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PROGRESSION TOWARDS PRESENCING MASTERY WITH A GROWTH MINDSET AND THEORY U:

A Practitioner's Spiritual Journey

Praline Ross, DBA

Institution: Africa Wellness Foundation (NPO)

Abstract: Contemporary discourse surrounding leadership, creates a context for presencing mastery as a practice. Globally, we are living in times of disruption, with institutions failing because of a blindness to the inner core of understanding with respect to transformation and leadership (Scharmer, 2018). Corruption is endemic in South Africa, with a lack of accountability and mindful leadership through standardization of systems that no longer serve the people. It is argued that an inner shift needs to occur where one is able to broaden one's thinking capacity to think beyond the self (ego) and move from ego-system awareness, centred around care for oneself only, towards eco-system awareness, centred around care for the benefit of all (Scharmer and Käufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2018). When this inner shift takes place in leadership, conditions for activating "wisdom-based leadership development become present" (Gunnlaugson, 2021, p. 4). I argue further that this inner shift can only occur when you surrender to the Divine Presence within.

Keywords: Growth Mindset, Leadership, Presencing, Spirituality, Surrender, Theory U

I. Introduction

In this article I argue that to advance towards presencing mastery, where one is already au fait with presencing as a practice, which in essence is "awareness - and presence-based from start to finish" (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 27) requires the application of a growth mindset. This allows one to embrace challenges, learn from failure and believe in continual learning as complementary to Theory U (by connecting the mind and heart), allowing one to see through the eyes of compassion. To get to a point in life where you are able to let go of your resistance to pain, be with pain and

smile through your suffering into presencing insight and realization is possible when you perceive the present moment as the only moment where you can be alive (Hanh, 2006) – a moment where you can “deeply connect with source” (Jaworski, 2012) – a moment I refer to as tuning in to the Divine Presence within.

I used the lockdown to complete my Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA), which involved self-reflection by embarking on a heuristic journey through the U towards presencing. To get to presence in the present moment, involves letting go by moving beyond mistakes that tie one to the past. I became aware of how I was unable to move forward towards presence in the present moment, due to my failures that kept me stuck in the past. Through skills like metacognition (Flavell, 1979), I became aware of my own thoughts, beliefs and practices, which I recorded in my reflective journal. I placed myself under the microscope, exposing repetitive patterns of behaviour, that no longer serve my purpose. The growth mindset allowed me to find a basis for belief in the power of lifelong learning and to challenge myself by learning from failure and overcoming deeper challenges in my life. Theory U allowed me to open and reclaim my mind, heart and will to see the beauty that resides in others, by first recognizing the beauty and promise that resides within me.

In this article, I propose avant-garde practices in the workplace and a framework with the growth mindset as a lens, allowing for progression towards presencing mastery. This article presents a rationale for engaging transformation through a growth mindset as a lens, complementary to Theory U and Dynamic Presencing as I embark on a spiritual journey, allowing for progression towards presencing mastery not only to improve self, but my presencing practice too. Guided by my intuition, the intention is to disrupt the standard conditioned ways of being to allow myself to contact and eventually be led by my inner knowing. In the same way, I write, using a non-traditional, less scientific approach, hence I have chosen to write personally, reflecting on my own journey, as well as subjectively in an attempt to establish rapport with the reader. In this way, I share life experiences through reconstructed stories of my past, present as well as emerging future in ways that I hope the reader can relate. I share personal stories of how presencing has assisted in my own development as well as leadership coaching within my practice. I purposefully write in the present tense, keeping me focused on connecting with presence in the present moment and with metacognition. Following this, I briefly explore the power of surrender, Theory U and a growth mindset - all of which have been instrumental along my presencing journey. Before concluding, I share my exposure to avant-garde practices like meditation,

breathwork and journaling and offer a framework that I use in the workplace to encourage the presencing mastery shift from a temporary state of knowing to a more permanent state of being (Gunnlaugson, 2020). In structuring this article, I frame change as involving “new ways of thinking, doing and being” (Dispenza, 2012, p. 220). Similarly, this article flows by tracing my shift in mindset from a state of THINKING to DOING to BEING, with three Acts; Act 1 - THINKING – where I allow the theory to lead and serve as a guide, Act 2 - DOING- allowing me to action what I have learnt through breathwork, meditation and journaling and ACT 3 – BEING - developing a state of being where I offer skills and a framework towards presencing mastery.

