

Community development for ecological sustainability: Working with interiority in the cultivation of social foresight

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Abstract

The research, teaching and practice carried out by the Strategic Foresight Program at Swinburne University has as a foundational aim the creation of *social foresight*. This is an approach to community development based on fostering an emergent, socially distributed capacity for systematic, long term thinking oriented towards the maintenance and enhancement of collective wellbeing. Social foresight has the potential to enhance and support efforts to build social movements for ecological sustainability. This potential derives from the observation that the significant ecological challenges faced by communities today are of human origin. Moreover, the origin of these challenges is located within the socially enacted epistemologies with which we engage with our world. Social foresight development involves generating insight into these origins and bringing to the fore ways of knowing and acting that are better attuned to ecological principles. For those of us who work with the Strategic Foresight Program, a central tenet of our work with groups to cultivate social foresight is the importance of engaging with participants as autonomous subjects, each with their own irreducible capacity for meaning-making. We describe this characteristic as *interiority*, an essential complement to the exterior aspects of community development, such as network building and information distribution. As with the exterior aspects of community development, tools and technologies are available that can be harnessed to strengthen and accelerate the development of individuals' and groups' interiority. Scharmer's Theory U is an emerging social technology that we consider offers particular opportunities in this regard. In this paper we introduce social foresight in the context of community development and discuss the importance of interiority in its cultivation. We then introduce Theory U and look at how it can be applied to the cultivation of social foresight, and consider the implications of this for cultivating social foresight for ecological sustainability.

Introduction

The research, teaching and practice conducted by the Strategic Foresight Program at Swinburne University has as a foundational aim the cultivation of *social foresight*. This is an approach to community development based on fostering an emergent, socially distributed capacity for systematic, long term thinking oriented towards the maintenance and enhancement of collective well being (Slaughter, 2004).

Strategic foresight, as we use the term, denotes an inherent organisational focus to our work. Here, we use the concept of “the organisation” to encompass any situation where groups of individuals come together in the pursuit of shared goals, on the basis of significant commonality of interests and values. This view recognizes that it is shared interest in co-creating and co-sustaining value *of some kind* amongst individuals representing otherwise diverse perspectives that is the general defining characteristic of any organisation. Organisational settings, in this sense, may range from informal communities of practice to large scale, highly formal commercial entities. In this context, the practice of foresight is strategic in that it involves some level of institutionalisation and formalisation of the innate capacity that we have as individuals to generate forward views in day-to-day life. Strategic foresight involves the formal development and implementation of concepts, language and discourse, tools and methodologies, and processes for creating rigorous, coherent forward views and applying these in organisationally useful ways.

Social foresight represents a particular quality of strategic foresight, characterised by an expansion of care and concern beyond the narrower confines of organisation-centric interests, to embrace what might be termed a “planet-centric” view. In particular, social foresight is ecological in character: it entails insight into the systemic interrelationships between organisations, their members, and the social and natural environments with which they interact. Moreover, it entails decision making and compassionate action that accords with this insight. Social foresight, in our view, represents a fully mature expression of strategic foresight.¹ In contrast with less mature strategic foresight, social foresight emerges more organically: its signature can be discerned in the spontaneity of foresightful conduct among communities of individuals who take personal responsibility for its enactment and propagation. Social foresight has, in this sense, “a life of its own”, a life that is embodied in individuals’ commitment to action and the community networks through which they act together.

Social foresight, community development, and building social movements

We see fostering social foresight as an essential aspect of community development. The organisational focus that we emphasise—encompassing government, “third-sector”, and business—may appear anomalous in this regard, given that “community development” is often based on civil society initiatives—that is, initiatives oriented towards community life beyond institutional settings. Our point of departure involves the observation that any organisation is at heart a form of community, and organisations themselves play fundamentally important and powerful roles in shaping and influencing the wider, informal communities in which they operate. The complementarity of the social foresight cultivation approach to more conventional community development (CD) can be illustrated with reference to the specific focus

of the conference stream to which this paper contributes, the building of social movements.

In considering the building of social *movements*, the image that perhaps comes most readily to mind is that of mass mobilisation of civil society in relation to a popular cause. A key question that then arises is how to raise awareness of and interest in a given cause, making it sufficiently popular that a significant proportion of civil society will act personally and directly in relation to it. While this is a critically important component of CD for ecological sustainability, the complementary contribution of social foresight cultivation hinges on a key distinction between categorically different developmental dimensions. This distinction is between *developmental span* and *developmental depth* (Wilber, 2000). In relation specifically to CD, the span dimension recognises and honours the very great importance of engaging as many people as possible in ecologically sustainable behaviour, and in efforts to further expand such behaviour through, for instance, influencing policy makers. The depth dimension, on the other hand, recognises and honours the great importance of ensuring that thinking, language, and institutional frameworks with which we comprehend and respond to sustainability challenges are adequate to the task. In other words, a focus on the depth dimension entails matching the complexity of our sustainability challenges with individual cognitive and moral capacities, and collective mental models, of requisite complexity. In our view, whereas building social *movements* focuses more on increasing the *span* of attention and action in relation to a cause, building social *foresight* relies on increasing the *depth* of attention and action amongst networks of actors with the power to influence systems, organisations, and institutions.

