creating. U.Lab trains the participants to do that. U.Lab is more than a course: it is an 'awareness-based action-research community'. The organization is in the hands of the Presencing Institute, a collaboration of MIT, Synergos and SOL (Society for Organizational Learning) among others.

U.LAB IN NUMBERS:

- > 28,000 registered participants from 190 countries;
- > 300 prototypes (action learning initiatives);
- A living eco-system of 350 self-steering hubs;
- 700-1000 self-steering coaching circles;
- 4 live sessions (webinars) with between 10,000 and 15,000 participants.

Source: Huffington Post

LEARN FROM THE FUTURE

After awareness comes listening: really hearing what is being said. U.Lab encourages us to experience the world in a new way. Really look around you and see what is

'Learning from the past' becomes 'learning from the future'. Virtually all quality and management systems extrapolate the past into the future, but that approach is simply a thing of the past. The world has become a 'global village', interplay of ever changing, complex relationships. And that requires a new way of thinking. In U.Lab terms: 'A critical infrastructure to translate this spirit into profound systemic innovation and change is currently missing. What is needed is a global platform for building entrepreneurial capacity, generating knowledge, and co-creating living examples that demonstrate how to transform social systems by shifting the awareness from which stakeholders in these systems operate.' Working from the Presencing Institute, Adam Yukelson was involved in the organization of U.Lab. He sees it mainly as a chance to create 'room for reflection'. If you become stuck in a situation, at home or at work, U.Lab can help you to come up with (often surprising) solutions. For example, for steering change processes, establishing a sustainability policy or plotting a strategic course for the coming years. Naturally that requires a proactive attitude; resting on your laurels is not an option.

HOW CAN I, AN INDIVIDUAL, COMPANY OR COMMUNITY MAKE A UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION THAT IS IN LINE WITH WHAT THE ENVIRONMENT REALLY NEEDS?

SLEEPWALKING

A new edition of U.Lab will be starting on 10 September, 2015. In a period of eight weeks, the students learn first to observe, listen and receive and then, together with others, to come up with creative ideas and solutions. The U is synonymous with this process: first 'dive off the deep end' then transform the insights gained into actions one at a time.

That starts with awareness: we are all sleepwalking, incapable of overseeing the consequences of our choices. According to historian, Christopher Clark, it is precisely for this reason that WW I happened: politicians took decisions solely based on their own perspective, unhindered by a helicopter view. We all know what the consequences were. A century later it seems little has changed. In 2008, after the economic crisis 'suddenly' struck, British economists investigated how it was possible that no one had seen it coming. The answer: we are incapable of overseeing the system as a whole.

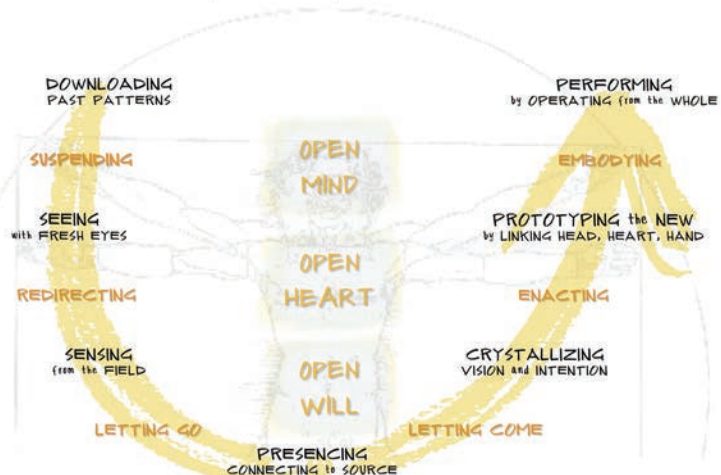
there. Be open to others without immediately forming an opinion. Then be aware of who you are, what you stand for and what you might contribute. New insights are then within easy reach.

