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Contents

EDITORIAL

- 1 Introducing the Inaugural Issue of the International Journal of Presencing Leadership
& Coaching
Olen Gunnlaugson

FEATURED ARTICLES

- 07 Nurturing Relational Forms of Presencing Mastery
Jessica Bockler
- 24 Cultivating Presencing Mastery in Organizations for Corporate Leaders: *Rediscovering a Values-Based Perspective through a Buddhist Inspired Framework*
Kathy Bishop & Luis Lunden
- 42 Dynamic Presencing Coaching: *Advancing a Next-Stage, Fourth-Generation Coaching Approach*
Olen Gunnlaugson
- 72 Presencing Mastery as a Relational and Iterative Way of Knowing and Being
Beatriz Carrillo
- 82 Cultivating Stillness through Yoga: *Considerations for a Deepening of Presencing Mastery at the Bottom of the U*
Renata Cueto de Souza & Charles Scott
- 96 Developing Presencing Mastery: *Drawing from the Works of Theory U, Dynamic Presencing, Mindfulness Practice & Systems Being*
Roderick Campbell & Marty Jacobs
- 111 Embodying Presencing Mastery as a Leaderly Way of Being: *An Archetypal Journey*
Katharina Sell
- 139 Progression towards Presencing Mastery with a Growth Mindset and Theory U: *A Practitioner's Journey*
Praline Ross
- 153 Reconnecting Self and Other: *Recognizing and Facilitating the Human Need to Belong as a Path to Fostering Presencing Mastery*
Ursula Versteegen

ACADEMIC THINK PIECES

- 174 An Emerging Path of Presencing Mastery: *Introducing a Framework for Exploring the Depth Dimensions of Presencing in a Coaching Context*
Olen Gunnlaugson
- 190 Rethinking Varela's Presencing Ideal: *Introducing a Three-Stage Method for Cultivating Presencing Mastery*
Olen Gunnlaugson
- 211 Reclaiming the Ontotelic Depths of Our Presencing Nature: *An Onto-Perceptual Approach to Presencing Mastery in Dynamic Presencing Coaching*
Olen Gunnlaugson

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EDITORIAL

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Introductory Remarks

Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching*! As many of you will be aware of presencing through the contributions of Otto Scharmer and colleagues with [the Presencing Institute](#), [Theory U](#), [ULAB](#) and [JASC](#)—these substantive projects have played a lead role in bringing together a global network of conscientious leaders, communities and organizations who are committed to stewarding a more promising future for all.

Alongside the above developments, over the past decade colleagues and I have published a growing body of research focusing on advancing the emerging field of presencing through the publication of several anthologies (Gunnlaugson et al., [2013](#); Gunnlaugson & Brendel, [2019](#), [2020](#), [2021](#)). These four in-depth peer-reviewed scholar-practitioner books provide an engaging overview of the thinking and research from our wider international community of scholar practitioners, independent researchers, consultants and many others. With a growing number of articles on presencing across a broad range of peer-reviewed academic journals, together our collective efforts have supported and developed Theory U-based presencing scholarship and practice in seminal ways since its inception.

In both contributing to as well as reflecting on the developmental unfolding and overall trajectory of the greater emerging presencing field, it has become apparent that there is a growing need for approaches that address the deeper underlying territory of presencing, particularly in leadership and coaching contexts. Recently, I've made a case for opening up a new direction with presencing scholarship by advocating both continued research within the Theory U-paradigm as well as encouraging exploratory paths of research and practice going forward, through what I call *emerging presencing approaches* (EPAs) (Gunnlaugson, [2023](#)).

Tracing the roots of presencing back to different Eastern, Indigenous, and global wisdom traditions, including early Greek practice, contemporary western philosophy including Existential philosopher Martin Heidegger's languaging and thinking on presencing, among other contributions, it is important to acknowledge that the subject, word itself and overall practice of presencing has a longer and diverse history that predates Theory U and current interest in the subject (Gunnlaugson, 2023).

From the early 2000s, organizational consultants Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, Otto Scharmer, and colleagues, offered a new direction and approach with their book Presence, which played a catalytic role in bringing presencing to mainstream awareness as an integrative leadership approach for learning from the emerging future. Alongside these older as well as more contemporary expressions of presencing, the earlier thinking of Francisco Varela's phenomenological method, Joseph Jaworski's storied journey of Source as an inner path of knowledge creation, and more recently my work with Dynamic Presencing focusing on a more in-depth overall mastery approach to presencing as a generative way of being have continued to clarify and excavate the deeper interior dimensions of presencing practice.

Building from these different works, our current Inaugural Issue of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* (IJPLC) showcases nine peer-reviewed *Featured Articles* and three *Academic Think Pieces*. Delving into the theme of developing presencing mastery, these contributions explore both in theory as well as in practice what is needed to develop, sustain and advance different forms and approaches to presencing mastery in leadership as well as in coaching contexts. The central theme concerning the shift from presencing *as a way of knowing* to presencing *as a generative way of being* is taken up as a red thread throughout many of the works, also imparting new insight into how presencing practice as a whole can benefit from this deeper shift in orientation on many levels. Overall, these feature articles and academic think pieces introduce important distinctions, frameworks and expanded accounts of presencing mastery, illustrating *how* as well as *why* this greater aim holds a crucial key to a continued development of the deeper potentials of presencing, particularly in contexts of presencing leadership and coaching practice.

Opening up a New Horizon in the Emerging Field of Presencing

As an alternative, independent peer-reviewed journal that is not affiliated with the Presencing Institute's *Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change* (JASC), the IJPLC aspires to become a place for new thinking that is attempting to evolve the deeper dimensions of presencing practice within the applied domains of leadership and coaching, and by extension, the greater field of presencing research. Where the scope of JASC has a cross-sectoral, inter- and transdisciplinary focus on awareness-based systems change through social field perspectives, IJPLC is specialized in rethinking as well as exploring the deeper transformational potential of presencing.

In response to a growing global awareness and interest in presencing, IJPLC aspires to support a continued evolution of diverse methods and approaches. As a generative scholar-practitioner voice, the IJPLC is committed to strengthening leadership and coaching applications, as well as introducing new directions within the greater field of presencing. We look forward to what the future will bring through this emerging wisdom lineage of theory and practice in the coming years and decades ahead!

For the purposes of giving recognition to, as well as differentiating the respective stages of presencing theory and practice, figure 1 below acknowledges the diverse historical roots of presencing from its initial *first stage* {pre-Theory U}, to its current more established *second stage* {Theory U} to its also current, yet still emerging *third stage* {Theory U and EPAs}.

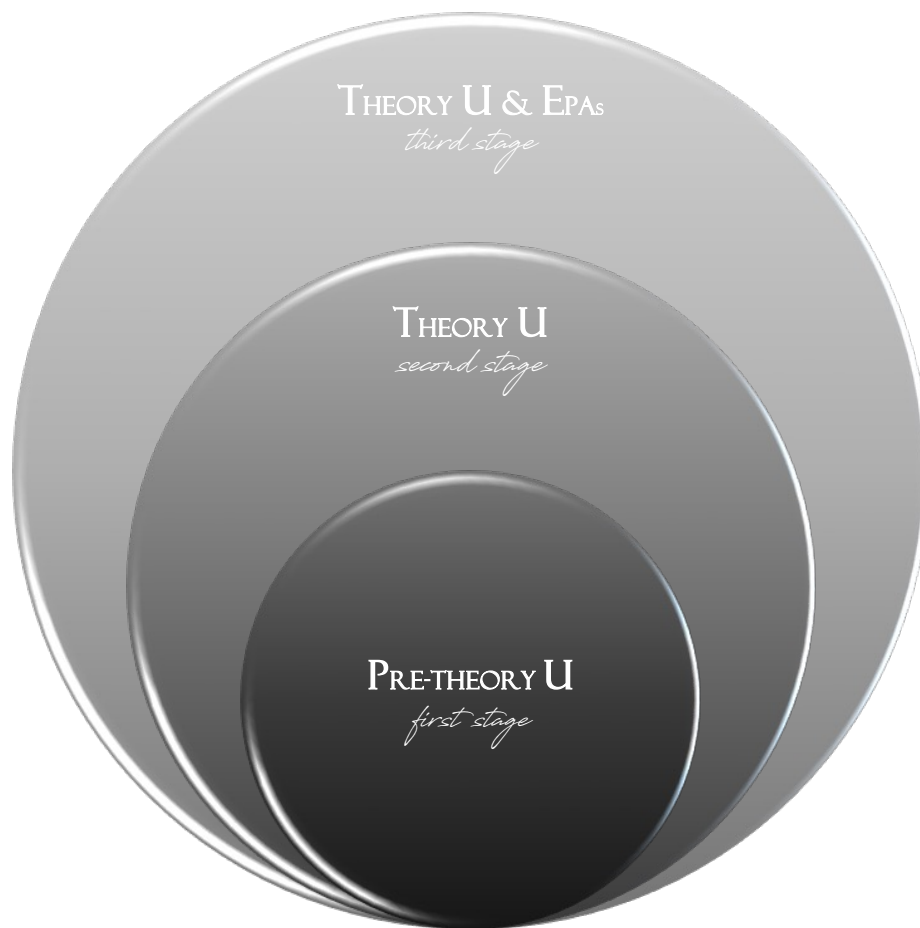


Figure 1. The Three Stages of Presencing Theory & Practice

If the current emerging *third stage* of presencing research is going to become viable in the future, as I've made a case for, there is currently a need for further developing a *plurality* of presencing frameworks, methods and overall approaches that welcome alternative *third stage* ways of thinking, critical perspectives and narratives.

In doing this, presencing researchers and practitioners regardless of their ideological or institutional affiliations, can develop a richer overall sense of

the field as a whole in ways that acknowledge points of similarity, convergence as well as divergence among the respective approaches. This is necessary to begin to establish fertile grounds for creative renewal as well as open new territory where a broader diversity of presencing practices, research and future inquiry can be explored.

Given this growing practical need for *third stage*, cross-paradigmatic research and scholarship that supports the growth and development of diverse forms and representations of presencing theory and practice, IJPLC is well positioned to support existing as well as emerging presencing approaches across leadership and coaching contexts. To open new pathways into healthy *third stage* presencing practice, there is a need for continued living inquiry, in-depth questioning as well as immersive engagement within the Theory-U-based paradigm, as well as within neighboring EPAs. In doing this, the complex needs of practitioners across different presencing communities of practice globally can be more effectively represented and engaged in the years and decades ahead for those who are called to join us in this larger conversation.

Inviting Future *Third Stage* Presencing Contributions

Each of the articles in this Inaugural Issue of IJPLC have undergone our peer-review process with members from our global team of Associate Editors and myself. Additionally as an official OJS Journal, we are pleased to have been generously offered full institutional support and licencing (complete with an ISSN, DOI's and full OJS support) from my home university, Université Laval, Québec, Canada, which has officially become the publisher and place of publication for IJPLC. In speaking with our ULAVAL team recently, they are enthusiastic to index the journal in a number of specialized academic databases, among other promising initiatives in the months ahead.

For this Inaugural Issue of IJPLC, the focus is on the theme of *Developing Presencing Mastery*. The second Issue will focus on *Presencing Embodiment*, and the third Issue explores the theme of *Collective Leadership*, with a Special Issue already planned on *Presencing Approaches to Coaching*. Contributions for the next three issues are currently being reviewed, with new submissions welcome to each of the above issues. Email me directly if you have a proposal in mind: Olen.Gunnlaugson@fsa.ulaval.ca

As a final aside, I feel it is important to address the subject of having Associate Editors and the Editor-in-Chief publish within their own journal. This practice tends to be discouraged by traditional scientific and medical journals that publish mainly empirical research. However, there are circumstances in more progressive theoretical research-based social sciences and business journals like IJPLC that take exception to this principle when the subject of research, the focus of the journal as well as the field of scholarship are in their early stages and there are limited options for publishing such specialized research.

Given that we find ourselves in such an occasion that touches on all of these four conditions, particularly concerning both the current limited options for publication as well as publishing in an emerging niche subject/journal/field, we are open to considering all submissions in equal measure. Meaning, it would be equally unfair to exclude submissions from either our team of Associate Editors or myself as Editor-in-Chief given these current circumstances.

To the extent that this inclusive practice is becoming more widely accepted among progressive journals and scholar-practitioners when conditions support it, as an additional gesture to support the development of EPAs, we are opening an exploratory sub-section entitled “Academic Think Pieces” that is separate from our main section of “Feature Articles.”

As EPAs case examples are still quite limited currently, my hope is this sub-section will eventually emerge as a robust space of engagement for future issues. For the current inaugural issue, these Academic Think Pieces showcase new thinking from my recent year-long Sabbatical as Visiting Professor at the John Molson School of Business at Concordia University, Montreal. Hopefully for our forthcoming issues, our readers and authors will grow to appreciate the value of this sub-section and more importantly, that I won't be the only one submitting contributions to it!

Going forward, I whole heartedly look forward to your interest and engagement with the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* as a current reader and future contributing author.

May our diverse efforts and generative offerings catch fire and inspire something deep and essential in you to come forth and join us in building *third stage* presencing contributions in future issues!



OLEN GUNNLAUGSON, Ph.D. serves as an Associate Professor in Leadership & Coaching within the Department of Management in the EQUIS, AACSB & PRME accredited Business School at Université Laval, in Québec, Canada. With an interdisciplinary research background in presencing leadership and coaching development, he received his Ph.D. at the University of British Columbia and did his Post-Doctorate at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada.

To date, his current and forthcoming research has been published internationally in 15 edited books as well as over 50 articles and chapters in leading academic journals and books. He has presented and keynoted at numerous international conferences and received five prestigious faculty level awards for excellence in teaching from universities in Canada and the USA. Over the past twenty years in his Master-level classes, he has taught and coached several thousand students (mainly emerging leaders, managers and executives) at universities in Canada, USA, Austria, Sweden, South Africa and South Korea.

Globally, his current research focuses on supporting those leaders, managers and coaches who aspire to develop personal mastery in leading their lives and work from an inner place of deeply resourced presence, presencing and embodied practical wisdom. Connected with this work, over the past decade he has served as lead editor of the academic-practitioner book, "Perspectives on Theory U: Insights from the Field" as well as the three volume book series, "Advances in Presencing." Recently he stepped into the thought leadership role as editor in chief of the new *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* to continue building this exciting new field of applied practice.

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NURTURING RELATIONAL FORMS OF PRESENCING MASTERY

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Abstract: Drawing on a body of collaborative work in communities of practice and research exploring holistic approaches to social transformation, in this article I discuss how a triune of community, deep participation, and embodied play may aid the cultivation of presencing mastery. For the purpose of this article, I explore presencing as a relational practice, the mastery of which requires us to come into fuller, more conscious engagement with ourselves, one another, and the world at large. To enable the deepening of each of these relationships, I make the case for integrative inner work, cultivating participatory ways of knowing that go beyond cognitive intelligence and that tap somatic, emotional, social, ecological, and spiritual insights. I posit that such integrative whole-person development is central for presencing mastery to be realised. I also discuss how communities of practice provide essential scaffolding on this journey, helping us to address our blind spots and automaticities in perception, thought and action. Creative practices and embodied play can be greatly beneficial here, loosening perceptual filters and enabling between us more open, receptive, and fluid states of consciousness that provide a kaleidoscopic appreciation of our inner and outer worlds and their complexities.

Keywords: Presencing mastery, communities of practice, integrative practice, holistic change facilitation, play, deep participation, intercorporeality, other ways of knowing, inner work, active receptivity

I. Remembering relationships

What is presencing mastery and how can we cultivate it? I gaze at my computer screen, mind open and still. I thought I knew what I was going to write – until I sat down and attempted to write it. *My gaze shifts. I'm drawn to look out of the window. Rain is falling from the grey skies outside my home in the green surrounds of the Northwest of England. My eyes soften as I sink into the embrace of the impressionist landscape before me, depicting shades of green and grey, suffused with soft purples, whites, and browns.* Why is this relevant? I ask myself, then a deeper thought surfaces: It is relevant because my shift in gaze entailed a widening and mellowing of awareness – from the still and rigid, black letters on my computer screen to the dancing colours of nature outside my window. *Rain droplets hang poised, my breath*

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suspended, from the tips of leaves. In the pause I drop deeper into being, feel the pulsing of vital energies. I see a single drop surrender to gravity. I exhale, sensing my body more deeply. As soon as I considered the question, my attention broadened, taking me from the confines of my rational mind to the dynamic wildness of nature, enlivening my being. Gazing through the window, the aperture of my awareness opened, and I was reminded of the wider, wilder world outside *and inside* of me. Presencing can remind us of this wilder world and its mystery. It can call us into a fuller participation, a dance, inviting us to deepen our relationship and to broaden our possibilities.

So, what is presencing mastery and how can we cultivate it? From my experience of working in communities of practice dedicated to presencing and holistic change facilitation, a triune relational model emerges, consisting of *community, participation* and *play*: three elements that intertwine in my experience and inform one another in service of presencing. In the following I set the scene with considerations of inner development in service of social change, broadly mapping some of the challenges I see before us. I then address each element in turn, highlighting learning and insights that have emerged from my practice and research in community initiatives over the past decade.

II. The conundrum of inner and outer

Many of us likely embrace the presupposition that presencing mastery requires individual effort, to enable the cultivation of inner skills, qualities, or capacities that we consider prerequisites for presencing. I certainly share that view, and yet I also believe that our mastery of practice is modulated by our practice-contexts and the action potential they afford us as individuals and as groups. The flourishing and mastery of practice is not automatically guaranteed if we work on ourselves by ourselves. Many different environmental and interpersonal factors – from the physical spaces we work in, to the wider landscapes and climate, to our interpersonal relations and the invisible norms of practice set by our communities and organisational contexts – shape what is possible in practice. Therefore, it is important that we pay attention to the contexts that surround and inform our practice, as much as we must make an effort to commit to inner cultivation. Inner and outer perpetually interweave in complex interplay.

The notion of inner development in service of outer change has gained traction in recent years (Woiwode et al, 2021; O'Brien, 2021; Wamsler et al., 2022); and I support and champion the idea myself, subscribing specifically to transpersonal and integrative approaches to social engagement (Rothberg & Coder, 2013; Patten, 2018). There is an increasing body of transdisciplinary research and scholarship that suggests

that the deepest leverage points for systems change, effectively addressing our global crises, are our inner states, worldviews and values (Wamsler et al., 2021). At the root of this proposition is the idea that the crises have been generated by a deep-seated sense of disconnection: from ourselves, from each other, and from nature. Embracing this belief, we are tasked with changing the story, remembering our taproot of being, our deep well of connection that joins us with the world at large (Eisenstein, 2013). The Vietnamese Buddhist monk and activist Thich Nhat Hanh called this *interbeing* (Robins, 2010). Aiming to link internal and external transformation towards greater sustainability, Wamsler et al. (2021) have developed a model which highlights a range of transformative capacities grouped into five clusters – awareness, connection, insight, purpose, and agency – that influence our perceptions and actions. Wamsler et al. (2021) also emphasise that certain intermediary factors, such as self-efficacy – the belief that one’s actions generate impact – inform how we express our agency in the world.

Critically, Wamsler et al. (2021, p.7) prompt for further research into contextual and enabling factors “that could support transformative qualities/ capacities and go beyond instrumental approaches to behavioural and systems change (e.g. policy incentives and nudging)”. There have been calls to better our understanding of how context-specific conditions and structural drivers modulate our individual and collective agency (Wamsler & Restoy, 2020; Boda et al., 2022, Cooper & Gibson, 2022). As stated in the opening of this section, I share these concerns for an overemphasis of the inner dimensions in the design of projects and interventions attempting to address our contemporary problems. As I see it, in Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and developed (WEIRD) contexts we tend to lean into the individualisation of intentionality and responsibility, underestimating how social, cultural, and structural dimensions condition our agency through deeply ingrained patterns. I mention this here because it relates to how we conceive of presencing mastery.

For the purposes of this article, I will focus on presencing practice as a collective endeavour, where we work with one another to cultivate presencing mastery *between us*, paying attention to the fine web of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal interactions. As Nicol (2015) puts it, we are embedded in reciprocal fields of consciousness relating to our familial, social, cultural, and ecological milieu. These fields of consciousness influence our mental patterns, perceptions and behaviours. Therefore, as we champion notions of *interbeing*, *interthinking* and *interacting* (Wamsler et al., 2021), we need to be careful not place the responsibility for transformation solely at the feet of individuals when it comes to the mastery of practice. Individual and collective efforts best accompany one another, for presencing is a participatory practice,

informed by the multi-dimensional contexts which shape what happens in the space between us. There is an injunction, calling us to take care of one another, presencing to each other's needs, capacities, and blind spots. In their exploration of social fields in awareness-based systems change Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) speak of the *affordance* of social fields, i.e., what behaviours, thoughts, and feelings the fields invite, as well as discourage. In co-presencing, we need to pay attention to affordance as it plays out between us and realise that “affordance is not experienced in a uniform way. Individuals differ in their propensity to ‘take up the invitation’ and go along with a certain atmosphere or pattern of interaction” (Pomeroy and Herrmann, 2023, p. 12).

Moreover, in many WEIRD contexts, *cognicentrism* prevails, as Ferrer (2003) puts it, giving the rational mind privilege over other ways of knowing and meaning-making involving our intuitive, emotional, somatic, and spiritual intelligences. These intelligences are vital in cultivating presencing mastery, as they expand our windows of perception, offering new perspectives and possibilities. Cognicentrism leads us to devise intellectually driven training regimes, prompting us to subjugate our multi-dimensional nature to extrinsic goals and performance measures – which most likely inhibit the autonomous maturation of our other intelligences, and which can potentially catalyse individual and collective existential burnout. That may sound overly dramatic! However, as Ferrer (2003) points out, Western education has been so focused on the development of the rational mind that our somatic and emotional worlds are not only under-developed but “frequently wounded, distorted, or manifesting regressive tendencies” (p. 26). Therefore, when cultivating paths of presencing mastery we need to pay attention how this plays out in our presencing practice and trainings. Are we speaking a lot from the mind? Or are we allowing non-rational voices to come to the fore? Do we give them enough breathing space? Do we trust them? Do we follow them and allow them to be expressed?

Other ways of knowing have an immense role to play as we open to and dwell in the space at the bottom of the U between the gestures of *letting go* and *letting come*. Gunnlaugson (2020) in his work with Dynamic Presencing has amplified this space, introducing the gesture of *letting be*, giving practitioners permission to slow down, and linger in the depths of their embodied experience and intercorporeality. To me, this slowing down is vital as it opens the aperture of our awareness to subtler information and impulses that can help us evolve as practitioners and human beings. When non-rational information presences itself during practice and we pay full attention to it, the energy between us shifts. There is a distinctive silence, perhaps a pause that descends as the chatter of mind subdues. The moment feels more charged – sometimes spine-

tingling, sometimes breath arresting, sometimes presencing itself through a rapidly beating heart, or a sudden urge to move! – as there is a heightened sense of potency in the group interaction. In these moments I know that I must give myself and others permission to trust and follow through, as the mind can jump in and form premature judgements of the emerging information and seemingly random impulses. Cultivating an open mind, open heart and open will involves a continuous recommitment in the moment: A commitment to trust that emerging *in-form*ation which is presencing itself between us, and to let it *in-form* us in word and action.

Given all this, it feels vital to me that we recognise several things: 1.) That inner work in service of presencing mastery is never simply or exclusively an individual and rational endeavour; 2.) that beyond a wholesome discipline, presencing practices are not best driven by extrinsic targets as external orientations can hinder autonomous emergence; and 3.) that presencing work may not be readily standardised and/or up-scaled to meet pre-configured timelines and ulterior motives. In my opinion then, holistic paths for the cultivation of presencing mastery are needed and will emerge when undertaken in nurturing and discerning communities of practice which honour the whole integrity of individuals, recognising their complexity in intricate entanglement with the world at large, and supporting their wholesome and creative participation in this larger, more than human, world.

III. The need for community

What then do we need from communities of practice to cultivate presencing mastery? A question I have been living whilst facilitating the co-creation of the *Conscious Community Initiative* (CCI, Alef Trust, 2020) and *Nurturing the Fields of Change* (NFC, Alef Trust, 2023), a community of practice and programme dedicated to exploring principles of holistic change facilitation. As Walsh et al. (2020) note, in contexts of collective learning, we learn best when we are accompanied by others who are inquiring alongside us and when the conditions are such that trusting relationships can emerge in which we can feel safe and brave enough to be more fully ourselves in exploration with others. Going beyond the original definition of a community of practice as “a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Murray & Salter, 2014, p. 4), we have endeavoured to configure our CCI and NFC as *integrative we-spaces* (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016; Patten, 2018), aiming to seed the emergence of collective wisdom through practices honouring the greater whole within, between, and beyond us.

Much learning has been generated in our shared inquiries which revolve around the braiding of conceptual explorations, reflective dialogue, and experiential practices involving embodied, contemplative, and creative methods. Our research findings from the first two years of the CCI (Bockler & Hector, 2022) highlight diverse considerations for the creation of integrative we-spaces that may be conducive for presencing mastery as they permit and enable more holistic sensing and meaning-making. We noted the necessity for deep ongoing attunement to the fractal nature of our work,

“...with self-similar patterns and characteristics repeating across varying project contexts and dimensions. ... Critically, holistic change facilitation entails a conscious attending to these fractal dynamics, noticing and calibrating their interplay. As we have found, this requires *active receptivity*, paying moment-to-moment attention to the dynamics at play in every dimension—interior and exterior, individual and collective—to nurture project coherence and tap collective intelligence. (p. 72)

Active receptivity emerged as a key relational skill, involving the continuous calibration of small, immediate adjustments in perception and action arising from moment-to-moment awareness in the relational space, like a playful movement improvisation arising between dancers. Active receptivity enabled us to be with one another more deeply, sustaining together the contact with the generative sources of our being. It enabled a communal fostering and growth of presencing mastery, which was nurtured through the shared indwelling at the bottom of the U. Dwelling there in *letting be* felt enlivening. Our holistic sensitivity to the collective and its informational field deepened, and the whole began to presence itself between us through shared imagery, emotions and felt sensations. After a decade of practice, I consider active receptivity an essential element for cultivating presencing mastery. In my experience active receptivity is enabled by

- inviting frequent pauses in dialogue and action,
- slowing down in movement and expression, to become aware of the subtler facets of our lived experiences,
- noticing what attitudes and ways of being we experience as supportive and enabling within and between one another,
- acknowledging that embodied experiences are generated between us and ripple between us,
- practicing the co-regulation of vulnerable emotions emerging in our groups,
- welcoming a diversity of views, noticing what was calling at the margins of our awareness,

- and developing trust and courage in engagement with challenging and emotionally charged material.

In the NFC which is in its first iteration this year (2023), the desire for whole-hearted connection is presencing itself, as many are experiencing the collective onslaught of anxiety, stress and grief arising from our global predicaments. There is also hunger for joint discernment and for communal care, expressing a need for balance between envisioning a future worth living for and navigating the present moment with grace, honesty, and humility, as well as compassion for self, others, and the world. And there is the recognition that we need one another in all this, to cultivate new stories and patterns in our psychosocial matrix.

If well configured and skillfully held (not that these things are ever a given!), holistic approaches to presencing mastery and, more broadly, awareness-based systems change enable engagement with the deeper sources beyond our ordinary egoic perspectives, opening our whole being to the larger, wilder emergent reality between us. Perceptions in ordinary, ego-centred states of consciousness are usually more self-referential and constrained by processes of sensory gating or filtering (Gilligan, 2012) which limit what we consciously perceive to what is of immediate relevance to our own biology, as well as to our beliefs and expectations. That is why many contemplative and spiritual traditions feature practices to help us attenuate the hold of the ego and open the aperture of awareness, so we may perceive more of the world at large. Similarly, the first gesture of presencing, *letting go*, intends to help loosen the “reducing valves” (Huxley, 1954) that constrain our perception of our emergent shared experience. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Bockler, 2021), in practice this means establishing an initiatory framework that can “support the transition of participants from an ordinary to a liminal (threshold) state ... hold them in this liminal state, and then aid their safe return” (p. 28). In the liminal state, new possibilities may become available to individuals and groups.

Designing and facilitating communities of practice that commit to presencing mastery requires an ongoing commitment to listen to the exterior and interior, as well as individual and collective dimensions of our intertwined experiences. We need to honour our individual unfolding; and we need to come into deeper relationship with one another whilst respecting our self-authorship. We must be careful not to inculcate oppressive, totalising unities of perception and narrative, to which all must subscribe. Rather, we want to welcome diversity in interbeing. As Nicol (2015) puts it:

Such a reality is not imposed unilaterally from above but (in conjunction with inspired leadership) emerges spontaneously from the voluntary participation of individuated persons

and cultures that recognize the advantages of collaborative engagement. Not only does this form of collectivity permit diversity, it actively encourages it to maximize the collective intelligence of the whole. (p. 162)

We each partake in life through a unique kaleidoscope of intersectionality (Cooper, 2016); our personal histories and positionality give rise to a unique blend of individual and collective possibilities and constraints that influence our presencing practice. Inner development in service of transformation is best done in the company of others sharing the path and appreciating the complexities of practice. The patient presence of others can help us in many ways, enabling us to co-regulate our nervous systems, to perceive blind spots and unhelpful habits, to keep us accountable, and to provide us with support and validation as well as opportunities for meeting our growing edges. This said, group work can also have its pitfalls. Even as we aspire towards wisdom, we can succumb to group think and collective folly (Bockler, 2022; Briskin et al., 2009). And so, in sum, our work is best cultivated in multi-faceted ways, thereby potentiating our holistic sensitivities, and anchoring our commitment in accountability towards self, other, and world.

IV. The need for participation

The kind of engagement I am describing above and that I believe will help us move towards robust forms of collective presencing mastery entails a participation in the deepest taproots of being. To me, presencing mastery means living in conscious engagement with these taproots or sources. As I have highlighted elsewhere (Bockler, 2021), I embrace a transpersonal perspective, positing that “psyche and nature are not two but one” (Romanyshyn, 2013, p. 38). Our inner nature is embedded in Nature at large. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we partake in an unbroken whole that is in a perpetual state of flow, or *holomovement* (Bohm, 1980). Presencing mastery is thus cultivated when we intend to align with this holomovement. This is not as obscure or abstract as it sounds. As a performing artist, to me it feels like dancing with the world. *I breathe with the trees outside my window, I let them guide me in writing the next sentence. I remind myself to connect with the world at large simply by remembering it and opening my senses to it, and that often!* In the communities of practice that I help facilitate what happens in the room emerges between us and from beyond. There is a constant flow of information and impulses rippling across the shared fields of consciousness. For example, during a recent NFC ‘case clinic,’ sensing that we got caught in the fast flow of intellectual musings, I invited a group of practitioners to pause and extend awareness towards the ground, sensing into heart and abdomen whilst connecting to earth. Some of us moved from chairs to sitting or lying on the ground. The decent into the abdomen felt like

entering what fellow NFC practitioner McTiernan (2023) describes as the Amazonian rainforest:

...a few hundred years back: a vast territory of unknown, explosively fecund power, layers upon layers of diversity balanced with each species within its specific niche; creased valleys concealing ancient cultures in perfect harmony with nature, cascading waterfalls and brooding mirror-like still waters, mountain-top views of boundless open skies above the cloud-covered jungle. (para 1)

Felt sense exercises can connect us to the ground of being, to the deeper sources of our embodied presence. Following our joint descent in the NFC case clinic, the room was still and silent, there was permission to be, there was a pregnant spaciousness that shifted us into a different kind of dialogue, more sensory and emotional in nature, literally shifting the perceptual possibilities for our work. Presencing mastery is cultivated by dwelling more and more in this embodied presence and letting it guide us in what wants to happen next.

As we become more aware of and attuned to these deeper currents of information we can come into co-creative relationship with them. To me, that is the ultimate potential of collective presencing practice. If we are aligned with the deeper currents, presencing can even be a form of *subtle activism* (Nicol, 2015) influencing the collective fields of consciousness that animate humanity and bring greater global integration and coherence.

Acknowledging the complexities at play in this work, I noted earlier that the ubiquitous *cognicentrism* in WEIRD contexts presents a particular problem in presencing and other change facilitation practices, as it gives the rational mind power over our other ways of knowing – emotional, somatic, relational, spiritual – and thereby tends to inhibit their autonomous intelligence. I find the guidance of Ferrer (2003) most helpful here, who proposes:

What is needed, then, is *to create spaces in which these human dimensions can heal and mature according to their own developmental principles and dynamics, not according to the ones that the mind thinks are most adequate*. Only when our body, instincts, sexuality, and heart are allowed to mature autonomously, will they be able to sit at the same table with our minds and co-create a truly integral development and spiritual life. In developmental terms, we could say that, before being integrated, these human dimensions need to be differentiated. (p. 26)

To this end, in our NFC community of practice we have co-created a programme that supports those working with presencing and other change facilitation approaches to engage in integrative development Ferrer (2003). I posit that integrative development is pivotal to supporting the cultivation of presencing mastery as it helps to awaken and mature our capacities in a holistic way. Critically, Ferrer differentiates between integral practice and integral training. Whilst the former is less structured and

more feminine in nature, aiming to engender our capacities and potentials through gentle holding and inward listening, the latter seeks to exercise these potentials through disciplined and structured action, taking a more masculine stance. In our NFC programme we have placed emphasis on integral practice, attuning to individual practice needs alongside a calendar of collective practice sessions and reflective meetings that provide time and space for our inner development whilst we are actively engaged in change facilitation projects.