The specific nature of social foresight is consistent with the depth of awareness and responsiveness necessary for effective engagement with our most pressing ecological sustainability challenges. The use of the term “ecological” is itself key to understanding the requisite depth needed and the contribution offered by social foresight for achieving this. The potential for social foresight cultivation to contribute significantly here derives from the observation that the most pressing ecological challenges faced by communities today are of human origin. Moreover, the origin of these challenges can be seen within the socially enacted epistemologies with which we engage with our world. Social foresight development involves generating insight into these origins and bringing to the fore ways of knowing and acting that are better attuned to ecological principles.

The socio-ecological character of the term *cultivation*, the metaphor that we use to describe the process of generating social foresight, itself reinforces this. Social foresight is seen as an emergent property of human systems that are themselves understood in ecological terms (Floyd and Hayward, 2008). The roots of the connection between social foresight and ecological sustainability are found in recognition that it is the “ecology of mind” (Bateson, 2000, Fisher, 2006) that must be our principal focus if we are to make genuine headway enacting ecologically sustainable futures “out there in the world”. A central tenet here is the fostering of construct-recognition. The aim with this is to open up creative space for social renewal by revealing our own role in the creation and perpetuation of social systems that undermine the integrity of ecological systems. Social foresight cultivation involves a shift from regarding present circumstances as having an externally-

determined, pre-given naturalness, towards an understanding of reality in which we live in systemic interrelationship with both the institutional and natural worlds. From the foresight perspective, the ultimate aim of bringing about such a shift is to create opportunities for innovation that can support genuinely and comprehensively healthy futures.

As we have implied though, such a shift needs cultivation: the ability to see “constructed-ness” cannot be assumed as generally and readily available. We need to know something of the nature of construct recognition and the way that it develops in individuals and groups. We need an appropriate ecology of concepts and practices that can be enacted within a community of practitioners focused on synergistically creating insight and value together. Following from this, there is a strong interrelationship between “organising ecologically” and “organising effectively for ecological sustainability”, something that Bateson explicitly recognised in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*:

[T]he problem of how to transmit our ecological reasoning to those whom we wish to influence in what seems to us to be an ecologically “good” direction is itself an ecological problem. We are not outside the ecology for which we plan—we are always and inevitably a part of it.

...

I believe that...our greatest (ecological) need is the propagation of these ideas as they develop—and as they are developed by the (ecological) process of their propagation. (Bateson, 2000: 512-3)

Bateson also recognised the very significant challenge involved in “organising ecologically”:

The step to realizing—to making habitual—the other way of thinking—so that one naturally thinks that way when one reaches out for a glass of water or cuts down a tree—that step is not an easy one. (Bateson, 2000: 468)

The principle of interiority

This challenge lies at the heart of social foresight cultivation in organisational settings, and is hence central to maximising the effectiveness of organisation-centred CD initiatives. A fundamental key to addressing this challenge is engagement with what we call *the principle of interiority*. The social foresight cultivation work carried out by the Strategic Foresight Program is both founded upon and unified by this principle. It is our understanding that the principle of interiority is very often overlooked in CD work, and that by integrating this principle, CD efforts can be made more powerful.

The term “interiority” as we use it here refers to those aspects of any given occasion that require direct, participatory immersion in the situation to recognise, appreciate and understand. Interiority contrasts with “exteriority”, or those aspects of an occasion that are known through observation from a distance. The inclusion of interiority in the way that we work is a response to the dominance of positivism, behaviourism and functionalism in the social sciences. We don’t advocate for consideration of interiority in preference to exteriority: rather, we recognise the great

value of integrating both of these aspects of reality in the way that we carry out our work. In fact, the principle is founded on our understanding that failing to take one or other of these aspects into account would effectively cut out half of the reality within which we exist and work, and so would render the outcomes of that work incomplete and less than optimally effective.

Our understanding of why it is critical to engage with these interior dimensions is that they are fundamental to our integrity as autonomous individuals living together with other autonomous individuals. Recognition of interiors as important in their own right acknowledges that each of us has experiences that are internally consistent and inherently meaningful to us - my way of making sense of reality is internally valid and valuable for me, as yours is for you. Evan Thompson, in his recent book *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, describes a basis for this principle that is itself ecological in origin:

The first idea is that living beings are autonomous agents that actively generate and maintain themselves, and thereby also enact or bring forth their own cognitive domains. The second idea is that the nervous system is an autonomous dynamic system: It actively generates and maintains its own coherent and meaningful patterns of activity, according to its operation as a circular and re-entrant network of interacting neurons. The nervous system does not process information in the computationalist sense, *but creates meaning*. [emphasis added] (Thompson, 2007: 13)