II. Act 1 - THINKING

The power of Surrender: my introduction to Theory U and the growth mindset. While at the gym on the 14 March 2019, a friend mentioned that he had a dream about me and passed on a message. He mentioned the story of Martha and Mary – a bible story in Luke 10: 38-42. Martha and Mary were sisters. Martha, was hardworking – busy with household chores, whilst Mary, decided to stop her chores to focus on listening to the word of God instead. The lesson is that Martha places her work above the importance of hearing the word of God, whereas Mary prioritized listening to God’s word instead. This friend said in his message that I was too busy and needed to slow down and be more like Mary instead of Martha. He did not know why he had dreamt about me on that day. I was astounded and thanked him for this message as he walked away.

Earlier in the week, I had pondered over the need to slow down and this was affirmed on my birthday by someone who was not even aware of my inner reflections or my birthday! Months went by. Though I pondered over his message, I resisted to act on the wisdom of slowing down. I was caught in the social web of always being too busy. Being on the never stopping treadmill was all I knew. Like many, I was doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results. One year later, COVID-19 and the lockdown forced a shift globally. Like many, my reset button was pressed for me. I felt an inner sense calling me to give in. Enticed by this inner knowing, I gradually surrendered and made a pact to use the lockdown as a period of self-reflection and renewal and to give way to that inner source of inspiration to lead the way by navigating into the unknown.

To surrender involves acting from the heart and letting go of conflict with

“what is and what can be” (Dyer, 1995, p. 29). This is no easy task, as it involves relinquishing control to a higher power. The need to be in control was the only way of being I knew. I felt an inexplicable call to slow down, as an inner voice beckoned me to tune in to the Divine Presence within. Within the process of surrender, there is trust (Dyer, 1989). I felt a calm sense drawing me into the flow and to simply trust the process. I felt a growing sense of freedom that defies me to explain or describe. To surrender involves letting go of all feelings at any time and being free of feelings that are negative, to allow spontaneity and creativity (Hawkins, 2012). I sensed this was the start of something new and I felt drawn to trust in the unknown.

With the growth mindset as a lens, I tackled the challenge of learning Theory U, which was completely new to me. I immersed myself in the works of various authors, including Scharmer (2009, 2018), founder of Theory U, which is a response to a world in crisis (Heller, 2019). With disruptions exacerbated by COVID-19 (Knepple Carney et al., 2020; McQuaid et al., 2020), Theory U is a framework that describes a change process, a method of personally effecting change, as well as change in communities and organisations and it describes world phenomena (Hayashi, 2010). Guided by my intuition, I needed to embrace change and be open to new ways of thinking by breaking the unconscious habits I had identified with as being myself (Dispenza, 2012). I needed to be open to continual learning (Dweck, 2006), have an open mind, heart and will (Scharmer and Käufer, 2013) and embrace non-traditional schools of thought beyond mainstream literature on leadership theories (Heller, 2019).

In Figure 1, within the abyss, there are three divides, ecological, social and spiritual (Scharmer, 2009, 2018), I felt a disconnect between self and Self, as I pictured myself standing on the first summit, hopeful that I would reach the second summit one day, but something held me back. Instead of looking ahead, I found myself constantly looking back instead. Thanks to the challenge of disruption, with the lockdown, I was forced to slow down. When reaching the presencing phase of my U- journey, I was tempted to turn back towards my old self, but this visual reminded me to keep moving forward.