I sense that there is great potential here to deepen the corpus of presencing practices, by bringing integral practice and training directly into presencing projects and training. We need to explore and acknowledge where we have been hijacked by the mind and habituated to approach presencing with more masculine attitudes that may be undermining the potential for organic emergence. For each of us, masculine and feminine ways of working need to be in conducive balance; and we need to listen in carefully, to calibrate our approaches, noticing day to day what we may need for our embodied, relational, spiritual, emotional, and mental lives to flourish, so that our paths of cultivating presencing mastery are informed by this holistic wisdom. The witnessing and nurturing presence of others can be enormously helpful here, as can be immersion in natural spaces radiating with vitality and abundance. Presencing practice in outdoor spaces can enable a deeper engagement, as immersion in nature can aid wellbeing, down-regulating stress (Ulrich et al., 1991) and aiding the enhancement of our attention and cognitive abilities (Berto, 2014). Reflecting on my own integrative presencing practices, being in nature, engaging with natural cycles and rhythms, helps me attune more readily to the energetic flux I encounter both in my inner life and my presencing work. It reminds me that we are all fluid beings and unfolding becomings ... and not a fixed entities. We aren't nouns but multi-faceted processes involving countless verbs: sleeping, dreaming, feeling, breathing, sensing, moving, thinking, desiring, releasing, loving, playing...

V. The need for play

I trained in theatre and community arts before I began to explore psychology; and embodied play has been a life-long passion of mine. I believe that play is central in human evolution and that notions of outgrowing play when we become adults are nonsense. In a world filled with uncertainty and complexity, play can enable skilful engagement with self and systems - or as Meadows (2002) put it, “We can't control systems or figure them out. But we can dance with them” (para 6). Play can bring greater fluidity to seemingly intractable, rigid, and unrelenting patterns and dynamics.

So, how do we understand play and what is its potential for cultivating presencing mastery? To draw out some principles I would like to bring an example from a field of practice adjacent to systems change and presencing. I have spent many years working in the arts and health sector in the UK, co-creating and co-facilitating creative programmes and community initiatives for behaviour change, to support greater health and wellbeing. I'm privileged to have initiated one of the longest-standing arts-based social prescribing programmes in existence in the England. The programme, Creative Alternatives, offers adults experiencing stress, depression, and anxiety a creative play space which is crafted by a team of experienced interdisciplinary artists who are encouraging participants to think of themselves as creatives, not patients, and to envision different ways of doing and being. Whilst Creative Alternatives is not structured as a presencing process, aspects of the community building efforts and the prototyping of new ideas and stories through creative expression resemble a U process. Making art involves dwelling in material relationships with the world. This material relationship is not reductionist and utilitarian (as may be the case in industrial production processes). Rather, it is intercorporeal and exploratory and experimental in nature, enabling the U curve, with particular emphasis on *letting be* and *letting come*. In Creative Alternatives mindfulness exercises frame and enhance the creative work cycle, and the arts materials stimulate the senses. There is an organic play with the materials that absorbs us, brings us into the present moment. We often enhance this experience by inviting participants to work with natural materials and found objects. And we invite them to trust the process, not placing overall emphasis on the final outcome. By creating an organic, playful context “people could experiment and discover different ways of being, thus beginning to release old patterns and make new choices in their daily lives” (Bockler, 2016, para 5). This feels vital for presencing practice. My sense is that well-crafted creative spaces, inviting more unbounded and free multi-sensory play and improvisation, would benefit presencing. If people were afforded more opportunity for free play, permitting them to *attune to what-is* (Gunnlaugson, 2020), I believe the capacity for sense-making and organic emergence would be enhanced.

I want to unpack a little more how and why this may be the case. Following years of experimentation and research, I perceive play as a universal adaptive process, enabling what Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) called *assimilation* and *accommodation* in a world constantly in flux. Whilst those two concepts are not homogenous in their meaning across disciplinary domains, Hanfstingl et al. (2021) assert that the following broad definition is widely accepted: “...assimilation means integrating environmental information into internal structures and schemas, while accommodation means

changing internal structures to meet environmental demands” (p. 331). Both assimilation and accommodation are essential for all life to maintain a healthy equilibrium and develop in response to evolving circumstances. Play enables a continuous adaptive re-patterning in service of evolution and flourishing.

Diving deeper into the psychological dynamics at play, pun intended, I want to consider how adaptive re-patterning may come about and then explore how this relates to presencing. It is well known that our motor skills, thinking, and perception, are subject to processes of automatisisation (Fitts, 1964; Deikman, 1966). This enables the fluency one associates with skill mastery: The more we practice a skill, the more it becomes a habit and the more it disappears from our ordinary awareness. In the end, we can execute the skill without paying much attention as the cognitive load is greatly reduced (Haith & Krakauer, 2018). Skill automaticity is vital for our daily functioning, and yet it also presents a risk, in that established habits narrow our perception and thinking, and those established habits can be hard to modify in the face of changing circumstances (Haith & Krakauer, 2018). We become stuck in our ways of perceiving, thinking, and doing. Creative activities in safe spaces, encouraging us to plunge with irreverence into playful experimentation, can, sometimes subtly, sometimes boldly, untether us from those habituated ways, returning us to the freshness of the present moment and inviting us to perceive the world and ourselves from unexpected angles. This I consider to be immensely useful in presencing practice, particularly when it comes to multi-modal play, enabling multi-sensory processing, and embodied forms of play which combine exterior movement, postural and gestural work with interior forms of attending and sense-making, e.g., via felt sense (Gendlin, 2003) and inter-bodily resonance. As Pomeroy and Herrmann (2023) elucidate, inter-bodily resonance offers us a strong avenue into the shared sensing of systems, helping us “to surface collective insight about hidden patterns and underlying dynamics of that social body” (p. 8). When we attune to intercorporeal resonances we become aware of the subtle patterns, shaping our relationships and interactions; and becoming aware we can begin to shift those patterns.

I recall a presencing exercise at a transpersonal symposium I attended, which commenced with the invitation to express our individual positions ... and to find common ground. The initial result felt chaotic, a cacophony of voices, vying for attention of the group. Gradually individual voices subsided and instead we began to move - first erratically as people were still acting as individuals not attuned to the social field. Then one, two, three of us paused and listened. We grouped together and witnessed one another, softly breathing, attuning, and gradually harmonising in

movement and sound. Once louder, the harmonic sound rippled through the space at an astounding speed and the energy in the entire conference room transformed. Common ground emerged through vocal harmony whilst bodies arranged in space were expressive of individual positions. There was a sense of coherence which guided subsequent reflections in heartfelt and refreshingly honest ways as people shared from a deeper place of embodied presence and care. This simple exercise opened us to what might be described as a gentle aperspectival awareness. “We move from having a perspective to being able to move into many perspectives to holding multiple perspectives simultaneously to seeing through presuppositions to awareness” (Hart, 2000, p. 163).

The attenuation of the ordinary self in play can prompt an opening to those deeper streams and sources that animate our lives. Gilligan (2018) refers to this opening as a loosening of reality filters. Gilligan (2012) proposes that creative flow engenders within us a generative trance state that opens the filters and “All the ordinary structures of identity that are usually fixed – time, embodiment, memory, logic, identity – become variable, free to generate new patterns and identities” (p.32). In the CCI and NFC programme we found such creative widening of the aperture of awareness to be an essential feature of holistic presencing praxis. It enabled a more conscious engagement with the archetypal dimensions of being:

We listen to the mycelium below ground, we follow the song lines and murmurings of our groups and communities. Where the deeper levels are not consciously engaged, processes and people tend to stagnate and/or certain prevailing archetypes find unconscious expression. For example, we find that the martyr archetype is dominant amongst many change facilitators, invoking a drive to self-sacrifice and to neglect self-care, and eventually causing burnout. We believe that archetypal levels are always engaged—unconsciously or consciously—and it is our responsibility to notice what is active, for good or bad, and what has been marginalised and needs to come to the fore in the service of our projects. (Bockler & Hector, 2022, p. 61)

A more playful approach in presencing practice could therefore be a game changer, enabling an opening to rationally uncharted territories, with the trust that the unknown holds potential for renewed vitality and increased coherence.

When we practise in these whole-hearted, embodied, and playful ways, we can get infused with a joie de vivre, an embodied vitality and enthusiasm that can be infectious and compelling. Opening to the full spectrum of our experience can lead to a sense of wonder, inspiration and awe. Vitality and joy can help us release into the unknown, the mystery of being ... and channelling what is emerging from the mystery can increase our sense of vitality and purpose. There is a kind of re-enchanting, affirmative feedback loop! (Bockler & Hector, 2022, p. 63)

VI. Conclusion

In the above article I have explored how a triune of community, participation and play may benefit us in the cultivation of relational forms of presencing mastery. My proposition is, in essence, quite simple: That presencing mastery necessitates a kind of mandala of integrative, relational work, honouring our multi-faceted nature in playful and more conscious relationship with one another and the sources of being that animate all life. Such integrative work – finding expression as practice or training – may enable within us and between us more fluid and generative states of being that provide a more expansive and more kaleidoscopic appreciation of our world and its complexities, thereby broadening our insights and action potential in presencing work. To enable new forms of presencing mastery we need supportive communities of practice in which new possibilities of being can be fostered through indwelling at the bottom of the U. Such indwelling must prioritise embodiment, the cultivation of trust, and a deep sense of playful participation before we move to enacting new ideas and visions in the world. New possibilities of being require us to explore and deepen our sense of intercorporeality, and they need time to be cultivated and strengthened in supportive social fields that can offer us oases in the deserts of prevailing narratives and psychosocial patterns.

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CULTIVATING PRESENCING MASTERY IN ORGANIZATIONS FOR CORPORATE LEADERS: *Rediscovering a Values-Based Perspective through a Buddhist Inspired Framework*

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Abstract: This article shares a theoretical framework supported by hands-on practices that can help corporate leaders develop and refine their core values in the context of developing presencing mastery. Presencing mastery enables a deeper way of being: one that is generative and contextually embodied. Drawing on our academic and practitioner experience, we propose exploring leadership values within a Buddhist inspired framework from a values-based leadership perspective as a means for creating the inner space in leaders to awaken a more profound sense of purpose and service. As a whole, presencing, values-based leadership, and Buddhist psychology intersect in their common intent of operating from one's generative inner being as primary.

Keywords: Presencing, Values, Values-based Leadership, Buddhist Principles, Organizational Leadership Practice

I. Introduction

In this article, we share a theoretical framework supported by hands-on practices that can help corporate leaders shift their current understanding of presencing. According to Gunnlaugson (2020), presencing is “a generative expression of our deeper nature” (p. 8). Presencing mastery develops from a more advanced applied knowledge of presencing as a way of being that is cultivated through a deepening of one's presencing self and facilitated through the approach *Dynamic Presencing* (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2021, 2023), which builds from Scharmer's (2009) Theory U. Elucidating the uncharted basal territories of inner transformation of one's existing presencing practice,

through a process of five journeys Dynamic Presencing uncovers presencing as an integrated, embodied way of being and relating to one's experience (Gunnlaugson, 2020). Passing through the threshold of each apprenticeship journey works with a process of integrating presencing from one's core faculties of presence, knowing, perceiving, communicating, and leading. The fivefold journey as a whole can be profoundly transformative in facilitating an embodied understanding of how to develop the potential of presencing as a way of knowing to a deeply generative way of being. Alongside Dynamic Presencing, drawing on our academic and practitioner experience, we pose that leaders can enrich their overall presencing mastery as a generative way of being by rediscovering the core values that drive their organizational leadership practice through a Buddhist inspired framework of cultivating wisdom, ethical awareness, and meditative practices. Influenced by the Noble Eightfold Path, this framework provides the practitioner with an entry point to explore the workings of the mind and its subsequent application into daily life as a journey of gradual transformation. The psycho-spiritual exploration and practice of Buddhist-based principles and leadership values surfaces related uncultivated dimensions of presencing into one's awareness and practice. Furthermore, exploring deeper leadership values supports the work of Dynamic Presencing in; "rerouting the prevailing Theory U path of *coming-to-know* through a deeply immersive embodied way of *coming-to-be*" (Gunnlaugson, 2023). Combining values-based leadership (Barrett, 2017) with Buddhist psychological principles (Ricketts, 2016) serves as a conduit and leverage point to help leaders shift the inner source location from where they operate, unveiling and expanding individuals' understanding of purpose by being in service to people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships (Valuescentre, 2020). Embracing knowing from being in this manner enables practitioners to observe, connect, and challenge additional dimensions of deeply held values that pertain to their presencing practice. The values-based journey triggers new horizons of inner knowledge and behavior, potentially aligning mind and heart into a congruent quality of being that is needed to grow the essence of presencing as a way of being. Revisiting, questioning, and experimenting with leadership values within this proposed framework creates a rich inner environment to revive a more profound sense of purpose and service that catalyzes a shift in presencing practice.

I.1. A presencing mastery pathway in the corporate context

In today's mainstream corporate environments, leaders often struggle with integrating their deeper purpose with more traditional institutional management role

expectations. Corporate leaders are called upon to deal with an array of emergent workplace demands (Deloitte, 2021) while simultaneously addressing complex societal challenges (Edelman, 2020). Without adequate support, competing workplace priorities can bring about a displacement from core values, which in turn affects the quality and depth of leadership presence, presencing and effectiveness. At the core of this dilemma is a deeper longing, barely noticeable when entwined in daily business routines, a yearning for meaning, value and, to belong authentically and contribute purposefully within the organization's culture.

Amidst this entangled landscape, a mastery path of presencing offers an opportunity to find a way to transform the above described dilemmas many leaders face. Learning to lead from the emerging future “requires us to tap into a deeper level of our humanity, of who we really are and who we want to be as a society” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p. 1). Scharmer (2009) contends, “A deep threshold needs to be crossed in order to connect to one's real source of presence, creativity, and power” (p. 164). In Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020), this threshold is ontological and involves shifting from presencing as a way of knowing to a dynamic way of being. In a leadership context, crossing this threshold requires moving from paradigms informed by the great man theory (Mouton, 2019) or the heroic notion of leadership (Goethals & Allison, 2019) to a post egoic, humanistic awareness, which lies at the core of presencing leadership. By learning to integrate self-development with a renewed commitment for the greater good, leaders can develop a more enriched and integrated “full spectrum consciousness” (Barrett, 2017, p. 234). In this way, a gradual shift in leadership motivation and drive from *me-based* thinking to *we-based* engagement (Barrett, 2017; Dethmer et al., 2015) can take place. Similar to Barrett's model, in Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) presencing mastery comes gradually through ongoing practice and refinement of deeper learning journeys that move presencing from more inner generated modes of presencing – *primary presence*, *primary knowing*, and, *primary perceiving* – to more interconnected, collective ones – *primary communicating* and *primary leading* (Figure 1). Gunnlaugson (2020) identified the challenge to make presencing actionable in leadership contexts today as a generative way of being is not only about learning how to access source through stillness, but also to learn how to lead from source as a way of being with one's presencing experience and in relationship.

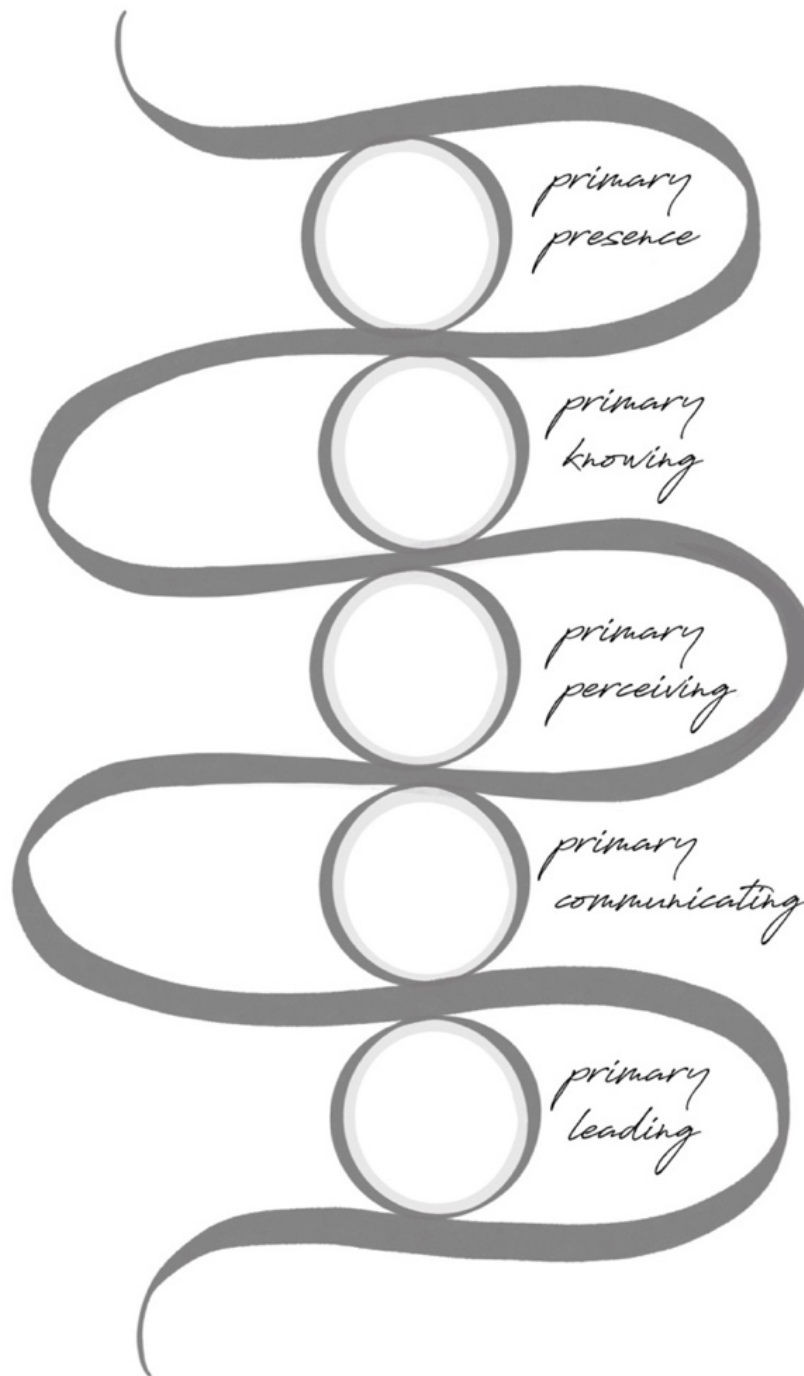


Figure 1.0 The Five Journeys of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 147)

I.2. Values awareness

As principles that are essential to humans, on a head, heart, hand, and spirit level, values-awareness plays an integral role in the quality and depth of leaders' presencing experience. Hall (2006) noted, that "values are ideals that give significance to our lives, that are reflected through the priorities we choose, and that we act on consistently and repeatedly" (p. 21). When values are deeply aligned with personal

meaning and actions, leaders act with authenticity and integrity. In many corporate environments, leaders have experienced a growing fragmentation and decoupling of values-awareness by diminishing emotional intelligence through the progressive separation of heart and mind (Miller, 2021). From our perspective, the mind transcends brain activity by encompassing the quality of reasoning (Leaf, 2021), while the heart goes beyond its biological purpose and involves emotional aspects of the self (Alshami, 2019). In certain empirically dominated contexts of leadership, where hard facts and figures drive decision making, many leaders have unknowingly and progressively smothered, or at worst shut down their access to deeper presencing sources of knowing and leading. Yet the evidence is conclusive: successful leaders draw from their intuition (Rowan, 1986) and “the practice of opening to a deeper knowing, a higher sensory perception, a calling, an inner voice” (Anderson & Adams, 2016, p. 259).

Various values-based leadership frameworks exist for approaching and living values personally and organizationally (Askeland et al., 2020; Barrett, 2017; Hall, 2006). In particular, Barrett (2017) offered a seven levels model that identified developmental phases of consciousness with values and behaviors associated with each stage of consciousness (p. 64). Barrett’s (2017) model is useful in recognizing that (a) leaders approach opportunities and challenges from different levels of consciousness and (b) all levels are needed for a holistic perspective. Comparable to climbing a mountain and observing the view at different stages, leaders incrementally expand their values-based perspective as they move up through each level. With an expanded perspective, leaders can then bring a more fulsome understanding to earlier stages of consciousness. In doing so, leaders can provide leadership aligned with the level of consciousness and its associated values, beliefs, and actions. For example, during a time of downsizing when the corporate focus is on viability, an employee may become fearful of losing their job and shift into a focus on personal survival. If an organizational leader is acting from a transformation-evolution perspective and rallies for creative thinking, they likely will encounter resistance because an employee, being in survival mode, needs reassurance and security first. In this way, a values-based leadership framework can help leaders explore their own level of consciousness and associated values, seek to align personal and organizational values, and become more present with themselves and their people to support moving through other levels of consciousness. The full spectrum process unveils an increasingly altruistic perspective for both personal and organizational transformation processes, especially when engaged mindfully.

I.3. Buddhism and an inspired framework

Buddhism has gradually made its way into the corporate world by encouraging the practice of mindfulness (Purser, 2018), a subset of meditative practices, inviting the practitioner to seek a heightened level of equanimity by anchoring the mind in the present moment through “metacognitive introspection awareness” (Yates et al., 2017). Meditative practices have gained credibility in many organizations, albeit not without criticism, primarily given their positive contribution to performance and well-being (Choi et al., 2022; Shahbaz & Parker, 2022). Foregoing its Buddhist origin (Choi et al., 2022), the proliferation of mindfulness has served as a stepping stone to normalizing the exploration of the inner being in a corporate landscape. However, its western secularization has neglected the opportunity to include other elements afforded by Buddhist psychology that support a purposeful practice with, “an ongoing heartfelt reflection on priorities, values, and purpose” (Batchelor, 1997, p. 41).

Buddhist psychology pursues harmonious living by observing and shifting unwholesome emotional states through transformational practices facilitating the ability to progressively transcend a conditioned self-serving motivation towards an amplified altruistic core for self, teams, and organizations to grow. A Buddhist inspired framework invites the practitioner to integrate and nurture three interdependent disciplines: personal wisdom, ethical awareness, and meditative practices (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho & Chodron, 2019). Cultivating wisdom speaks to the ability to deeply question the nature of reality (Batchelor, 2015; Bodhi, 2020) and includes the interconnectedness of all existence (Anālayo, 2021; Goldman-Schuyler, 2012). Developing an ethical lens essentially calls upon minimizing harm to self, others, and the environment by creating a cognitive moral compass (Loy, 2018; Norman, 2010). Meditative practices serve the function of clearing the mind to regain focus and affording new insights to surface (Bodhi, 2020). These interdependent steps act as catalysts to expand or challenge existing mindsets and while they are not all encompassing of the vast continuum of Buddhist knowledge, they represent an entry point for initial experimentation. Ultimately, combining these practices seeks to transcend self-absorbed states of being, allowing for altruistic awareness and cognition to emerge.

Dynamic Presencing, values-based leadership, and Buddhist psychology intersect in their common intent of facilitating a transformational experience of one's values to reencounter and operate from one's inner being as primary. Together, each plays a role in affording the practitioner a concrete experiential path, albeit not necessarily linear, as access points into generative being. In the next sub-sections of this

article, we will go a step further in considering a Buddhist inspired framework by addressing how the three practices, 1) cultivating wisdom, 2) enhancing ethical awareness, and 3) practicing meditation play a key role in creating awareness and the competency to live values skillfully (Viinamäki, 2012) that in turn serve as helpful catalysts for developing leaders' presencing mastery.

II.1. Cultivating wisdom

Cultivating wisdom entails an inner journey into the nature of existence and reality in which societal and cultural conditioning are called into question, challenging deeply conditioned habits (Brach, 2019; Hanson & Mendius, 2009). In utilizing a values-based framework to cultivate wisdom, leaders locate the values that are true to who they are, while also identifying where the gaps may be to embody a full spectrum leadership approach. To develop, leaders can explicitly and intentionally align with the values they will attend to as part of their daily leadership practice from a holistic perspective. As a starting activity, leaders can identify their core values and check these essential values against actions, distinguishing between espoused and lived values (Barrett, 2017; Schein, 2010). Espoused values are those that the leader or organization professes as important whereas lived values are the those that are observed in behavior and decision-making. Leaders' may utilize journaling as a way to explore their values development and cultivate wisdom by reflecting-in-action (i.e., attending to their experience in real time) and reflecting-on-action (i.e., reviewing their experiences via journaling after the fact; Schön, 1987). Reflecting in and on action can help leaders develop their ability to observe and bear witness to what is going on internally and externally for them.

An example of an open process of journaling is free writing, which involves writing, nonstop, without filtering one's thoughts, for a timed period. It is a way to access creative, and often unconscious, narrative possibilities and inner guidance and wisdom. A writing prompt can be used to start the free writing process to focus one's writing, offer inspiration and be used to develop values work through a prompt such as, "How might I show up more [name the desired value] today," or, "What is calling to me to live or lead purposefully?" A structured way to approach journaling would be to write according to Kolb's experiential learning cycle (as cited in Coghlan, 2019, p. 34) which consists of engaging in four areas (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) or Schein's ORJI model (as cited in Coghlan, 2019, p. 34), which involves observation, reactions, judgements, and interventions to observe thoughts, actions, and behaviors.

Applying Kolb's experiential learning cycle (as cited in Coghlan, 2019), a leader could journal about a concrete experience in which they experienced a values conflict with one of their team members. They could reflect on what they thought and how they felt, contemplating what this conflict might mean in terms of ways of approaching a situation dependent on underlying values. After considering the experience, leaders could decide on a few next steps and test them out in action. Similarly, a leader could apply Schein's ORJI model (as cited in Coghlan, 2019) by asking colleagues to offer values-based feedback on how they are showing up, and then journal about their observations, reactions, judgments, and derive interventions that they could apply to intercede differently in the future. These models enable leaders' to utilize their own experience in context to explore, make sense of their learning, and open up possibilities around next steps to take in their leadership.

To further deepen learning and leadership, leaders can work with values-based leadership frameworks to craft their purpose and guide their decision making intentionally and explicitly. For example, a leader can approach an organizational project by considering viability, relationships, measurements of success and achievement, ways to support continuous learning, develop personal alignment, cultivate collaboration through a shared vision and values, and inspire a greater purpose or contribution. This decision-making pathway follows the seven levels of consciousness of Barrett's (2017) values-based leadership model. A leader can then choose the most useful values to address for each level (e.g., financial resources or psychological safety of people for survival-viability, belonging or open communication for relationship, quality or efficiency for self-esteem-performance, agility or accountability for transformation-evolution, integrity or trust for internal cohesion-alignment, partnerships or mentoring for making a difference-collaboration, and living purpose or stewardship for service-contribution). While values do not exist in isolation, often they can cluster. When leaders work within a values-based framework in a holistic way as illustrated, they become more connected to their self and source, uncovering a greater sense of purpose and contribution, and gaining presencing mastery by learning to shift between stages of consciousness with associated values as required for full spectrum leadership. Drawing on practices like free writing or more structured journaling approaches enables leaders to journey the path of primary presence which involves moving through four grounds: *being real*, *being witness*, *being essence* and *being source* (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 33-61). Through reflecting in and on presenced action, leaders get in touch with their presencing self and what is important to them as expressed in their values. Utilizing

frameworks like Kolb and Schein (as cited in Coghlan, 2019) to guide a critical values-based inquiry, leaders can discover new insight from the four grounds of primary presence. Through reflecting on their concrete values experience and observations in *being real*, leaders become aware of their own perceptions and mental models by connecting with reality as it is. Leaders work with *being witness* when they consider their reflective values observations and reactions, in turn gaining an expansive yet connected perspective to discover what is of value to self and others. When leaders discern insights from *being essence*, they can align with the depths of who they are, to become more aligned with their core values as part of their own essence. With an expanded perception both from within and outside of themselves, leaders enable a flow of consciousness between different values perspectives as they engage in active experimentation and interventions. In the final stage of *being source*, leaders can connect to the deeper source of their values in these moment to moment experiences to discover their authenticity and overall alignment within themselves and their organizations.

Moving from primary presence to primary knowing can occur with the opening of the mind, heart, and deeper faculties of being by delving into the intrinsic values that support a leader's dismantling of self-limiting paradigms. Within the journey of primary knowing which involves a *letting go* of the limiting paradigm and in turn, opens an indwelling space for *letting be*, and then *letting come* can shift awareness to a more emergent wisdom at subtle, embodied levels of one's experience (Gunnlaugson, 2020, pp. 65-84). Leaders are then able to cultivate emerging forms of values-based awareness that in turn, can be integrated to deepen insight and learning to advance their overall presencing mastery through the journeys of primary presence and primary knowing.

II.2. Enhancing ethical awareness

The essence of enhancing ethical awareness in Buddhist psychology stems from the ability to see fellow human beings as fundamental equals. Consequently, ethical awareness is rooted in empathy. While it should not be confused with moral certainty, it invites the practitioner to question the most compassionate action to take in any situation (Batchelor, 1997). Compassion in this realm is not to be understood as related to passive observation and resignation, but as an opportunity to connect with someone else's struggle and take skillful action, an approach identified as "courageous compassion" (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho & Chodron, 2019, p. xv). The intent driving this discipline is ensuring that leaders observe due diligence and accountability, which enables them to handle a situation in an emotionally intelligent way, whether they are

letting go of someone at work or attempting to have a crucial conversation. Kabat-Zinn (1994) recommends considering “if you are really seeing them or just your thoughts about them” (p. 26). In this space of inquiry lies the opportunity to connect meaningfully, lifting the subjective projections, and connecting with another human being. This profound connection can change the dynamics of the interaction, embracing compassionate intent while affording a deep quality of attentiveness.

At this point, it can be helpful to explore how ethics and morality diverge and converge. While morality is generally understood as grounded in personal values, ethics is more prominent in social and professional contexts (Grannan, 2016); hence, they are seen as distinct but intertwined principles. While the essence of human equality is oddly simplistic, embracing its full significance equates to a herculean shift in thinking. In the current world where polarization and extremes abound, it is relatively easy to observe equality among those an individual respects and admires, yet it is counterintuitive to observe the self as related to those with divergent values (Lieberman, 2022). However, as leaders draw upon values-based frameworks, they can see how a variety of values are needed within any project and start to call people in, rather than call them out (Ross, 2021).

To enhance ethical awareness, leaders can work with developing their moral compass by examining their deeply held idealized values, like human rights and global justice, and then consider what personal and organizational actions may be needed to support living these values. They can engage in discussions about what it means to attend to the common good and how true collaboration can happen within the workplace. They can champion having regular leadership dialogue circles in the workplace, thereby cultivating belonging. The focus can also be on alignment, in which employees are encouraged to uncover and live into their purpose and identify what values they will hold to as a moral compass. These personal values can then be discussed with colleagues to evolve shared values for the organization. At the heart of these shared values is attending to the common good through considering me, you, us, and all. This inquiring exercise aligns with values-based leadership as it is “the exercise of influence and/or authority balancing healthy self-interest and the common good” (O’Toole, 1996, p. 1). Through this gradual practice of developing an ethical lens, leaders can be inspired to create a cognitive moral compass minimizing harm to themselves, others, and the environment.

Another activity that leaders could do is attend to values focusing on current workplace issues. A current workplace issue is equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). The

American Council of Education in partnership with the Pullias Centre for Higher Education_ developed a Shared Equity Leadership Model (Kezar et al., 2019) to address EDI. At the heart of the model is a leader's personal journey to consider how they have come to journey around EDI. This is then supported by values that have been identified to serve a shared equity leadership journey and builds out to include practices. As a way of enhancing their ethical awareness, leaders could choose to explore the shared equity leadership values, not simply by thinking about them but by exploring how the values come to life in their own leadership practice. For a period of time, a leader could choose to live and lead with one of the Shared Equity Leadership Model value areas: mutuality, vulnerability, humility, accountability (self and collective), courage, creativity and imagination, transparency, comfort with being uncomfortable, love and care.

Leaders do not often discuss what being a leader means to them, nor do they explicitly name their values. Imagine two leaders: one who thinks of leadership and shows up as being accountable to self and others and another who thinks of leadership as creativity and imagination. If they were in the same room for a project, one might focus on putting in structures and systems of how to move forward, whereas the other might be rallying for a shared vision and exploring possibilities. These two leaders could find themselves in conflict if they have not clearly communicated their values. In sharing their values, leaders gain empathy and compassion for each other which helps establish a common ground for how to move forward. By working with values that honor self and others, leaders develop a greater inclusive ethical awareness.

Leaders utilize values exploration, collective dialogue, and values frameworks in their workplaces to enhance their ethical awareness. In particular, these activities can be integrated with the Dynamic Presencing journeys of *primary perceiving* and *primary communicating*. Primary perceiving involves *attuning to what-is, entraining what-is-emerging, and discerning the arising new* (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 87-103). Leaders attune to what-is by anchoring their presence in who they are with their values serving as their moral compass. Being clear on their values enables leaders to allow for emergence at the felt-level of their experience. Leaders can draw upon their values to be in a relational experience with their inner being and the external context so that they are actively connected and participating with emergence. From here, they can work with entraining with what is emerging by connecting their presencing awareness to their core values. This can provide openings to discern the arising new as leaders remain in touch with emergence and their presencing self in the inquiry. A leader can remain present through holding a big picture view (by drawing on models like Barrett or SEL) while at the same

time attending to the common good and espoused values to monitor possible gaps or discrepancies. In this way, primary perceiving helps create conditions for leaders to gain insight into the nature of values alignment in themselves and their organizations. Primary communicating draws on different presencing field locations in the *i-space*, *you-space*, *we-space*, and *all-space* to heighten presencing across all fields (Gunnlaugson, 2020, pp. 107-135). Values reflection and dialogue enable this deeper engagement across the four field-spaces. Gunnlaugson (2021) noted that “through the course of developing, deepening, and maturing one’s presencing leadership, leaders uncover a deeper resilient source of transpersonal meaning and purpose (Gunnlaugson, 2020; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2021, 2020, 2019) that can be potentially drawn from to develop our ethical compass and moral perception (Bai, 1999)” (p. 2). Leaders can uncover this deeper source of meaning and purpose, through engaging in dialogue to understand and co-create shared values. At the heart of shared values is attending to the common good, which encompasses considering me, you, us, and all. Thus, leaders can develop their presencing self as an “embodied reference point” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 111) in which they then can nurture and steward the presencing process across each collective field location. As teams and organizations work with their shared values to bring them to life in service of organizational and societal challenges, they can explore moving between healthy self-interest and the common good which is akin to the primary communicating experience that enables both agency and interrelatedness.

