

## Crystallizing

The Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum • The Field Structure of  
Crystallizing • Principles of Crystallizing • Field Notes

The last chapter described the bottom of the U process: presencing. Earlier, as you might recall, I described presencing as the eye of the needle or the process of inversion (turning inside out and outside in). In ancient Jerusalem, there was a gate called “the needle” which was so narrow that when a fully loaded camel approached the gate, the camel-driver had to take off all the bundles before the camel could pass through. Referring to this well-known image of his day, Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, at the bottom of the U there is an inner gate that requires us to drop everything that isn’t essential.

What is it that constitutes this eye of the needle at the bottom of the U for groups, organizations, and communities? It is the connecting to our authentic or higher self, to our capital-S Self. If this connection is established, the first thing that happens is: nothing. No-thing. It’s just a connection. But, when we succeed in keeping alive that connection to our deeper source of

knowing, we begin to better tune into emerging future possibilities. Acting now, from a different place or sphere, we are able to begin to operate from a different source. We envision, prototype, and embody the new.

The term presencing can be used as either a noun or a verb and designates the connection to the deeper source of self and knowing. But because we keep that connection alive across the whole right-hand side of the U, we can say that we keep presencing (connecting and operating from source) throughout our entire journey of the right hand side of the U. The term crystallizing designates the first stage of that process.

Crystallizing means clarifying vision and intention from our highest future possibility. The difference between crystallizing and normal visioning processes is this: crystallizing happens from the deeper place of knowing and self, while visioning can happen from just about any place, even from the place of downloading.

After such a moment of stillness or presencing, in groups, you can notice a subtle shift in identity and a different foundation for working together and moving forward. Up to this point, we have only felt the possibility of a future. After a presencing moment or encounter, people are now poised to bring this individual and collective potential into reality. “We can’t not do it.” The first step in this journey is to crystallize the vision and intention more clearly. We put into specific language what it is that we want to create.

### The Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum

Recall the Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum that I wrote about in the previous chapter. After the group of physicians and patients formed a strong collective conversational field of thinking together, they were ready to move from the sense-making phase to the action phase. If we did that successfully, the event would produce some activity that could change or even transform the quality of the patient-physician relationships. If we didn’t, our efforts would all be wasted.

“We’d like to shift gears this afternoon and invite you to brainstorm about what kinds of actions and initiatives might help us move from here [pointing at levels 1 and 2] to here [pointing at levels 3 and 4]. If you have any practical

ideas about how to move our health care system from its current state, symbolized by the blue dots, to where all the white dots are, now is the time to propose it to the rest of us. And just so you know,” Ursula and I added, “there will be no afternoon session unless you come up with enough initiatives that excite and engage us to define the agenda for the afternoon.”

You could see the skepticism and disbelief in their faces, followed by uncertain silence. No one had left during the lunch break, and it was obvious that the group was engaged and interested. They wanted to move on, but they had never been asked to take over the agenda of an event in an “open space” approach.<sup>6</sup> You could see the wheels turning: You guys can’t be serious. You must be kidding. Aren’t you? Well, maybe we’d better get our act together. What could I possibly propose? Wasn’t I just thinking about something that might?

After a generative silence, one person stood up and suggested an initiative for a group. Then another person rose to suggest a second, followed by a third, and so forth. Before long we had the group split up into six or seven groups working on different action initiatives. At the end of the day each smaller group reported back to the whole group.

One group wanted to found a Bürgerforum, a civic forum that would create a place and voice for the people of the region within the health care system. Another group proposed ways to broaden the support for an existing initiative, the restructuring of the region’s emergency care system. A third group suggested a patient initiative to work on the capacities patients and doctors needed to create and sustain a “dialogue relationship.” A fourth group was developing steps to “sensitize youth” to chronic disease, planning to take their stories into schools and discuss how they could have taken a different course through prevention.