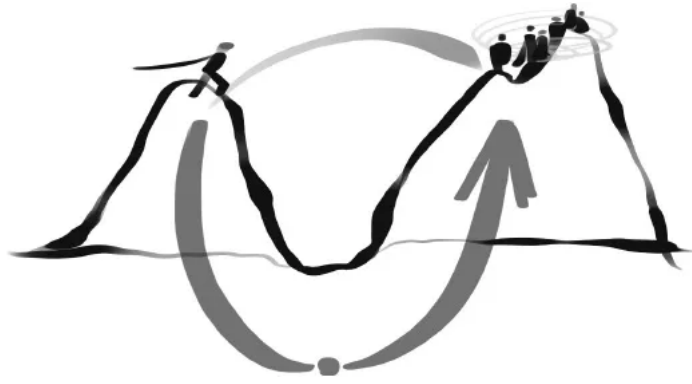


Figure 1: The challenge of disruption, a scribe by Kelvy Bird (Scharmer, 2018)

The term presencing combines the words presence and sensing and relates to joining in by creating a future dependent on the individual bringing it into being. If you want to create a future that is different from the past, it depends on the intervenor's interior condition or the blind spot, that inner source from which our inspiration emanates (Scharmer, 2009). To create a change in the system, we need to move the inner place that we operate from (Scharmer, 2009, 2018). Guided by two key questions, “Who is my Self?” and “What is my Work?” (Scharmer, 2018) and being consciously aware of the power of surrender, kept me focused on my spiritual journey.

As I embarked on this deep, inner journey, I became cognisant of the inner battle – the internal conflict I have been facing for the past few years, with a mind concerned about the future and a heart that dwells in the past. Instead of brain and heart coherence (McCraty et al., 2006; McCraty, 2018) namely, a state with the connection between the heart and brain and the quality of communication enabling one to perform at one’s best (McCraty, 2018), I was experiencing a disconnect, with brain and heart incoherence, playing out in all aspects of my life, affecting my worldview. I realise how anxious I get when concerned with my future and how upset and angry I get with decisions made in the past, yet when focused on the present moment, I feel relaxed, listening to the wind and the birds outside, often losing track of time. Somewhere along the way, I began to focus on presencing - taking the necessary actions to form this practice as a new habit towards the creation of a state of being.

Professor Carol Dweck, world-renowned psychologist known for her contribution to social psychology coined the terms fixed and growth mindset. In her seminal work, Dweck (2006) distinguishes between a fixed mindset where qualities such as personality traits and intelligence are innate and cannot be practised or developed and are set in stone and the growth mindset where personality traits can be cultivated through efforts and experience. People with a growth mindset experience happiness in

incremental growth, welcome continual learning, do not feel intimidated by failure and tend to work hard without a reward in mind (Ng, 2018). The growth mindset is a mindset where people believe that through hard work, basic abilities such as intelligence can be developed over time (Dweck, 2006; Sahagun et al., 2021).

While I theoretically and conceptually explored Theory U in the context of a growth mindset, the act of living and experiencing these models added the final dimension required to allow me to make the connection between mind (growth mindset) and heart (Theory U), critical in my quest for presencing mastery. This was critical as I am a pragmatic person and the more I embarked on this heuristic experience, the more I felt the disconnect between my mind and heart. I challenged myself to move beyond thinking about my future and the familiar past towards the generous present moment where you achieve order and balance within your body (Dispenza, 2012). I knew that my failures kept me stuck in the past. I needed to be still and trust in the unknown. As in the case of Foot et al. (2014), I embarked on this self-study to examine my practice and changes in my identity as who I see myself as, affects my practice. Who I am provides an air of confidence in me and plays a significant role in who I am becoming. By exploring the literary works of the great researchers who shared their knowledge, this helped to mould my thinking along this journey. Theory U served as a deep and profound change model that supported transformation of self, along with growth mindset, which allowed me to move beyond self-imposed boundaries that bind me to my past towards a very different emerging future.

III. Act 2 - DOING

Slowing down to tune in to the Divine Presence within using journaling, breathwork and meditation. During the lockdown, I started feeling uncomfortable and chose to slow down. This involved more time dedicated to prayer and being open to new practices like journaling, where individuals become experts in their thought processes, with the researcher being the research instrument (Janesick, 1998) and breathwork – associated with mental functions and is essential in the practices of meditation (Zaccaro et al., 2018).