Developing ethical awareness at these deeper levels of our being invites leaders to cross a threshold into collective coherence through the journeys of *primary perceiving* and *primary communicating*. By attuning to the ethical dimension of their experience through presencing, leaders can engage in introspective and collective values dialogue while renewing their moral compass's understanding and creating a collective awareness to deepen organizational values. In turn, this collective awareness enhances presencing beyond the realm of the self in attempting to address corporate challenges.

II.3. Practicing meditation

The notion of meditation generally can convey a misunderstanding of its purpose as attaining a sense of calm. In reality, reaching a state of inner relaxation is a by-product of meditation. At a primary level, the purpose of meditative practices is to sweep the mind from excessive thought, to observe what arises without judgment but curiosity, and to learn to pace reactivity when engulfed in an overstimulated environment. When starting meditative practices, the focus can be curiosity,

observation, and acceptance without judgment of arising thoughts. The intent of this process is not to clear the mind at this stage, but rather to create a space to explore the nature of mind. Seeking to observe without judgment can be misinterpreted as passivity, so differentiation between observing and the following action is required.

Understanding that the self is experiencing anger or agitation should not become an excuse for unskillful behavior but the opportunity to learn to react skillfully, creating a space for growth. Feelings affect behavior; therefore, it is essential to appreciate this causality loop by setting a higher intent of growth beyond mere surveillance.

Leaders can follow a simple five-minute exercise at the beginning of the day to ascertain how they feel by attending to their experience, sitting upright in a quiet space, and paying attention to their breathing. Undoubtedly, the mind will do what the mind does best, propelling a barrage of random thoughts to manifest. The skill is not to ignore what arises but to observe it with curiosity and, once acknowledged, caringly let it dissipate. Paying attention and observing serves to relax the nervous system, which, in turn, represents an opportunity to connect with the first few glimpses of being, the opening and sensing of consciousness. Working with leaders, we have observed the most challenging endeavor is to create a cadence of practice amidst the busyness of work. As with all meditative pursuits, creating the habit, even if for a few minutes a day, is the most critical initial step, as irregular practice yields lesser results, even when practiced for extended periods. Once an initial routine has been developed for a few weeks, it may be productive to slowly start introducing the observation beyond breath and mind and attend to the somatic experience, mentally scanning the body and detecting areas of stress.

Buddhist meditation embraces a plethora of approaches not limited to sitting in a lotus position and observing the breath (Rahula, 1980). Our observation is that meditative reflection combined with intellectual and scientific context is beneficial to leaders. The essence of meditation calls for simple progressive gains, such as sitting for a few minutes in the company of oneself and observing what arises. These techniques illustrate the concept of no-big-deal meditation, subsiding unnecessary pressure (Kabat-Zinn, 2015) as a sense of failure may emerge if leaders measure progress against unrealistic expectations. Given the brain's neuroplasticity, of being able to carve new neural pathways, resulting in more mindful reactions, supports leaders in continuing their meditative learning.

In meditation, the organizational cultural norm of busyness as a source of leadership worth plays havoc with creating an adequate developmental space. During a

recent program delivery, when posed with the question “How are you feeling?” a participant shared their inner conflict about taking time for personal development at the cost of dealing with pressing work demands. Finding time to cultivate personal growth feels counterintuitive for most leaders. Complex challenges can be overwhelming and may spiral into a vicious circle of knee-jerk reactions, self-defeat, and lack of purpose. Finding the space to grow and lead from sustained awareness continues to be one of the hardest challenges for leadership development.

Leaders can begin meetings with “a mindful minute” (Reitz & Chaskalson, 2016, p. 6), a way to take a moment to engage in “collective breathing” (Fairbanks Taylor & Bishop, 2019, p. 106). As an example, leaders in a meeting can invite participants to take four shared breaths together in a presencing circle, as this provides a quick way to help people to refocus on the present moment, become in sync with each other and be primed to deal with issues at hand. Breathing together and sitting in a circle with others can also support meditative learning. Values, such as being in service, stewardship, creativity, agility, courage, or collaboration, can be meditated upon. Thereafter, the leader can facilitate a shared understanding and develop a strategy about how to prosper in the organization through the values perspective. Leaders can also expand this practice into their daily routine. As a way to engage deeper with collaboration, they can choose to be present with their intuition and act accordingly. For example, if they are attending a networking event, they could be mindful to listen to their intuition and see how this guides them to the right people and situations that aligns with their purpose and opens up possibilities for collaboration.

Practicing meditation can support moving through higher stages of consciousness, profoundly altering how individuals interact with their surroundings and their experience (Harris, 2015), which creates supportive conditions for “presencing to take root in our immediate experience and progressively become second nature to us” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 149). This is a critical step to supporting the presencing mastery aim of fostering a generative way of being. We contend that practicing meditation with values is at the heart of primary leading which involves *accessing one’s stillpoint, connecting to the source and leading from presencing awareness* (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 140). Through establishing regular practice, a leader can work with meditative awareness throughout the day, individually and collectively, to renew their felt connection between their own ground of presence and the presencing field-spaces that they are engaging (e.g., i-space, you-space, we-space, all-space). Depending on which space of presencing they are engaging, leaders can direct their presencing process accordingly. For example, working

with a five-minute morning meditation personally in one's i-space, doing a mindful minute with a colleague to create optimal conditions for engaging their you-space, starting a team meeting with shared breathing in the we-space, or tapping into intuition in their decision making and daily actions to access the all-space. Within these different meditation practices, leaders can connect with a variety of values, such as practicing being calm, competent or living from purpose. In presencing these deeper values, this helps develop a more robust presencing mastery by integrating the personal meaning dimension of leader's experience with presencing. Exploring different ways to meditate with and from one's or a team's core values also helps leaders to focus on accessing presencing as a dynamic way of being through their stillpoint, fostering a connective state of openness and potential, which facilitates a more fluid connection and reconnection with source. Personal and shared values in this way are directly connected with presencing from this source level of being. Values act as beacons and anchors to enable leaders to hold the course, "allowing a presencing way of being to guide our actions and leadership moment to moment" (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 145). Instead of trying to discern best practices, leaders can instead explore discerning new and emergent ways of leading based on the situation at hand in congruence with their values and shared organizational values. Through an ongoing meditative practice applied in different ways to each presencing field-space as illustrated above, leaders develop a foundational container for living and facilitating an embodied experience of primary leading by connecting to source through stillness, and leading in consultation with the different emerging forms of presencing awareness. In summary, by centralizing the values-dimension and engaging in activities for cultivating wisdom, enhancing ethical awareness, and practicing meditation in a fluid and intertwining process, leaders are well positioned to deepen their existing presencing capacities and so in turn develop new realizations that advance their overall presencing mastery.

III. Conclusion

In this article, we have explored how values-based leadership and Buddhist psychological principles enrich leaders understanding for creating important conditions for the presencing mastery milestone of presencing as a way of being. We propose that cultivating a fertile inner ground for corporate leaders to rediscover and reclaim their core values is essential to support the presencing shift to a profound and wholesome inner realm of learning to lead from source and one's deeper presencing self. The framework proposed entails the practices of cultivating wisdom, fostering ethical

awareness, and integrating meditative practices to awaken new levels of presencing awareness. Alongside values-based leadership, which enables the observation and questioning of core values to awaken new levels of consciousness by reacquainting heart and mind, our intent is to seed future conversations concerning the role of values-based leadership and Buddhist principles in shaping the overall journey to presencing mastery as outlined in *Dynamic Presencing* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). Ultimately, we hope future dialogue and ongoing experimentation will inspire corporate leaders to uncover new pathways for deepening their sense of purpose and service through this work.

IV. References

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DYNAMIC PRESENCING COACHING: *Advancing a Next-Stage, Fourth-Generation Coaching Approach*

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Abstract: This article draws upon findings from a recent five-year period of research, which led to the genesis and development of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), an emerging next-stage, fourth-generation coaching approach. In the sections that follow, I present a meta-framework outlining seven transformative shifts for exploring beyond the territory of current “third-generation coaching practice” (Stelter, R. 2014a). I then address how this meta-framework, derived from key insights generated from the Dynamic Presencing Coaching methodology serves as a transformative lens for exploring, clarifying and deepening into the space of fourth-generation coaching as a path for uncovering emerging forms of presencing mastery.

Key words: Presencing, ontological, process ontology, presence, fourth-generation coaching, presencing mastery

I. Introduction

This article provides an overview of the key discoveries and insights from a recent five-year period of research where I investigated and inquired into the optimal *inner, intersubjective* and *field-based* processes for engaging deeply generative, *presence-* and *presencing-based* coaching cultures. For this project, I drew on both my expertise and research in presencing as well as insights derived from teaching and coaching in my global MBA courses offered in hybrid and distance formats each autumn and winter semester, which generally attract between 25 to 40 early to mid-career professionals from a broad array of business and non-business contexts from North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Looking back, these MBA courses offered advanced graduate-level classroom environments to observe, prototype and develop the Dynamic Presencing Coaching

(DPC) method. This took place through ongoing reflective and generative inquiry from teaching and coaching two master's level cohort groups. The first cohort group was through semester-long coaching modules of both group and 1-to-1 coaching. This took place regionally as well as by distance in my three MBA courses at the Management department of the Faculty of Business at Université Laval in Québec, Canada: MNG 6133: *Developing Management Skills*, MNG 6060: *Group and Organizational Communications* and MNG 6161: *Leadership*. Each MBA course offered immersive coaching modules where I introduced third-generation coaching thinking, methods and practices (Stelter 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2017, 2021). In the second cohort group, I applied the learnings from running the first regional cohort in the form of the initial DPC method, which I then developed online through several different iterations with early- and mid-career professionals at the University of Massachusetts (Boston) and UKZN (University of KwaZulu-Natal) in South Africa. Finally, during this period I continued to refine and develop the DPC method through 500 hours of coaching my MBA students and clients for the ICF requirements of the Professional level Coaching Certification, a project that took place concurrently with teaching and coaching these cohort groups.

Methodologically speaking during this time, in my main research practice I worked with analyzing, uncovering and discerning new fourth-generation coaching distinctions through an integration of different applied traditions of theoretical inquiry (Ravitch & Carl, 2019), which drew from phenomenological (Moustakas, C, 1994), mindful (Schapiro & Bentz, 1998) and integral research methods (Anderson & Braud, 2011; Esbjörn-Hargens, S. 2006). Overall, this project was instrumental in distilling key findings that played a central role in shaping the overall research, inductive processes of reflection and eventual development of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching method and overall approach (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming, Proches, C. et al., 2024). In the section that follows, I will discuss these seven transformative shifts in greater depth, with an interest in illustrating how each shift plays a catalytic role in revealing emerging fourth-generation territory in coaching as well emerging forms of presencing mastery.

II. A Meta-View of the Field of Coaching

In our post-pandemic world and VUCA age (Millar, C. et al., 2018), climate change, the growing widespread threat of war, the rampant proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), an accelerated unraveling of our international democratic process and governance, as well as increased polarization and mental health issues presents a deeper widespread global sensemaking crisis. In response to this growing predicament and what

some thinkers have referred to as a profound global polycrisis (Lawrence et. al, 2024) that has interwoven crises across multiple global systems, there is a clear need and call for transformative change across all levels of our society and culture. While approaches to effective ways of addressing these increasingly complex and intractable problems can to a certain extent be taught, there is a growing collective sense that fundamental inner work awaits those of us who are serious about discovering the practical inner wisdom means to effectively work with this challenging, transitional time.

Coaching it turns out has valuable insights to bring to this larger conversation. Over the past thirty five years, coaching broadly speaking has grown significantly as a profession, industry and as an emerging field of practice, that is a widely used and highly valued change methodology worldwide (Greif et al., 2022). As an emerging cross-disciplinary field and profession that draws from current thought and practice from many fields and disciplines (Cox et al., 2018), there has been a proliferation of approaches, models and practices that offer helpful guidance in stewarding transformative change.

Good coaching helps practitioners explores philosophical, psychological and deeper spiritual issues of meaning, purpose and identity that arise at the deep intersections of our work and life (Yip et al., 2020). Given the growing internal demands placed on us both personally and professionally, there has been a need to develop our perspective taking, self-reflective as well as self-generative capacity, expanding and deepening our sense of identity and construction, while building personal resilience and fostering emergent wisdom to address the challenges of living well in our new complex world (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). As such, there is a continued need for evolving leading edge coaching approaches that provide insight into the fundamental processes, principles and wisdom practices that will optimally serve coaching practitioners today and well into the future (Whittington, 2020).

Despite the exponential rise of professional coaching approaches in recent years, there has been a noted absence of conceptual overviews or meta-framings of the field. In part this is due to the sheer volume and diversity of coaching perspectives and approaches (Brock, 2012), making such an attempt in some respects quite difficult if not theoretically impossible to do given the wide range of different types of coaching serving an array of human needs, not to mention schools based on different specializations and niches, philosophies and worldviews.

One well-known integral approach to coaching that draws from best practices and theorizing available in the field without resorting to over-simplification with his

method, has been the third-generation coaching method of professor researcher, Reinhard Stelter from the University of Copenhagen (Stelter 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2017, 2021). Stelter's framing of the three generations of coaching offers a provisional meta-overview of the coaching field useful for exploring the different stages of its evolution. Stelter's approach unfolds "a new universe for coaching" (2014, p.51) drawing from the framework of "current social research, new learning theories and discourses about personal leadership." I personally resonate with his vision for third generation coaching that is dialogical in nature, attempting to make sense of and navigate the challenges of our hyper (complex) historical moment as a discerned, wisdom response.

Unlike first generation coaching, where the goal is to help the client achieve a specific objective, and unlike second generation coaching, where the coach assumes that the client implicitly knows the solution to particular challenges; third generation coaching has a less goal-oriented agenda but a more profound and sustainable focus on values and identity work. Coach and client create something together: They generate meaning together in the conversation, where both parties are on a journey. (2014, p.51).

For Stelter, the role of the coach in the first generation stage is to help the client overcome their challenges with realizing specific goals, ends and effective action strategies. The second generation coach draws strongly from positive psychology in developing constructive future scenarios that focus on the client's innate strengths and empowering their voice. Third generation models focus on the transformation of values, meaning-making, and our deeper identity—all elements of essential human development. With the industry of coaching rising to a new level of professionalism and influence in our culture and society as a whole, I agree with Stelter and colleagues that this reflects a growing need for a new mandate and agenda for coaching.

As Stelter points out (2014a, 2014b, 2014c), third-generation coaching was initially intended as a kind of manifesto for rethinking the broader aims and objectives of coaching in our late post-modern moment, given its deeper value in mirroring and advancing the developments of new research and thought in our emerging global culture. This work is essential and coaching has taken a lead role as an emerging field in navigating this territory. By offering a compelling visionary rationale that illustrates how coaching is capable of addressing the deeper underlying needs of practitioners facing the challenges of our time, Stelter's case for third-generation coaching is well taken. Now a decade later since his initial positing of this vision, I am persuaded that emerging fourth-generation coaching approaches are more than ever needed to continue the important work of advancing coaching practice at the leading edge.

III. Towards Next-Stage, Fourth-Generation Coaching Models

Since Stelter's initial research (2014a, 2014b, 2014c) was published, aspects of his third generation framework have been reformulated (Grant, 2017) as well as built upon as a "new generation of coaching" (Einzig, 2017) approach. Additionally, there have been a few initial forays into mapping and outlining emerging fourth-generational coaching practice and territory (Brock, 2018, 2012; Boyatzis et al. 2022; Law, 2021; March, 2018). In part, I understand these responses more broadly as a deliberate effort to address the different innovations and developments across coaching-related fields as well as changes in our society which are not yet reflected in much of the current landscape of existing coaching models.

In solidarity with the above next-generation coaching developments and approaches, Dynamic Presencing Coaching has emerged as a body of work that is keen on exploring and discovering paths into this emerging fourth-generation territory. To develop an overall coaching approach that would adequately qualify as fourth-generation, I worked with an assortment of different theoretical research methodologies, including a useful conceptual approach from integral philosophy; namely, *transcend and include* (Wilber, K. 1979). This conceptual method was helpful in differentiating and recontextualizing third-generation coaching practice in a way that serves the developmental unfolding of a greater coaching process. In this way the intent isn't to be exclusionary, but rather to incorporate an evolutionary developmental principle that helps guide and reveal emergent coaching territory.

Process-wise, the *transcend* part of the method required a sustained period of phenomenological bracketing, suspending of presuppositions and dis-identifying with the previous or existing stage (Dörfler, V. et al., 2021), in this case third-generation coaching. This was done in order to create optimal conditions for exploring the growth edges of third-generation practice that are not well accounted for. The transcend phase opened a generative space where emergent ways of understanding were explored without reverting back to interpretive framings and conclusions of third-generation meaning-making and practice. Here I worked with bracketing the assumptions of third-generation coaching practice, to explore presencing the next-edges of what I perceived as essential elements of an emerging fourth-generation practice through iterative cycles of knowing and not-knowing (Gioia et al., 2013) in my reflective practice.

Through the several year extended period of 1) tracking the leading edges and limits of third-generation coaching as well as non-coaching approaches and 2) immersing in this deeper emerging fourth-generation coaching territory with my MBA

students, colleagues as well as independently, I gradually began to notice a meta-pattern of how each fourth-generation advance emerged out of the conditions enacted by third-generation practice, methods and ways of being. Theoretically speaking, this signaled the *include* part of the integral method, where the previous stage was re-contextualized and re-identified with as a bridge into next-stage coaching practice.

Stelter's (2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2017, 2021) overview and genealogical accounts of coaching offered helpful insight into locating emergent fourth-generational coaching territory, again, within the peak expression of third-generation practice. Building from the learnings and insights gathered from investigating both the optimal and limiting conditions of third-generation coaching practice gradually revealed a path into fourth-generational coaching territory. A series of significant vertical shifts gradually became apparent, which connected back to an overall creative *fourth-generation movement* that began to surface in subtle, interior, relational, and transpersonal ways. As each vertical shift became recognizable and embodied, the need for developing and applying a robust coaching method and practices to facilitate these essential transformative shifts became the obvious next step to further develop the work.

As an overarching framework, Stelter's integrated model was useful in helping evolve, develop and refine Dynamic Presencing Coaching in relation to previous first, second and third-generational iterations of coaching. In this respect, Dynamic Presencing Coaching is not attempting to be an integral or integrated coaching model that works with all three-generational approaches to coaching. Rather, it is positioned as an emerging fourth-generation coaching approach based on a presence-sustained, presencing-guided, field-based method of coaching from source (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Building from the contributions of Stelter's robust third-generation coaching approach, Dynamic Presencing Coaching is a deliberate response to the growing need for transformational methods of coaching that draw from fourth-generational territory directly.

In the following section, I introduce and narrate each of the seven key vertical shifts as a transformative meta-framework for advancing next-stage, fourth-generation coaching practice (figure 1) through the Dynamic Presencing Coaching approach.

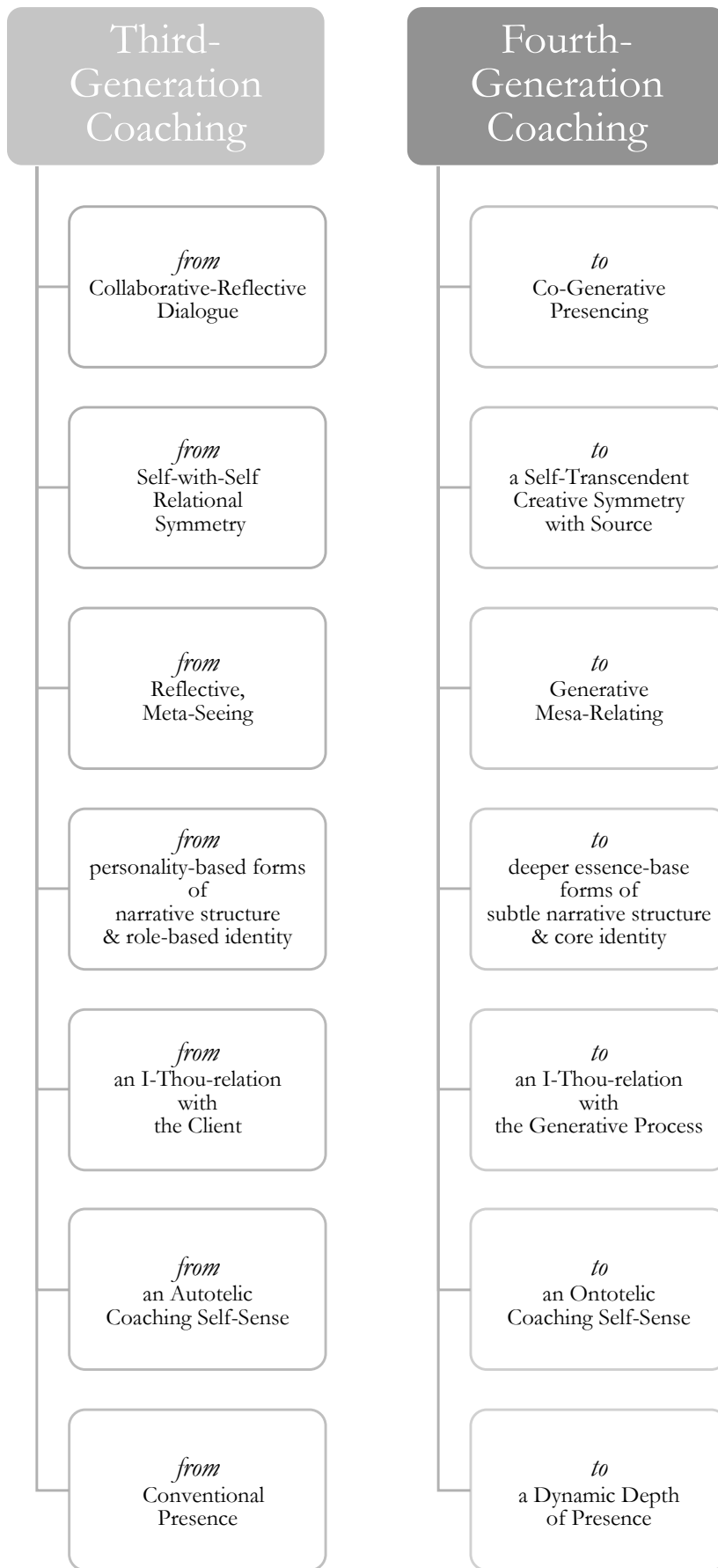


Figure 1: A meta-framework outlining seven key shifts into fourth-generational coaching

IV. Next-Stage Shift #1: From *Collaborative-Reflective* Dialogue to *Co-Generative Presencing*

Stelter (2021, 2017, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c) situates third-generation coaching approaches as contributing to deeper learning and development through a collaborative, reflective process from a client's experience. In such contexts of coaching, the knowledge and learning are relationally mediated through past-based reflection and reflective dialogue. Though reflective dialogue is valuable in guiding the knowledge-creation process by having it focus on our experience and subsequent action (Stelter, 2017), the method loses its effectiveness in working with actively discerning emergence within the generative process in coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a). Broadly speaking, coaching approaches that draw primarily on reflection from past-based sources of reflective learning become limiting, inadvertently developing a blind spot to more subtle *present-centered* and *presence-based* ways of being and sensemaking modalities that draw directly from source and are needed to make the shift to what I'm calling *co-generative presencing* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Additionally, the method of reflective dialogue is not well-equipped to work with discerning future-based learning processes that in the language of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, draw phenomenologically from the *deep present* (Gunnlaugson, 2024b, forthcoming) and *the future that presences* (Gunnlaugson, 2024b, forthcoming). Reflective process, in relying on the cognitive functions of the intellect to present and re-present existing knowledge tend to limit as well as obstruct deeper generative emergence in the coaching field, where a more complex, subtle and nuanced sensemaking process is needed to be embodied, modeled and facilitated by the coach. The DPC approach (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024) addresses this third-generation limitation by introducing the *five level-depths method of presence* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), framing exemplary coaching as an optimal state and presenced way of being that one explores with one's client through each of the five depths of presence: *immediate, expansive, core, originating and dynamic*.

Whether individually or in a group, the five level-depths method focuses on fostering a dynamic, relational way of *being presence* with one's self as coach, one's client or group, the coaching field and the presencing process. This generates a multi-dimensional, subtly embodied attunement to presencing as a core flowing movement in DPC coaching. Drawing from the five level-depths method to develop their capacity for being presence, the DPC Coach works with enacting a fundamental shift in one's ontological depth of presence and quality of relating, which creates essential conditions

for presencing new, emerging client knowledge. It is important to note that in Dynamic Presencing Coaching, presencing *as a way of being* precedes presencing *as a way of knowing*. In prioritizing connecting with and coaching our client from their deeper essential state of being, a new presencing path into this fourth-generation frontier emerges through the gift of the third-generation ground work (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

As a presence-sustained, presencing-guided, field-based method of coaching from source, the DPC approach works with creating optimal conditions in the flow zone of the coaching field, where the generative process of presencing itself becomes the focus (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming). In learning how to anchor one's coaching practice in an optimal state of generativity through a dynamically presenced way of coaching, DPC Coaches learn how to engage our subtle sensemaking capacities towards discerning client emergence through different level-depths of presence. Drawing from a core strength of reflective dialogue, in its social, empathic, I-thou forms of relating in the client field (Stelter, 2017), this naturally develops an in-depth receptivity to the coaching dialogue process itself, which is needed to shift the conversation into fourth-generation territory. Here DPC Coaches work with reflective dialogue as an initial bridge and gateway into the coaching field, where they explore shifting the coaching conversation from collaborative reflective dialogue sourced in the past to co-generative presencing directly sourced in the *deep present*. This connects both coach and client to the immanent possibilities for what the world wisdom traditions refer to as the *timeless* or *eternal* (Pandit, G, 2021) on the one hand, as well as emergent possibilities for establishing embodied connectivity with the *future that presences* (Gunnlaugson, 2024b, forthcoming) on the other.

By fostering a coaching conversational culture and ethos of authentic deep relating that is the hallmark of third-generation coaching approaches, the DPC method works with developing our social-emotional capacities for relational sensing, sensemaking and meaning-making. The key gifts of healthy third-generation coaching perspectives are in offering a relational connecting bridge into fourth-generation territory. In the DPC approach, the five level-depths method plays a key role in developing the coach's presence. Alongside the *five field-stages method of presencing* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), each method supports a co-generative form of presencing rather than being sourced through thought and reflective constructs.

Overall, the DPC method supports learning to recognize this essential next-stage shift, as well as how to activate key conditions for co-generative presencing in a coaching conversation. Shifting how the coach relates to the coaching process re-

focuses the coaching conversation into a new, unexpected way and direction, which is essential for preparing the generative ground for a new interior structure and process of fourth-generation coaching to emerge within the coach, client and the coaching field. Third-generation reflective coaching plays an important role in developing social-emotional-relational processes that are tempered by the timeless wisdom of I-thou connection with the coach baring witness to their client and the situation they are in the middle of (Stelter, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). But we mustn't stop there. What is needed is to build a bridge and base of shared relating as an essential form of deeper communion that is then transposed into the next-stage context of co-generative presencing. Drawing from the language of DPC, upleveling these relational ways of being to support the process of creative emergence directly by changing how we *attune to*, *entrain with* and finally *discern* generative emergence (Gunnlaugson, 2020) inside the flow zone within the coaching field provides a new presencing method and path for engaging fourth-generation territory (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Coaching that is mainly guided by our reflective faculties risks stopping short of learning how to direct the coaching conversation in ways that lead to making creative breakthroughs not only at the level of apprehending new insights and client knowledge, but at the level of our way of being relational with the creative process itself. Coaches who are interested in learning how to coach from the source of emergence directly make progress when they learn how to integrate the previous third-generation approach of working *reflectively* with emergence. In developing a self-awareness of *how*, and *from what depths* we are sourcing our presence and attention creates conditions to begin shifting the coaching conversation into fourth generation territory. It does this by removing a limiting condition to working with creative emergence by introducing a new I-thou relational path to coaching directly from it. By learning how to connect one's subtle sensemaking faculties and inner body directly to stewarding the generative process, pulse and source that drives internal transformation within the coaching conversation, the DPC method provides key conditions for exploring generative co-presencing at the relational level as a means and approach to unveiling deeper fourth-generation discoveries with one's clients.

V. Next-Stage Shift #2: From a *Self with Self, Relational Symmetry* to a *Self-Transcendent, Creative Symmetry with Source*

In building his model, Stelter (2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2017, 2021) situates the leading edge of third-generation coaching practice as shifting from a *facilitative role* of

first- and second-generation styles of coaching. This takes place by leading through well-crafted questions to being a co-reflective partner, that through *a collaborative role* and coaching dialogue process, mirrors the client with the situation s/he is working with. As we discussed in the previous shift, the co-reflective process is essential, however not as an end in and of itself, but as a bridge to accessing the next stage. The initial “clear asymmetry between coach and client (2014b, p.52) gives way to a deep relational I-thou “symmetry.” This symmetry is showcased in how Stelter opens his book (2014b) with a memorable quote from the late Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, “in true dialogue, both sides are willing to change.”

Outgrowing our resistance to change at the personal, psychologically-identified levels of our experience through dialogue is essential. To advance to the next-stage of coaching, a deeper self-transcendent commitment is needed that is of an entirely different order, yet also includes the foundational third-generation, reflective-based wisdom ways of relating. Where the asymmetrical positionings of first- and second-generation models were essential in guiding those methodologies, the deeply symmetrical positioning of the third-generation-models opens up a valuable form of both ontological and epistemological healing for both coach and client. No question about it, in our increasingly polarized and polarizing VUCA world, as coaches we need to re-learn how *to be* together with our clients if we are going to learn to really *know* and *see* anew together. In DPC, the quality of our *presencing way of being* is foundational. At both a source and practice level, our presencing way of being precedes and shapes the quality of our presencing knowing and seeing anew together. Working from this level depth of presencing is necessary to make transformative breakthroughs with our clients.

In the language of fourth-generational coaching, the challenge is to learn how to awaken and engage a form of presencing into the depths of one’s own as well as one’s client’s life in order to create conditions for transformation. However, it is critical to note that a symmetrical structuring of the coach and client relation can diminish what is possible in coaching if the focus is too interpersonally or relationally mediated. In other words, *the We* of the intersubjective sphere of the coaching *between* can in later stage third-generation forms of coaching become an obstacle to generative relating *if* the relational process inadvertently blocks or mitigates the generative process (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Structurally speaking, the symmetrical structuring of the DPC Coach and client’s relation are essential in empowering the client. However, to get to a fourth-generational level of coaching, the symmetrical structuring needs to discover its limiting point and boundary to support the emergence of a new dynamic form of co-

generative presencing that is mediated through the DPC Coach's presence and presencing way of being.

Instead of returning to the earlier asymmetrical form of first- and second-generation models, which would be a regression, or sticking with the symmetrical form of third-generation models, which risks being a suppression from a fourth-generation perspective, we take another approach. With the method of DPC, the way forward lies with establishing a new subtle process symmetry that supports the generative impulse through indwelling, relating and coaching from presence (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). In this sense, we extend the gifts of both previous ways of structuring the coaching relation to arrive somewhere different, that tends to be at once familiar yet also curiously unfamiliar. The DPC approach goes into depth with this, introducing a series of subtle fourth-generation practices for establishing a symmetry within the coach, client, coaching field and Dynamic Presencing Coaching process (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Aside from the few above noted developments, there has yet to be clear methodological guidance in the coaching world concerning how to access and engage fourth-generation coaching territory with one's clients. Reflection, though essential, again epistemologically speaking as a way of knowing isn't sufficient to catalyze the insight, energy, attention and presence needed to actively engage change in the moment with our clients (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). In learning how to establish a subtle symmetrical structure, process and relational way of being *with the generative impulse directly*, the DPC coach apprentices with and learns how to deeply embody generativity as a way of being. In this way, the DPC process opens both coach and client into a mutual co-created movement that actively works with depth, insight, and meaning that is distinct from third-generation approaches. By teaching coaches how to structure and deepen their attention and presence to foster a symmetry with the overall presencing process and underlying generative impulse, this enacts a transformative shift in the coaching conversation with one's clients. With practice, the DPC method guides coaches in how to embody this as a signature way of being and coaching one's clients in the coaching field.

If we look back over the prior-generations of coaching, several generalizable patterns are evident. In traditional goal-oriented, first-generation sports forms of coaching, there is an *asymmetrical pattern of power* that follows from the coach fostering *objectivity* through qualities of neutrality and distance based on authority and expert interventions offered to the client (Stelter, 2014b). In second-generation coaching

methods, there is a shift into *inner symmetry* by acknowledging as well as deepening the category of empowering the *subjectivity* of the client, where it is assumed that they, “implicitly knows how to deal with a particular challenge.” (Stelter, 2014b, p.10). This prepares conditions for third-generation coaching, which gives rise to the coach empowering a *shared symmetry* and quality of *inter-subjectivity* through a journey of shared-meaning at the reflective level of dialogue (Stelter, 2014a; 2014b). To arrive at a fourth-stage method, our way of coaching shifts into an overall *process symmetry* that draws the coach, client, coaching field and presencing coaching process into a singular flowing movement. To get to a place in our coaching practice where we can articulate, speak, listen and engage our clients actively as a generative *process symmetry* (as a DPC Coach) is the extent to which we have arrived inside fourth-generational coaching territory with our clients.