This basis for interior engagement contrasts with a more utilitarian approach—for example, an approach motivated by a desire to more effectively pursue some objective that is defined from outside, without reference to its meaningfulness and value for those who are being engaged in its pursuit. Another way of looking at this would be to say that recognising these interior dimensions respects the inherent dignity of the people with whom I am working in any situation. We will always actually *engage* with these interior dimensions, whenever we engage with other people: the question is, do we do so a) intentionally and reflectively and b) in a way that attempts to *better* respect this inherent dignity. So a basic goal might simply be to develop the quality of interaction and engagement with CD participants, such that everyone involved (facilitators + participants + others affected) has the opportunity to grow through the process. Even so, this does not mean that all ways of making sense of reality are equally adequate – my way, while internally consistent and inherently meaningful for me, may be inferior to your way, in terms of the quality of the futures to which it might lead. The most skilful approach to engaging interiors for CD will recognise these qualitative differences in participant perspectives, and will strive for *better*—more insightful, more discerning, more compassionate and caring—interiority.

The importance of recognising interiority can be further illustrated with a simple example. The image depicted in Figure 1 may be familiar. This particular version appears in *The Evolving Self* by Robert Kegan, Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor of Adult Learning and Professional Development (Kegan, 1982). The image is noteworthy in relation to our discussion here in that the meaning that arises for you or me as subjects encountering it is dependent on our own interior “meaning-making structures”. Depending on these structures, the image can be interpreted as a drawing

of an old woman or of a young woman (in some instances, neither view is obvious, and it is also possible to see both simultaneously, although this possibility is often denied). That is, in order to understand what is happening when someone encounters the image, we need to know about that individual's direct experience as a subject. It is not enough to have a mathematical description of the image—such as the code from the JPEG image used to reproduce it here—or prior knowledge based on our own observation. The meaning that arises on engaging with the image is intrinsic to the act of engagement, and everything that the person engaging brings to that act. Regardless of what I think the meaning of the image is, it would not make sense to define someone else's different interpretation as in error, on the grounds that it is internally consistent and meaningful for that person.

The practical implications of this for CD initiatives may not at first be obvious, but they are very significant as we will attempt to explain. Consider an analogy between the structure of the image above, as defined by the binary code in the JPEG file, and the functional structure established for a CD initiative, in terms of the organisational form, formal roles, processes and procedures etc.



Figure 1: “A figure to figure”. This version is reproduced from (Kegan, 1982: 9).

As can be seen with the example, if we are interested in the nature of the direct experience of engaging with the image, and the outcome of that engagement in terms of the meaning that arises for the person encountering it, then we need more than an objective description of the image. We need to engage with the interiority of the person. Likewise with the functional and logistic arrangements relating to a CD

initiative: If we are interested in the quality of the outcomes from that initiative, and its meaningfulness for stakeholders, then we need to engage with the interiors of those stakeholders as well as with the exterior manifestation of the initiative in terms of systems, policies, and infrastructure.

While it is true that functional structure can influence (and even determine) behaviour (Senge, 2005), the nature of this influence is dependent on the interiority of the individuals involved, and their shared culture. A functional structure that works effectively in a particular context may not produce adequate results in a very similar context, if the interiority of the individuals who enact the structure is significantly different—for instance, if there is significant misalignment in the balance of economic, social and environmental interests and values amongst the participants. Conversely, an initiative underpinned by a less than optimal structure can produce high-performance outcomes if the interior qualities of the participants in the initiative are appropriately attuned. Many efforts aimed at developing highly effective communities focus on specifying the optimal policies, procedures and structures, while the prevailing interior qualities of participants remain unexamined. The result may be of lower quality than is hoped for.

Engaging CD participants: getting the right people on board

With the foregoing discussion in mind, it is our understanding that the success of any organisation-centred CD initiative will be highly dependent on the interior capacities of the individuals involved, and on the cultural space within which they engage together. This would apply across the structures through which the initiative is enacted, from a formally incorporated organisation's governance board for example, to community stakeholders engaging in a participatory process focused on very specific outcomes. Harmonisation of interiority within all areas is an important aim in this regard. In practice, such harmonisation would manifest in recognisable “behavioural signatures”, such as consistent mutually respectful interaction, as demonstrated, for instance, by making and keeping of commitments by participants.

A central challenge that arises here is how to develop a quality of interiority capable of supporting social foresight amongst a community of actors, given that this cannot simply be mandated by procedures or controlled by structural design. In pursuing the depth approach to CD, it is essential to treat “community” in a very specific sense, rather than as a general quality of social cohesiveness, as measured for instance using indices of social capital. Community in this sense is the particular socio-cultural matrix that arises and supports the collective activity of a specific group of actors engaged in the enactment of high-leverage interventions for socio-ecological wellbeing. Such a community will almost certainly have a very different culture and structure to that of the wider community that it serves and in which it is situated. The development of actor communities will in turn contribute proactively to the development of the surrounding community by innovating for socio-ecological sustainability. The broad aim is to engage previously disconnected individuals in high-performing groups to generate synergistic outcomes. This is a two-way process: individuals will contribute to the development of community, while the community will provide an ongoing context for individual growth. This feedback loop of individual interiority co-developing with community culture and structure is shown in

Figure 2. The key to the success of this process is the availability, identification, and engagement of individuals with an interior orientation towards social foresight.