When using journaling as a reflective tool, it is important to guide participants through a process of self-reflection throughout the phases of Theory U, especially during sensing and presencing. This allows participants to become more self-aware as they access on a deeper level, more knowledge of self and link this knowledge to their actions (Scharmer, 2009). I realised the benefits associated with my reflective journal

(Yong and Hoon, 2013). It assisted in improving practical skills and allowed time for critical reflection (Murillo-Llorente et al., 2021). It is argued that examining of self is often forgotten, with educators getting caught up with theory, instead of posing fundamental questions about what and how we think and why we do what we do (Tremmel, 1993). As a researcher I reviewed extracts of my journal, in an attempt to view things from another perspective and for an objective opinion. Posing questions like “Who am I?” and “What is my Work?” and then sitting in the stillness, allowed me to gain insight and write down ideas that emerged.

“Who am I?”

I am a Mindset and Heartset Practitioner and an Edupreneur.

“What is my Work?”

As a mindset and heartset practitioner I focus on the power of thoughts and emotions in controlling our behaviour. I help people to become better versions of themselves, by becoming more self-aware. (This designation came about as a result of my spiritual journey and exploration with presencing. As thoughts emerged, I wrote them down, as I did not want to forget them). Through metacognition I was able to reflect on my thinking ability (Phelps, 2005) and during presencing, I sat in the stillness, connecting with the Divine, and I was able to write down ideas that came to the fore.

As an edupreneur or educational entrepreneur who enters the education field (Tharaney and Upadhyaya, 2014), my desire to add creativity within the realm of education and the workplace is the driving force behind my research. Introducing avant-garde methods like breathwork and journaling came about as a result of becoming familiar with the power of presencing and capturing thoughts in my reflective journal thereafter.

To master the art of the present moment or the “eternal now”, breathwork is important as it can be used to liberate energy that is then made available for a greater purpose (Dispenza, 2017). As breathing is known to reduce stress and is beneficial in treating depression (Steffen et al., 2021), I began experimenting with breathing techniques in the workplace, as during the lockdown, clients complained about being highly stressed, with mental fatigue due to working from home, while kids were being homeschooled. There are various breathing methods such as the Wim Hof Breathing Method (Citherlet et al., 2021) and Box Breathing techniques (Scott, 2020), which assist in stress reduction and calming the mind and body. I preferred the easier method in the

office, namely Box breathing, which is a basic method entailing breathing in, to a count of four, holding the air in your lungs for a count of four, before exhaling to a count of four, repetitively. This I use in seminars, church groups and retreats when I observe that clients are overwhelmed, stressed and just need time to unwind and be more present and mindful. People report feeling relaxed and calm thereafter.

As a co-facilitator for the Inner Development Goals (a non-profit organisation focusing on inner development) Practitioner Network, I take the team on a path of taking four conscious breaths that create the platform for being in the present moment. When I get participants to focus on their breath, this is when they are fully present. There is so much power in breathwork, as breath connects consciousness and life, ultimately uniting your thoughts and your body (Hanh, 1975). Practitioners within the Inner Development Goals Network have provided feedback on feeling more centred and whole as a result of engaging in this breathwork collectively, despite having these sessions conducted online. Breathwork leaves me feeling connected, calm and confident as I am able to delve to the core of my being – allowing me to connect to the Divine within me. The growth mindset allowed me to be open to continual learning and Theory U allowed me to see the benefits of presencing and journaling, which encouraged me to explore this from a business perspective.

IV. Act 3 - BEING

What is needed to develop presencing mastery?

In this act, I share a framework highlighting skills required in mastering the art of presencing and I share the intention behind the framework Skills such as metacognition, mindfulness and the power of a growth mindset and the power of surrender are discussed.

Metacognition, initially coined by John Flavell, means “cognition about cognitive phenomena” (Flavell, 1979, p. 906) or being aware of one’s own thoughts. As a result of metacognition, one can learn a particular strategy to resolve a challenge and apply that strategy in a new situation. Metacognition involves relating to other concepts, including critical thinking and motivation (Lai, Beimers and Dolan, 2011). I liked the idea of being aware of my thinking and started practising thinking about my thinking. Since the lockdown, I began practising spending more time alone with my thoughts. The more I did this, the more I realised the importance of doing it often as a form of practice. This assisted greatly when it came to journaling as well. In presencing mastery, metacognition is a necessity due to its ability to capacitate self-awareness.