Building from Thich Nhat Hahn’s insight, we need to not only be willing to change with our clients, we need to be willing to learn how to grow to be at ease with change as a co-extensive aspect of the generative life impulse itself, expressing itself anew with our clients in the coaching field. The deeper and more integrated our relating to the source of change in our coaching work and life as a whole, the less it is something we are resistant to, but grow to embrace through the interior arts of learning to *be-with* and eventually, *as*. To learn to coach from the generative flow of presencing at this source level of our being is by implication to become more life aligned from the underlying ontological ground of presence that plays a central role in the DPC process. In learning how to coach from this source ground directly as a way of being, DPC focuses on apprenticing with the presencing process in this complex and nuanced way. As it becomes second-nature, a more dynamic flow begins to take over, opening into unprecedented possibilities of generative relating for coach and client. Here both coach and client shift into a deeply participative process of shaping and being re-shaped by the generative impulse leading the coaching conversation. Apprenticing with this emerging form of co-participation in the generative unfoldment of new meaning for the client, the shift into establishing a relational process symmetry again within the coach, client, coaching field and presencing coaching process is needed to advance our coaching practices to the fourth-generation level.

VI. Next-Stage Shift #3: From *Reflective Meta-Seeing* to *Generative Mesa-Relating*

Connected with Stelter’s (2014) point about the shift in conversational style

from *question-posing* to *reflective dialogue*, he characterizes the mirroring gesture of reflective dialogue as deeply reflecting the client's situation through what he refers to as a "collaborative meta-dialogue" (Stelter, 2021, p.1). This inner coaching move takes place through a shift into meta-dialogue. Working with building meta-awareness in the coaching conversation offers invaluable insight and a key *perspectival shift* within the coach, which in a dialogue context can be shared with the client. *Going meta* in the coaching conversation is an essential "subject-object shift" (Kegan, 1998) that is well accounted for in the transformative change management literature (Eschenbacher, S. 2020; Pinkavova, E., 2010).

To *go meta* is to go beyond, outside or above by mindfully shifting one's awareness to becoming aware of both our mental, emotional, and spiritual process, as well as our clients. Meditation simulates Kegan's subject-object shift at the level of our internal awareness where instead of being imbedded in our thoughts and feelings, we are able to mindfully witness and observe them, while also retaining a felt-awareness of our embodied experience. Robust third-generation coaching performs this meta-dialogue by teaching coaches to go to their inner psychological balcony of being able to dispassionately observe their own as well as their client's process from a meta-aware position, imbued with a calm, well resourced-witnessing. Meditation practice helps stabilize one's meta-awareness here as a foundational practice (Dorjee, 2016). So does practicing mindfulness of the coaching dialogue (Dunne et al., 2019). A coach whose practice is at a stable third-generation level routinely provides this form of inner perspective taking for their clients. And a highly-effective third-generation coach learns how to embody this inner balcony as part of their coaching way of being when needed to deploy in a coaching session at moment's notice.

Active meta-perspective-taking with our own and client's experience is an important aspect of third-generation coaching practice. It is helpful to become aware of the underlying psychological patterns that hold our client as well as our own conditioned behaviors and habits in place. Once sufficient meta-awareness has come to fruition in the coaching conversation with one's client, there is a need for a different coaching move to help us continue exploring new coaching territory. In *Dynamic Presencing Coaching*, we work with developing a *meta-perspectival balcony*, where as coaches, we invite our client to explore a meta-view and way of seeing their own and client experience. From here, we explore transitioning to the next stage of *meta-relating* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), which isn't yet being acknowledged in the developmental coaching literature.

Mesa-relating is a qualitatively different coaching move than *meta-seeing*. Rather than an epistemological shift in the attentional location informing our way of knowing, it involves a vertical ontological depth shift in our way of being. In DPC, mesa-relating requires letting go into our presencing nature, which shifts the ontological depth location of our presence. Instead of keeping the process focused solely on the reflective level of perspective-taking by going and staying meta, we advance the coaching conversation by exploring *becoming mesa* with our client, which involves supporting them in learning to embody the essence of the insight and learning gained from the initial meta move. Instead of leaving the meta insight at the level of cognition as an intellectual perspective, we shift into embodying the essence of what was discovered there with our coaching client. This *mesa-reversal* is necessary to open up a fourth-generation path that is oriented towards the deeper involution and integration of the coach's generative nature as leading the DPC coaching process.

Mesa-relating focuses on an interoceptive mode of awareness from *inside, within and between* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Mesa-relating is distinct from third-generational reflective practice in two ways. The first difference is that it draws from relational ways of being as a stepping stone to embodiment. In third-generational dialogue, reflective awareness is an end in and of itself. In generative co-presencing, we stretch into new territory with clients where we fortify their growth and development by first uncovering and revealing the change (going meta) and then exploring the nature of the change by becoming it from the inside-out *with* and *from* embodied awareness (returning mesa). Mesa-relating, when supported by meta-seeing, offers a powerful way of relating with the coaching process. Here coaches work with meta-seeing and mesa-relating practice as a basis for cultivating a transformational way of being in one's coaching practice. In this sense, the mesa-shift opens a new coaching path or gateway into a deeper fullness of contact with our generative nature, which is needed to build our ontological capacity for radically staying with and supporting our clients from the depths of our being and source.

Learning how to shift our way of relating to our presencing self *as object* and getting sufficiently inside our presencing nature phenomenologically as *subject* becomes the *mesa-path* that returns us to engaging a deeper order of presencing-based coaching. This *object-subject reversal* (inverting Kegan's developmental wisdom) (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming) facilitates an inner embodiment process and is essential to reaching a fourth-generation coaching way of relating. Mesa-relating is needed to access a deeper realm of embodied experience, but more importantly, embodied realization for both

DPC Coach and client. While the relational focus of third-generation methods offers an essential contribution, the shift from meta-dialogue to mesa-dialogue, is needed to steward the full cycle of transformation in a fourth-generation coaching context (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Without the meta-shift, embodied practice becomes challenging to access in a skillful way for both coaches and clients, as there is a tendency towards fusion with one's conditioned mental-identified experience, which can in turn subvert perspective-taking and block Kegan's subject-object shift. Here the center of gravity of our presencing conversation, when left unchecked, tends to drift back upward to being disassociated and cognitively led, reinforcing inner barriers to being able to make contact from and rest *inside presence as presence*, from our deeper essence and source nature. Without mesa-relating, the quality and depth of the embodiment process is limited in the coaching process. This approach risks leaving coach and client prone to becoming caught in a subtle web of mentalized, dis-associative or transcendent ways of connecting to source. That is, through abstract ways that may be externalized outside us, beyond us, from the future, etc. When a coach bypasses mesa-relating, there is a risk that their coaching method becomes unintegrated and projected onto their clients. Because of this problematic, there is a need for coaches to work with developing their capacities for *waking up* {evolutionary process from the inside-out} into an embodied way into *meta-seeing*. And then from here, stretching into a *waking down* {involutionary process from the outside-in} through a felt-guided process of mesa-relating as a path for offering full embodied support and integration of the creative insights that arise in the presencing coaching conversation.

VII. Next-Stage Shift #4: From *personality-based forms of narrative structure and role-based identity* to *deeper essence-based forms of subtle narrative structure and core identity*

In being effective at uncovering existing self-knowledge, third-generation coaching is well positioned to lead and manage personal and social change through the gradual transformation of a client's narrative structure. Whether based in the past or connected to the limiting conditions of one's life and story, deficient or lacking narrative structures often lead to client's seeking out coaching through a new way of perceiving or understanding their life to break the hold a persistent pattern has on their life (Stelter, 2014a). Shifting the underlying content structure of our narrative takes place by cohering the client's identity, self-concept and sense of overall agency through an

integration of events in the past within a new structure that gives new direction and meaning via reflective coaching processes.

Third-generation coaching methods broadly speaking have a valuable role in supporting a movement into new narrative territory, helping shape new meaning and direction for the client via social constructivist practices, positive psychology, existential phenomenology among a broad array of other modalities that increase self-reflexivity and reconstitute the client's narrative structure towards a healthier and more integrated sense of self. In our *post-modern* or what some integral thinkers have referred to as our *post-post-modern* age (Wight, 2016), human experience holds together as it always has, through our everyday storied attempts to make meaning despite the at times disorienting and discouraging VUCA conditions that shape twenty first century life. This deep perennial need for meaning and to make sense of our existence in ways that make a daily difference and ultimately matter persists and third-generation coaching has an important role to play in developing upon this process.

Building from this work, fourth-generation coaching takes this a step further into new territory by tracking the underlying source of self-development and identify formation of the client. It manages this by exploring upstream from existing narrative structures to paying attention to the quality of presencing awareness and presence underlying and informing those structures. The intent here is to first *identify* and then secondly, *contact* the underlying essence of our deeper generative sense of self and the corresponding ways of being that drive, inform and lead forth new knowledge and narrative co-creation. Shifting from the previous focus of reflecting on our identity to working with shifting and integrating the deeper ontological source of our identity to *essence-based* is an essential fourth-generation coaching path distinction. Facilitating new perspectives and reflections are the basis for third-stage coaching methods as Stelter (2014a) points out. However, coaching becomes limited if we cannot empower the deeper wisdom nature of the client and by extension, the coach (which for the purposes of this article I broadly characterize as essence-based). In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, this generative empowerment process takes place through the deep cultivation and ontological development of our underlying generative nature that gives rise to our narrative structures to begin with.

While adult-developmental frameworks measure and promote higher stage development in practitioners (Liu et al., 2021), in the DPC method, attention is directed to monitoring and developing the coach's ontological capacity for being-with the full depths of their client's generative nature. As a hallmark indicator of fourth-generation

coaching mastery, the focus shifts to developing the capacity to coach the inner evolutionary edge of our client's experience where it is arising. In DPC, this takes place by shifting from a more everyday existential- to essence-based form of narrative structure, which is subtle and located within one's wisdom depths, in contrast to personality-based forms of narrative structure and role-based identity of third-generation coaching. In cultivating a deeper essence-based self-awareness and identity, fourth-generation methods empower both coach and client in ways that drives change beyond the third-generation focus of facilitating new perspectives and reflections which tend to be past, cognitive-, as well as narrative- and personality-based. In waking up client's to their essence, a deeper source of motivation, purpose and clarity awakens within the coaching process.

With this fourth-generation lens, we descend to a new level-depth in the coaching field where the core values and our deepest sense of being and self are explored, with both coach and client shifting to a subtle way of presencing the transformative source of their experience firsthand. This takes place by journeying from current personality-based forms of narrative structure to directing our attention upstream to the generative nature of our experience itself, which is connected to the deeper unitive source underlying third-generation narrative-based dialogue. Again, at the stage of fourth-generation coaching, the nature of the transformation or form that is transforming shifts from personality-based to essence-based narrative structure. Here, the fourth-generation experience of transformation shifts from the third-generation epistemological exploration of a knowing that leads to new self-knowledge to becoming fundamentally about a new essence-based way of being with one's experience and story. This shifts the focus of the coaching dialogue from exploring the content and experience of a client's story, to facilitating a process of uncovering and amplifying the deeper source ground and generative nature of the client's core essential identity through the DPC method of co-generative presencing.

As illustrated, fourth-generation coaching methods work differently with both the coach and client's self and identity. By leading the coaching session from a vertical depth shift in one's way of being, the DPC Coach uncovers a new transformative basis for working with the client's self and identity from an essence-level of awareness and embodiment of being. Building on the relational nature of coaching that is paramount in third-generation methods, in order to access new fourth-generation coaching territory, a deeply generative orientation that is sourced in the evolutionary ground and generative impulse arising from that ground is required (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). In this sense,

the relational attunement and resonant process of co-generative presencing works with the deeper archetypal existential, spiritual, soulful and source-level ways of presence and generative being within the five level-depths of presence method. As we open into a way of coaching from these new depths, the nature of our sensemaking journey with our client shifts to include more essence-to-essence based modalities of attuning to where the client is coming from (depth-wise as well as experientially). Here presence-based attunement practices are needed to shift the nature of the narrative identity of the client's self from personality-based narrative structures and content to helping them uncover their narrative ground inside presence and their deeper generative nature directly.

VIII. Next-Stage Shift #5: From *an I-Thou Relation with the Client* to an *I-Thou Relation with the Generative Process*

With third-generation coaching, as noted above, a strong relational symmetry with the client develops, where the reflexive iterations of the dialogue drive the change. In the shift to fourth-generation coaching, a vertical deepening of the coach's ontological location of presence is needed to effectively embody their deeper generative nature *as a way of being*. In the DPC approach, the coach works with practices to master coaching from our generative nature in the coaching field, which opens up a fourth generation process symmetry via a co-embodied generative way of relating. In this I-thou, deeply human to human relational space, there is a newfound I-thou relational quality that gives way to an embodied-communion-discernment process with the source of generativity itself in the coaching conversation.

Here the coach becomes an expert in stewarding the presencing process, first and foremost within themselves, then with his/her client. This is markedly different from a therapeutic dialogue that facilitates healing. Instead, the coach is working with the emerging generative self of the client and integrating a coaching process that brings the client into their depths of being and presence. In turn, this activates the deeper fullness, aliveness and overall empowerment of the client. By working with self-practices for developing their presence and aliveness at this level, the DPC Coach shifts to apprenticing directly with the generative process as they coach their client. Where reflective dialogue relied in part on empathic listening, co-generative presencing shifts to presencing listening and sensemaking from both the *deep present* and *future that presences* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Shifting from being dialogue partners on a relational level, the DPC Coach

invites a deeper form of generative dialogue that builds from the I-thou relation. The I-thou relation on a person-to-person level is needed to open up a generative way of being and I-thou relation to the creative process itself as a core movement of *enfolding presence ~ unfolding presencing* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). The third-generation focus on meaning-making gives way to a fourth-generation emphasis on generative-sourcing (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). A focus on sensing and relating in reflective dialogue shifts into generative unfoldment and presencing from the depth location of presence that the coach is accessing and transmitting in their coaching.

This generative-sourcing element opens a space to unfold the hidden, living, creative depths of the client once the DPC Coach is sufficiently established in the depths of originating source presence. In coaching from the existential, spiritual, soulful and source-based lifeworlds of the client, the DPC Coach works with each of the five level-depths of presence to reveal fresh *inscapes* {inner landscapes} for coaching the client. Working through the initial process of exploring the client's lifeworlds activates key conditions for the five level-depths of presence, which then engages the deep presencing process with the client through the five field-stages of presencing. In being attuned to and oriented by depth, fourth-generation methods like DPC stand in contrast with earlier first or second-generation methods with goal- and positive-thinking oriented agendas and the meaning-driven focus that typifies third-generation coaching. Depth eventually opens a subtle path to co-generative presencing directly at the source level of both the coach and client's experience, which is needed to have transformative breakthroughs in coaching. In learning to coach from an I-thou way of being with generative impulse from this source depth, conditions become active for exploring this emerging fourth-generation territory.

IX. Next-Stage Shift #6: From *an Autotelic* to an *Ontotelic Coaching Self-Sense*

In a think piece within this inaugural issue (Gunnlaugson, 2024c) as well as my forthcoming book (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), I introduce the distinction *Ontotelic* as a fourth-generation coaching lens that reveals essential insight into the overlooked and often bypassed ontological nature of the generative self. In fourth-generation coaching, the generative self lies at the heart of both the coach and client's ability to change and transform. If our generative sense of self isn't well developed, our capacity for engaging our client's change process as a coach is comparatively diminished. As a precondition for creating optimal conditions for learning from the emerging future, the DPC Coach apprentices with the *Ontotelic* depth-dimensions to bring about a significant and lasting

shift in depth within their coaching practice that supports the development towards mastery-level experiences of presencing that are immersive, continuous and increasingly sustained. By integrating the dormant Ontotelic dimensions of our generative nature, the existential, spiritual and soul depth-dimensions of our being create essential conditions for a stable access and grounding in source as integral to supporting our presencing nature, presencing awareness and overall coaching practice (Gunnlaugson, 2024c, forthcoming).

The Ontotelic self builds on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (2015) notion of the *Autotelic Self* or one's flow self. Autotelicity is the love for a way of doing an activity, practice or work that has an end/purpose in and of itself. As a third-generation milestone, the autotelic self is characterized by meta-skills or competencies that enable individuals to find deeper enjoyment in the face of certain challenges (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015). That is, for coaches to learn to enter and stay in flow through the reflective dialogue. The flow self is autotelic, in that the experience of finding and staying in flow is inherently satisfying in and of itself. Similarly, when we awaken our generative self by connecting to our deeper underlying depth-dimensions of presence and being, this experience has the potential to become a deep source of intrinsic satisfaction and flow.

In examining and reflecting on the performance of presencing-based coaches, (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming) it was discovered that Ontotelic cultivation develops our generative capacity and *mesa-skills* for coaching more directly from presence. The Ontotelic is attuned to a love of being for its own sake and this connects to the creative/generative impulse that is being stewarded in the coach, client, coaching field and overall presencing process. The love of being is rooted in a deeply intrinsic wisdom-imbued *eudaimonic* state of being alive to truth, beauty and goodness, whereas the love of flow arises out of engaging a process that brings flow, which may be pursued with a hedonistic or self-centric agenda. Building from the Autotelic, the Ontotelic represents the deeper connection with *being for its own sake* as an inherently meaningful process in and of itself. When our generative nature is sourced from the depth grounds of our being and tapped into this deeper Ontotelic realm, the DPC Coach becomes more internally sustained, sourced, and led forth from a vitalizing sense of renewing purpose and curiosity that emanates from within. To grow towards the mastery accolade of experiencing presencing as a sustained and sustaining way of being, exploring Ontotelic paths of presencing that are self-transcendent, intrinsically satisfying, and deeply immersive engage the subtle and inner senses by involving a sustained presencing awareness from the depths of our being. In this way, the fourth-generation shift into the

Ontotelic dimension of one's self open us up to the possibility for re-discovering presencing from the ground of our being up as a sustaining, creatively liberating way of presencing the coaching experience moment to moment (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

In shifting the focus from seeking the Autotelic to apprenticing with and learning to stably embody the Ontotelic, through both *meta-skills* (transcendent, awareness-based) and *mesa-skills* (immanent, embodied) (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), this work fosters a fourth-generational coaching capacity for a self-generating and dynamically presenced way of being. Learning to access, embody and master the Ontotelic dimensions of our generative nature is essential for discovering and sustaining presencing as a generative way of being. With the DPC method, this takes place by learning how to enfold one's presence and consciousness into immediate, expansive, core, originating and dynamic presence within the five level-depths method of presence (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Both the meta- and mesa-skills to perform presencing as a way of being involve cultivating first and foremost the capacity for self-transcendence (Frankl, 1966), which involves developing a coaching sense of self that is directed towards a deeper source of transcendent meaning and purpose that is served through each coaching engagement with one's clients. With dedicated practice, practitioners gradually become rooted in this generative sense of self as an enduring disposition and *way*.

From a developmental perspective, self-transcendence is reflected in the capacity for a fluid and creative relationship with one's inner sense of self, where we explore taking a meta-aware position of observing ourselves from a witnessing position through Kegan's (1998) subject-object shift. Letting go in presencing is a self-transcendent gesture that enables practitioners to move beyond identification with their ordinary sense of self, in order to connect to their deeper presencing self. In the context of the DPC approach, self-transcendence or going-meta is incomplete without a subsequent re-embodiment or returning-mesa to re-embody the essence of one's deeper generative nature. The initial meta subject-object shift requires a mesa object-subject shift or reversal of learning to embody what we have taken a perspective on. Again, to go mesa with our meta experience by letting ourselves be drawn into the inner underlying regions of presence that await. In being able to make the shift from being imbedded in our ordinary separate self-sense to deepening into our embodied connected presencing self-sense, this opens up the fourth-generation mastery path of learning to sustain presencing at an intrinsic level of our being. To the extent that these meta- and mesa-skills are dynamically embodied, DPC Coaches are able to rise up to meet the

inherent challenges of the mastery practice of learning to sustain presencing as a dynamic and generatively sourced way being.

X. Next-Stage Shift #7: From *Conventional Presence* to a *Dynamic Depth of Presence*

In third-generation coaching, depth tends to be viewed within the interior dimension of the coach and client's experience of dormant qualities of presence. When we shift to a fourth-generation stage of coaching, depth opens to become an embodied, dynamic, flowing presenced movement that weaves together inner and outer dimensions of our experience in a single unified way. In DPC, we work with a *presence as depth approach* that creates conditions for coaching from co-generative presencing (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Third-generation methods of coaching that work with unfolding presence without first ensuring presence has been sufficiently *enfolded into* eventually reach an impasse or encounter a glass ceiling on the mastery curve of presencing. In DPC, there is a *enfoldment process of presence* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming) that is necessary to sufficiently embody the depth-dimensions of presence which shifts the ground and ethos of the coach and client's way of relating in the coaching field. In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the process of enfoldment works with the five level-depths method of presence as a means for 1) actively supporting the deeper generative nature of both coach and client and 2) actively embodying the deeper ontological depths of presence that are necessary for stabilizing presencing as a way of being.

Third-generation approaches tend to view presence as a natural, inherent part of our experience in the case of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) or as a plethora or range of different qualities that are felt and fluidly experienced (Almaas, 2008). In both views, the subtle underlying ontological structures or grounds of presence are not accounted for. Both third-generation approaches to presence overlook these underlying ontological dimensions of being. When this subtle underlying region of presence isn't recognized or integrated well, this becomes a limiting condition from a mastery perspective. In a DPC coaching context, the coach focuses on enfolding into five level-depths of presence as ontological grounds that play a formative role in the coaching process, which implicates our presencing nature and identity as a subtle embodied self-structure that is co-extensive of deeper ground(s) of being. In working with fostering an ontological stabilization of our presence through the enfoldment process ensures that coaching from presence as a sustained way of being is possible. Put in another way, when our

depth and embodiment of presence directly shape and inform our generative sense of coaching self and identity, this greatly empowers our ability to coach from each of the respective level-depths of presence (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

When presence is viewed as an inherent part of our makeup and experience, the *presence as innate approach* is limiting in that it reduces presence to the act of being present to our experience, rather than drawing attention to the underlying relation to the more foundational interior context of consciousness or being that presence itself arises out of. The *presence as innate* approach tends to bring us to the surface of here and now. When we overlook the location depth of consciousness or being from which our presence is sourced in a coaching context, we have one less essential tool set for orienting from an otherwise valuable ground and means for inner presence-guided navigation as coaches. With the DPC coaching approach, each form of presence originates from a particular level-depth of consciousness within our generative nature. In DPC, depth can be traced ontologically to a subtle interior archetypal structure and lifeworld where the form of presence is contacted, uncovered, enfolded into, embodied and finally realized as playing an integral role in constituting our generative way of being.

With the DPC *presence as depth approach*, we begin to immerse in and awaken the depth power of presence from these subtle grounds. From the vantage point of the deeper apprenticeship work of a DPC Coach, the realization often comes that these grounds of presence have a foundational role in their coaching practice. This paradoxical fourth-generation development empowers the DPC Coach to not only embody presence dynamically at depth, but to take the mastery step of learning to sustain contact with deeply generative forms of presence. This strengthens presence as a self-and client empowering force of being and becoming when worked with from its root source depths of our presencing nature.

In the second case where the methods of Almaas (2008), Tolle (2004) and other spiritual teachers have been imported and applied as coaching methods, it can be problematic to view presence through the lens of sacred qualities, as differentiated from parts of one's personality or the everyday content of consciousness such as thoughts or feelings. Qualities alone do not contain a sufficiently strong ontological anchorage to ground the DPC Coach in and from depth. Without a well-anchored coaching practice, the client and coaching process can't be held and resourced well with presence. The *presence as qualities approach* tends to overlook as well as essentialize the underlying ontological structure of depth. It does this by working with the surface quality because it is relatable for clients.

For example, when presence is pursued in this essentialized manner, it tends to be attributed to a deeper wholeness that is expressed through sacred qualities such as love, courage, trust, peace, compassion and so on. However, this essentialized view reduces experience to an underlying structure of a singular wholeness. When the deeper ontological ground of these qualities is ignored, each quality of presence is then traced spiritually to a singular non-dual inner omega point of depth that like a drain in the bottom of a bathtub, draws everything towards this essential-most expression of being. Within spiritual contexts, this subtle reductionism can help practitioners get into contact with essence by helping them realize the everyday content of our experience does not define us. However, in a coaching context, we lose the empowerment function of presence when the inner ontological dimensions are left undifferentiated and not integrated as central to the presence enfoldment and presencing realization process.

This dual integrative process is taken up in depth with the DPC approach as this initial deep enfoldment stage of presence is needed to restore the full depth immersion into presence, which when combined and integrated with presencing, moves to the next stage iteration of a dynamic depth of presencing (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Unfolding depth from a third-generational coaching approach is limited if there is no prior stage of either enfolding or embodying depth in one's coaching practice. Third-generation methods that bypass the initial stage of enfolding depth and go straight to unfolding depth overlook a key source dimension of generativity. In considering these third-generation limitations, our practices of presence need to become more nuanced and embodied to access and optimally engage emerging fourth-generation territory of coaching.

XI. Concluding Remarks

Over the past five-year period, the above series of seven essential next-stage shifts played an invaluable role in revealing emerging fourth-generation coaching territory in my research and coaching practice, as well as emerging forms of presencing mastery that I will be introducing in my forthcoming book. Applying, developing and refining the DPC method in my MBA global classrooms as well as through 500 hours of coaching for my ICF professional level accreditation provided helpful conditions for advancing the overall Dynamic Presencing Coaching approach. As an integrative meta-lens, these seven key shifts highlight important growth edges for an emerging next-stage, fourth-generational coaching approach. As a transformative coaching method, DPC opens up a mastery path to coaching from presencing as foundational to one's core way

of being as a coach. And finally, as a new vehicle for engaging fourth-generational coaching territory, the DPC approach imparts insight into the fundamental processes, principles and practices needed to open a path into a deeper transformed way of being with our experience that is capable of effectively working with the VUCA conditions of our global polycrisis that is increasingly impacting our lives at this time.

With the greater field and industry of coaching continuing to grow internationally in serving the role of engaging the optimal functioning of individuals and groups in our emerging global culture and society, I couldn't agree more with Stelter's (2014b) call for a new mandate and vision for a continued evolutionary development of the practice. From a recent review of the coaching literature and available online accredited coaching offerings, it became apparent that the generative methods and processes outlined in the above DPC meta-framework have yet to be addressed. The predominantly second- and third-generation accounts of the coaching process signal a clear need for continuing to advance fourth-generation coaching approaches. Alongside the emerging fourth-generation approaches of colleagues mentioned above, in building from Stelter's third-generation vision, Dynamic Presencing Coaching is also positioned to continue to *re-think*, *re-envision* as well as *re-discover* new insight beyond the existing leading edges of coaching practice currently available.

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PRESENCING MASTERY AS A RELATIONAL AND ITERATIVE WAY OF KNOWING AND BEING

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Abstract: This article uses the case study of a social innovation hub formed as part of the u.lab MOOC at a Sino-British university, to outline the ways in which Theory U's integrative framework alongside the experiential learning and contemplative practices embedded in u.lab can be used to develop core capacities for presencing mastery. Presencing is understood here as a relational and iterative process that, when supported by epistemic and ontological shifts, guides the locus of presencing mastery to be informed by the pattern and quality of relationships, with one's inner knowing and among individuals in a group. The article positions Theory U as a holistic framework for individuals and groups to engage and integrate the cognitive, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of theirs and the group's presencing. It identifies empathic listening, supported by awareness-based contemplative practices in u.lab, as key for developing relational and embodied forms of presencing mastery.

Keyword: Theory U, u.lab, relational capacities, presencing mastery

I. Introduction

It is wise in your own life to be able to recognize and acknowledge the key thresholds: to take your time; to feel all the varieties of presence that accrue there; to listen inwards with complete attention until you hear the inner voice calling you forward. The time has come to cross. From 'Thresholds' John O' Donohue (To Bless the Space Between Us, 2008)

In Theory U, Scharmer's (2016) theory of transformation, he describes presencing as a process and movement by which individuals and groups enter a deeper state of being of fundamental freedom and capacity to create. Arriving at and crossing this threshold, Scharmer tells us, cannot be achieved through conventional analytical knowledge, rather,

this process emerges out of a set of practices that act as leverage points to deepen our capacity to draw our action from a deeper source (Scharmer, 2016, p. 183). Presencing can thus be understood as an iterative and relational process, guided by practices that help individuals and groups explore the fundamental questions of Who is my Self? (authentic or higher Self) and What is my Work? (purpose, vocation, life's work), to allow for an awareness of future possibilities that would have otherwise not been available or conceivable. Core practices for cultivating presencing mastery can be linked to the development of both individual and group relational capacities that are supported by epistemic and ontological shifts toward and focus on the patterns and quality of relationships within a particular group or system.

Through the example of a social innovation hub formed as part of the u.lab MOOC at a Sino-British university, I argue that Theory U's integrative framework, supported by the u.lab experiential and contemplative curriculum and platform, provides an integrative holistic structure for individuals and groups to foster relational and embodied forms of presencing mastery. Theory U's systems-view perspective provides the conceptual framework for individuals and groups to engage with and integrate the cognitive, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of theirs and the group's transformation (Pomeroy & Olivier, 2021, p. 72). This epistemological grounding, in turn, is supported by u.lab's experiential learning and contemplative practices, which serve as a form of scaffolding to develop and support different ways of being (ontological shift) necessary for cultivating presencing. Hence, I argue that while Theory U's conceptual framework emphasizes a shift in ways of knowing, the u.lab's embodied experiential learning process supports shifts in ways of being. Put differently, Theory U and u.lab can provide individuals with a body of knowledge and a set of tools to engage in the interrelated shifts in ways of knowing and being. Such iterative cognitive and felt/embodied experience, when understood, framed and applied experientially towards this ontological end, can help connect with the experience of presencing as a way of being, which is a core focus of Gunnlaugson's account of "presencing mastery" in the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2021).

Within this context, I identify empathic listening, supported by awareness-based practices such as journaling and mindfulness, as key practices for developing intersubjective capacities that support relational forms of presencing mastery. Crucial to engaging with and honing these practices is the development of a safe holding space – in this case the hub – where group members meet regularly to discuss Theory U principles, and to engage in generative dialogue around an individual's or a group challenge in small coaching circles. In

this way, individual and collective presencing capacities are supported, which can then be deployed in other contexts outside the hub. I thus argue that presencing mastery requires individual and groups to engage in an iterative “cycle of presencing” (Scharmer 2018, p. 31) to deepen awareness, inner knowing, and connection to what in Theory U is referred to as one’s highest future possibility or true work. Iteration is thus not only about repetition of certain practices, but about implementing those practices from newly gained worldviews and ways of being.

II. u.lab: supporting practice for developing capacity for presencing mastery

In Theory U’s U-shaped journey of transformation, presencing is a pre-condition to crystallising and co-creating emerging future possibilities arising from a new eco-awareness (up-ward trajectory of the U-journey). Arriving at the threshold of presencing at the bottom of the U involves shifting perception to enable the connection to our “real being” or true work or vocation (Scharmer, 2016, p. 161). This downward movement on the left side of the U entails a shift in the ways in which we attend, via opening of the mind (through curiosity), the heart (through empathy and compassion), and the will (through courage) (Scharmer, 2018, p. 28). Further, the aim here is to shift the place from which we operate and attend, we - as individuals and as groups - need to negotiate and overcome our internal voices of judgement, cynicism, and fear (Scharmer, 2018, p. 28).

As mentioned earlier, leverage points for deepening one’s capacity to operate from a deeper awareness and inner knowing are embedded in both individual and collective contemplative practices, supported by a safe and regular holding space. The u.lab curriculum and activities, including the hubs, also referred to as local communities of change, provide a scaffolding or “set-up” – such as coaching circles - for engaging in the regular enactment of those practices. Over fourteen weeks, u.lab participants are introduced to the Theory U framework and the U journey of transformation through videos, reading materials, and experiential learning exercises to apply various awareness-based practices, such as mindfulness, empathic listening and a daily journaling practice. Early in the course participants are introduced to Theory U’s levels of listening, and for the rest of the course, they are asked to do a short daily journaling exercise to reflect on how they listened to others in the interactions they had that day. Meanwhile, from the first hub meet-up, members commit to engage and listen to others from a place of non-judgement, with an open mind and open heart, seeking to give rise to a generative dialogue over the course of each session.

Because listening has a relational dimension to the practice, the way we listen to others is also shaped by the quality of the interactions and relationships of those engaged in dialogue. Consequently, developing a listening-awareness practice is prioritised to shift the place from which our actions stem, away from ignorance, hate and fear, toward engaging with others from a place of curiosity, empathy, and courage. At the hub sessions, the common intention and commitment to empathic listening allowed participants to feel safe to share without fear of being judged. The shift toward more empathic listening and trust building within the group was a gradual one, built over several fortnightly sessions.

This new awareness of how empathic listening can positively influence relationships (a cognitive shift), emerged alongside, and was supported by new ways of being (ontological shift) within the group. For example, such a shift was expressed by some participants as feeling more confident in themselves, an experience that seemed to emerge from a more empathic disposition towards themselves and others (negotiating their inner voices of judgement, fear and cynicism). Interactions within the safe space of the hub also created a new awareness of the embodied or felt quality of the transformation they were undergoing. This quality of “knowing through being,” (Gunnlaugson, 2023, p.14) became a way through which participants could gain a greater awareness of how a shift in ways of being can play a role in influencing the quality of relationships.