Dr. Gert Schmidt, the co-founder of the physician network and health care initiative, helped the core group clarify its vision and intent. “Looking at our situation here,” he said, “you could get depressed. We have 280,000 inhabitants, 60,000 chronically ill people, 10 hospitals, 15,000 employees, 400 physician practices, plus the whole bureaucracy that comes with all these institutions. Each year we have six million contacts between patients and the health care system in this region. How can we possibly change? But the forum has helped me

look at all this in a different way. It can all be reduced to a single simple formula: Patient A has problem B and wants C. It's just like in chaos theory: you reduce the behavior of complex systems to the relationship of three or so variables. When I started to see the essence of the health care system in terms of this equation, I realized that the core axis around which the whole system revolves is the relationship between patients and physicians. Before the dialogue forum, we had never dared to conceive of this fundamental truth. But now, even the insurance companies and other health care providers have come to accept this view. Without an intact patient-physician relationship, no health care system can ever work."

He went on to explain that he now understood that the key to solving many issues lies in focusing on the region. "The health issues are defined through your genes, your biography, your social context, and the structure and processes of the health care system you operate in. You can't change your biology or your genes, but your biography, your context, the structures and processes of the health care system—all of that is enacted locally, all of that you can change in the context of a region. The courage to boil all of this down to the very essence where you start to see what you can create, the courage to boil all of this down to that point where your next action becomes evident, that courage stems from the dialogue forum and from the system analysis we have been doing."

Dr. Schmidt and his colleagues left the Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum feeling a charged inner energy: "We intend to move our system from levels 1 and 2 to levels 3 and 4."

Many of the forum's insights became a reality because of the group's structured attentiveness to each level of interaction. In 2000, a year after the forum took place, the contracts were signed and the new emergency care system began operation. Now, rather than treating every call to 112 (the German equivalent of 911) as an emergency, physicians can provide comfort, counseling, or a home visit as needed. At the same time, the system lessens the burden on physicians by directing calls to a single center rather than to a hundred individual practitioners. One senior health care executive said that he thought the ideas succeeded because of a shift in the social field: "The core group's

quality of commitment and intention radiated over time and changed the consciousness of the system's decision makers.”

### The Field Structure of Crystallizing

Presencing, as we have said, is connecting to source. Crystallizing means sustaining that connection and beginning to operate from it. The first practical aspect of this journey is to clarify what wants to emerge. Crystallizing facilitates the surfacing of a living imagination of the future whole. It clarifies the vision and intent of the emerging future.

In the case of Dr. Schmidt and the German health care network, this resulted in a deeper systemic view and in the clarification of the intention “to move our system from levels 1 and 2 to levels 3 and 4,” including some tangible initiatives for prototyping this new way of operating.

In the case of a strategy reinvention process with the procurement group of a global company, the key result of the crystallizing phase was a new identity, a new way that group wanted to go about its business in the future. “We are not just service providers to the plants—we are actually the managers of a global business.” As a consequence, the group came up with prototyping initiatives that resulted in reducing the number of its suppliers by 80 percent. They did this by making the formerly competing suppliers collaborate with one another, reminiscent of how strategic global networks speak with one voice to the global company and its globally distributed networks of plants.

“What struck me most,” said Peter Brunner, who coached the team throughout the intervention process, “is that it was so different from a normal visioning process. In a visioning process, you just come up with a dream of the future, even though that might be quite disconnected from what wants to emerge. But having gone through the learning journeys, sharing and reflecting on it and a six-hour personal field walk in silence, I simply had people share their vision and intention going forward as they returned from their silent walk. What they came up with was much, much more essential and connected to what they really care about. To their real selves. And that helped a lot in coming up with the right prototype initiatives.”