Mindfulness involves a shift in the mindset of an individual where one can be in the present moment with the ability to focus on where your attention lies (Scharmer, 2018). Mindfulness strengthened my ability to focus and allowed me to be more aware of the environment and together with journaling and breathing techniques allowed me to be receptive in recognizing opportunities with agility coupled with an open mind, open heart and open will.

Through the use of the growth mindset, I believe in continual learning and am open to new approaches, thus opening my mind to new ways of learning. The growth mindset, Theory U and breathing techniques, mindfulness and journaling, have assisted in molding my identity. I have become more agile with a combination of learning from mistakes and allowing that inner source of inspiration to be my guide, as I surrender to the unknown. COVID-19 has forced a shift to allow for agility through the use of staying at home using technology, whilst business continues, as the world adapts to newer methods of operating in the world of work. This in turn has created challenges regarding mental fatigue as people are on devices even longer and are mentally fatigued. By introducing new methods like breathing techniques, journaling and mindfulness, will assist by allowing people to slow down and disconnect from devices to reconnect with life and become one with nature.

The power of words is important in exposing how a growth mindset can be encouraged (Campbell, 2021). In my spiritual journey along the U, I was cognisant of the use of words to keep me focused on my goals in order to move forward, especially when times were tough. Along my U-journey, I took the theory of the growth mindset and Theory U and translated it into a framework that made sense to me. The intention of this framework is to create an:



Figure 2: Ross Framework Intention - using the growth mindset & Theory U on a spiritual journey (Ross, 2022)

I refrained from numbering the points as this may not be a systematic process, neither is it a linear one as change is disruptive. The process may vary from person to person.

Surrender	Be open to surrender. Take an overwhelming leap of faith. Challenge yourself to slow down and leave all that is familiar behind to trust in the unknown. Be guided by your inner compass – namely the Divine (your intuition)
Be willing to unlearn and relearn	By observing your thoughts, beliefs, emotions, behaviour and writing them down in a journal (<i>Observe, observe, observe</i>) challenge traditions and habitual patterns of behaviour that no longer serve your purpose.
Have an open mind	Be mindful of the Voice of Judgement . Practice mindfulness and self-corrective behaviour, to not pass judgements on yourself and others. Be open-minded and learn new techniques like journaling.
Have an open heart	Be mindful of the Voice of Cynicism . Focus on listening from the heart – feeling the emotions, sensing what your heart calls you to do. By applying deep listening skills, take a deep dive inward. Allow yourself to see through the eyes of compassion. Only then are you able to see others in the same way. You may notice a shift in terms of moving beyond all things physical, namely, moving beyond only seeing the human form to focus on seeing with your heart instead.
Have an open will	Be mindful of the Voice of Fear . Through mindfulness and breathing exercises, whilst retreating and reflecting become aware of the inner critic that can hamper the ability to reach goals. The growth mindset allows for curiosity and embracing of challenges whilst learning from failure. Ask tough questions like “What am I prepared to let go of?” “What thoughts do I need to let go of?”
Get comfortable being uncomfortable	This allows one to push beyond self-imposed boundaries and suspend doubt and fear. Have faith in the guidance of your inner knowing. Zone in on your purpose and state your intentions, with a focus on what God has called you to do.