Participants spoke of bringing their newly gained listening awareness and disposition to everyday interactions and observing the qualitative change in those encounters, as well as in themselves. Empathy walks are one of the tools or practices that u.lab participants are encouraged to engage in, to develop empathic listening, and an awareness of how that listening influences the relationship with those they are engaging in. The empathy walk requires individuals to suspend judgement and “hold space” for someone who is very different from themselves, in order to establish a relationship across a significant boundary (u.school, n.d.). One participant, for example, shared about her decision to engage in an empathy walk with a stranger while on a trip overseas.

For me the empathy walk was probably the biggest challenge because I'm not a person who is really...how to say...open at first, I'm really bad at starting a conversation [laughter] with someone... I think this [new disposition] really helped me to get over myself, step out of the comfort zone and try to connect to someone. And I wouldn't have done that before.

When first formed, the hub also brought together a diverse group of strangers. Hub participants were from different cultural backgrounds and came from different parts of the university, and therefore most did not know each other before they joined u.lab and the hub.¹ One student, commented on the initial uncertainty over how to relate to others in the

¹ For a full outline of the hub composition and activities, as well as of the methodology used to gather and analyse the qualitative data in the case study see Carrillo 2023.

first few meetings: "...everyone is really different to engage with...how to say? Yeah, at first, I was not sure how to engage with everyone..." Later on, when asked to share about their overall experience in the hub, the same student mentioned:

I found it very different from all the other classes...at the core I think that also the atmosphere is very different from another classroom...I liked that we did this meditation in the beginning...a little bit like, hmmm...how did I feel? I felt like with people that are similar, very similar to me...or probably are there for the same reasons...And that made me feel comfortable, I would say...

This sense of common purpose or intention, built through mindfulness and empathic listening, helped hub participants feel more confident to share a personal experience, dilemma, or aspiration within their coaching circle. For some, the hub and coaching circles became a safe space where they could be vulnerable through their sharing, in a way that had not been possible in other contexts (Carrillo 2023, p. 526). In this way, the hub and coaching circles opened a space for personal exploration and in some cases, transformation, whereby hub members' listening became "a holding space for bringing something new into reality that wants to be born" (Scharmer, 2018, pp. 27–28).

New self-awareness and insights about themselves gained through the dialogue and interactions in the hub gave participants a new sense of agency, as well as a more empathic disposition towards themselves and others. These shifts point to the felt or embodied dimensions of presencing, and to the transformative capacities of learning through doing and being. As examples of "letting be" (Gunnlaugson, 2023), these shifts would eventually help participants develop relational capacities - such as empathic listening and non-judgement - that could be deployed in conversations and interactions in other contexts. Empathic listening and sharing in the context of the safe space of the hub allowed participants to make an inner shift, helping them access their authentic self and the liminal space of presencing.

The shift in how they listened to others, supported by awareness-based practices, was identified by participants as one of the most important enablers of personal transformation, through its effect on the relationship to themselves and to others. In tandem, their newly gained disposition for empathic listening, helped them foster the relational capacities needed for authentic and inclusive collaboration and co-creation to emerge (Carrillo 2023, p. 516). As the course progressed, the quality of the interactions within the hub gave participants a glimpse into how interrelationships create reality (Buechner et al., 2020, p. 95). The epistemological and cognitive shift triggered by the engagement with the Theory U framework, was thus enhanced by the felt or embodied, emotional and relational dimensions that were explored in u.lab. In this sense, the development of relationality and deep connectedness can be seen as essential for bringing about transformative individual, organisational and societal/systems change.

III. The transformative capacity of Theory U's integrative framework

Nurturing the practice of empathic listening within the context of a safe space and supported by mindfulness and journaling practices speaks to the embodied potential of presencing when it is rooted in a relationality that “conveys a connection beyond the ego, capturing spiritual dimensions all humans share with deeper self, others, nature, and the universe” (Watson, 2002, p. 13). A shift toward such forms of relationality, however, requires critical self-reflection; a questioning of one's personal worldview, values, and ways of knowing. Hence, the more embodied and affective ontological forms of transformation that take place within the hub, need to also be supported by an episteme that enables individuals and groups to embrace different ways of knowing the world.

Those who are attracted to u.lab are usually drawn in by Theory U's holistic framework of transformation, which links personal and systemic transformation, going beyond a focus on cognitive or mental processes, to engage with the “emotional/relational, and spiritual dimensions of transformative change” (Pomeroy and Olivier, 2021, p. 72). Within the education sector, affective, and spiritual relationships have generally been kept out of the curriculum, while learning and knowing have tended to be separated from our senses and life worlds (Selby, 2002 cited in Lehner, 2022, p. 39). This has contributed to the fragmentation of students' views of themselves (Shahjanhan, 2005, p. 692), and to their sense of separation from others, from nature, and from the systems they are part of. Theory U provided a powerful systematic framework through which participants could interrogate what they knew and how they knew it, while u.lab tools and practices enabled participants to integrate that into their lives.

Hub participants mentioned being drawn to Theory U and u.lab's framework and platform, curious as to the links it made between personal growth and broader social change. One participant mentioned how much they appreciated having the space and opportunity to “recognise and find yourself”, while connecting with other people and the world (Carrillo, 2023, p. 10). Within u.lab, Theory U's systems-view perspective allowed participants to view and understand knowledge and reason as relational processes (Gergen, 2015; Lange, 2018). The shift in how they listen to others becomes the pathway through which this new relational understanding of the world also becomes a form of embodied knowledge through different ways of being. By attempting to engage the whole person - body, mind, emotion, spirit and will - Theory U can thus provide a foundation for a presencing type of cognition or “open knowing” to emerge (Scharmer, 2016, p. 165). In this way, Theory U explored in u.lab helped participants develop a relational form of

presencing mastery that can be understood and experienced as “knowing through being” (Gunnlaugson, 2023).

IV. Discussion and Conclusions

In the above analysis presencing was defined as an iterative and relational process through which individuals and groups can connect to and cultivate their inner wisdom and sense of future possibilities or purpose. Presencing can thus be characterised as both a “social technology” of freedom (Scharmer 2016) and as an instrument of personal, transpersonal and collective transformation (Gunnlaugson, 2021). Enabling and nurturing paths to presencing mastery is thus a worthwhile endeavour in the pursuit of more just and equitable futures. Here I argue that Theory U’s integrative framework, alongside the curriculum and infrastructure of the u.lab MOOC can provide practices through which more relational forms of presencing mastery can be developed, through the holistic and dialogical transformation of the individual and the collective. On the one hand, Theory U’s holistic framework provides individuals and groups with a framework to engage with and integrate cognition, emotion, relationality and spirituality to support theirs and the group’s transformation (Pomeroy & Olivier, 2021, p. 72). On the other hand, u.lab provides the scaffolding to develop and support individual and collective practices to cultivate presencing within a safe holding space.

Without intending to be a prescriptive formula, empathic listening, mindfulness, and journaling (to support listening awareness) were identified as core practices for deepening the capacity to operate from a deeper source or inner knowing. Empathic listening, in being informed by a relational onto-epistemology, was crucial for guiding the iterative “cycle of presencing,” in ways that led to encountering the possibilities for presencing as a felt, embodied experience. The hub or local community of change part of u.lab, provided a safe holding space for individuals to develop and hone their listening skills and relational capacities. Such a safe container was built on a commitment from its members to listen and relate from an open mind and open heart. Intentionality and a shift in perception hence become crucial qualities of a transformative holding space.

The transformative potential of Theory U and u.lab were mediated by the characteristics of the individuals and the group, and the heightened level of self-awareness within them. Theory U and u.lab are meant to engage individuals and groups in a journey of transformation, one which is not meant to conclude upon conclusion of the course. Cultivating presencing at an embodied level thus becomes a crucial element for fostering long lasting and evolving transformative processes. Additionally, practitioners can

complement the Theory U and u.lab frameworks with mastery approaches such as Gunnlaugson's Dynamic Presencing, which emphasise the need to cultivate embodied forms of presence based on "knowing through being," rather than a presencing based in awareness-based forms of making a cognitive shift. Among other aspects, cultivating the relational and embodied dimensions of presencing are critical to any path of mastery. The path towards presencing mastery, consequently, depends in part on contexts of quality relationships (to inner knowing and to others) and safe spaces, where individuals and collectives can sense and actualise emerging future possibilities with potential to disrupt the status quo.

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CULTIVATING STILLNESS THROUGH YOGA: *Considerations for a deepening of Presencing Mastery at the Bottom of the U*

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Abstract: Dynamic Presencing offers a significant advancement in the work of presencing. The work as a whole opens up new territory at the bottom of the U that develops existing understandings and applications of presencing in Theory U contexts. Key to the first three journeys is the ability to embody different level-depths of presence and to learn to rest in stillness and discern emergence in a way that generates a subtle but active renewal of our seeing from Source. We suggest the *Yoga Sutras*, as a foundational document of the philosophy and practice of yoga, and as a holistic and systemic approach to stilling the waves of consciousness, offer supportive practices and ways of being that are complimentary to the Dynamic Presencing method of attuning to, being and seeing from Source. In this article, we illustrate how yoga practice not only aligns with but also provides an important and necessary contribution to the Dynamic Presencing mastery ideal of engaging presencing as a generative way of being. To this end, we outline two of the eight limbs or components of classical yoga—*yama-niyama* and *gunas*—as a means of demonstrating these alignments and essential contributions.

Keywords: *Yoga Sutras*; stillness of consciousness; holistic approach to Dynamic Presencing; *yama-niyama*; *gunas*

I. Introduction

Living in a historical moment when change is ever more rapid and uncertain, when the characteristics of a VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Hadar et al., 2020; LeBlanc, 2018) are ever more present, Gunnlaugson and Brendel (2020) note *presencing* increasingly represents “... a viable, comprehensive praxis for stewarding change and global transformation.” Contemplative

practice has been a feature of the presencing work since its inception. In their initial dialogues, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers (2005) referred to contemplation as part of the work of suspending, of “seeing from the whole” (p. 41ff), as part of integrating “inner work.” They saw it as a “capacity to slow down and gradually become aware of our ‘thought stream’” (p. 37), pointing to two aspects of contemplation: concentration, the ability to still and focus the mind, and mindfulness, the ability to attend as fully as possible to the present in a dispassionate fashion (pp. 50–53).

They defined presencing at that time as the work at the bottom of the U, as “seeing from the deepest source and becoming a vehicle for that source” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 89). Contemplative stillness plays a role in connecting us to what is referred to in Daoist philosophy as Source: “It’s what is ‘at the heart of the heart.’ When we’re connected to the source, things become more and more integrated as a path, with attention, body, and mind coming together ...” (p. 99). Jaworski (Senge et al., 2005) described this contemplative process as “[b]ecoming aware of yourself and the world by stopping the flow of thought” (p. 182) that leads to a state of “true stillness, what we’ve called the bottom of the U” (p. 183). Brendel (2020) points to contemplative practices of mindfulness and focusing on the breath as means of deepening our awareness and bringing us into the present moment as needed in presencing.

The focus on inner stillness and the ability of contemplative practices to stabilize it connects to a central part of Theory U work. In recent years, Gunnlaugson (2020) has made the case for “a more in-depth approach to presencing” (p. 4) that takes root foundationally in one’s daily life and experience. He concluded that a pre-condition for this task is to engage with presencing as a way of living and being from “a sufficiently lived into depth of embodiment of presence.” Gunnlaugson focuses on an integrated cultivation of presence, which among other core commitments, includes bringing Source into the self and, more specifically, into our own grounded, lived, phenomenological experience. This deep, focused work at the bottom of the U draws upon a contemplative orientation and set of practices to sustain and deepen our overall presence and presencing awareness as a flowing movement. This work is informed in part by the capacity to *connect to*, *be-with* and *be* Source. The contemplative work offers what Reams, Gunnlaugson, and Reams (2014) refer to as the means of accessing “stillness, discernment, and generative action” (p. 41) by revealing the most fundamental levels of our being and underlying dimensions of presencing. The deeper presencing work of Dynamic Presencing is a kind of emergent contemplative practice, in that it requires working with presencing regularly over a sustained period of time in ways that

connect and deepen our access to presencing as a way of being. Gunnlaugson notes that a pre-condition for this task is to engage with presencing ontologically as a way of living via “a sufficiently lived into depth of embodiment of presence” (pp. 6–7). For this purpose, Gunnlaugson developed Dynamic Presencing, which is a more integrated path of presencing mastery that consists of five immersive, transformative journeys (figure 1.0).

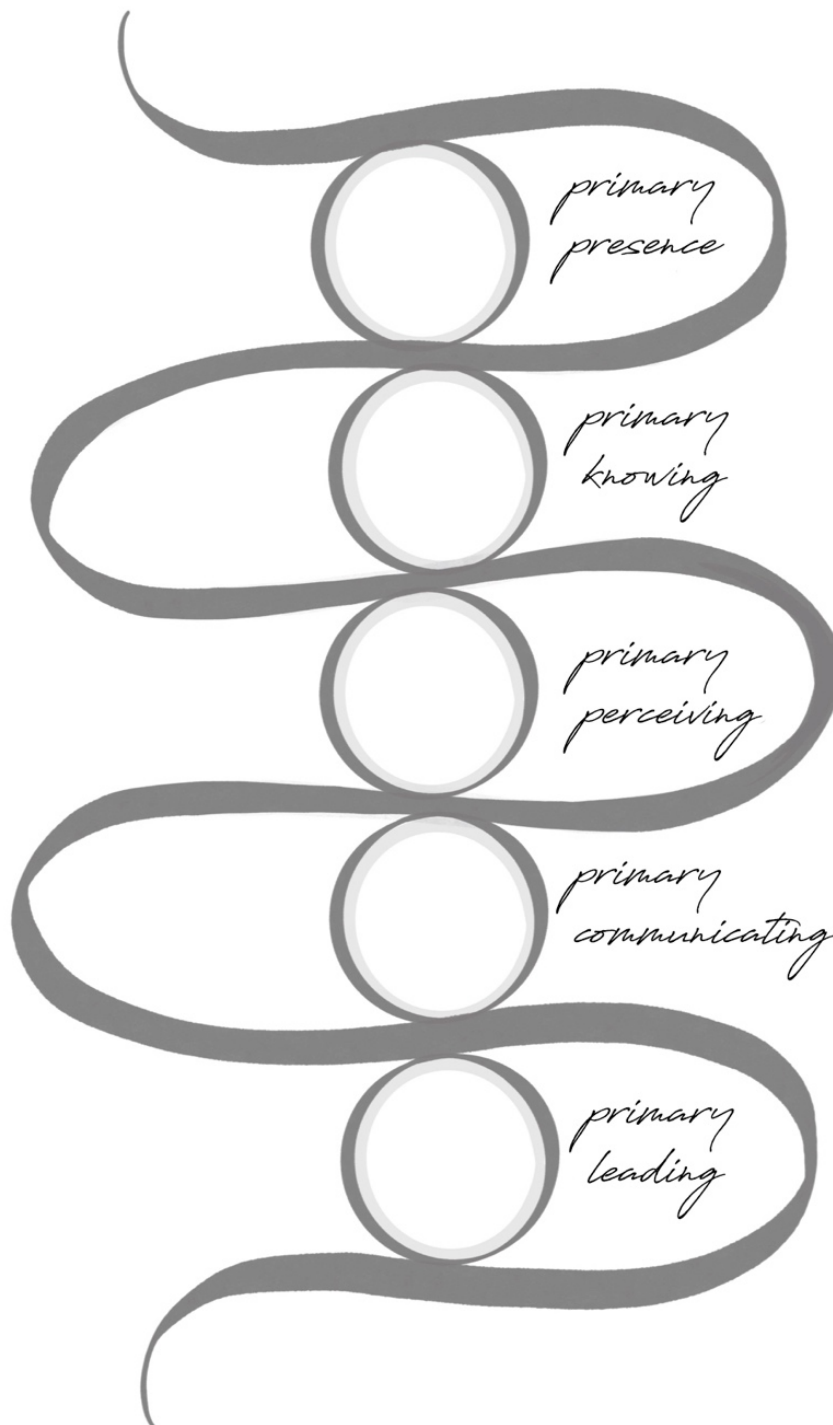


Figure 1.0 The five journeys of Dynamic Presencing

His method focuses on cultivating the ontological dimension of one's immediate experience since this dimension is "precisely where our work begins and continues to live into through each of the five journeys" (p. 67).

For the purposes of this article, we would like to build on the contributions of Dynamic Presencing with its ideal of presencing mastery (i.e., presencing as a way of being) by exploring connections to the ancient path of yoga, as represented in the teachings and practices of the *Yoga Sutras*. As much a way of living as it is a practice (Zimmer, 2009), the *Yoga Sutras* offer a comprehensive, integrated, and effective means of achieving the stillness of mind that is reflected in the first three journeys of *primary presence*, *primary knowing*, and *primary perceiving*.

While incorporating meditative approaches supports the work of Dynamic Presencing, we maintain that these alone will not achieve the desired transformation of consciousness. The *Yoga Sutras* point to a comprehensive and integrated set of practices, regularly working through the body, intellect, emotions, and spirit, that foster the deeper inner work required by Dynamic Presencing. In his commentaries on the *Yoga Sutras*, Chapple (2008) writes of the virtues of an integrated, systemic approach:

Yoga practice takes an individual on an inward journey. It begins with taming one's impulses through the cultivation of ethical precepts and molding a positive outlook through the application of the virtues. It requires the harnessing of the energy generated within one's body and breath. It culminates in a threefold interiority of concentration, meditation, and becomingwhelmed or enraptured. (pp. ix-x)

The essential focus of the *Yoga Sutras* is a systemic, holistic practice embracing every aspect of the individual's being in cultivating stillness. The stillness of consciousness that yoga develops in practitioners helps give an enriched access to the "foundational levels of our humanity" where, Gunnlaugson (2020) asserts, "new inscapes emerge through which presencing can flow through anew, illuminating unforetold insights and revelations" (p. 23). As a systemic approach, yoga practice requires the practitioner to work with all aspects of one's life to still consciousness and is ideally suited to assisting in deepening the practitioner's capacity for the aforementioned Dynamic Presencing journeys. Likewise, yoga encompasses the ontological dimensions of both experience and being. As we outline the relevant teachings and practices of the *Yoga Sutras* in this article, we intend to establish how yoga's aim at comprehensively transforming one's inner being bears similarities to and supports the Dynamic Presencing goal of offering an in-depth journey to transform the capacity, function and purpose of one's existing presencing practice, and in turn realizations and developments along the path of

presencing mastery. Yoga aims at a comprehensive transformation of one's deeper capacities, one's inner being. The stillness of consciousness that yoga develops opens the doors where the ontological, epistemological, and intersubjective transformations can take place.

II. The *Yoga Sutras*

Yoga represents one of the six philosophical schools of Indian philosophy. It is most closely aligned with and literally follows from the teachings of the *Sāṃkhya* school, which provides the metaphysical foundations upon which the yoga teachings rest. *Sāṃkhya* teaches two fundamental principles that comprise reality—*purusa*, the innermost consciousness, the Seer, higher Self, or unitary soul, and *prakṛti*, the material world with all its variability, the Seen. *Sāṃkhya* argues that we normally identify with *prakṛti*—a materialistic self in a changing world—but should aim to re-establish our identity as *purusha*. As Chapple (2008) puts it: “The purpose of Yoga is to reveal reality as it relates to the seer and, through certain practices, break through to the point of consciousness where there is no distinction between seer and seen” (p. 27). This theme of unity is central to the Vedānta school, with which yoga is also closely aligned.

Written by Patañjali, the *Yoga Sutras* present a comprehensive, integrated program for stilling the restless of the mind. The teachings represent what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Eightfold Path of Yoga’ or ‘Eight-limbed Path of Yoga’ or (*ashtanga yoga*):

Yama—the ethical imperatives, restraints, and abstentions, around what *not* to do: nonviolence; not lying; not stealing; sexual restraint; and non-possessiveness.

Niyama—the ethical imperatives around what one *should* do, the observances or virtues: purity of body, speech, and mind; contentment; self-discipline; study of self and spiritual teachings, self-reflection and introspection; and devoted surrender.

Āsana—assuming and maintaining a comfortable posture for meditative practices.

Prāṇāyāma—control of the breath and energy (*prāṇa*) in the body.

Pratyāhāra—interiorization of the consciousness; withdrawing the mind from the sensory world.

Dhāraṇā—concentration; developing one-pointedness of mind.

Dhyāna—meditation; a contemplative awareness of what the mind is now focused on

Samādhi—union; complete immersion in or joining with the object of meditation.

The Eightfold Path is meant to be practiced and developed sequentially; that is, one works on developing *yama* and *niyama* before working on developing stillness in a meditation posture (*āsana*). Once one has developed *āsana*, one can then proceed to practice control of breath and energy (*prāṇāyāma*)—and so on. The practice and

development of one step leads to readiness for the next step. However, in reality one is also working on all the various steps concurrently as part of an integrated practice. As Bryant (2009) points out, the *Yoga Sūtras* is a manual for the yoga practitioner rather than an exposition of a yoga philosophy; the aim is direct experience and ultimately union with *puruṣa*.

What is widely considered the most important *sūtra* (verse) comes at the very beginning: “*yogaś citta vṛitti nirodha*,” which translates as “Yoga is the stilling of the changing states of the mind” (Bryant, 2009, p. 10). The aim of the yoga teachings is to still the restless mind so that it can perceive the true nature of reality—*puruṣa*. The very next *sūtra* asserts: “*tadā drastuḥ svarūpe ’vasthānam*,” which translates as “When that [stilling] has been accomplished, the seer abides in its own true nature” (p. 22). Abiding in that true, still nature provides a greatly deepened insight into the nature of things.

This aim of stillness is similarly reflected in the work of Dynamic Presencing, including what Gunnlaugson, in the last chapter of *Dynamic Presencing*, refers to as the “stillpoint.” Śāṅkara, perhaps the most famous Indian philosopher, in his commentary on the *Yoga Sūtras* (called the *Vivaraṇa*, circa 700 CE; Leggett, 2016) on this *sūtra*, asserts that knowledge of reality is the aim of yoga; stilling the restless consciousness is the means to this knowledge. Again, we see the connection to Dynamic Presencing and the journeys of *primary knowing* and *primary perceiving*.

It is worth noting that *chitta* (or *citta*) is a comprehensive term, covering the many dimensions and activities of consciousness/mind; as Feuerstein (1989) notes, the term is not easily translatable into English because of its comprehensive nature. It includes the *manas* (the rational mind with its various thoughts and the senses as vehicles of perception; likes and dislikes), *buddhi* (intelligence; judgment, discrimination), and *ahamkāra* (the sense of self or identity, egoity). Feelings/emotions, (likes and dislikes) are also a significant component of *chitta*, and they are often associated with the heart.

The meditative practices outlined in the *Yoga Sūtras* that comprise steps six and seven of the ‘eightfold path’ of yoga—*dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna*—are key to this stilling of the mind. However, the teachings of the *Yoga Sūtras* are meant to be considered as a whole; stripping *dhāraṇā* and *dhyāna* from the text as isolated practices is not as effective in producing that stillness of consciousness. Bryant (2009) writes: The more the eightfold path is practiced, the more these impurities [of the mind, such as aversion, attachment, ego] dwindle, and the more they dwindle, the more this light [of insight, mental illumination, stillness] can correspondingly increase. This increase culminates in the desired discriminative discernment (p. 241)

III. Yoga and Primary Presence

In his discussion of the first journey, *primary presence*, Gunnlaugson states that in learning to “contact and root our awareness from the grounds of presence that support our presencing nature, each lifeworld helps us rediscover what our presencing nature is” (p. 37). The unique contribution of yoga practice lies in offering the practitioner an integrated set of tools that allow one to still consciousness and open awareness in a systematic and holistic fashion.

In fostering this stillness of consciousness, we begin to establish ourselves in our “presencing nature” and in turn to be “in touch with the fullness of reality that is present in each presencing situation” (p. 39). This inner stillness helps create conditions to ground oneself in what Gunnlaugson refers to as the “seat of presence inside each lifeworld” (p. 37). Yoga practices offer, through the integration of stillness and awareness, a sound inner foundation from which one can orient. In this respect, yoga helps navigate and develop the “ontological regions or grounds” that support presencing. Yoga can thus play a uniquely valuable role in navigating each of the four lifeworlds of *primary presence*.

To illustrate how this is possible, the lifeworld of *being real* represents reconnecting to the “immediacy of our existential ground” (p. 39) being “open to ourselves to contacting reality as it is” (p. 40). By returning to stillness, we make this connection to reality, to things as they are. When we contact reality as it is, we can then be more authentic and open to what Gunnlaugson refers to as “an existential form of seeing and relating to reality without the filters and societal lenses” (p. 40). This stillness allows us to disentangle from the intellectual and emotional colourings of our experience in the second lifeworld of *being witness* by accessing a “more transcendent consciousness-based perspective” (p. 45). Similarly, when in the third lifeworld of *being essence*, we contact what Gunnlaugson refers to as “a coherent state of felt contact with our essential nature” (p. 49). From this place of stillness, we begin to gain a deepened insight into the nature of our experience, which leads to re-connecting with the fourth lifeworld, *being Source*. He writes, “in taking our seat in being Source, we contact the very foundation of who we are. From the wisdom traditions, this is regarded as the non-dual immersion into the very heart of reality” (p. 55). Gunnlaugson later states, “through the depths of quiet that rise to meet us, there is an inner cessation and suspension of habitual activity. We come to the fullness of being at rest and in this stopping, therein lies the possibility of communing directly with source to understand, learn from and

apprentice from it directly” (p. 57). We would suggest that yoga, as an integrated practice, can support the journey of primary presence by supporting practitioners in establishing this deeper communion with and *as* Source.

For those practitioners working with Dynamic Presencing, for the remainder of our article, we have chosen to focus on two elements of the *Yoga Sutras* that we feel can be helpful in both understanding and practice: 1) the *yama-niyama*, and 2) the *gunas* (primordial qualities), which tend to be overlooked in contemporary contemplative/meditative practice.

IV. *Yama–Niyama* and the Three Gunas

The first five limbs of Patañjali’s Yoga—*yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, and *pratyāhāra*—are known as the ‘outer limbs’ (*bahinranga*), as they “concern a practitioner’s basic orientation to the social world and to the senses” (MacKenzie, 2019, p. 208). Among these five limbs, *yama* and *niyama* constitute the moral foundation upon which the practitioner is to live in a peaceful way in the world, develop and transform character while in engagement with the other limbs. In MacKenzie’s (2019) interpretation, the *yama-niyama* “constitute Yoga’s framework for developing both other-regarding and self-regarding virtues [or modes of being] and virtuous modes of living” (p. 208). The significance of the practices of *yama-niyama* as part of one’s daily life is that they contribute to the development of a foundation of stillness in one’s life.

The *gunas* may be said to represent three fundamental qualities or forces in all nature or the manifest cosmos (*prakṛti*). The significance of these qualities—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—is that they influence *chitta*, either by contributing to its stillness (*nirodha*) or its restlessness (*vṛitti*). Each of the *gunas* manifests in an individual in varying degrees. The first of these, *sattva*, denotes the qualities of lucidity, tranquility, virtue, wisdom, detachment, unalloyed happiness, purity, and peace; the Sanskrit root of the word *sattva* denotes the fundamental nature of being itself. Attunement with *sattva* stills consciousness and contributes to the Dynamic Presencing journeys by deepening both stillness and insight. *Rajas* signifies activity, creativity, restlessness, attachment, power, passion. While attunement or alignment with *rajas* can evoke creativity and dynamism, it can also contribute to a restless consciousness that can obscure deeper connections to Source. When *tamas* is predominant in the consciousness, ignorance, lethargy, disinterest, delusion, untruth, indolence, and darkness are principally present. These latter forces almost certainly impede the inner processes represented in the Dynamic Presencing journeys. What is significant is that these *gunas* come into force through the

thoughts and actions of individuals, influenced by both internal and external forces. One can increase or decrease the presence and power of any of the *gunas* by conscious and sustained intention, thought, and action. Bryant (2009) points out that one of the goals of yoga is to maximize the presence of *sattva*, since these qualities contribute to a stilled, luminous consciousness, and minimize the presence of *rajas* and *tamas*. It is then that one works towards the stillness of one's consciousness, what Chapple refers to as "the goal of luminosity" (p. 72). The practice of yoga empowers one to "regulate and pacify the drama of the ever-changing *gunas*" (p. 105). Indeed, the last *sutra* of the *Yoga Sutras* (IV.34) references higher awareness or steadfastness of consciousness as a transcendence of the *gunas* and their influence.

V. The Significance of *Yama-Niyama* and the *Gunas* to Yoga Practice and Dynamic Presencing

The significance of both *yama-niyama* and awareness of the *gunas* for the Dynamic Presencing practitioner is, again, that conscious, intentional practice of *yama-niyama* and the development of sattvic qualities leads to the stillness of body, mind, and heart, allowing presencing practitioners to "... delve into uncovering new inscapes and horizons beyond their existing presencing practice" (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 7). Other significant considerations are awareness and practice. As mentioned, the *Yoga Sutras* present a comprehensive, integrated/Integral (Wilber, 2006, 2018) approach to the stilling of consciousness and a greater awareness of Source (Gunnlaugson, 2020; Jaworski, 2012), of both what is and what is unfolding, part of the essence of Dynamic Presencing. The application of the teachings of the *Yoga Sutras* allows what Senge et al. (2005) mention: concentration, the ability to still and focus the mind, and mindfulness, the ability to attend as fully as possible to the present in a dispassionate fashion. Central to both yoga and Dynamic Presencing is regular, committed practice. The *Yoga Sutras* presents not only a comprehensive teaching but one that is in its essence a practice. A study of these teachings helps one understand the nature of consciousness and how the restlessness of the mind can be overcome to achieve this state of *nirodha*, which is reflected in the first two Dynamic Presencing journeys of *primary presence* and *primary knowing* (Scott, 2021).

We addressed the ontological dimensions of practice earlier in this essay with our focus on *primary presence*. With respect to the epistemological inquiries, Gunnlaugson writes: "... learning to let go as a surrender relaxes our usual separate self-identity and connects us with our presencing nature. From this perspective, letting go is in essence a

gesture of coming home to a fuller sense of who we are.” The yoga practices are designed, as mentioned early in the essay, to shift the sense of identification from a separate, material sense of self to a complete identification with *purusha*, the Seer. This movement is both ontological and epistemological, as it moves us into that which is unknown to the ordinary, world-centered consciousness. The following passage from *Dynamic Presencing* links the ontological and epistemological and perfectly captures what yoga practice is designed to achieve:

As our ontological capacity for being with what-is develops, so also does our epistemological capacity for discerning new emergence. In other words, our discernment of letting come, when guided by a more developed capacity for letting be, is more centered, coherent, at ease, receptive—again, all subtle qualities of well-being and wholesome, integrated wisdom. (p. 74)

The practice of surrender that is part of *primary knowing* is explored in the fifth *niyama*, devoted surrender (*īśvara-pranidhāna*). This prepares us for the journey of *primary perceiving*. In surrendering, we then can attune ourselves to *what-is*; the non-attachment of both contentment (*santosā*) and devoted surrender (*īśvara-pranidhāna*) deepen our ability to discern what is arising, as we know longer hold on to attachments, desires, assumptions, and knowing. We then can see more clearly *what-is-emerging*. These more foundational ontological and epistemological shifts move us beyond a limited sense of an isolated self. One now identifies and perceives through an interconnected Self, *purusha*, which is “witness, free, indifferent, a spectator, inactive” and all-pervasive (Bryant, 2009, p. xlvi); there is now a “nonseparation of knower, knowing, and known” (Chapple, 2008, p. 27). As *purusha* is the ground of all being, realization of one’s identification with it opens the possibilities for intersubjective connection in the *you-, we- and all-space*. As Lasater (2007) puts it “Patañjali’s Sutra gives us tools for improving our relationships by stripping away the illusions that shield us from connection with our true Self, with others, and with life itself.”

Primary leading, which is made possible by success with the other four journeys of Dynamic Presencing, follows from what Gunnlaugson refers to learning to access one’s stillpoint: “Our stillpoint is the felt inner region of stillness that pervades our inner body and allows for a seamless contact with our ground of presence and the presencing field-space we are in (i.e. *i-space, you-space, we-space or all-space*).” Yoga practice can serve the development and embodiment of this stillpoint, which connects us to source—what we would suggest is the *purusha* of the *Yoga Sutras*.

What distinguishes Dynamic Presencing is its focus on intentional journeys that

cultivate a deepened presencing mastery that builds on the applied, practical focus of Theory U. The active and dynamic elements of these journeys—what Gunnlaugson refers to as an “in-depth apprenticeship”—align well with yoga. A focus on regular, repeated, and sustained practice and on mastery are critically central to the *Yoga Sutras*. *Sutra* I.12 states “[The] *vritti* states of mind are stilled by practice and dispassion” (Bryant, 2009, p. 47); Chapple (2008) translates this as “restraint arises from practice and release from desire” (pp. 116; 146). We earlier compared the restless mind to a stream flowing over rocky terrain; Vyāsa, in his commentary notes that practice (*abhyāsa*) ‘checks’ or tames the flow of water, stilling it (Bryant, 2009; Leggett, 2016). Bryant notes “By flowing along the course of discrimination, the mind leads to upliftment and ultimate liberation by practice of yoga, the flow of mind toward higher knowledge becomes unobstructed, and the mind becomes immersed in discrimination” (p. 48). Minimizing the influence of both *rajas* and *tamas*, as appropriate, is ultimately a disciplinary set of acts and an art of discrimination: in total, a sustained, repeated set of practices. Mastering *yama-niyama*, likewise, is a disciplinary set of acts and an art of discrimination, a sustained, repeated set of practices. These both contribute to yoga and its success. Practice of yoga extends beyond any time set aside for, example, meditative engagement. In a larger, more relevant context, yoga becomes a way of life, a set of conscious intentions and acts designed to be aware of and transform the consciousness that can be carried out throughout one’s life.