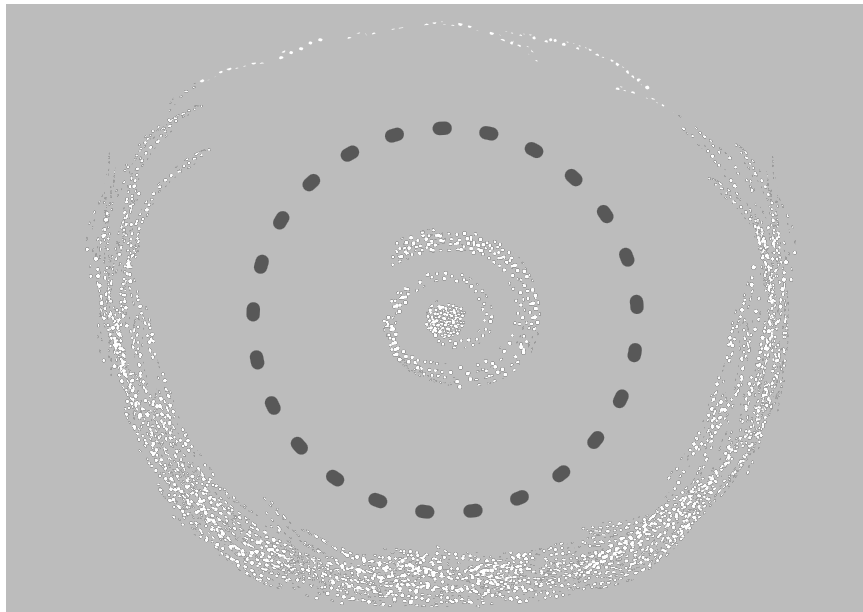


FIGURE 12.1: THE FIELD STRUCTURE OF CRYSTALLIZING

Figure 12.1 depicts the crystallizing field structure of attention. The place from which you operate (the dot at the center) has shifted toward the surrounding sphere (outside the white circle, which represents the boundaries of the observer). When you operate from that larger holding space, something new begins to emerge from the center; it begins to crystallize.

I asked Peter Senge to describe what he does when he creates. “To create music, you have to have violins. You have to have instruments, okay? But the music doesn’t come from the violin. The violin is an instrument. For me, at an experiential level, giving a talk or working with a group in a workshop can be the same. I create that reality in my own consciousness, and then I play the instruments. I just really, really enjoy myself; I kind of fall into my love of the people. And I know, at some level, when I’m doing those programs and things begin to operate this way, nothing can go wrong. No matter what happens, it’s exactly what needs to happen right then. Now, I don’t always feel that way, but I know when that kind of state develops. This is what in the Christian tradition we call a state of grace, because I think there is a deep understanding of this in the mystic Christian tradition. It’s just so much [about] joy. That doesn’t

mean it's always happy. Sometimes it's very intense, but you literally have the experience that absolutely nothing could possibly go wrong. That doesn't mean it always turns out according to your plan. It means that whatever turns out is exactly what is right in that moment, and that is the music."

He continued, "When we are leading a program or course, we say a good rule of thumb is that the quality of the relationship between the people will have a bigger impact than the articulateness of the presenters. Say that two people are facilitating. The single most important generative feature is the quality of that relationship. It's not a smooth relationship. It's a relationship with a lot of presence, being, or consciousness that you can be present with whatever is there together. To me, that's the essence of a loving relationship, because love is about presence.

"I think there is a deeper force that's dominant, and has to do with this capacity to live in the world you want to create. ... If you know what you want to create, then you can to some degree live in that space in your own consciousness. There is no more powerful force than operating from that kind of knowing, from that kind of intention and place."<sup>a</sup>

## Principles of Crystallizing

There are four principles that in my observation come into play when moving into the space of crystallizing: the power of intention, letting come, grand will, and "venues for waking up."

### The Power of Intention

Nick Hanauer founded half a dozen highly successful companies and was a board member of Amazon for many years. When Joseph Jaworski and I interviewed him, he was working with a small group of people to "reinvent" the educational system in the state of Washington. When we asked about the role of intention in his entrepreneurial experience, Hanauer replied, "One of my favorite sayings, attributed to Margaret Mead, has always been 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' I totally believe it. You could

do almost anything with just five people. With only one person, it's hard—but when you put that one person with four or five more, you have a force to contend with. All of a sudden, you have enough momentum to make almost anything that's immanent, or within reach, actually real. I think that's what entrepreneurship is all about—creating that compelling vision and force.”