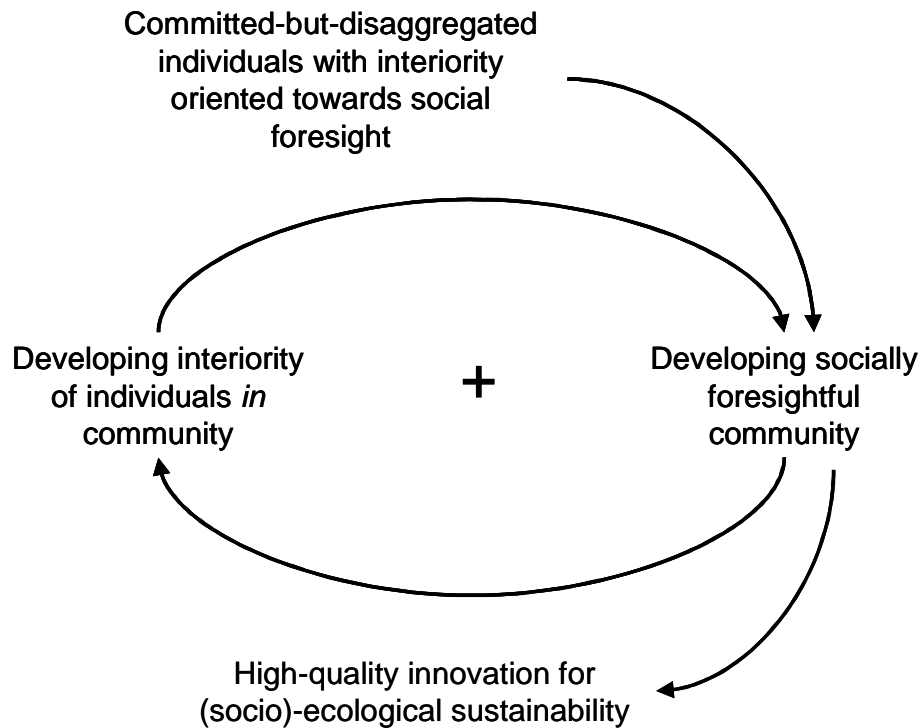


Figure 2: General process for co-developing individual interiority and socially foresightful community.

At least two pathways for identifying suitable community participants offer possibilities. On the one hand, it is possible to select desired interior attributes and then screen for these among potential participants. This might involve a less formal process based on dialogue interviews conducted by people suitably qualified to assess an individual’s interiority, or it might involve formal testing using rigorous tools. In either case, there are some basic problems associated with this type of approach, one that might be considered “practical”, and another that is more deeply philosophical in nature.

The practical problem links back to the “structural design” problem, in that someone must first know just what to screen for. In a sense, this approach amounts to CD by top down design: decide on the interior qualities that are desirable within the participant community, if high quality socio-ecological outcomes are to result from the community’s activities, and then attempt to build such a community by bringing together previously disaggregated individuals.

The philosophical problem that arises here is of greater concern. This relates to the treatment of interiority, of the ways that people make meaning together and the meaning thus created, as only the basis for a more effective set of tools. Indeed, it is this more utilitarian, “social systems” focus that honouring of interiority is intended to avoid in the first place. There is an important need here for the CD practitioner to reflect deeply on *why* interiority is seen as important. Is it because this offers a new tool for shaping outcomes towards an exogenously defined outcome? Or is it because

those engaged in the CD initiative are regarded as autonomous beings in the process of actively bringing forth their endogenously defined, preferred futures? If it is the latter, then the embrace of interiority becomes not something that needs external justification, but instead has its own natural—ecological—purpose. There is a sense here in which the recognition of interiority is also recognition that the participation of community members in the definition and development of community futures is a natural and self-evident good.

With this in mind, the technical details of the objective ecological challenge on which a CD process is focused, while important, are perhaps less critical than the processes of reflection and dialogue through which they are explored. A key aim of engaging explicitly with these interior dimensions is to expand collective insight into ecological sustainability challenges in terms of conceptual frameworks that are *themselves* ecological in nature. That is, to better understand the objective ecological challenge, we need to generate insight into the nature of self-in-culture. For example: what “ends” would fit with this understanding of self-in-culture?; what “means” for achieving these ends would fit with this understanding?; what changes to self-in-culture might assist achievement of these ends, and likewise, how might the means be made more effective in bringing forth sustainable futures characterised by improved quality of life for all those affected? This is subtle but important—and relates directly to the difference between engaging with interiors for utilitarian purposes, versus engaging with interiors as an expression of respect for the inherent dignity and autonomy of those involved in the process.