VI. Conclusion

Contemplative approaches have become widely advocated in the fields of education, leadership, and health (Gunnlaugson, Sarath, Scott, & Bai, 2014). One can see that practicing the *Yoga Sutras* is not a short-term project that can be taken on as a practice decontextualized from the aspects of one’s life but rather requires intense, sustained effort in virtually all aspects of life. Similarly, practicing Gunnlaugson’s work on Dynamic Presencing reflects a similar conclusion: sustained effort in practice in one’s life is needed to reach the far shore of presencing as a dynamic way of being. The deeper sustained accolades of presencing mastery cultivated through the five methods of Dynamic Presencing can benefit from comprehensive approaches like the *Yoga Sutras*, which foster stillness through one’s body, mind, heart, and spirit. Meditative efforts on their own, we believe, would not be sufficient for a fully integrated stage of mastery. In this regard, the *Yoga Sutras* offer a comprehensive applied teaching that outlines a set of practices and disciplines that can be carried out anywhere, in every context of one’s life,

with the aim of achieving the quality of stillness and lucidity that are essential to the work of Dynamic Presencing.

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DEVELOPING PRESENCING MASTERY:

Drawing from the Works of Theory U, Dynamic Presencing, Mindfulness Practice and Systems Being

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Abstract: This article presents a leadership practice directed towards the cultivation of presencing mastery through the integration of Theory U, Dynamic Presencing, Systems Thinking management theories, and a Buddhist-based mindfulness practice as a method of leadership and organizational development. Each of these modalities are explored to gain insight into enhancing a leader's overall ability to lead viable organizational systems amidst current VUCA conditions. The article posits that capacities that cultivate presencing mastery are enhanced in particular ways through an overall integration of Theory U and Dynamic Presencing, as well as through a mindfulness and systems thinking and being practice, leading to more effective overall presencing leadership. As a whole, these progressive approaches reorient the pursuit of presencing mastery as an essential component of an integral organizational systems leadership framework.

Keywords: Presencing mastery, mindfulness, systems thinking, presencing leadership, Theory U, organizational equanimity

I. Introduction

Over the past couple of decades, the theory and practice of leadership has been undergoing a noted transformation in response to the rising level of VUCA conditions in our world. This emerging situation requires leaders to, among other

elements, acquire skills beyond those of traditional leadership where elements of diversity, multigenerational, and multicultural workforces have become the new normal. Today's leaders are challenged to find ways to embrace uncertainty and effectively uncover the wisdom within to lead effectively from the inner place or source from which attention, intention, and action originate. Initiated through the redirection of our intention and observation while leading, leaders can begin to access a deeper order of living presencing wisdom. By focusing, sensing, presencing, and learning to choreograph one's actions from this emerging generative way of leading, leaders can find ways to bring the future into being through their actions and presence. This enactment of presencing occurs when the mind is quiet, still, and centered and we are receptive to the movements of generative emergence. Through the cultivation of presencing mastery, mindful meditation, and a systems approach to organizations, new promising forms of leadership are emerging that are changing the landscape of how leadership is thought about and practiced.

For the purposes of our article, our exploration into the subject of presencing mastery is informed by the work of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009, 2013) and Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2021). In Theory U, presencing involves “sensing and actualizing one's highest future possibility” (Scharmer, 2013, p. 19). Per the Theory U process, there are three movements leaders can follow: observe, retreat, and act. Most leaders when acting within a system have a habitual way of thinking and behaving called downloading. A small or large disruption “triggers us to reconsider our current ways of knowing and behaving” (Cowart, 2020, p. 99), making openings for presencing. Cowart offers an example:

The present moment is viewed as possessing a past-facing and future-facing side. The past-facing side is shaped by past patterns of behavior and assumptions based on experience. The future-facing side is shaped by the future as it emerges. The past-facing present is where humanity historically and habitually resides; the future-facing present is the area where presencing seeks to focus our attention. Theory U is a framework, literally a U-shaped process, employed to achieve an individual and/or collective state of presencing, and then to action what is learned from this new level of awareness. (p. 98)

As an expanded, in-depth alternative to the presencing method outlined in Theory U (Scharmer, 2009), Dynamic Presencing cultivates a more advanced and in-depth form of presencing mastery as taking place in the overall shift to engaging presencing as a generative way of being. It digs deep into the inner embodied awareness of our presence, enabling us to uncover new ontological and embodied sources for our inner stillness, being, and leadership to flow forth from. With practice, the path and methods of Gunnlaugson's presencing approach develop a greater degree of discernment through increased overall presencing acuity, helping leaders discern the emergence of future

possibilities with more skill, depth and overall adeptness.

Alongside Dynamic Presencing, we also use a systems approach and a mindfulness practice to integrate learning and further support leaders in this work. As leadership and systems practitioners, we are relatively new practitioners of mindfulness meditation. As mindfulness practitioners, we have come to appreciate that a practice based in Buddhist philosophy provides a robust foundation for presencing leadership. With our understanding of presencing leadership in the U-process, the integration of mindfulness and systems thinking begins with sensing and continues through crystallizing in the seven archetypal field structures of attentions that map the territory describing the seven different ways of relating the self to the world (see Figure 1.0).

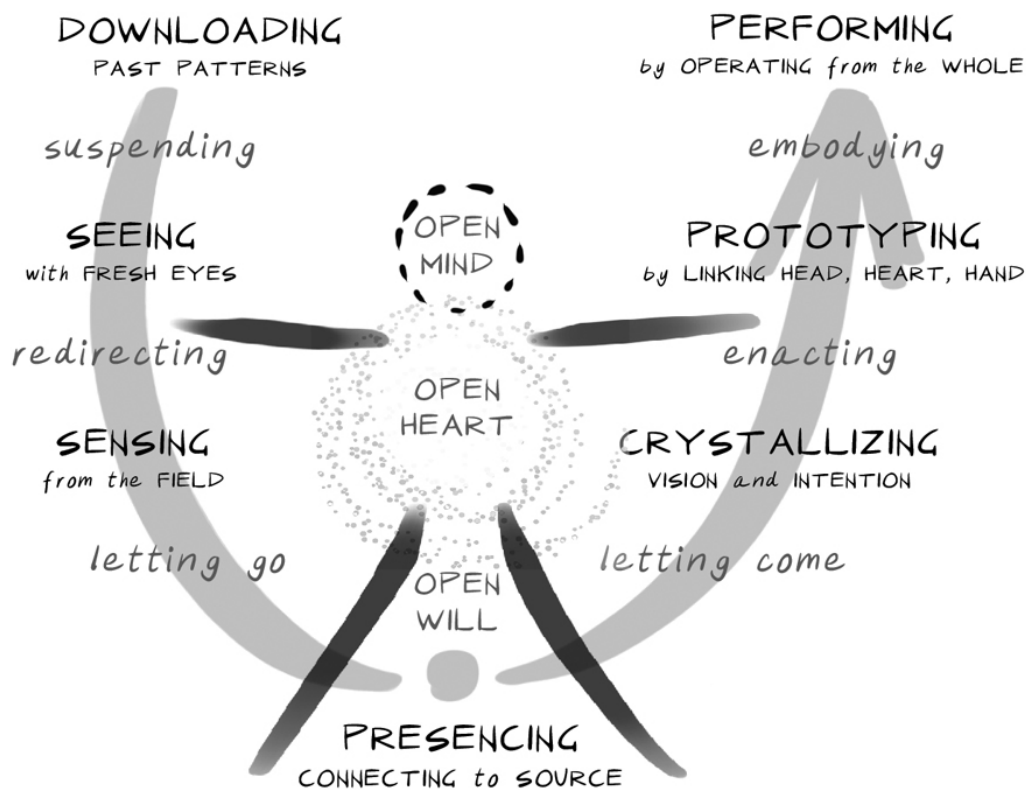


Figure 1.0: *Theory U: Seven Ways of Attending and Co-shaping* (Scharmer, 2018, p. 23). Copyright 2018 by Berrett-Koehler.

As we outline in this article, mindfulness enables us to develop a greater degree of presencing awareness and positions us to be ready to embrace the future-facing side of the U. In briefly examining mindfulness in the context of presencing, we then delve deeper into the connection between presencing mastery and mindfulness through the first four practitioner journeys of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020). In

addition, we examine the integration of systems thinking and systems being. Systems being is a way to embody systems thinking, bringing it to a new level of consciousness in what is referred to as evolutionary leadership (Laszlo, 2012), a concept closely aligned with presencing leadership. Systems thinking and systems being enhance our mindful connections to our world and our capacity for presencing mastery. Finally, we conclude the article by exploring the concept of organizational equanimity as it is achieved through mindfulness, systems thinking/being, and presencing mastery, offering suggestions for integrating these practices into one's personal and professional life.

II. The Bottom of the U: Mindful Presencing as a Means to Presencing Mastery

In Theory U's account of presencing, in order "to activate the deeper level of knowing, one has to go through a three-step process" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 21): observe, reflect and retreat, and prototype. Of these three, the first two can be refined through a mindfulness practice. We observe the arising and passing of our thoughts, enabling us to "connect to the places of most potential" (p. 21). This process of observation makes it possible to reflect on wholesome and unwholesome thoughts and retreat from the unwholesome ones, "[allowing] the inner knowing to emerge" (p. 21). These processes cannot take place unless we develop our ability of becoming aware through suspension, redirection, and letting go (see Figure 1.0). Suspension is defined as "the suspension of habitual patterns" (pp. 22-23)—from a Buddhist mindfulness perspective, the ones that are unwholesome and cause suffering. Redirection is achieved by shifting "from the "exterior" to the "interior" by turning the attention toward the source of the mental process rather than the object" (p. 23). Letting go takes place as a result of suspension, where we remove barriers and open our minds (Scharmer, 2009).

These "three gestures" (Scharmer, 2018, p. 22), as Francisco Varela referred to suspension, redirection, and letting go, are embedded in the seven core processes of Theory U (see Figure 1.0). Of these seven processes, it is from "seeing" through "crystallizing" where a mindfulness practice can be of use. Seeing begins by clarifying our intent, focusing on what matters, and suspending judgment (Scharmer, 2009). We accomplish this through the focus of concentration meditation and seeing the world as it is, not as we think it should be. More specifically, we can apply the Buddhist mindfulness concepts of right action and right speech to clarify our intent by speaking authentically and acting accordingly. The practice of right mindfulness, which requires an acute awareness of the activities of the body, sensations or feelings, activities of the

mind, and thoughts, ideas, and concepts (Rahula, 1959/1974), makes it possible to focus on what matters. Finally, suspending judgment is enhanced through equanimity, the result of a calm, concentrated mind (Thera, 1960).

Sensing takes place when our attention is redirected away from the self to the whole system, and we start thinking together and opening our hearts (Scharmer, 2009). Mindfulness makes it possible for us to let go of our egos and widen our perspective of the presencing process. There are four main principles of sensing: setting the container, diving deep, redirecting attention, and opening the heart. Setting the container means creating a safe space in which we can open our hearts and minds to new knowledge. Scharmer (2009) defines diving deep as “total immersion in the particulars of the field—in the living presence of the phenomenon. It is becoming *one* with the phenomenon you study” (p. 148). This “total immersion” requires a great deal of focus and concentration, something that the mental discipline of mindfulness helps us develop. Furthermore, the mental discipline of mindfulness makes it possible for us to redirect our attention to seeing the collective patterns of the system and our roles within it. When sensing connects with opening the heart, this “means accessing and activating the deeper levels of our emotional perception” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 149).

From sensing, we enter into the stillness of presencing by letting go of what was and “[connecting] to the surrounding sphere of future potential” (Scharmer, 2018, p. 24) where there is “space for the future to emerge” (p. 24). A mindfulness practice is an ongoing process of letting go of the past and the future and making space for the present, creating a serene sense of calm. Presencing extends and deepens many aspects of sensing, such as creating a space for deep listening and opening the heart and mind. A critical factor in presencing is whether or not we pass through what Scharmer (2018) calls “the eye of the needle,” which he describes as follows:

To pass through the eye of the needle requires three conditions: the opening of our mind, heart, and will. Open Mind means no judgment, allowing the Mind of the universe to operate through your thinking. Open Heart means no cynicism, allowing the Heart of collective to operate through your feelings. Open Will means no fear, allowing the Intention of the emerging future to operate through your actions. (p. 64)

Passing through the eye of the needle takes place when we let go of what was and allow what is to be to emerge. This process requires the wisdom of right understanding, when we see things as they truly are, making it possible to open our hearts, minds, and will. Mindfulness allows us to come into our higher, authentic selves.

If presencing means connecting to the source of our “highest future possibility” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 163), then “crystallizing means sustaining that connection and beginning to operate from it” (p. 195). It enables us to clarify “the

vision and intent of the emerging future” (p. 195). Presencing and crystallizing embody the Buddhist mindfulness concept of clear comprehension, also translated as “clearly knowing” or “fully aware,” in which we gain a clear understanding of what we are doing and why, demonstrating “that mindfulness is more than simply being present. With clear comprehension, we know the purpose and appropriateness of what we’re doing; we understand the motivations behind our actions” (Goldstein, 2016, p. 11). In other words, clear comprehension makes it possible for us to clarify our intentions and create opportunities for the future to emerge by listening to our hearts, minds, and will as one voice.

III. Dynamic Presencing as an Embodied, Ontological Path to Presencing Mastery

None of the core processes of seeing, sensing, presencing, and crystallizing can be effective without some degree of presencing mastery. In the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) there are five “practitioner journeys” that develop our overall capacity for presencing as a generative foundational way of being. They are primary presence, primary knowing, primary perceiving, primary communicating, and primary leadership. The first four of these journeys create the foundation for primary leadership. In this section we will focus on these four journeys and explore how mindfulness enhances our ability to develop presencing mastery through each. Although *many* different facets of mindfulness can be applied to these journeys, we will concentrate on the aspects that have the greatest impact.

Primary presence (see Figure 2.0) is defined as the ability to “[draw] upon the innate wisdom and intelligence that resides [within the energetic source of our presence]” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, pp. 13-14). In other words, it is the capacity to uncover and connect with our presencing nature and being that is the key difference here that makes the difference. There are four stages to the core movement of primary presence: *being real*, *being witness*, *being essence*, and *being source* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). *Being real* means being true to oneself and to learning to be with reality as it is. *Being witness* means having a transcendent awareness that enables us to let go of the self and open up to new ways of being that await our discovery. *Being essence* refocuses us on “our sense of intrinsic purpose, drive and what it means to be truly human” (p. 49), connecting us to presence at a level that is core to who we are. *Being source* means connecting with the generative depths of our emerging presencing selves. Taken as a single core movement, each stage of primary presence can be amplified through a Buddhist-based mindfulness practice.

Being real can be experienced in an enhanced way through the practice of right speech (being truthful and authentic) and right understanding (seeing things as they are). The quality of our speaking affects our relationships, minds, and hearts (Goldstein, 2016) by aspiring to be truthful, authentic, and real. Practicing right understanding develops an applied wisdom that supports the process of “getting through to the truth of what is most real and letting this directly inform our presence and reality” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p.40). *Being witness* embodies the Buddhist characteristic of no self. In mindfulness, letting go of our attachments to “me” and “mine” enables us to gain a broader perspective of who we are. *Being essence* begins to connect with the deeper nature of practitioners, though from a more personal point of view. *Being source* can be developed through deepened realization of reality and consciousness. For example, in insight meditation, we learn to see clearly into the nature of the mind and gain firsthand understanding of the way things are, resulting in a sense of deep calm that comes from knowing something for oneself and uncovering “a tangible and actionable way of relating with and actively presencing from source” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 53).

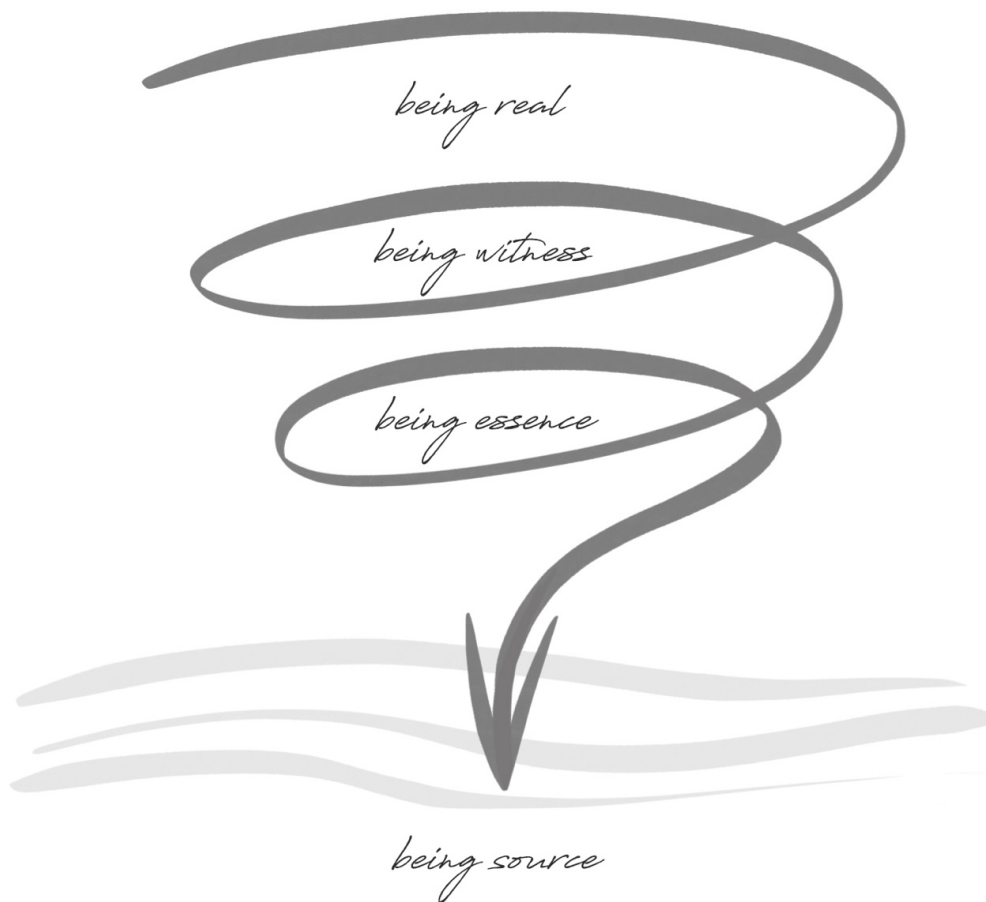


Figure 2.0: Core method of Primary Presence, (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 15). Copyright 2020 by Trifoss Business Press.

Primary knowing (see Figure 3.0), the second journey, builds upon what is uncovered by primary presence through a deeper active form of embodied knowing: “when our process of coming to know is brought down through the body and our being as a sensemaking process, this invites a somatic integration and embodies cognition” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 65). There are three stages to the core movement of primary knowing: *letting go*, *letting be*, and *letting come* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). *Letting go* and *letting come* sit on either side of presencing at the bottom of the U (see Figure 1.0) and represent the releasing of our old habits and discerning emerging wisdom respectively. *Letting be*, a new presencing movement, provides a missing bridge between *letting go* and *letting come*, allowing us to deeply connect with ourselves and the foundation of our presence so as to facilitate a deeper embodiment of it. Practicing mindfulness with primary knowing enhances our ability to let go of our current thinking and open our minds to any insight or emerging wisdom we may experience. Insight meditation connects the mind and body, developing a sense of calm through sustained inner-directed awareness and attention, allowing primary knowing to flourish through “somatic integration.”

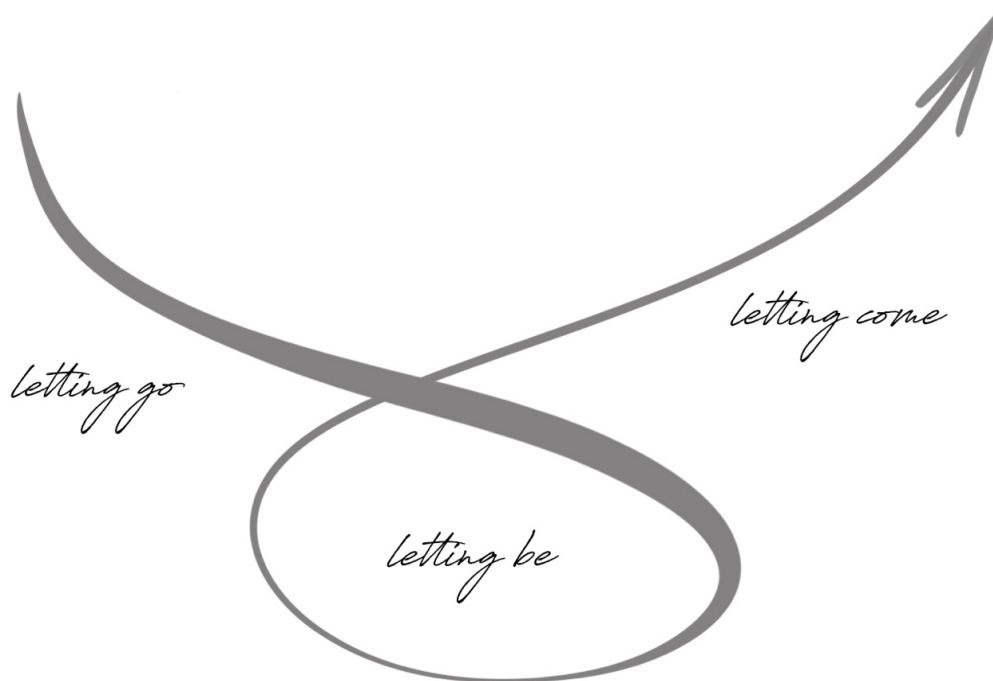


Figure 3.0: Core Method of Primary Knowing, (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 16). Copyright 2020 by Trifoss Business Press.

Primary perceiving (see Figure 4.0), the third journey, involves a form of seeing from “an embodied perceptual process” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 87) that clears the way into creative seeing, which is integral to presencing leadership. There are three

stages to the core movement of primary perceiving: *attuning to what is*, *entraining with what is emerging*, and *discerning the arising new* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). *Attuning to what is* means paying attention to the fullness or suchness of the here-and-now, which lies at the heart of the practice of mindfulness, drawing on an awareness of the activities of the body, sensations or feelings, activities of the mind, and thoughts, ideas, and concepts (Rahula, 1959/1974). Insight meditation develops our ability to be present, and helps foster the practice of right understanding, which helps us see the world as it is with less of the veils of prejudice. *Entraining with what is emerging* involves synchronizing with what is emerging, that is, merging with it in a subtle, somatic way via a state of flow (Gunnlaugson, 2020). Mindfulness similarly fosters becoming one with our current environment through the practice of being present and opening our minds to what arises. In particular, the practice of right concentration enables us to calm our minds and develop the equanimity we need to integrate with the emerging wisdom. The final gesture, *discerning the arising new*, involves refining how we see and connect with what is emerging. A mindfulness practice supports discernment by helping “[pause] and [refresh] our attention within” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 98), something that is part of a daily practice.

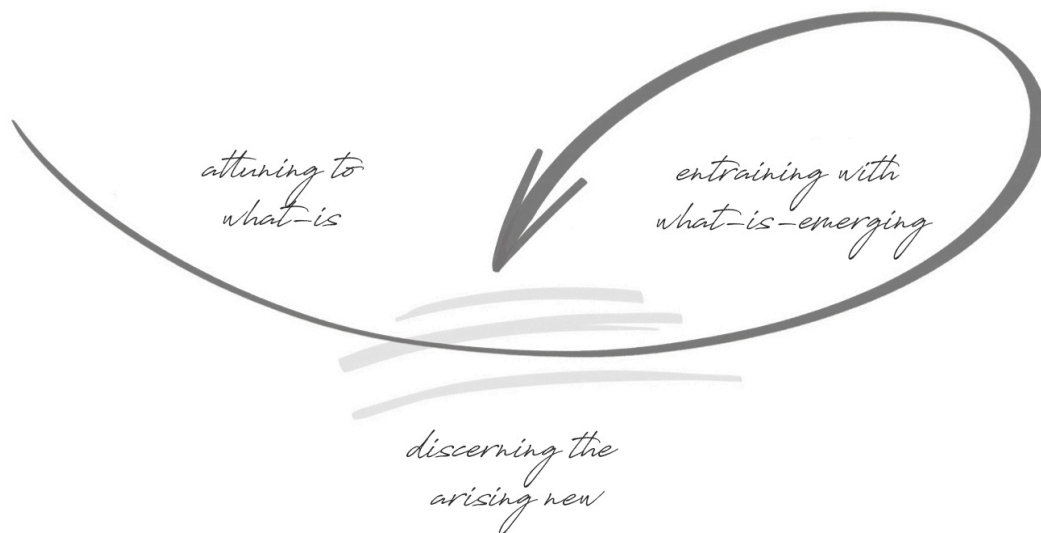


Figure 4.0: *Method of Primary Perceiving*, (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 19). Copyright 2020 by Trifoss Business Press.

Primary communicating (see Figure 5.0), the fourth journey, encompasses the four presencing field spaces that comprise the presencing field: *the i-space*, *the you-space*, *the we-space*, and *the all-space* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). In the *i-space*, we are “connecting with our presencing self” (p.116). It is here where mindfulness can help practitioners access a clearer self-awareness in relation to the collective dimension of the presencing field. The

you-space involves connecting with another's *i-space*, acknowledging the distinct interior dimensions of who they are. In the *we-space*, we are connecting to the collective dimension of presencing, while also honoring the individual dimensions of our *i-* and *you-space*. The *we-space* is informed by the Buddhist view of interbeing. As Shen and Midgley (2007) note, "reality is viewed as a dynamically interdependent process. Everything exists in a web of mutual causal interaction, and nothing, whether mental or physical, whole or part, is immutable or fully autonomous" (p. 171). Finally, in the *all-space* we are connecting to the larger whole or system—not just the human realm but all more-than-human as well.

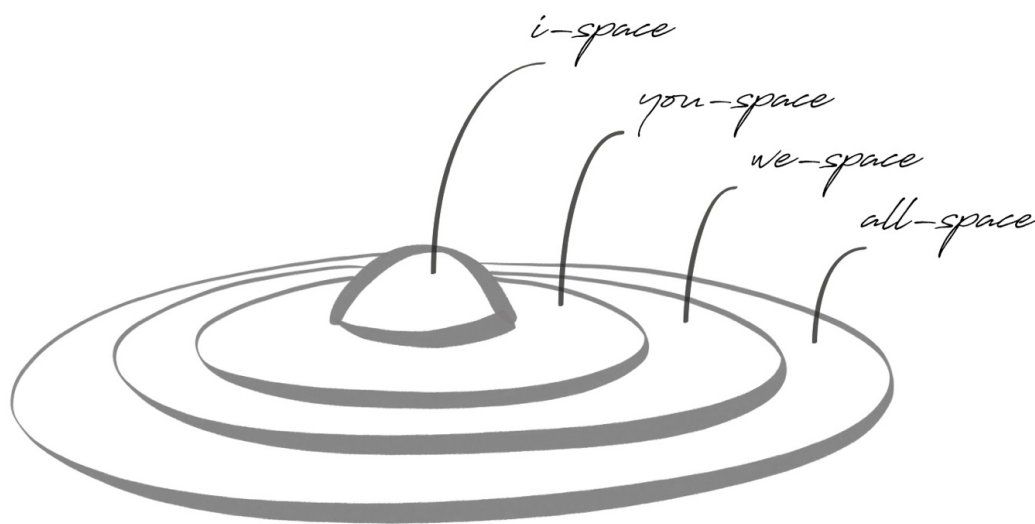


Figure 5.0: *Core Method of Primary Communicating*, (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 20). Copyright 2020 by Trifoss Business

IV. Systems Thinking and Systems Being

As mindful systems thinkers and leaders, we seek out those aspects of systems science, complexity science, and leadership theory that will help us develop organizational equanimity and the cessation of suffering. As presencing leaders, we apply a systems approach to see with fresh eyes the larger systems and our imbeddedness, connections, and relationships within and outside them. At a level of interdependence where possible leverage points within the system can be illuminated, "systems thinking is precisely about changing the focus of attention to the forest, so that you can see the trees in their context; understanding the forest gives new and powerful insight about the trees" (Reynolds & Holwell, 2020, p. 3). Living well among the world's systems requires our full humanity, one of the key cornerstones of systems being. In this context, wisdom is reflected in our effective use of intelligence, as evidenced by our

capacity to alleviate suffering and increase joy in human and organizational systems. A systems perspective provides mindfulness practitioners access to a critical toolbox of theories, archetypes, methods, and models with which to describe our environments and map complex situations. Systems thinking involves learning to think in terms of the unfolding processes of the “big *moving* picture” (Laszlo, 2012, p. 97), which is the future emerging from the present, exactly where presencing leadership interventions are needed. By taking into account the notion that the environment is in constant flux, within this context leaders must find their inner calm and equanimity. From a presencing leadership perspective, the future of leadership depends increasingly on a leader’s capacity to make effective discernments and interventions that confront these deeper complex issues at their very root source. As mindfulness practitioners and systems theorists, we propose complementary systems thinking practices that would supplement our mindfulness practice and enhance our overall presencing mastery through our internal sense of well-being. Turning to the concept of systems being, we can begin to form the outlines of this leadership practice. Laszlo (2012) defines systems being as follows:

The expression of systems being and systems living is an integration of our full human capacities, the expression of an evolving humanity. It involves rationality with reverence to the mystery of life, listening beyond words, sensing with our whole being, and expressing our authentic self in every moment of our life. The journey from systems thinking to systems being is a transformative learning process of expansion of consciousness – from awareness to embodiment. (p. 101)

Laszlo’s description emphasizes the importance of authenticity and the embodiment of conscious awareness. Systems being and presencing leadership speak to the expanded worldview that is a fundamental basis for leadership with a long-term perspective – one that sees events in the present in light of the evolution of humanity with “a capacity to mobilize oneself and others to consciously and effectively redefine world views, cultures, and institutions for a more just, sustainable, and flourishing world” (Ovchinnikov, 2016, August 30, para. 5). Leaders who display the capacity to exhibit quality leadership in the moment, being fully aware when this moment arises, operate in moments of pristine clarity and wisdom. Through these practices, we can envision alternatives to redesign worldviews, cultures, and institutions to bring about new socio-economic orders that light the path to the maturation of our individual, organizational, and societal levels of practice.

V. The Integration of Mindfulness and Systems Thinking/Being

The exercise of systems thinking, when applied to the wicked problems

encountered by organizational systems, emphasizes the importance of cohesiveness and interdependency within organizational structures and communities. As organizational architects, we seek the truth of situations in order to properly intervene. Systems thinking encourages us to examine how our actions influence others in our individual and collective systems and includes learning to recognize the ramifications and tradeoffs of the actions we choose (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). As we develop our minds and increase our awareness of our systemic sensibility through study of the principles and practices of systems thinking, we increase the frequency with which we encounter these arenas. This awareness highlights the importance of systems awareness and knowledge to aid the evolution of our culture, organizations, and leadership systems. As noted previously, both mindfulness and systems thinking/being support the development of presencing mastery. Specifically, the mental discipline, presence, and inner calm of mindfulness combined with the whole system view and appreciation of interrelationships and emergence of systems thinking/being create a powerful foundation for exploring Theory U as well as the five journeys of presencing mastery outlined in Dynamic Presencing. All three of these practices are holistic in nature, supporting the development of presencing leadership acumen while increasing organizational and leadership effectiveness and clarity.

In our view, a mindfulness practice helps optimize the path towards cultivating systems being. As we develop our presence and awareness, we become conscious of the systems within which we live and work. We see the interconnections that create the emergent properties of the system, the patterns that appear over time, and the constant change in our environments. We expand our view to see how all things are interrelated. As a transformative learning process, there is the possibility of expanding one's consciousness and cultivating new ways of being drawn from the presencing patterns of change in our environments and relations. To develop our systems awareness of presencing, scientific thinking can be integrated with a humanistic perspective through an embodied way of integrating our experience and mindsets as essentially interdependent (Shen & Midgley, 2007). Herein lies a presencing leadership development opportunity for a lifelong process of personal and professional development through a presencing mastery practice supported by mindfulness and systems thinking/being.

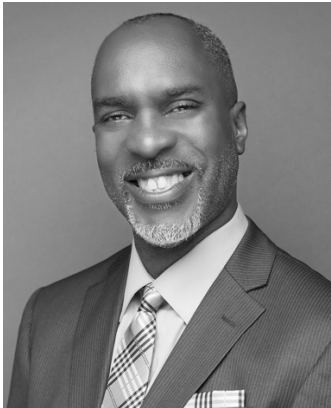
VI. Conclusion

Through our brief exploration of the ideal of presencing mastery, it is our

hope that new possibilities for becoming an effective presencing leader and practitioner have become evident. Practicing mindfulness at the bottom of the U enhances our ability to engage the emerging future in our presencing leadership. From this deeper ground, in the work of Dynamic Presencing we are able to mindfully see *what-is* and bring forth *what-is-emerging* through an embodied immersion into the four journeys of Dynamic Presencing that deepen our presencing mastery capacities as a foundational way of being. Developing presencing mastery is also enhanced by engaging a systems approach to our leadership practice, enabling us to see the larger systems we are embedded in with fresh eyes and senses to observe the connections and interrelations. Systems being, the embodiment of systems thinking, is accomplished through learning to live in and from embodied systems awareness. Creatively integrating these four approaches—Theory U, Dynamic Presencing, Mindfulness and Systems Thinking/Being—offers a holistic path towards cultivating a more in depth overall presencing mastery. In learning to effectively access our inner calm, spaciousness becomes active to be engaged creatively for new thinking and forms of being to emerge. As Margaret Wheatley (2017) eloquently reminds us, “facing reality is an empowering act—it can liberate our mind and heart to discern how best to use our power and influence in service for this time” (p. 5). As presencing leaders, we are both empowering ourselves and those with whom we work to uncover emerging promising paths of wisdom which can be meaningfully lived through the complexity and chaos of today and the uncertainty of tomorrow.