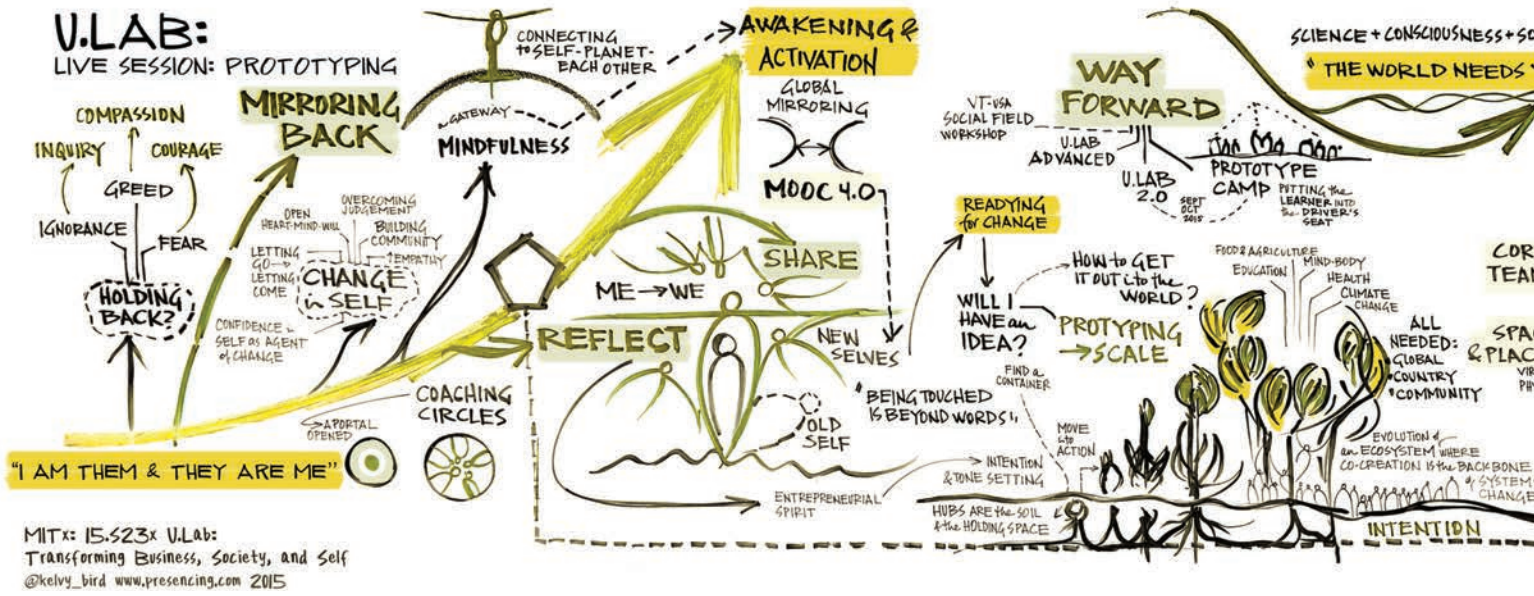
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

A new way of thinking also requires a new form of knowledge exchange. In its own words, U.Lab must be seen as: 'A platform you can use to connect and collaborate with people from across institutions, sectors,

"The SUCCESS of an INTERVENTION DEPENDS on the INTERIOR CONDITION of the INTERVENOR."

- WILLIAM O'BRIEN, FORMER CEO of the HANOVER INSURANCE COMPANY





systems, and cultures. The videos, activities, and new social features in the U.Lab are designed to help you learn a method for leading profound innovation, find others to work with, and apply this method to challenges in your work and life.

In short: forget the old classrooms. The place to learn is where it's happening, in everyday reality. It is not just about what you pick up during U.Lab, but how you apply that knowledge from then on. For every challenge encountered, U.Lab encourages participants to follow a process of three steps:

1. **Observe:** listen to the other person without

immediately forming an opinion. Be aware of your own assumptions and stick to the facts. This is also known as 'Open your Mind'.

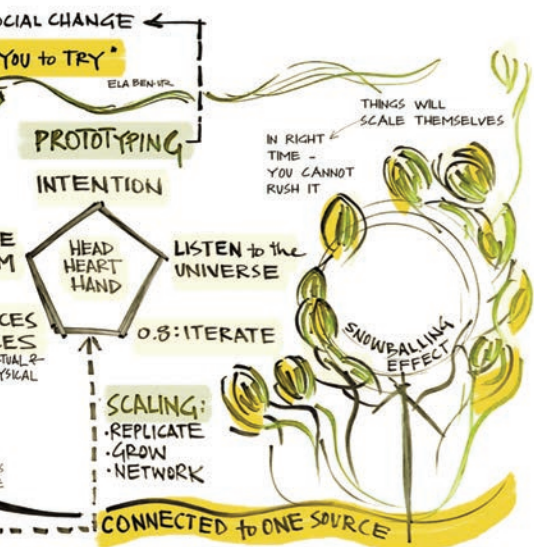
2. **Reflect:** put yourself in the position of the other. Show empathy and look through the eyes of the other person. This is also known 'Open your Heart'.
3. **Anticipate:** analyse the situation from the helicopter view. Signal new chances and possibilities. Allow yourself to be inspired and come up with creative solutions, anticipate the future. This is also known as 'Open your Will'.

HOW TO MAKE THIS TANGIBLE?

In U.Lab, during four live webinars, various leadership skills are discussed. Then, in 'coaching circles', the students begin to work with the material. A coaching circle consists of five participants who, either virtually or physically, meet each other. They help each other with their individual leadership challenges, also known as 'case clinics'. Initially 'help' mainly means listening without immediately giving (well-meant) advice from your own perspective. Cynicism, criticism and prejudice are also not tolerated. After all, U.Lab is based on the principle 'energy follows attention'. By giving the other the space, you create an atmosphere of self-reflection together: who am I? What do I stand for? What is my job? That may seem a little soft, but appearances are deceptive. This type of self-reflection is more powerful than it seems. The open atmosphere of non-judgmental interaction leads to extraordinary results. Scharmer: 'Some people are enthusiastic and will thank you. But there was another type of reaction, one where people virtually become silent. These were the people who were moved deeply, beyond words, and it was really touching to see that. This went beyond being excited and enthusiastic, it was about a deeper level of awareness or a deeper way of being present with yourself and who you really are. That was what touched them and inspired them. It was in their eyes, even though they were unable to find the words. That moved me and the fact that at the end people said: 'it can't be over already!'