Figure 3: Ross Framework using the growth mindset & Theory U on a spiritual journey (Ross, 2022)

Through skills like metacognition and mindfulness, assisting with awareness of one’s thoughts, beliefs and practices and with the growth mindset, I argue that one can move beyond mistakes from the past by embracing challenges and learning from failure. This can be done through mindful language when speaking to yourself and others. Finding positive affirmations and repeating them really helped me. I reminded myself that “All change is hard at first, messy in the middle and gorgeous at the end” (Sharma, 2018, p. 60). Words such as I am “turning my wounds into wisdom” (to encourage learning from failure), “be the light” (served as a reminder when someone tried my patience); “fail forward” (when tempted to give up), “slow progress is still progress” (when tempted to rush the process); “Faith can move mountains” (served as a reminder to believe and eradicate self-doubt). Journal extracts captured in my reflective journal (Bashan and Holsblat, 2017), created an awareness of how the power of words can have an impact on emotion and behaviour, which can either accelerate or impede transformation. The power of words is crucial as selecting positive words along the presencing journey will determine whether one will reach presencing mastery. Psalm 46: 10, namely, “Be still and know that I am God”, has been a powerful, guiding force, allowing me to recognise the power behind being still, being present and truly connected with the source of all creation. When sitting in the stillness, words emerged that allowed me to understand that when praying, I talk to the Divine, but when sitting in the stillness, I allow the Divine to talk to me. All my life, I had been conditioned to believe that being busy meant being productive and being still was a “time-waster”. As a result of Psalm 46:10, my mindset has shifted, as only through the power of surrender, am I able to be still and truly present and connected to the Divine. Theory U refers to “let

go” and “let come” along the U Journey. Through the power of surrender, I believe it more pertinent to explicitly say, “Let go” and “Let God”, as I surrender to the Divine within.

V. Conclusion

This article offers a framework for the proposed inclusion of the growth mindset alongside Theory U when advancing towards presencing mastery, along my spiritual journey. I have shown the importance of critical reflection through metacognition, which assists in allowing awareness of my thoughts and behaviours which have an impact in my practice and are captured in my reflective journal.

In this article, Theory U is explored as a profound model of change required for transformation of self, alongside a growth mindset, allowing one to move beyond self-imposed boundaries that bind one to the past to move forward toward a future that is emerging. Theory U provides for a focus on mindfulness, seen as a shift in mindset and occurs when an individual can shift from viewing the system as something that is “out there” to viewing the system with oneself in it (Scharmer, 2018, p.25) and through mindfulness, we can construct our meaning in terms of reality (Moodley, 2016).

The more I started experimenting with mindfulness, journaling and breathing exercises, the more I could see the benefits in my life. As these are not standard approaches in the workplace, I experimented with these methods, where possible. As I continued to surrender, these practices played a more prominent feature as I became more and more mindful of seeing into the future as it emerges.. By introducing methods like breathing techniques, journaling and mindfulness, will assist in allowing people to slow down and disconnect from devices to reconnect with life and become one with the Divine. Through self- study, the use of journaling allowed me to capture and record cognitive responses as I went about my daily tasks and when interacting with others. Through journaling and mindfulness, I was able to become more aware of my thoughts, emotions and behaviours. The combination of the growth mindset and Theory U has allowed me to delve deeper into the mind and body connection, namely brain and heart coherence. Through the power of surrender, I am using these methods to assist with presencing to become second nature by abandoning habitual ways of knowing towards a generative state of being.

V. References

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PRALINE ROSS DBA is a Mindset & Heartset Practitioner, focusing on the power of thoughts and emotions in controlling behaviour. She is the Chairperson of the Africa Wellness Foundation (NPO) – “your beacon of hope in the struggle between the Mind and Heart”, specialising in Mindset Coaching, Leadership Development and Organizational Change. With a vision to place Ubuntu at the heart of all training initiatives – “I AM because YOU are, I AM because WE are”, this non-profit, places the human element and spirituality at the core of all wellness training initiatives. She is the South African Wellness Ambassador for World Digital Detox Day, a movement that helps people to lead a balanced and holistic life by turning off devices and tuning in to the Divine Presence within for mental wellbeing. She is also the co-facilitator of the Global Inner Development Goals Practitioner Network, a co-creative space for Change Agents who believe that to effect societal change, personal development is necessary first. Dr Ross is an advocate for Servant Leadership and uses her gifts in service to others. As a professional singer she uses music as a form of healing in churches, schools and the greater community, uplifting and transforming one life and one community at a time. Contact: praliner@aes.enterprises