The first time I personally encountered the power of intention was during my student days at Witten-Herdecke University in Germany. I was sitting at a large breakfast table with about a dozen other students. With us on that morning was the dean of the Management School, Ekkehard Kappler, and a special guest, Johan Galtung, the Norwegian founder of peace research as a science and the recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize. Galtung, famous for his theory of structural violence, had taught at more than sixty universities on all continents and published over a hundred books. One student turned to him and asked, “Johan, having accomplished all that you have, what's left for you now? What is it that you want to create in the remaining years of your life?”

“I have an idea for a mobile global peace university. Its students would travel the world learning how to see the global system as a living whole and viewing it from the perspectives of different cultures and civilizations.”

When he then started to describe in more detail what that global learning journey would look like, I knew this was what I was meant to do. Others at the table that morning had the same feeling. That knowing was a source of enormous energy. As it turned out, Galtung had tried to realize such a global university project with a US college. But the complexity of organizing, financing, and managing it had proved too great. Although as students we lacked any experience in such matters, we knew in our guts that we could do it. And then we did—in record time.

Five of us pulled it together in just a few months: we mapped out the projects, raised a half-million dollars from industry and private sponsors, contracted with twelve partner universities and 290 lecturers, recruited and selected the first class of thirty-five students from ten different countries, including participants from third-world countries and Eastern Europe, raised money for scholarships, and handled the financial and organizational details by putting



in time as volunteers. Our joint commitment to this project empowered us in a way that none of us had ever experienced before. We felt part of a larger field, a formative field of intentional creation. When we were operating in that field, we knew that nothing would prevent us from succeeding. Yes, we hit walls and obstacles time and again. But each time we encountered a setback, we knew that we would bounce back by some kind of “predictable miracle,” some kind of door would open up or helping hand would show up and lead us onward.

Jaworski describes this kind of coincidental help as “synchronicity” and suggests that the whole U process is about just that: getting into the flow of that deep intention and going with it.<sup>6</sup> Many entrepreneurs concur with Brian Arthur when he says, “Intention is not a powerful force; it is the only force.”<sup>6</sup>

Since I wrote the lines above, some ten years ago, I have experienced numerous other living examples of the power of intention. But the most striking one is probably the global launch of the u.lab in 2015, which I describe in the preface to this book and in the closing chapter. I have dreamed of something like the u.lab all my life, or at least since my late teenage years. But although it remained distant for many years, the dream, the intention, lived on in my mind. Then finally, when I was thinking about giving it up, the door to the future opened. It was a very interesting process. In retrospect, I might use the term “power of intention” to explain how it finally came into being. But for a long time my power of intention didn’t seem to be working.

#### Letting Come

The inner work of getting into this flow has a lot to do with letting go and letting come. Letting come is the other side of the power of intention. The real question is: How can you tune in to that intention? The answer is: tuning in to something new requires that you must first let go of something old. If I think about it, almost all of my most successful projects were suggested to me by other people. Galtung’s idea for a global peace university is just one example. Turning my u.lab class into a massive open online course (MOOC) is another. That is why the U process starts with observation (going into and attending to the world) and not with retreating and reflection. First you clarify

your intent and go out into the world. As you follow your trail, the universe has its way of suggesting to you what to do. Then you listen to it deeply. You pay attention to what is emerging from your inner sources of knowing. To do that well, you have to learn to let go and let come. Old attitudes must die in order for new and inspiring ideas to move into the picture more fully.

### Grand Will

As we open up to the new, we gradually tap into our deeper will, the one that Martin Buber refers to as grand will. In his book *I and Thou*, Buber gives a very precise account of the double movement that is involved when accessing one's grand will:

The free man is he who wills without arbitrary self-will.