This leads to the second pathway for engaging individual participants in a CD initiative. By creating a vision of what life might be like within a high-performing community, in terms of the outward behavioural manifestation of high-quality engagement and interaction, this vision can form the basis for describing the behavioural responsibilities to which participants will be expected to commit. By defining behaviour that will entail a certain general quality of interiority, a process of self-selection can be used to ensure that “the right people are on the bus”, to draw on a metaphor that Jim Collins uses to characterise what his research shows is critical to high-performing organisations (Collins, 2006). Underpinning this is the observation that individuals are unlikely to self-select for situations demanding behaviour for which they do not have either the self-directed inclination or the interior resources. Even so, this does not automatically exclude participants who have not previously cultivated the necessary abilities, but who are motivated to do so as an aspiration.

The process of self-selection involves providing potential CD participants with a rigorous description of expectations to which they would be required to formally commit. Those who do not appreciate the value of these expectations are less likely to join the initiative, and those who elect to join in any case will do so with awareness of their responsibilities. Of course, more formal organisation-based engagement might also involve conventional recruitment processes, and these will then need to first indicate suitability on other grounds such as having particular skills, training, or experience.

An important point of departure from more conventional engagement approaches is that the personal benefits of contributing be played down in favour of emphasising the joint responsibilities involved. One particular expectation in relation to this will serve

as a good example of what we have in mind. The principle of servant leadership, as defined by Robert Greenleaf (2002) is strongly consistent with high quality CD initiatives for the enhancement of ecological sustainability. This entails a willingness to take responsibility for leading on the basis of perceived service opportunities wherever they arise, rather than on the basis of formal role, and a willingness to assist others to take leadership initiative on the basis of the needs and opportunities that *they* perceive.

We recognise the potential for the depth approach to CD, and the proposed participant engagement method, to attract charges of elitism. In response to this, we note that “elitism”—in the sense of qualitative distinction leading to hierarchical ordering—is not inherently pathological. In fact, elitism—as we understand the concept—arises necessarily wherever leadership is enacted. We suggest elitism becomes problematic only when it entails the harmful misuse of rights and privilege associated with an “elite” status, or where this status is used for exclusive purposes. Through development of the interior capacity to manage responsibilities entailed by elite status, and by making such status available to anyone prepared to accept these responsibilities, it is our view that “elitism” in the sense that we describe it here can be a force for collective wellbeing.

With this in mind, we will now examine an emerging approach to the theory and practice of CD that we believe has great potential to support and enhance the cultivation of social foresight. Otto Scharmer’s Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) provides a framework for intervening in complex social challenges that is oriented towards innovation for socio-ecologically healthy futures. Theory U provides a rigorous conceptual background for the U Process, Scharmer’s practical approach to connecting deeper thought with more effective action. In the U Process we find a powerful vision of community practice that is ideally suited to attracting and engaging participants with the interior qualities needed for effective social foresight cultivation. We introduce Theory U and the U Process here in some detail, in the context of CD for ecologically sustainable futures.

Introduction to Theory U

Scharmer’s work is underpinned by recognition, appreciation and integration of interiority in responding to complex social challenges. As such, it provides an established framework for bridging between structures, processes and procedures on the one hand, and the interior qualities of the individuals who enact these exterior factors on the other hand. By drawing deeply on the principle of interiority, Theory U offers a powerful and effective approach to developing community within organisational settings. The deeply systemic perspective underlying Theory U provides particular power for cultivating construct-sensitive insight into the “ecology of mind” underpinning our objective sustainability challenges. As such, Theory U offers great potential for enhancing capacity amongst communities of actors to effectively engage with these challenges.

At the heart of Theory U lies an enhanced appreciation of the knowledge dimensions involved in responding to complex social challenges. This starts by considering two conventional dimensions that are widely recognised, and then moving beyond these to introduce a third dimension that receives far less attention. Scharmer employs an

analogy to illustrate this, by likening the three dimensions to three different ways that we can look at an artist's work. He introduces these perspectives as follows:

- We can focus on the *thing* that results from the creative process; say, a painting.
- We can focus on the *process* of painting.
- Or we can observe the artist as she stands in front of a *blank canvas*.
(Scharmer, 2007: 6)

The first more conventional dimension involves explicit knowledge: knowledge about things. Drawing on Scharmer's analogy of an artist creating a painting on a canvas, explicit knowledge relates to the finished painting itself: for example, a detailed description of the end product. Transferring the analogy to CD for ecological sustainability, explicit knowledge relates to the detailed documentation of specific initiatives that will be carried out, either for enhancing community cohesion and effectiveness in general, or for intervening directly in socio-ecological systems. This might include knowledge about how to carry out particular, standard tasks such as creating a piece of infrastructure or designing a system. But which infrastructure and systems are required? And what innovations will be required with respect to existing infrastructure and systems? What network of arrangements between people and resources will generate the ideas to be implemented?