From the U.Lab course team - a heartfelt thank you for helping create such an amazing experience!



Source: Kely Bird

HUBS

U.Lab also encourages knowledge exchange in a wider context. Groups of participants meet each other in 'hubs'. Some hubs are organized geographically (location), others around a specific theme (for example, coaching, innovation or stakeholder management). That must ultimately lead to new ideas and workable solutions for frequently occurring organizational and societal issues. To that end, students are asked firstly to create and test small prototypes that, if successful, will be developed further. Those are not only made available online, but also discussed in detail during a physical meeting: from 29 October to 1 November, 2015, the first edition of 'Prototype Camp' will take place on the MIT campus. This is an 'online to offline learning infrastructure' where 'pioneers' and 'catalysts' will come together. There, a selection of the current 300 prototypes will be discussed.

DEEP LEARNING

With 28,000 participants, the first edition of U.Lab was a huge success. However, it is not so much the numbers, says Scharmer: 'What we really went for was deep learning, not only for each isolated individual, but deep learning by activating the social field, activating small communities. That was the main experiment we carried out and many responded really positively to that.'

Scharmer's conclusion is confirmed by a survey carried out under students which showed that 52% of the respondents saw

the course as an 'eye-opener'. For 36% it was even 'life-changing'.

What was remarkable was the reaction from a delegation of the Scottish government. A group of civil servants jointly came to a clear conclusion: 'This is something we need to make available not only to all the government and civil servants, but also other agencies and NGO's, because it could be the infrastructure that will help us reinvent ourselves as a nation/country and enable us to lead and learn from the emerging future, rather than extending the past.'

JOIN IN!

Change is difficult and painful. Many approaches show a mainly cosmetic, temporary result. Structural change is often missing. New means and methods have no chance if you are not prepared to change. Indeed: true change comes from inside. U.Lab offers you the opportunity for that.

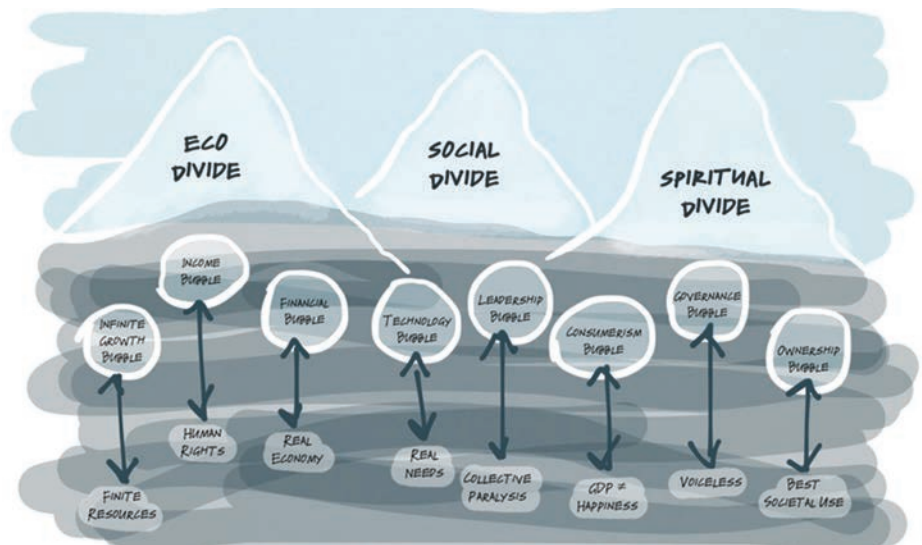
U.Lab 2.0 is starting on 10 September: the same concept, but with extra tools and upgrades. Participation is completely free; register via www.edx.org (search 'ulab'). But be aware: U.Lab can change your life. It is not a course, it is a game changer. Be warned.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jacqueline van Rijswijk is the owner of Improve4all, an international consultancy firm for the creation of sustainable excellence. Improve4all provides advice, training and coaching. For more info: www.improve4all.nl.

Sources:

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- www.presencing.com
- www.huffingtonpost.com/otto-scharmer/mooc-40-the-next-revoluti_b_7209606.html



'THE NEXT REVOLUTION IN LEARNING & LEADERSHIP'

'The connection with other circle members was personally transformative. Although I missed the first coaching circle call, I felt as though I had known the others my entire life.... My scepticism around the ability to connect in such a way melted. I realized it was not the medium [through which] I communicated, but how I showed up internally that made all the difference! This paradigm shift will stick with me for the rest of my life. After endless in-person and online 'downloading' sessions that went nowhere, this was as though a portal I never knew existed was opened completely. All I had to do was walk through it with the love and support of the others. I was so struck by 'I am them' and 'they are me.'

Review Huffington Post of a case clinic