He believes in destiny, and believes that it stands in need of him. It does not keep him in leading strings, it awaits him, he must go to it, yet does not know where it is to be found. But he knows that he must go out with his whole being. The matter will not turn out according to this decision; but what is to come will come only when he decides on what he is able to will. He must sacrifice his puny, unfree will, that is controlled by things and instincts, to his grand will, which quits defined for destined being. Then, he intervenes no more, but at the same time he does not let things merely happen. He listens to what is emerging from himself, to the course of being in the world; not in order to be supported by it, but in order to bring it to reality as it desires.<sup>4</sup>

Buber starts by assuming that free human beings believe in destiny—a destiny that stands in need of us—yet we don't know where to find it. To find it, we must be willing to move into an unknown territory and to go out with “our whole being.” It may demand sacrifice. This is not merely about contemplating—it's about listening to the course of being in the world, to what is wanting to emerge with the full intention of acting on it. And, once under way, we must pay careful attention.

The physicist Arthur Zajonc moderated the Dalai Lama–Cognitive Science Dialogue at MIT. He told me he believes that when he moderates,

he has more than the visible people present at the table—he also wants to hear what the “invisible” have to say.

“I’ve developed a couple of little practices. For instance, I’ll be in a board meeting where the energy is tough and maybe I’m up against some hot issue. I don’t know how to deal with it. I find myself in those times letting go. It’s a practice of saying ‘Okay, we’ve had full, bloody attention on this thing. We’ve really turned over a lot of stuff.’ Then I kind of sit back and expand in nonfocal awareness. Empty out. Sometimes I even pretend there’s an invisible person next to me. When I was chairing the board of a new school, sometimes I would imagine invisible children at the table. I was actually working for these children who were not yet born or were not yet there. They were my reason for being there. I try to listen into the space. The future is also at the table. There is a wonderful creative moment when everyone present recognizes a special moment. I encourage them to hold on to it, to play it out.

“Those moments give a lot of positive energy to a group. There’s a feeling of originality, can-do, and collaboration. Nobody takes ownership, because the idea could have come from somebody else across the table.”

#### Venues for Waking Up

For crystallizing to happen, a certain environment or context is required.

In a farming community workshop in Germany, the core group of farmers invited people from the neighboring communities, people they thought would somehow want to be connected to the future of that place. The design of the one-day event followed the U process. During the morning, about eighty participants checked in and connected with one another on what was emerging in their life’s journey and in their own contexts. During the afternoon, we formed five groups with similar interests and intentions about what they wanted to co-create, much like what Ursula and I had done in the Patient-Physician Dialogue Forum.

About a year later, we learned that four of the five groups had initiated an astonishing stream of activities and events. They had founded a kindergarten-type play group on the farm (which soon after turned into a fully accredited kindergarten); created and co-sponsored a series of concerts and cultural events on

the farm; formed and implemented cross-institutional collaborations that include sharing machinery (a great money-saver); and organized several successful seminars on self-leadership as a precursor to additional public seminar offerings in the future.

Why had that one-day meeting been so much more effective than many earlier meetings with the core group of the farm? There probably had been some dormant potential all along. But unless there is an infrastructure that creates a context for sensing and crystallizing together—a one-day workshop in this case—nothing is going to happen.

Venues for waking up can work in two ways. The first one is exemplified above: you invite the surrounding eco-system or partners and players into your organization or place. Or you can move yourself outside your organizational boundaries—far out, into some other place that allows you see yourself and your deeper intention in a new light, as exemplified in the story of Eileen Fisher shared in the preface of this edition.

## Field Notes

This chapter weaves together two golden threads: small will and grand will. By tapping into the authenticity and connectedness that emerge from a presencing experience, the group can become aware of its deeper intention or “will.” The second type of will, grand will, involves acting on the following principles:

- Clarifying your own intention by “testing” it against the future possibility that has emerged from the presencing experience
- Broadcasting the power of intention to create the opening for creative emergence
- Letting come: listening to what emerges from one’s inner sources of knowing
- Acting as an instrument of the emerging future and bringing it into reality as it desires
- Building infrastructures for waking up together across institutional boundaries

Crystallizing means to stay connected to Source and to slowly clarify the vision and intention going forward. As we do this, our image of the future keeps evolving. Then we need to take this process of bringing the new into reality to its next level by enacting living examples or prototypes of the future that we want to create.