This leads to the second of the more conventional dimensions, tacit embodied knowledge: knowledge about enacting things. With reference to the artist-and-painting analogy, tacit knowledge relates to the process of painting, for example a description of the craft by which the artist brings the artwork to life on the canvas, giving it physical embodiment. What techniques and skills are used to create a painting, and how are these skills developed? Again transferring this to CD for ecological sustainability, tacit embodied knowledge relates to the processes by which the focal challenge is identified and defined, by which participants are engaged, and through which the participants work with their encompassing community to generate innovative responses to the focal challenge. The conventional approach to complex social challenges is to bring together particular people and resources in some network of configurations, and to engage in a process aimed at generating constructive responses to the challenge at hand. All of this involves tacit embodied knowledge of some form. But this usually commences with the social challenge as given in terms of its immediate manifestation in the here-and-now, and with the repertoire of responses as similarly given on the basis of established skills and expertise. The process problem is to apply these established skills and expertise, albeit in novel configurations, to the social challenge as it appears right now to the "naked eye".

The point of departure in Theory U is to recognise a third knowledge dimension, that of self-transcending knowledge: knowledge about origins for enacting things, or "not-yet-embodied" knowledge. The shift to inclusion of self-transcending knowledge recognises that for most of us, most of the time, we have a fundamental blind spot with regard to both seeing the origins of our complex social challenges, and accessing the ground of origination from which our responses arise. To return to the painting analogy, self-transcending knowledge relates to the source from which the painting emerges through the artist. It involves the sources of inspiration that orient and motivate intention, and it involves the contexts distant in space and time that shape

the background to this particular creation at this place and time. Theory U is a social technology, an integrated set of arrangements that can facilitate enactment of particular states of being amongst groups of people, in which this “field of origination” is accessed in relatively stable and repeatable ways. The aim of entering this field of origination or creativity is to see situations differently and more comprehensively, and then to respond to the newly-appreciated situation in ways aligned with the future as it is emerging, rather than on the basis of past expectations and habits.

The emphasis with any innovation process based on Theory U is to move beyond a more instrumental input-output model in which participants deliver standard solutions based on pre-existing knowledge and expertise. With Theory U, the aim is not only to change the circumstances of the complex social challenge itself: it is the participants also who will be transformed. Participants must be open to being *changed*, not just *challenged*. This is because successful outcomes will of necessity involve a new appreciation of the situation—its social origins in particular—and the generation of genuinely innovative responses that are meaningful in the context of the future that is emerging, rather than the historical past or taken-for-granted present. And at its most powerful, the type of insight that arises with this openness to being changed is of the nature “Oh look – *we* are part of the problem: our ways of thinking about how to organise ourselves give rise to forms of organization that we then see as something that imposes itself on us as some external *thing*” (Scharmer, 2007: 54-5).

Overview of the U Process

The basis for Theory U is a distinction between two qualitatively different types of cognition. The first Scharmer calls *downloading*, characterised by reacting to challenges with established habits: the way things appear is regarded as given from outside—things are simply as they appear on the surface. The second is characterised by a shift in the inner place from which attention and subsequent action arise. This second quality of cognition can be characterised by a three-step process:

- *Co-sensing*: deep observation
- *Co-presencing*: inner connection with what is naturally emerging
- *Co-realising*: swift, focused action

It is this three-step process that forms the basis of Scharmer’s U Process. The two types of cognition are depicted in Figure 3.

