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Presence
Human Purpose and the Field of the Future
By
Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer
Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers

The four authors bring interesting perspectives to the subject of transformation and learning. Peter Senge wrote the *Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* and is the founding chair of the Society of Organizational Learning, which published this book. Otto Scharmer is a lecturer at the MIT Sloan School of Management and the author a book, *Theory U: Leading from the Energy Future* (unclear whether it was published). Joseph Jaworski is the chair of Generon Consulting and cofounder for the Global Leadership Initiative and author of *Synchronicity: the Inner Path of Leadership*. Betty Sue Flowers is director of the Johnson Presidential Library and Museum and a former English professor and international business consultant.

The authors shared a common desire to understand the deeper dimensions of transformational changes. They have a series of meetings between November 2000 and April 2002 with wide ranging discussions on their various experiences. They also analyze the results of 150 interviews by Otto and Joseph of scientists and entrepreneurs to explore how new ideas are brought into reality. What they find in common among these very successful people is the capacity for a deeper level of learning. They use the U Model developed by Otto to explain what is going on—with its centerpiece being “presencing.”

The U Model has seven capacities. Moving down the left side of the U, the first capacity is Suspending. This requires suspending normal assumptions and observing without forming conclusions, having the patience to do nothing while waiting for a new reality to emerge.

The second capacity is Redirection. Redirection leads not only to a deep sense of connection but also a heightened sense of change. What first appears as rigid begins to appear more dynamic.

The third capacity is Letting Go. It is necessary to surrender control for presencing to occur.

It is at the bottom of the U where presencing takes place. The model says, “Retreat and reflect”—allow “inner knowing” to emerge. It is “being open beyond one’s preconception and historical ways of making sense.”

As you move up the right side of the U, the fourth capacity is what the authors' call Letting Come. Surrender becomes commitment and the future begins to emerge.

Next comes Crystallizing intent. A vision is fashioned or as Joseph said, "real visions are uncovered, not manufactured." The intent is then broadcast.

Prototyping is the sixth capacity and it is the way we test new ideas. It is concrete, but adjustment can still be made. Feedback is critical. You have to have "an incredible capacity for self-observation and course correction in real time."

The last capacity in the U is Institutionalizing. Completing the U movement frequently creates new institutions or transforms existing ones. They need not be rigid or fixed. The learning process has provided totally new ways of thinking and acting.

When W. Brian Arthur, economist of the Santa Fe Institute explains innovation, it sounds very much like a U movement, "Every profound innovation is based on an inward-bound journey, on going to a deeper place where knowing comes to the surface."

I think the model is light on substance, but the book is rich in stories—from the interviewees, clients, and the authors themselves. I did not like the format of the book with the meandering conversations and lack of conciseness in explaining the model. I found the language convoluted most of the times. I cannot imagine "presence" becoming a common term of art, nor the book a best seller, despite Senge's popularity.

Judy Denny
jadenny@aol.com