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EMBODYING PRESENCING MASTERY AS A LEADERLY WAY OF BEING:

An Archetypical Journey

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Abstract: Over the past decades, presencing has gained increasing weight as an approach to address complex societal and organizational challenges. But could presencing be more than a method to gain contextual knowledge? Could it be a path to more profound ways of experiencing the world and our place in it? Embracing the increasing complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguity in organizations seems to require not just a different toolset or way of *doing*, but an entirely different way of *being* – one that is able to move in sync with our VUCA environment by incorporating the presencing process and disposition in our day-to-day life. *What would it mean to develop this form of presencing mastery and embody presencing as a second nature in our leadership, life, and work? What finer aspects of the presencing process and disposition would we need to deeply integrate? Which challenges might we need to grapple with on the journey? And which potential might lie in incorporating presencing mastery as a leaderly way of being?* Based on a six-year doctoral action research, this article fleshes out the archetypical inner journey towards presencing mastery. Ongoing cycles of action and reflection with a long-term collaborative inquiry group of organizational leaders have revealed key insights and practices for the process of developing presencing mastery as an embodied way of being. The findings also suggest that in order to incorporate and navigate with a noted degree of presencing mastery, we need to face the inertia of conventional mental models and commit to the costs and growing pains of embracing post-conventional epistemologies and ontologies. Through this ongoing commitment we may come to discover presencing mastery as a powerful way of participating in an unfolding, interconnected world and co-creating generative ways of living and leading in it.

Keywords: presencing, presencing mastery, inner knowing, embodiment, leadership, leadership journey, way of being, VUCA

I. A transformative personal journey towards presencing mastery

Many of the leaders I have been working with as an executive coach look for

ways of mastering the complexity and uncertainty inherent in their leadership challenges but often find themselves trapped in recurring crises as they seek new answers through old paradigms. It is becoming more and more evident that the ever-increasing complexity and volatility in organizational reality requires fundamentally different responses to those that have brought most leaders to success. Approaches to complex challenges that promise the idea of “having things under control” tend to distract our attention away from the essential nature of the reality we are facing.

Over the past decade, a good part of my attention has been focused on developing an approach that enables leaders to confidently navigate in a complex world, a capacity of *being with* disruption and uncertainty and acting from an inner compass, rather than from external metrics which risk becoming obsolete shortly after they are developed. In several key moments in my life, I have had profound encounters with this inner compass, which made me acutely aware of the powerful guiding quality of this particular form of inner knowing – a holistic knowing that is able to point us forward in transformative ways. But this form of knowing didn’t seem compatible with how leadership is socially constructed (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Grint, 2005). How could I decode and understand this compass deeply enough to make it available to leaders who operated from conventional mental models and positivist worldviews? And more importantly, what would it require to integrate this compass in our very being, so that it could become second nature in our leadership, life and work? These questions were the birthplace of a long process of personal inquiry (Sell, 2017) that eventually found its way into a six-year executive doctoral research study (Sell, 2021).

Throughout the years of personal and doctoral inquiry I deeply engaged with the ideas and practices around Theory U and presencing (Scharmer, 2016; Scharmer & Kaeufer, 2013) as a relevant method to break through habitual thinking patterns and access a deeper knowing related to specific challenges. As impactful as these breakthrough-moments were, I was intrigued to find out if we could ground ourselves in this inner knowing more deeply. Could an ongoing commitment to and engagement with presencing be a means to awaken the compass of our inner knowing not just momentarily and contextually but as a general way of being amidst complexity and uncertainty? What would it require to attain such presencing mastery as our second nature in our leading and living?

To deepen the exploration of presencing mastery, a more profound understanding of the actual presencing experience at the bottom of the U was needed. What exactly happens on a phenomenological level in the process between *letting go* (of

habitual mental models) and *letting come* (of the emerging insight or future)? Since years before embarking on the formal research, I had engaged in embodied awareness practices, amongst others those inspired by physicist and awareness teacher A. H. Almaas (1986). By a very attentive embodied inquiry into this very moment, I had experienced moments of tapping into an expanded sense of being, a profound level of consciousness – a phenomenon that Theory U might relate to the realm of source that we are tapping into in deep presencing. I was intrigued by the encounter with this subtle realm as it seemed to hold a deeper wisdom than that which we can access by deliberative thinking. Tapping into it not only serves as a guiding quality, but also fills me with an invigorating presence: a sense of aliveness born from feeling almost viscerally connected to an underlying wholeness far bigger than my individual self. These experiences pointed to something more profound than attaining contextual knowledge related to specific questions. They pointed to a particular state of being that is able to connect us to an expanded consciousness through which we can approach life and its challenges in generative ways.

Gunnlaugson's Dynamic Presencing (2020), a phenomenological and ontological advancement of Scharmer's Theory U, strongly correlates with the subtle experiences of my awareness practice and offers an in-depth unpacking of the underlying dynamics at the bottom of the U. Dynamic Presencing unpacks the process at the bottom of the U into five primary movements. Each movement consists of key core shifts that are needed to experience the depth of the presencing process² and an overall process of presencing mastery.

In relation to the presencing mastery inquiry as to how presencing can advance into a way of being, the first movement of *primary presence* is an essential one. Unlike Theory U, which sees being present mainly as a precondition for moving on to bringing forth the emerging future, Gunnlaugson sees primary presence as a “foundational way of being” or “a generative embodied ground” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 33) out of which the other movements follow. In order to reach the full depth of this embodied ground of presence, we have to suspend our wish to “get somewhere” with presencing and move into the increasing depth of the four lifeworlds of *being real* (letting go of any self-image and facing our immediate experiential reality), *being witness* (transitioning into an observer of our experiential reality), *being essence* (entering a felt contact with our essential nature) and finally *being source* (reaching a state of unity that allows us to “reconnect with

² For a detailed discussion and empirical advancement of the primary movements and their core shifts see doctoral thesis (Sell, 2021).

the deeper flowing wholeness that pervades reality” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 57)). Mastering these lifeworlds yields corresponding embodied forms of presence that strongly correlate with the experiential qualities in my personal and collaborative presencing practice and underpin the practical findings of my doctoral inquiry. Attuning to and learning to abide in presencing as a second nature, we have realised again and again, is not a practical exercise or learning journey one performs iteratively but requires a committed in-depth apprenticeship of connection and re-connection to our deeper ontological realms of being.

To realize presencing as a way of being—a core accolade of Dynamic Presencing’s vision for presencing mastery—also asks us to strengthen our relationship with the particular knowing that arises in the process of *letting come*, which has entirely different qualities to the conceptual, abstract knowing in day-to-day life. Like Scharmer, Gunnlaugson (2020) uses the term *primary knowing* to frame this knowing, though applies it differently as originating from an in-depth process of *letting be*. Originally termed by cognitive psychologist Eleanor Rosch (1999, 2001), primary knowing comes as an all-encompassing sense that has a quality of field-consciousness and holds unconditional value and openness. Action from this awareness-based knowing, Rosch argues, is “spontaneous, rather than the result of decision-making; it is compassionate, since it is based on wholes larger than the self; and it can be shockingly effective” (Rosch, 2001, p. 2). The phenomenon of primary knowing grounds in a participative ontology (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011), which sees the world as an interconnected whole, within which our experience forms the ground of our being and knowing. Primary knowing thus can be seen as an expression of our embeddedness in and participation with the living world, emerging from an invisible attunement with the hidden dynamics within and around ourselves, and making itself known through our wider senses. The phenomenon of primary knowing receives a lot of grounding through Ian McGilchrist’s extensive research on the underutilized and devalued role of the brain’s right hemisphere in western civilization (2018). The left hemisphere works in a decontextualized, explicit, and disembodied way and mediates abstract, unambiguous knowledge. It speaks to the positivist ontology prevalent in conventional science and society that aims to predict and control from a neutral, disengaged position (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). The right hemisphere knowing, by contrast, comes through direct presentation, without preconception, and evolves from a self that is “drawn into and inextricably bound up with the world in a relation... suggesting involvement of the whole experiential being, not just the process of cognition” (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 153).

As McGilchrist elaborates, the right hemisphere’s “primary consciousness” (2018, p. 149) – correlating with primary knowing - constitutes our world and gives us a holistic understanding of it. However, in western societies we seem to be locked into the way of thinking of the left hemisphere, which disconnects us from an intimate contact with and knowing from a more profound realm of reality. This realm “puts us in direct communication and participation with the very heart of emergence” (Gunnlaugson, 2020, p. 58). As a practice, presencing momentarily “unlocks” us from the restrictions of the left hemisphere and facilitates our contact with the right hemisphere’s primary knowing. As a way of being in our life and work, presencing asks us to create a whole new balance by stepping out of the confinements of the left hemisphere’s dominance with the habitual need to conceptualise, abstract and control and instead re-ignite the right hemisphere’s expanded, interconnected and often ineffable take on reality. In this spirit, the journey towards presencing as a way of being also challenges taken-for-granted epistemologies and explores new ways of meaning-making and relating to life. Analogue to how transpersonal psychologist Rosemarie Anderson (2011, p. 59) frames intuitive inquiry, this research endeavour can be seen as a quest “to find trajectories for new and more refined ways of being human in the world.”

Within this context and theoretical foundation, this article explores two presencing mastery-based inquiry questions around our transitioning from presencing as a situational leadership tool to an embodied ontological disposition in our lives:

1. *What finer aspects of the presencing process and disposition do we need to master to make presencing a second nature in our leadership, life, and work?*
2. *And which potential lies in incorporating presencing as a way of being?*

The following section will outline the specific participative action-research approach that facilitated a "presenced" research process and summarize the key aspects of the inquiry process. Drawing on the findings of my research, I will then illuminate the finer aspects of a presencing mastery level disposition and practice that hold transformative potential towards a generative leaderly way of being. After summarizing key practices for the archetypical presencing mastery journey, I conclude with highlighting the possibilities that arise from transitioning into the ontological disposition of presencing as a way of being, suggesting presencing mastery as a timely and relevant leadership path.

II. Mirroring the presencing process in the research approach

As my research into “presenced” ways of coming to know explores a territory

that emerges from the edges of human consciousness, I second Scharmer's claims that such an investigation implies that "philosophers and systems thinkers must leave their reading room and immerse themselves in the real world in order to actively participate in its unfolding" (2016, p. 105). Diverging from the Cartesian approach inherent in positivist research "trying to be a spectator rather than an actor in all the comedies that are played out" (Descartes, 1985, p. 125), such action-oriented view urged me to go right into the matter and expose myself to experiencing my inquiry first-hand.

In this spirit, my research is situated in the following methodological approaches. Action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) provides an overarching framework to this research, particularly in the way it orientates the inquiry towards practical knowing as to how presencing as a way of being might be a resource in our leadership and life. Action research as a family of practices of living inquiry is defined by Reason and Bradbury as:

a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice... in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern... (2008, p. 4)

Being a reflexive inquiry practice, action research values the situated and specific over the generalizable, which supports the nature of an inquiry that explores the depths of our inner world. In addition to the depth and quality of insight, the subjectivism of intuitive, first- and second-person data may reveal a deep intersubjectivism, which according to qualitative researcher Vallack (2010, p. 113) is steeped in "common and eternal images for humanity". A further relevant aspect of action research as a supportive methodological orientation is its use of *extended epistemologies* (Heron, 1996; Heron & Reason, 2008): a multi-dimensional account of knowing that pays credit to the fact that knowing in the realm of human experience has wider dimensions than the merely intellectual one. Heron (1996, pp. 52-57) suggests a pyramid of four dimensions of knowing that jointly inform research outcomes: *experiential, presentational, propositional* and *practical knowing*. *Experiential knowing* offers a foundational quality for robust research outcomes, which is congruent with an inquiry into the depths of the presencing experience. As Heron and Reason (1997, p. 276) argue, the "experiential encounter with the presence of the world is the ground of our being and knowing" and this encounter cannot be confused with the symbolic representation of it. The *experiential* and *presentational* dimensions add robustness and depth to the abstracted *propositional* knowing. All three ways of knowing culminate in the purpose of *practical* knowing which translates our inquiry into "worthwhile action in the

world” (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 378). In the pursuit of *practical* knowing around incorporating a presencing disposition in our leadership, I have embraced the *participative* approach of action research - doing research *with* others rather than *on* others – and invited a group of leaders into a long-term collaborative inquiry. Over two years, we explored in cycles of action and reflection how we could navigate the challenges in our work and life with a presencing disposition and what it took to embody this disposition more profoundly. This shared journey of action and reflection over time allowed for the possibility to make the inquiry a developmental process and “effect desired change as a path to generating knowledge” (Bradbury, 2010, p. 93). Indeed, we did experience a profound developmental and transformational journey in our group, which I will further describe in the following sections.

Within the methodological framework of action research, I situate my methodology in heuristic research as developed by Clark Moustakas (1990, 1994), an approach that I consider particularly adept at exploring the subtleties and ineffable qualities of presencing as a way of being. Heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990, 1994; Douglas & Moustakas, 1985) engages with a question of personal significance through a process of open-ended inquiry, self-directed search and immersion in active experience. It aims at the discovery of the underlying meanings of important human experiences and requires a “passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 15). Heuristic inquiry can be seen as an advancement of central phenomenological ideas. Originating in the ideas of Edmund Husserl (1960, 1970), phenomenology claims our day-to-day world of lived experience, our lifeworld, as the arena in which knowledge can be developed. Merleau-Ponty (1962) regarded the human body as the mediator between human experience and the world, which in return means we need to be embodied in our presence to experience the world fully. This forms a direct link to the stance that presencing needs to be embodied in order to take us to deeper realms of knowing and being. Heidegger’s view that reality is not a thing but a process of *coming into being* (1999) supports the participative perspective of living, dynamic systems in which our reality emerges. From a phenomenological perspective, consciousness develops within an “ecological system in constant and dynamic association with the world beyond it” (Ladkin, 2014, p. 614).

This systemic and relational perspective is congruent with the ideas behind Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) and a participative ontology (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Whilst sharing these general foundations, heuristic research departs from phenomenology in several ways: It

encourages not detachment from but *connection and relationship* to the phenomenon investigated; it aims for *depictions of essential meanings* and personal significance rather than definite descriptions; it does not conclude with distilled structures of experience but a creative synthesis that *includes the researcher's intuition* and tacit understanding; and it does not lose but *keeps visible the research participants* in the meaning-making. This stance of embracing the relational and intuitive aspects of experience speaks to the presencing process itself and establishes congruence between the nature and methodology of this research. In an additional congruence, the six phases that guide heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-32) broadly reflect the Dynamic Presencing process itself, involving phases of *letting go*, *letting be* (a key addition to Theory U) and *letting come*. These three phases seemed to unfold naturally in my research process, which might suggest that Moustakas seems to have unknowingly captured the inherent unfolding dynamic in the presencing process.

The heuristic process of data analysis can be seen as a presencing process in itself. After an intensive engagement with data from about four years of first-person and two years of collaborative inquiry (the latter comprising the transcripts of ten recorded sessions of four hours each) - looking at the data from different angles, again and again switching between phenomenological details and the bigger picture – I was moving to the bottom of the U where I had to put the data away and become still, letting the pieces of the puzzle silently settle on the deeper grounds of my presence. In the spirit of *letting go*, *letting be* and *letting come*, accessing heuristic insights requires the researcher to maintain an internal focus:

Validity of the research is established by surrendering to the process that is pushing itself into the consciousness of the researcher, allowing the process to unfold and then noticing results in expansion of self-awareness, deepening of understanding, and of self-transformation... (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 79)

After many weeks, a coherent picture slowly started to emerge in my consciousness. The following section will describe the key aspects of the emerging picture that directly relate to the questions around what it takes for us to incorporate presencing as a way of being.

III. Archetypical growing pains of apprenticing presencing as a leaderly way of being: The finer aspects of the presencing disposition and process we need to master

Six years of ongoing inquiry with self and others have proven to be an intense period of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) and offered a powerful opportunity to explore the developmental aspects of a presencing practice and disposition: how it is

affected by or affects our habitual ways of knowing and sense-making over time and which challenges we might need to master to turn it from a situational tool into an embodied way of being. This section will summarize the key findings related to the presencing mastery-based inquiry questions:

1. *What finer aspects of the presencing process and disposition do we need to master to make presencing a second nature in our leadership, life, and work?*
2. *And which potential lies in incorporating presencing as a way of being?*

As the inquiry has revealed, in the presencing mastery quest to incorporate presencing as a way of being we are likely to encounter a number of challenges, or growing pains, in accessing and navigating with primary knowing, especially if we have been socialized in conventional action logics (Torbert et al., 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; Cook-Greuter, 2002). In ongoing cycles of action and reflection our inquiry group developed specific practices that help master these growing pains. In the first part of this section, I will lay out each particular *challenge* in accessing and navigating with presencing and introduce the specific *practice* that may facilitate the transition from pain to growth. In the second part I will address the question that suggests itself: What makes it worth facing and mastering those growing pains? In other words, what specific potential lies in incorporating presencing as a way of being?

III.1. Growing pains in accessing and navigating with primary knowing we need to master to make presencing a second nature in our leadership and life.

To ground us in a disposition of presencing and make primary knowing available to us beyond a dedicated presencing session, we need to incorporate the presencing process in or day-to-day life. Stepping out of our habitual thought patterns, redirecting our attention to our senses and letting the new arise from our connection to source is a whole different level of challenge if we aim to embody it as an orienting way of being in our leadership and life. Our long-term action research suggests that this endeavour is not necessarily a smooth ride and tends to come at a price. The process is likely to challenge our habitual ways of knowing and sense-making, and stepping out of conventional epistemologies and into post-conventional ones seems to come with a number of growing pains. These growing pains relate to the three mayor movements of primary knowing as discussed in Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) *letting go*, *letting be* (an addition to Scharmer's original model that emphasises the importance of apprenticing with the four depths of presence in the unknown), and *letting come*. And they might continue as we aim to navigate presencing insight over time.

III. 1a) Challenges in letting go: Getting out of action mode, acknowledging the

unknown and facing what stands in the way

Six years of action research have revealed several ways in which the disposition of presencing poses a challenge to the conventional action logics (Torbert et al., 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005; Cook-Greuter, 2002) many players in organisational life are rooted in. As executive leaders in the corporate world, our inquiry group recognised in themselves conventional sense-making patterns that seek to gain increasing skill and control in the outer and inner world in order to accomplish our goals and be effective in our wider surroundings. This operating mode stands in opposition to what the presencing process requires us to do: to pause, step out of our habitual patterns of thinking, judging, and acting and instead inquire into the current moment. *Letting go* requires us to de-emphasize the left hemisphere with its tendency to keep recurring to what it already knows and its inability to grasp what is present as a whole. To activate the holistic capacity of the right hemisphere we need to slow down, so that it can fulfil its task “to carry the left beyond, to something new, something ‘Other’ than itself” (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 164). Letting go is often experienced as a form of surrender into a more permeable sense of self, which is able to encounter more fully the depth of experience. This act of slowing down in itself turned out to cause discomfort for some leaders in our group. Peter³, an experienced strategy executive, acknowledged that in times of challenge it felt safer to “hack your way through” than to slow down, which he initially experienced as deeply anxiety-provoking. Avoiding feeling this anxiety by staying busy seems to hold us in the comfort zone of “being on it” but limit our capacity to access the deeper truths of holistic ways of knowing. This *discomfort in switching from doing mode to inquiry mode* seems like an internal itching that wants to push us forward. In moments of complex challenge, slowing down often requires us to acknowledge that we actually *don’t* know, that any further attempt of rational-analytic deliberation or forceful action won’t lead to an answer, or that we are stuck in clinging to an idea of how things should work out. Many of our leaders realised how situations of uncertainty activated their engrained operating mode to fix or bypass the situation as quickly as possible and move on into a comfort zone of perceived order and control. From the rootedness in action-mode, slowing down can bump up against the hidden assumption of being unproductive and feed into our immunity to change (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). For our leaders, it took critical self-awareness and discipline to recognise

³ The identity of group members has been disguised and names have been changed.

and resist that impulse – and instead to *face the discomfort of the unknown*.

One specific practice has particularly helped our leaders to overcome moments of discomfort and the impulse to download mental models (Scharmer, 2016) that seemed to promise a quick fix. *The practice of bodily grounding* has proven to be an enabler for our inner resources to hold the discomfort and stay with not knowing. As I focus on my bodily presence, inquire where and how my body is connected to the earth, intentionally root myself in the ground and breathe into the arising sensations, I might find that the feeling of discomfort slowly eases and starts to give way to more resourceful sensations, like a slight relaxation, a sense of space in the mind or a feeling of inner calm. Several of our leaders found that through engaging in a regular grounding practice, they were not only more able to hold the discomfort of the current leadership challenge, but they reached new and wider perspectives on the situation that yielded more generative choice. Through bodily grounding, we seem to be capable of priming our nervous system for the movements of *letting go* and *letting be* at a much deeper level than through mental intention alone. The so-far scarce research on grounding practices (Chevalier, 2015; Chevalier & Sinatra, 2011) supports the calming effect on the mind and emotional stress from a medical perspective but stops short of suggesting a possible contribution to the process of coming to know.-

Once we manage to slow down and become aware of what is, the presencing process often first *reveals what stands in the way* of a more generative way of knowing and being. One of our leaders, Andrew, a former partner in a major consultancy firm who had recently stepped out and founded a new firm, had been going through a painful process of analysing the “right” approach to make his new business flourish. In a collective presencing session (using a form of systemic constellation, the “seed dance”), he realised how analytic thinking was cutting him off from an emergent exploration of possibilities. The representative of the analytic part of him reported how they felt completely paralysed, stuck in brooding mode, unable to lift the gaze to what was around. Only when we invited the whole system (which included his intuitive and playful parts) to become aware of itself and allow for movement, an organic unfolding revealed a generative way forward. Andrew was initially quite shocked seeing his analytic part crouched down on the chair, head down, held by his hands, staring on the floor (*Oh my, is it really that bad?*). As uncomfortable as it was to face that current inner reality, as much needed it was to make him realise that this was not an approach that promised a generative way forward.

The way a presencing inquiry brings to light aspects of our inner reality that we

might have suppressed from consciousness makes it a catalyst for *being real* – the first movement of primary presence in Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) - and helps us recognise and engage with the obstacles to wider and more holistic ways of knowing. Whilst the bias for rational-analytic thinking and swift action has been an asset for many leaders in their professional journeys so far, it seems that this paradigm reaches its limits in a reality of complexity and uncertainty. We became aware how in situations of increased complexity *the rational-analytic, left-hemisphere approach tend to keep us stuck*. And yet, in times of pressure we seemed to automatically revert to the default approaches that aim to turn the inherently uncertain into certainty. These dynamics bear the demands of an adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1998): The challenge of navigating the unknown in a complex world cannot be successfully addressed by technical problem-solving methods but call for entirely new approaches.

Our inquiry experiences suggest that the first step in addressing this adaptive challenge – recognizing that we are stuck in a dysfunctional habit – can be facilitated by *embodied inquiry practices*: whilst holding a state of embodied presence we critically inquire into our sense-making patterns and assumptions. Particularly when we noticed in ourselves a resistance to slow down and to restrain from (re-)acting, it proved very useful to *critically inquire into our competing assumptions*. This might be a deeply rooted belief that under pressure we don't have time to slow down, or that slowing down equals being unproductive. Unearthing and facing those competing assumptions enabled our leaders to make a conscious choice as to which route to take and helped ignite a process of attuning their mental models to a presencing approach. As our leaders became more conscious of their habitual impulses and used embodied inquiry and critical reflexivity (Schön, 1983) to intervene, they were able to recognise the moments of slipping back more quickly and instead access new ways of understanding and responding.

III. 1b) Challenges in letting be: Entering a liminal space and being with the unknown

In the Dynamic Presencing transition from *letting go* to *letting be*, we often seem to encounter aspects of the reality that might not be easy to acknowledge – ways in which we have contributed to a current problem or strong emotions we hold about it. It might be tempting then to swiftly shift the attention to the emerging future and focus on the *letting come* disposition of Theory U-based presencing. Following the impulse to bypass discomfort and get on with presencing will most likely disconnect us from travelling into the deeper realms of presence and thus from tapping into the wisdom that primary knowing might hold for our issue.

A specific practice helped our inquiry group face potentially uncomfortable aspects of our reality. Again, an embodied, phenomenological approach, this practice can transform the emotional charge of the inner reality: When facing a negative emotion in the context of a challenge, *the practice of moving towards and inside the felt experience* of negativity can help not just transform these emotions but also yield new insights. A common concern about inquiring into a negatively perceived state is that by paying more attention we amplify the sensation. However, our disposition in inquiry makes the crucial difference: The willingness to *own and stay with* the sensation itself (“this is how I experience my frustration in my body right now”), rather than identifying with the story around it (“everything is so awful”), appears to be the enabler for a gradual transformation into a more resourceful state, like peace, acceptance or clarity. The practice of *embodied owning* has a kinship with *focusing* (Gendlin, 1969, 2003), where grasping and staying with the felt sense of an inner state causes a shift that “carries us forward” into a more relaxed and clearer state. This practice can be an initial challenge for leaders who have learned to operate under the assumption that the quicker an obstacle can be removed, the more effective we can be. However, our leaders found inquiring into their felt sense to have a significant effect on their ability to *be with what-is* (Gunnlaugson, 2020) and eventually tap into more generative responses to the challenges they were facing.

The readiness to *be with what is* (letting be) appears even more relevant as we cannot deliberately produce primary knowing. There is no guarantee that a presencing process either individually or collectively will directly lead to actionable insights. The wisdom move is therefore to bring ourselves into an open, receptive state – and *be with what is*. I see this particular kind of intentional indwelling in non-action as an active discipline of holding a state of not knowing, containing any discomfort, and being in a receptive state of attentiveness to any internal felt-shift or felt-movement. In order to learn to see the unexpected, we have to practice a kind of feeling that gives rise to seeing in a way that keeps the broad openness of the right hemisphere active enough not to be shut down by the narrow focus of the left hemisphere. This “wise passivity”, as McGilchrist calls it, enables primary knowing to emerge less by what is done than by what is *not* done and “opens up possibility where activity closes it down” (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 174). Depending on the nature of our question, we have found that this practice of *being with the unknown* can transpire over a period of minutes, weeks and even years.

Whilst insight can’t be deliberately produced, the negative capability of *being*

with can be intentionally practiced. If we focus on mentally and physically arriving in the state of not knowing and inquire into any slight sensations and movements of our embodied presence in this moment, we become interested in *what-is*, here and now, instead of striving to ignore or fix our reality. As an integral process of Dynamic Presencing, by *being real* with the unknown, we can shift into the slightly calmer and less attached state of *being witness* of the experience for as long as it might take. This allows us to detach ourselves from the urge to make progress towards a tangible solution and instead *surrender into the liminal space* between not knowing (in a rational-analytic way) and knowing (in a holistic, embodied way). It appears that only in the liminal space we can enter portals to new ways of perceiving and knowing, and in order to reap those fruits we have to willingly enter the “realm of anti-structure, uncertainty, imagination, and possibility” (Slater & Coyle, 2017, p. 385).

Dora, a CEO in a non-profit organisation, went through a period of significant distress and uncertainty in her life during our time together. After several weeks of increased embodied awareness - using a simple daily grounding practice of shifting the attention to her legs - she discovered in herself a pattern of running away from situations of emotional discomfort. This realisation enabled her to *question her patterns of sense-making and acting* and to choose to pause and inquire deeper into the reality of this time in life. She consciously chose to not give in to her impulse but to stay with ambiguity and discomfort as long as a knowing from inside would emerge. In that process, she realised how she was able to dim down anxiety and discomfort by being present and in her body. By committing to being in a liminal space, she eventually contacted an emerging knowing which led her to make changes that allowed her to thrive in a completely new way. Having gone through this experience led to a profound appreciation of the creative potential inherent in being with not knowing. As the leaders in our inquiry group increasingly allowed themselves to not know and become fully present in the liminal realm, they realised that *being with what-is* can be more than a situational practice; it can be a general disposition of welcoming an ever-changing, inherently uncertain world with our embodied and holistic awareness.

III. 1c) Challenges in letting come: Practising discernment of the arising new

I consider an awareness of the kind of quality of the arising knowing to be a helpful clue because in order to learn to navigate with the knowing arising from presencing we need a critical discernment as to what constitutes genuine presencing insights and what distinguishes them from other impulses and sensations rooted in

engrained habits or subconscious defence mechanisms trying to keep us in familiar territory. Intuition is scientifically understood as rooting in previous experience and learning (Salas, Rosen & DiazGranados, 2010; Kahneman & Klein, 2009; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2004) or in habits of mind (Simon, 1987, p. 63) – the very mental models that presencing is aiming to get us out of. Therefore, I am not advocating an undifferentiated call to trust your feelings but rather a refined process of critical discernment. Our numerous cycles of action and reflection suggest that impulses which seek to keep us in familiar territory rather than provide genuine presencing insight tend to narrow down our scope of awareness and seem to suggest that this is the only reasonable choice. They often have a fiery, impatient, and hurried energy and call us to act fast, not to look for alternatives, push through and swiftly move on. We can feel a sense of contraction in our body, as if we are positioned in a starting block, all concentration focused on the sprint ahead, can't afford to look left or right. This tension can be an important clue because it stands in opposition to the optimal receptive state which indicates our being at the bottom of the U: the arising of primary knowing seems to come with a bodily shift into a particular sense of relaxed presence, open and receptive to what is around and within. The voice of fear and control typically retreat into the background, and we feel a degree of permeable expansion and confidence. Most noticeable, moments of primary knowing seem to come with a *particular felt sense of stillness*. This stillness feels different to that of the quiet mind, which we can deliberately practice. Whilst the quiet mind signals the *absence* of something (the mental chatter), the stillness carries the *living presence* of something, which I conceive of as the underlying wholeness to which we are now connected, the ultimate ground from which creation emerges. Peter, the already mentioned strategy executive, had a powerful encounter with this type of stillness one morning as he resumed his daily grounding practice of standing barefoot on the grass of his backyard, at the break of a day which held a make-or-break business conversation. Allowing the freshness of the cold grass to enter his system, sensing the earth below and the soft movement of a myriad of leaves above, he suddenly found himself in an intimate encounter with the aesthetic power of the moment. His whole system relaxed into a realisation that this is the real world here, taking him into a realm that held the knowing and resources to make the upcoming conversation a generative one. And so it did, leading to a result that he hadn't thought possible. I see these visceral qualities of stillness and relaxation as an embodied indicator for being grounded in the source level of presence, connecting us to the realm of wholeness and generative knowing from being. When we are connected sufficiently to this realm, it invites us into its living

silence and helps us remember what deep down we might have always known—a timeless wisdom as it were.

The *discernment practice* we developed from realising the specific sensual qualities of primary knowing committed us to hold an *ongoing awareness of our embodied state in the moment*. Once we recognise that hurried, contracted energy as an indicator of the movement of our conditioned mind, we can intervene, pause, bring ourselves into a state of embodied presence, for example by a grounding practice, and engage in a fresh presencing process through which an alternative route might emerge. Once we tap into that sense of deeper presence and living stillness, we can surrender even more deeply into the presencing process and welcome what Gunnlaugson (2020) describes as “the arising new.”

III. 1d) Challenges in navigating with primary knowing over time: Stepping out of conventional epistemologies and learning to navigate in the liminal space

The numerous cycles of action and reflection in our inquiry group revealed the fact that the challenges of making presencing a second nature in our leadership don't stop with accessing primary knowing but continue in the process of learning to navigate with and from it. One major reason for this appears to be that *presencing insights are seldomly crystal clear* but typically come with a sense of vagueness that might not be actionable directly. In the mentioned collective presencing session, our leader Andrew discovered an explorative, emerging approach to run his new business, co-created by the subtle movements of all parts of the system in a state of utmost presence. This insight didn't point to a direct solution, tangible instruction, or outer manifestation, but to the critical *how* of navigating the current uncertainty in service of a most generative development. This was a major insight – and yet, its meaning was beyond the left hemisphere's drive to turn it into actionable knowledge. If we are operating under the left-hemisphere dominance and haven't yet learned to navigate with the right hemisphere's holistic understanding, we risk discounting the significance of a presencing insight once our rational-analytic thinking has taken over again. Three months after the mentioned presencing session, despite his deep inspiration and excitement at the time, Andrew reported how he had fallen back in the trap of his old analytic approach, suffering from the pressure and frustration of being stuck. This was one of many moments where we realised that a profound presencing insight might require us to *keep its felt qualities alive over time*, so they can serve as a guiding quality, a compass in the crucial time of bringing the insight to life in the world. If presencing remains a

situational practice where we connect with the holistic right hemisphere knowing only momentarily and subsequently return to our habitual patterns of sense-making and acting, we risk disconnecting from the presencing insight and lose the generative potential it holds.