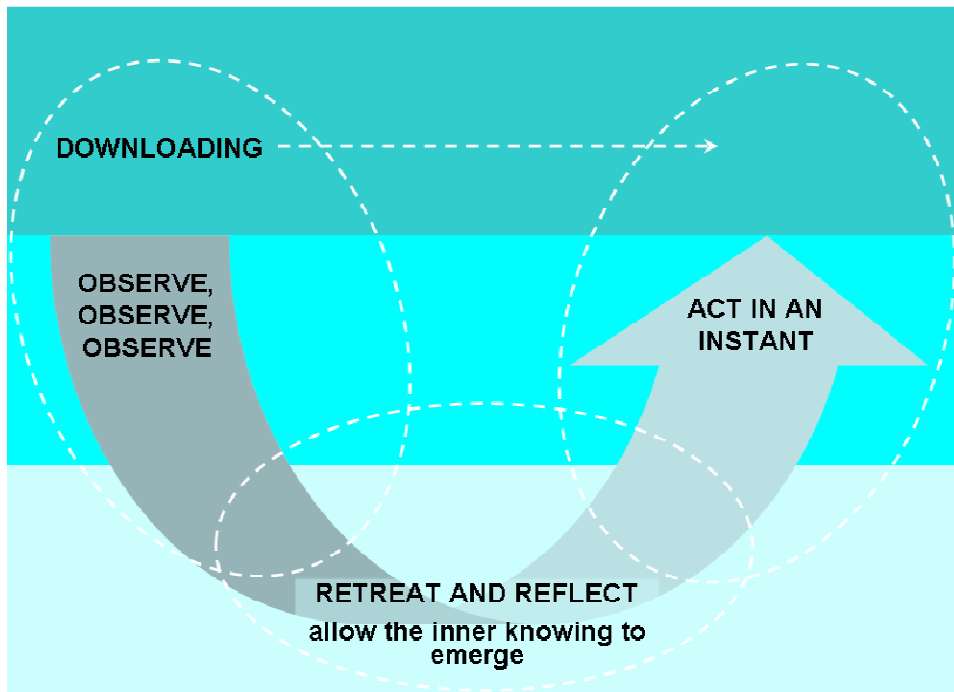


Figure 3: Three movements of the U (Scharmer, 2007: 33, figure 2.3)

There are two levels at which Theory U facilitates the shift from downloading to this deeper way of knowing. At one level, it provides a language and a set of concepts for exploring complex social challenges together, into which the deeper way of knowing is built. By engaging with this language, the deeper knowing can more readily be brought to light. The language and concepts can facilitate greater awareness of the social reality creation process (Scharmer, 2007: 18). The construct-sensitive and systems-oriented nature of the language and concepts provide one crucial aspect of Theory U's capacity for powerful social foresight cultivation.

At another level, Theory U provides a detailed set of principles and practices to guide practical enactment of the U Process in relation to specific social challenges. The underlying structure of the U Process is a set of five movements, an expansion of the basic three-movement structure introduced above. The five movements are:

- *Co-initiating*
- *Co-sensing*
- *Co-presencing*
- *Co-creating*
- *Co-evolving*

These are shown in Figure 4, along with expanded descriptions of each. A heading summary of the full set of 24 principles and practices that make up the U Process is provided for reference in Appendix 1.

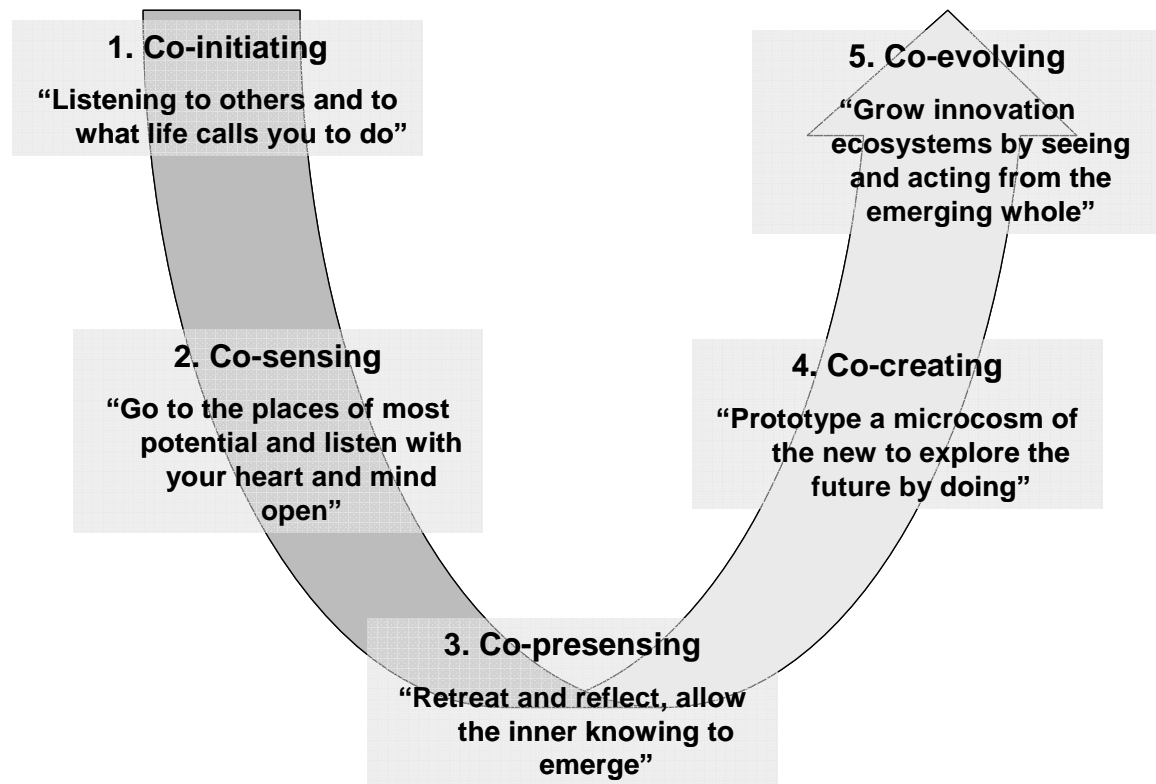


Figure 4: The five movements of the U Process (Scharmer, 2007: 378, figure 21.1)

The U Process balances Theory U's conceptual rigour by linking deeper awareness, thought, and conversation with timely and compassionate action. This is where the connection between Theory U and the cultivation of social foresight comes fully to light. It is this critically important action-orientation that characterises genuine social foresight. This should not be underemphasised: as with the building of social *movements*, the value of cultivating social *foresight* lives and dies with timely action carried out in the world to support the healthy growth of socio-ecological systems. From the social foresight perspective, it is not sufficient to critically deconstruct the nature of our ecological situation. There is an inherent danger that this intellectually privileged perspective simply leads to nihilism, paralysis, and the diminishment of care. It is through engagement in compassionate action that we can avoid this danger. This is action taken with full knowledge that we do not know with certainty what futures will emerge. Such action is therefore taken in the knowledge that its imperfection will be subject in turn to an ongoing cycle of critical scrutiny and renewal. By acting under these circumstances, we make ourselves more vulnerable. And it is with this vulnerability that opportunities for deep social innovation—innovation that embraces an increasingly wide sphere of interest and concern—can arise.

Conclusion

1. Community development pathways to ecologically sustainable futures are a vitally important complement to the frequently excessive emphasis on expert-led technology "fixes". Navigating these pathways is essential if we are to adequately address the deeper foundations of our critical ecological challenges, rather than just treating superficial symptoms. Such foundations

can be found in the socio-ecological character of these objective sustainability challenges. From this perspective, the ecological perspective is not just a better way of objectifying the natural environment: it represents the essential character of mind, of our interior life, as we create, perceive, and respond to our ecological challenges in the natural world. Development and propagation of this insight requires high quality epistemological leadership. It is our view that the cultivation of social foresight is closely attuned with such leadership. Cultivating social foresight among communities of committed actors and among distributed networks of community leaders will increase the depth of interior capacity that we can bring to bear in working together for sustainable futures. Greater interior depth entails greater insight into our collective situation, and wiser, more compassionate action in response. This represents an essential complement to developing social movements through wide-span mobilisation of individuals and groups to shift entrenched structures and enact new ways of living. For social foresight cultivation efforts to be as effective as possible, frameworks and practices are required that can bring about profound shifts in the way that participants in these efforts engage together to attend to their world and their place in it. Scharmer's Theory U offers a framework and set of practices that we believe are eminently suited to this task, and that as such offer great potential for contributing to community development for ecologically sustainable futures.

Endnotes

¹ For more on fostering social foresight, with a particular focus on the community sector, see (Floyd & Hayward, 2008).

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Appendix 1: U Process Principles and Practices

The Principles and Practices listed below are drawn from the section headings in chapter 21 of *Theory U*, “Principles and Practices of Presencing for Leading Profound Change and Innovation” (Scharmer, 2007: 377-442). For detailed commentary on each Principle and Practice, see the original source.

Co-initiating: Listen to Others and to What Life Calls You to Do

2. Attend: Listen to what life calls you to do.
3. Connect: Listen to and dialogue with interesting players in the field.
4. Co-initiate a diverse core group that inspires a common intention.

Co-sensing: Go to the Places of Most Potential and Listen with Your Mind and Heart Wide Open

5. Form a highly committed prototyping core team and clarify essential questions.
6. Take deep-dive journeys to the places of most potential.
7. Observe, observe, observe: Suspend your Voice of Judgement (VOJ) and connect with your sense of wonder.
8. Practice deep listening and dialogue: connect to others with your mind, heart, and will wide open.
9. Create collective sensing organs that allow the system to see itself.

Co-presencing: Retreat and Reflect, Allow the Inner Knowing to Emerge

10. Letting go: Let go of your old self and “stuff” that must die.
11. Letting come: Connect and surrender to the future that wants to emerge through you.
12. Intentional silence: Pick a practice that helps you to connect with your source.
13. Follow your journey: Do what you love, love what you do.
14. Circles of Presence: Create circles in which you hold one another in the highest future intention.

Co-creating: Prototype a Small Microcosm of the New in Order to Explore the Future by Doing

15. The Power of Intention: Connect to the future that stays in need of you—crystallize your vision and intent.
16. Form core groups: Five people can change the world.
17. Prototype strategic microcosms as a landing strip for the emerging future.
18. Integrate head, heart, and hand: Seek it with your hands; don’t think about it, feel it.
19. Iterate, iterate, iterate: create, adapt, and always be in dialogue with the universe.

Co-evolving: Grow Innovation Ecosystems by Seeing and Acting from the Emerging Whole

20. Co-evolve innovation ecosystems that allow people to see and act from the emerging whole.
21. Create innovation infrastructures by shaping safe places and rhythms for peer coaching (supported through social technology).

22. Social Presencing Theatre: Evolve collective awareness through Field 4 media productions [this obviously requires further expansion to be meaningful to readers new to the U Process].

Root Principles: The Three Groundings of the Social Field

23. Intentional grounding: always serve as an instrument for the whole.

24. Relational grounding: connect and dialogue with the global social field.

Authentic grounding: connect to your highest self as a vehicle for the future to emerge.