The practice we developed out of this insight was a simple but important one: A routine of *repeatedly re-connecting to the felt sense* of the presencing insight (our embodied right hemisphere's holistic understanding of it) and taming our left-hemisphere desire to pin it down to a concept or action item. The left-hemisphere abstraction of the insight (e.g., "you just need to stay open to what possibilities arise") is vulnerable to attacks from our analytical mind (e.g., "isn't that just fatalistic waiting and doing nothing?"), but the aliveness of our embodied reality in the moment of presencing (the sense of utter aliveness, possibility and expansion that Andrew experienced) is beyond rationality and able to grasp the holistic meaning. When Andrew started to repeatedly re-connect to the felt sense of playful, emergent exploration of the wider system and to allow for unplanned co-creation, his presencing insight became more than a one-off revelation and turned into a crucial guiding quality for his professional future.

The gift of presencing mastery in our leadership, life and work appears to be less about providing us with tangible, actionable knowing, but rather about *pointing us to some form of truth* – personal or perhaps interpersonal from deeper regions of our being. Heidegger (1999) saw truth as a process of un-concealing, a progress *towards* something which is in sight, but never fully seen. Understanding presencing as a process of un-concealing truth in Heidegger's sense corresponds to the disposition of the right hemisphere which yields an evolving, interconnected, implicit and embodied world (McGilchrist, 2018). This world, it seems, links us to the realm of source - we can glimpse it through presencing but by nature this world is never fully graspable, never fully known.

In addition to the ineffable nature of the knowing to navigate with, the process of living with presencing as a second nature yields another challenge. Because the process asks us to step out of our habitual ways of knowing and sense-making, the way we have constructed our entire *personal or professional identity is likely to be shaken up*. A good part of Andrew's struggles with the uncertainty of his newly founded business involved a severe sense of guilt for imposing financial uncertainty on his family. Committing to an emergent, iterative unfolding (and thus to a longer period of not knowing and trusting the ongoing presencing process) shook up his former identity as provider of stability and financial security to those dependent on him.

Stepping into new frames of knowing and letting go of former identifications *can feel like losing our former sense of self* before we have fully embodied a new one. In the process of questioning and recalibrating our sense of identity, a phenomenon we often encountered is that of paradox. Dora, the non-profit executive who had committed to staying in the discomfort of the liminal space at a time of significant crisis, experienced the falling apart of one area in her life as paradoxically constituting her thriving in another part. Whilst Carol, another of our leaders, struggled with a profoundly unsettling sense of loss of control in her life, she unexpectedly tapped into a feeling of deep gratitude for the meta-consequences of having to step into something much bigger, which she related to an existential trust in the deeper wisdom of life to which she was forced to surrender. The transition to post-conventional epistemologies and ways of being seems to require our *ability to hold paradox and ambiguity* as inevitable aspects. In giving up old identities and holding paradox and ambiguity in the process we are again dealing with an adaptive challenge. Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009, p. 66) argue that mastering adaptive challenges involves “orchestrating the inevitable conflict, chaos, and confusion of change so that the disturbance is productive” - rather than tipping us into fight, flight or freeze mode of coping.

What practices might help support working constructively with this sense of conflict, chaos, and confusion? Our inquiry has yielded three specific practices to complement the rather general advice of taking care of yourself both physically and emotionally (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 69). First, our various experiences with *physical grounding* in the face of anxiety provided a down-to-earth approach to master the emotional charge in the moment. Second, our bonding journey of mutual support and challenge suggests that some form of *social and developmental support*, such as collaborative inquiry groups, can help transform the sense of inner conflict or confusion into a process of (un-)learning and growth. We realised that our group meetings offered an invaluable platform to open up to our vulnerabilities and struggles, encounter different perspectives, reflect and recharge in the process of unlearning, and embrace new paradigms. The shared field of consciousness softened the grip of our patterns and gave us more freedom to actively choose our ways of being and navigating. Third, we realised that without our *active commitment to face, own and grapple with the challenges of the journey*, even long-term projects like our inquiry group would not be enough to catalyse lasting shifts in our ways of knowing and being in the world. As Peter said, “you can’t be wishy washy on this stuff”, or in Dora’s words, “the work is not possible... without making that commitment to step into your power.” The process of transition appears to

be continuous work which again and again requires conscious choices to hang in the liminality and protect the new that we only vaguely sense arising.

III. 2. What makes it worth facing those growing pains? Which potential lies in incorporating presencing as a way of being?

Considering the number of challenges and growing pains in the process, the question suggests itself what makes it worth facing and working through the tough parts of the journey. What exactly is the potential that lies in embodying presencing as a way of being? The following section will illuminate how the journey of incorporating presencing mastery in our life has transformed our sense of self, our being in the world.

III. 2a) Felt reality – not mental concept - of being part of a larger whole

The previously discussed challenges make the process of incorporating presencing as a way of being a demanding journey. And yet, we realised that by committing ourselves to going through experiences of ambiguity, confusion, or anxiety and by nurturing our capacity for primary knowing from being, we slowly became familiar with a different ontological realm: In this realm, we experience *coming to know as a co-creative act between our embodied presence and the cosmos* around us. In all deep presencing moments, we encountered our interconnectedness with the world as a visceral reality. It made us realise that we are part of a living cosmos in which knowing can arise in manifold ways.

In Charles Taylor's notion of the modern "buffered self" (2007, p. 27) we recognised the way of being in which many of us have been socialised, perceivable as a sense of disenchantment in a mechanical universe that is made of analytic structure and rational thinking. *Relating to the complexity of life in a presencing way has re-enchanted our world.* It made us overcome our internal divide between mind, body and world and allowed us to participate in a more-than-human world (Abram, 1996). We understood the moments where our capacity to go on as usual broke apart as the dark phase of liminality operating in the interest of making whole (Shorter, 1988, p. 79) our sense of self and being in the world. In the realm of this more organismic, participative sense of self, the holistic knowing or truth in presencing is less something we receive or acquire than something that we are a vessel for to emerge. Through our sensory response, it affects us in deeply personal ways, but at the same time it feels as if not merely belonging to ourselves. We are part of a bigger process that our analytic mind is quite incapable of grasping. In the terminology of presencing, we may call this bigger process the realm of

source. Our ongoing practice of *staying connected to and moving in sync with this source energy* allowed our sense of self to become permeable and merge with the world; the experience of oneness points to something bigger than ourselves and at the same time makes us feel we have never been more ourselves.

III. 2b) Presencing as a way of being – a personal ecosystem restoration

This profound inquiry process over many years has made us realise that in deep, dynamic presencing, the dimensions of knowing and being are not separate from each other, but rather interwoven. The way of knowing that emerges is connected to particular embodied ways of being presence, which we may call *being essence* and *being source*, using the terminology of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020). These realms form the necessary ground from which presencing knowing emerges. Very often, deep presencing realisations have *connected us more profoundly to our way of being*. They have directed our attention to the ways we related to life and to ourselves and inquiring into them in a presencing way pointed towards more wholesome ways of being. Our leaders felt “naturally uplifted” by sensing into and caring for their way of being, which they perceived as a reassuring, beautifully simple and warming quality in the heart.

An overarching quality that connects to presencing mastery as a way of being is the *quality of generativity*. Presencing insights appears to carry a sense of *resourcefulness, confidence or calm*, like in Peter’s expanded sense of reality standing barefoot in the grass or in Dora’s period of liminality, facilitated by grounding herself in her legs. These qualities might also highlight central aspects related to important life questions - they seem to *point towards more wholesome ways of being*, of relating to ourselves and to our work. Hence, it appears that the journey towards presencing mastery tends to touch upon our sense of self and might give us a sense of a generative way of being, connect us to the meaning of wholeness. As Anderson suggests, “the body has a kind of intrinsic teleology always pointing in the direction of wholeness and healing” (2001, p. 98). The trouble appears to be that we seem to have largely disempowered, forgotten or devalued that inherent embodied ability because it doesn’t seem compatible with the doctrines of rationality. However, we have experienced presencing as a way of being to be “more in touch with reality” (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 195) than rational- analytic thinking of the left hemisphere, enabling us to embrace more perspectives, opening up generative choices and therefore allowing us to meet the world as a place of growth and development rather than one that needs to be managed.

This generative quality seems to have the capacity to ignite and catalyse a

personal process of ecosystem restoration: we are restoring the right-hemisphere perspective with its focus on the holistic qualities of being and interconnectedness. We are also restoring “a self that is drawn into and inextricably bound up with the world in a relation... suggesting involvement of the whole experiential being, not just the process of cognition” (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 153). Through entering the realm of holistic sensing, the whole experiential being can experience truth in the Heideggerian sense of un-concealing. This viscerally felt truth has a living power (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 172) and un-conceals our path of unfolding presencing mastery in service of a much more profound sense of wholeness.

IV. Key practices in support of a presencing mastery apprenticeship

As the previous section has illuminated, the presencing mastery journey of embracing presencing as a way of being is not necessarily just one of moving toward, but also a more or less challenging one of moving away from what was once holding and reassuring. The following section summarizes the key practices that facilitate turning the growing pains into developmental catalysts to help make presencing a second nature in our life and work.

Practices for letting go:

- In order to incorporate presencing as a more adept response to complexity and uncertainty, we need to *be real* and become aware of how our habitual patterns of sense-making and problem-solving might disconnect us from a more generative way of knowing and engaging with our reality. This can be facilitated by *embodied inquiry practices*: Whilst intentionally grounding ourselves physically into this moment, we critically inquire into our sense-making patterns and assumptions. Particularly when we notice in ourselves a resistance to letting go, it proved very useful to *inquire into our competing assumptions* (e.g., of not having the time to slow down or to be unproductive) that hold us in loyalty to an unconscious but dysfunctional belief. Unearthing those assumptions enables us to make conscious choices and helps ignite a process of adapting our mental models to a presencing disposition.
- To facilitate the potential discomfort in slowing down and facing the unknown, *the practice of bodily grounding* appears to activate our inner resources to hold the discomfort and stay with not knowing. Grounding may have many forms, e.g., consciously connecting our feet to the ground and breathing into this connection for a while; simply becoming aware of our legs and how they are connected to the ground at any given time; or standing barefoot on the earth for a few moments, consciously noticing the sensations rising into the body.

Practices for letting be:

- As the presencing process often first reveals our emotional reality around the issue - feelings that might not be easy to acknowledge - we need a practice that makes sure we don't bypass the inherent discomfort but stay present with it. The practice of moving towards and inside the felt experience of negativity can help not just transform these emotions but also yield new insights. This practice of *embodied owning* has a kinship with Gendlin's *focusing* (1969, 2003), where grasping and staying with the felt sense of an inner state causes a shift that carries us forward into a more relaxed and clearer state.
- Navigating with presencing as our second nature requires our active commitment to stay in a liminal space. The negative capability of *being with can be intentionally practiced*. As we focus on arriving in the state of not knowing and inquire into any slight sensations and movements of our embodied presence, we become interested in what *is*, here and now, instead of striving to ignore or fix our reality. In the terms of Dynamic Presencing, this shifts our presence from *being real* to the calmer and more detached state of *being witness* and carries us in the state of *letting be*, from where the new eventually arises.

Practices for letting come:

- Mastery in presencing as a way of being requires our ability to discern what constitutes a genuine presencing insight and what distinguishes it from an impulse or experience-based intuition that keep us in habitual mental models. Whereas impulses that hold us in familiar territory tend to come with a hurried, contracted quality, presencing insights carry with them a sense of expansion and alive stillness. Practising an *ongoing awareness of our embodied state in the moment* serves as a useful discernment of the arising knowing.

Practises for navigating with presencing insights over time:

Incorporating presencing more firmly into our day-to-day life appears to require active commitment. The challenges of being in a liminal space don't end with the emergence of a presencing insight but continue on the journey towards truly living presencing as a way of being.

- As most of us will have developed a dominance of the left-hemisphere's rational-analytic approach, keeping subtle but transformative presencing insights alive doesn't happen by itself. In order for us to navigate with them over time and bring their

potential forth into the world, we need to practice an ongoing connection with the subtler experiential qualities of the primary knowing we tapped into. A helpful practice can be a routine of *repeatedly re-connecting to the felt sense* (not the rational interpretation) of the presencing insight and taming our left-hemisphere tendency to discount its value due to its subtle and ineffable nature. This requires our conscious choice to protect the new that we only vaguely sense arising and to use it as a compass.

- As we continue to step out of former action logics in incorporating presencing more deeply, we might encounter a potentially painful threshold between our former identity and a new, not yet fully embodied one. Ambiguity and paradox might be inevitable aspects to hold in this liminality. Three practices have helped our leaders in this transition: First, *physical grounding* in the face of anxiety provided a down-to-earth approach to master the emotional charge in the moment. Second, our bonding journey of mutual support and challenge suggests that some form of *social and developmental support*, such as collaborative inquiry groups, can help transform the sense of inner conflict or confusion into a process of learning and growth. Third, our *active commitment to face, own and grapple with the challenges of the journey* is required from us to make lasting shifts towards embodying presencing as a way of being in the world.

These presencing mastery practices suggest the described archetypal journey as an emerging presencing approach that embraces Gunnlaugson's recent call for the full development and realization of the presencing self by integrating the embodied, phenomenological and ontological dimensions.

V. Presencing mastery as a timely leadership path

Years of “living life as inquiry” (Marshall, 1999) have revealed the process of deeply incorporating presencing as a way of being to be a challenging and disruptive process. It required from our leaders the discipline of a critical reflexivity, continuous practice to step out of patterns and into new habits of seeing and making sense, and the commitment to face discomfort, uncertainty and ambiguity as natural consequences of learning to effectively orient oneself in and through liminal spaces.

As demanding as it may be, the journey towards presencing mastery can be seen as a catalyst for transitioning from the stuckness in the conventional leadership paradigms of predict and control to a generative way of being in and navigating a complex and uncertain world. The encounter with new, possibly more adept paradigms

emerging from the unknown have supported our leaders in appreciating liminal spaces as necessary realms for the emergence of practical insights, deeper levels of meaning or personal truths that open up entirely new paths. Having travelled the road towards presencing mastery, our leaders were able to create ripple effects as role models for generative ways of being in a reality of complexity and uncertainty: by holding space for discomfort, by resisting the impulse for busy action and instead cultivating the deeper realms of presence from where fundamentally new solutions might emerge, and thus by encouraging others to access profound levels of insight and meaning.

Through activating and integrating the right hemisphere's capability to contact and know reality more comprehensively, the presencing mastery journey helps restore the balance between left and right hemisphere, enabling us to embrace more perspectives and open up generative choices. As a result, the apprenticeship in presencing mastery is likely to bring us closer to experience the world through a participative paradigm and to feel an "ever more conscious sense of belongingness and unity with the ground" of the realm of source (Cook-Greuter, 2002, p. 4), so that we overcome the ontological divide between mind, body and world. The journey builds a bridge into a reality that allows for more profound levels of meaning, deeper experiences of flourishing, and that points us towards our "ecosystem restoration" as human beings.

Embarking on a presencing mastery journey appears to be a timely endeavour as it seizes the potential of the perceived sense of urgency to find sustainable and generative ways to navigate our complex and volatile world. With its ability to cooperate with, rather than bypass, complexity and uncertainty, presencing mastery illuminates the creative potential that lies in widening our mental models and integrating dormant capacities of knowing and being that so far didn't have much space in organizational life. In this sense, presencing mastery might contribute to reimagining the foundations of leadership practice where they are limited by "the absence of belief in anything except the most diminished version of the world and our selves" (McGilchrist, 2018, p. 460). These new foundations will invite wider dimensions of consciousness into organizational life and inspire leaders to become "artists of the invisible realm" (Seeley, 2011, p. 97) by creating transformative spaces for themselves and others. From a higher perspective, living and leading in an increasingly uncertain, complex and ambiguous world could be seen as an invitation to move beyond the limits of conventional paradigms and embrace forgotten realms of knowing and being that breathe a fresh sense of what it means to be alive. If we commit to the growing pains of the process,

the path of presencing mastery grounds us in the generative realms of presence, enables us to cooperate with emergence, and allows us to meet the world as an exciting place of growth. Essentially, it catalyses the highest form of leadership by pointing us towards profound forms of human flourishing.

VI. References

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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

A Practitioner's Spiritual Journey

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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.

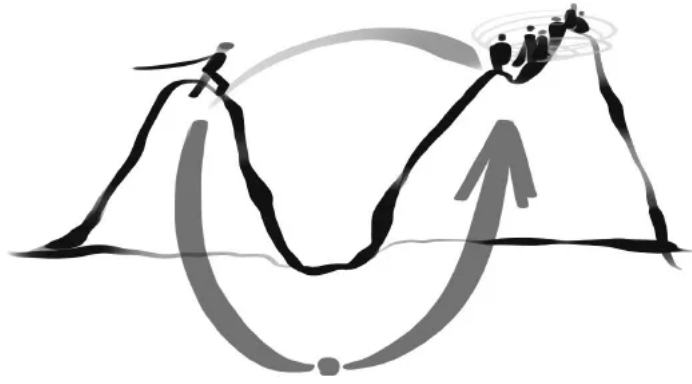


Figure 1: The challenge of disruption, a scribe by Kelvy Bird (Scharmer, 2018)

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.

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RECONNECTING SELF AND OTHER:

Recognizing and Facilitating the Human Need to Belong as a Path to Fostering Presencing Mastery

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Abstract: This article explores presencing mastery from the perspective of serving a human need that is universally shared: the need to belong. Starting from a personal experience I will set the context for presencing moving beyond a situational or systemic interventionist activity towards cultivating deeper causes and conditions of wellbeing. To then develop an understanding of presencing beyond its current framing in Theory U, I will draw on the fundamental human need to belong (Baumeister & Leary 1995). By rooting advances in presencing in this foundational aspect of human nature, I follow a thread of developing two interdependent capacities of presencing mastery. One, cultivating awareness and compassion in one's inner world to deepen understanding of how the need to belong shapes our way of being in the world. Second, as self-understanding of one's own nature gradually deepens inwardly, develop the skillful means to create conducive learning environments reflective of the human need to belong. These learning environments prototype the causes and conditions of satisfying the need to belong as a way of being, shifting our experience of separation towards realizing connectedness as a source of wellbeing. I will close by pointing to Gross National Happiness as a holistic societal development model integrating these two capacities towards the well-being of all.

Keywords: Presencing, presencing mastery, need to belong, conducive learning environments, wellbeing.

I. Introduction

In this paper, I depart from an understanding of *presencing mastery* as the capacity to apply skills to deepen the presencing process by tapping into a universal need of human nature. In the present article, I propose and illustrate two skills of presencing mastery that appear central for the effectiveness of presencing as a process for building social spaces. The first skill is to become aware, recognize and access the human fundamental need to belong. The second is to build and facilitate conducive

learning environments mindful of the deeper layers of human nature that help us to live and work, as well as innovate and organize systems skillful to live up to this need. While I do not aim to argue that these two are more important than other presencing mastery skills, I consider them central for two reasons. First, I situate the skills to recognize our need to belong and to facilitate environments responding to that need in the literature of psychological needs. As with our core needs, humans have a fundamental need to belong to others, ultimately also because it gives us an understanding of who we are (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As important as food, belonging nurtures who we can become. Accordingly, we benefit from conditions that allow us to belong. Second, as the U-process seeks to move from ego- to eco-awareness (Scharmer 2018), the understanding of humans, stakeholders, and citizens is inherently social. The shift in the sense of self from being separate to belonging requires tapping into a deeper layer of what Gunnlaugson calls our *presencing nature* (Gunnlaugson, 2023). Therefore, I consider the exploration of any presencing mastery skill worthwhile, but here promote and focus on the introduction of the skills to recognize and facilitate our need to belong as crucial both to our presencing nature and the presencing process.

To illustrate the relevance of belonging, I start by arguing that the prevalent suffering in the world may at least partly be because we tend to live disconnected from our need to belong. That is, our learning, working, and living environments make us neglect our need to be connected and deny ways to live in line with it. Instead, the shift to eco-awareness in presencing multistakeholder systems – though not yet always consciously - awake a sense of self rooted in a universal need of human nature and hence speak to the relevance of belonging and find ways to practice it. Previous work on presencing has repeatedly highlighted the detachments of self and other, self and nature, and self and self (Versteegen & Versteegen, 2020). However, by founding this disconnect on the psychological need to belong, I hope to more explicitly advance our understanding how the shift from knowing to being at the bottom of the U is furthered by practicing insight into and recognition of our nature of belonging and facilitating the nurturing of this need as skills.

More practically, I argue that presencing scholars and practitioners will benefit from becoming more aware of this need. With growing practice and insight into it, the capacity of the facilitation team to nurture and live up to the need of *being with* each other amongst themselves to sustain oneself becomes sustainable and affects participants and organizations they work with. The effectiveness of the process arises from the quality of *being with each other and oneself*, rather than from applying techniques.

In turn, this collective experience will increasingly nurture a rising longing to develop personal livelihood and societal structures that allow to live in resonance with the need to belong as a source of being, which ultimately contributes towards well-being for all. For example, nurturing a culture of belonging at the workplace will not just serve workers to have “more fun” or be more effective, it increases well-being and meaning because it creates an experience of truthfulness in doing justice to a human need to *be*, rather than “do work”. From this perspective, presencing mastery comprises the skills of presencing scholars, practitioners, and facilitators to design learning environments that are conducive to realizing the belonging need as a source for refining self-other relationships and to then align our livelihood and organizations to this need. In so doing, this sense of presencing mastery mediates inner transformation with social innovation towards embodying a collective sense of meaning and belonging.

To illustrate this argument, I start with two observations. On the one hand, I observe a fundamental lack of connectedness that causes multiple crises in contemporary societies. This lack, I argue, can be attributed to the issue that many responsible for organizational, social or political processes currently lack the ability to recognize our need to belong and facilitate environments enabling it. On the other hand, I note how social connectedness has helped societies overcome major challenges. Arguably, this may not necessarily be because actors actively learned skills related to the belonging need, however, their practices and culture implicitly often emphasized the need to belong, and established various forms of being together. Consequently, I argue that we rely on skillful means that help become aware of the need to belong and cultivate interpersonal connectedness. Becoming aware of one’s sense of belonging alleviates suffering and helps to move from ego-awareness to eco-awareness, from knowing to being (Scharmer & Kaeufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2018).

Finally, I review mindfulness, presencing (Scharmer, 2016), and happiness (Gross National Happiness (GNH), Karma Ura & Karma Galay, 2004) as three related but complementary approaches to become aware of humans’ need to belong and facilitate environments that allow to live, work, and learn in line with it. I propose that reconnecting to self through cultivating belonging facilitates pro-social action and enables eco-awareness for the happiness and well-being of all. Therefore, presencing mastery in the way that I’m developing it makes it a skillful means to raise awareness for essential qualities of what it is to be human.

II. Illustrating the Present: Two Manifestations of Social Reality

Illustration I: Experiencing Adversity

The decades following World War 2 brought benefits worldwide, including economic growth, prosperity, and safety. However, its side effects are currently manifest in climate change, pandemics, social isolation, and inequality. Moreover, Western societies have experienced a surge of anxiety and depression (The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, 2023). Likewise, life expectancy is declining in the U.S. (CDC National Center for Health Statistics, 2022; Shmerling, 2022; Harris, 2021), and in some age groups, mortality rates are the highest since 1999 (Loucks, 2023). Arguably, current societies objectively are as healthy, secure, and wealthy as never before (Bregman, 2021). However, there seems to be a growing subjective experience that “things have gotten out of tune,” which causes both distress and a search for happiness (Versteegen, 2023). In fact, despite the considerable levels of wealth in the Western world, we increasingly learn that happiness does no longer substantially increase once a certain level of material well-being is reached (see Killingsworth et al., 2023, for a recent debate).

Especially young people suffer from financial and ecological instability in their daily lives (Chen et al., 2022) and sizable shares of young adults in Germany are threatened to impoverish (Arte.tv European Collection, 2022). While societies generally are technologically connected more than ever before, many suffer from loneliness (Mann et al., 2022) and relationships that do not foster happiness (Twenge, 2017; 2023). Instead, anxiety and depression drive suicide rates among young adults (Cohen, 2023). Never have young people been as unhappy as today and never have they been unhappier than the post-war generation of elders (Chen et al., 2022). Similarly, students nowadays are better educated than previous generations, but often feel unprepared to use their knowledge (Robinson & Aronica, 2016).

To summarize these first observations, a lack of social connectedness becomes apparent in contemporary societies. The massive challenges of our time demand collective creativity and every single person to contribute (Versteegen & Solberg, in prep.). However, the way we organize our systems make us often feel isolated, inept, and irrelevant. Arguably, this problem is multi-faceted. However, it seems like a *social* disconnect transcends to a lack of connectedness with oneself, one's abilities, and society's challenges. In turn, experiencing a disconnect from one's own creativity and the lacking ability to contribute to a larger whole fuel a sense of being unheard and unseen in increasing shares of society. Ultimately, perceptions of social exclusion are associated with a mobilization of those feeling “silenced,” and sometimes even societal

polarization. Politically, these experiences may explain a radicalization across societies, which seek to portray individuals' perception of reality as objective "truth," and results in radical movements like populist convictions or uncompromising climate activism (Finkel et al., 2020). But while this lack of social connectedness has precarious consequences for various realms of society, our current situation is not that dire. Despite all adversity, there are many efforts around the world to recognize the need to belong and to build connectedness. Presencing and other programs—with their emphasis on designing and facilitating social processes and their intention to organize systems aligned with this need—are prominent examples of such efforts. Next, I will illustrate one case in more detail.

Illustration II: Building from Rubble

During a recent visit to Vietnam—a vital, inspiring, emerging, and innovative economy of 100 million inhabitants with an age average of 32 years—I made two observations. First, I observed what it takes to rebuild a country out of the rubble. Second, I experienced that material growth and inner development may not be two separate things but, in fact, co-arise: On the one hand, what is seen and sensed inwardly will be expressed in what we value and attend to outwardly. On the other hand, what we build outwardly is formative for our inner experience of the world.

Regarding the first observation, I noted in Vietnam what I had just missed in my home country. Having grown up in the post-war years in Germany and France, I had been too young to fully grasp the many efforts and resources that had been activated to rebuild a country. It made me realize the mental and emotional efforts it must have taken to believe in a future and the possibility to build something whole and beautiful despite all loss, hunger, and harmful memories. These and many other countries have successfully rebuilt their countries and economies despite all hardship. In fact, people were able to act. Of course, facing the adamant truth of destruction was an unescapable reality. However, instead of surrendering to despair, it seemed to awaken a dormant possibility and an imagination of a world beyond the visible rubble that entrusted the survivors of a war with the courage to start anew. Interestingly, this relates to previous research showing that immediate and visible threats and extreme conditions often activate an energy of survival (Franklin, 2011) and connect us to our transformative capacities (Scharmer, 2020). While the resilience and willpower of these and other post-war societies are certainly due to various factors, I attribute them also to peoples' capacity to imagine a wealthier, healthier, and safer societal, that is, connected

future particularly for the next generation.

Specifically, my second observation concerns various initiatives and programs to explore and facilitate social belonging (Ha Vinh, 2022). Like in many other countries, amid the country's steady progress in material wealth, a social development took off in some parts of Vietnamese society. Particularly in business and education, this development questions one-sided material growth and suggests that visible societal development is a function of the invisible quality of connection to self, other, and nature. Various projects, trainings, and workshops across the country aim to build happiness skills for the purpose of advancing inner development (Ha Vinh, 2022). Specifically, they seek to implement Gross National Happiness (GNH), a new development paradigm (Karma Ura & Karma Galay, 2004) used to measure and mirror advances in collective well-being in education and business based on inner development and the quality of social cohesion. For me as an observer, it was impressive to witness the evocative and collective drive, skill, and vitality of these initiatives, as well as the aspiration of the organizations (i.e., public schools in various parts of the country and big corporations) pursuing them. They shared the aspiration to make the holistic development of an inclusive society towards happiness and well-being for all an overarching goal; aiming to mobilize encouragement, joy, togetherness, speed, learning, and compassion in finding ways of balancing material and non-materialistic development goals. Being trained in happiness skills, the teams establish profound connections amongst themselves. They embody mindfulness and social-emotional skills towards self, other, and participants while conducting programs, retreats and workshops. With mindful listening and speaking and other skillful means, the teams exemplify a community whose rhythm and flow carries a culture conducive to deepen social connections to which each participant can contribute. Enacted first within the team, the newly emerging relational patterns of interdependent, diverse, and kind contributions spread to participants (Engert et al., 2023). Together, they help create a culture of happiness generating free and authentic collective action (Ha Vinh, 2022).

To summarize their intention, they seek to master interpersonal relationships as a practice of mindfulness, kindness, and compassion. This cultivates an experience of distributed agency rather than single individuals running separate sessions or exercises lining up throughout the agenda. Participants adhere to the altering climate of their learning environment from *doing to being* as the social field of collective agency emerges. Their evolving social reality is inclusive, cultivates attention, gratitude, affection, responsiveness, and potentiality as the team masters its own social process as a

collective practice. Interestingly, to watch a team being kind and attentive to each other is contagious. It cultivates a motivation amongst participants to turn into their own capacity to contribute rather than to search for individual solutions. The learning experience invites participants to tap together into the deeper reality of becoming aware of each other beyond knowing about each other.

In the next section, I attempt to identify the deeper forces underlying both illustrations, which allow or impede turning individual knowing into collective action. Specifically, I will argue that we need to rebuild the relational world to scale up our capacity to balance material and immaterial development towards living in harmony with all living beings. While this has been suggested elsewhere (Ha Vinh, 2022; Karma Ura & Karma Galay, 2004), I here emphasize the relevance of social connectedness as a central human need. Put this way, the capacity to recognize humans' need to belong and the capacity to organize systems in line with it are central skills of presencing mastery.

III. The Lack of Connectedness and Why it Matters: The Need to Belong

In this section, I develop previous arguments observing divides between self and other, self and world, and self and self (Scharmer & Kaeufer, 2013). I build on my illustrations above to argue that these partly result from lacking connectedness and, in turn, reflect the potential of facilitated connectedness.

The first illustration shows the lack of connectedness, the challenge it implies, and the consequences thereof. Post-war societies have been amazingly successful in rebuilding the foundations for physical safety, nutrition, and economic prosperity. Yet, this did not touch the cause of social disconnection underlying the original material destruction. Specifically, it remains neglected that our way of connecting to ourselves, each other, and nature likely contributed to these adversities. For example, current technological progress seems to suggest independence from each other. However, the consequence of highly individualized, self-optimizing lifestyles is often social disconnect and isolation (Twenge, 2017). The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory calls loneliness a crisis on the order of smoking and obesity (The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023). The Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey (2021) shows that more than half of the U.S. population are lonely and marginalized, lower income groups and young people are particularly likely to report loneliness. Unsurprisingly then, the surgeon general calls for a "culture of connection" (The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory, 2023). The first illustration portrays this disconnect and loneliness, where a predominantly material reconstruction is followed by a mental and physical health crisis leaving many in search

of purpose and meaning (Silver et al, 2021; Van Kessel & Silver, 2021). While I consider the recognition of social isolation a necessary first step, it seems to remain a rational and momentary conclusion. However, to overcome this problem, we need to recognize and internalize the relevance of social belonging beyond a rational understanding. Presencing entails this recognition, when it moves from knowing about social processes to the skillful means of awakening the remembrance of our deeper nature of belonging as an essential skill of presencing mastery.

The second illustration emphasizes the relevance of social connectedness as a collective practice. It also shows that social connectedness does not necessarily result from a workshop that educates participants about social connectedness. Instead, it takes the high-toned effort of a whole team of skillful practitioners to sustain their being with each other. In this illustration, the team understands itself as a community of practitioners embodying a culture of high-quality interpersonal relationships. Together, they master a state of awareness that shapes the in-between space of relational interdependence as a culture. The ability to operate from an awareness of one's team's shared source shapes its inter-relational culture toward the well-being of all leveraging the social whole. Such teams, organizations or groups model a culture of connectedness as a source of well-being and happiness amongst themselves that is socially contagious and spreads amongst participants (Christakis & Fowler, 2012; Engert et al., 2023). As they practice mindfulness and social awareness towards each other, they experience joy. In my observation, it was the practice of kindness and compassion for each other that helped to expand and shift the sense of self within the team and between the team and the participants. Participants longed to become part and be seen as contributing to the well-being of the group as well.

Thus, this second illustration unites two essential aspects. First, it shows how people become aware of the relevance of social connection. Second, it shows how skillful means allow to set up a learning environment and to facilitate it so that it enables social connection. Both aspects represent presencing mastery skills as they bring out the potentialities of a way of being while a sense of community starts to percolate, allowing the individual to act from their comprehension and freedom and the collective to become aware of itself. The community creates a holding space for the individual and collective potentiality to manifest. Potentiality in turn co-evolves with rising group awareness, growing skillfulness, and declining suffering caused by disconnect. In short, a sense of agency evolves from the group when it recognizes its potential once social connectedness starts to build.

Arguably, many presencing researchers and practitioners already know that belonging and connectedness are essential in the U-process. However, by tracing them back to humans' fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Garner, 1996), I hope to raise further awareness for why they matter and, consequently, why their recognition and facilitation represent crucial skills that support the development of presencing mastery. The need to belong is “an innate motivational drive to form and maintain interpersonal bonds with other people” (Allen et al., 2021, p. 1138). Conceptualized as a *need*, belongingness is not a “nice to have.” Instead, the motivation to form positive, long-lasting, interpersonal relationships is of existential and evolutionary importance. As Allen and colleagues put it, “the human mind contains a basic and nearly universal drive to form and maintain relationships with some other people” (Allen et al., 2021, p. 1136). Our innate dependence on groups has profoundly influenced our motivation to be social (Over, 2016). Importantly, the need to establish social connections and to be accepted is not just focused on specific individuals but on social relationships more generally. This matters because it suggests that communities will get dysfunctional if their actors remain detached. For the need to be fulfilled, two criteria must be satisfied: first, individuals must have relatively frequent positive (or at least neutral) interactions with a few others. Second, these interactions must happen within a framework of long-lasting mutual concern for each other's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Allen et al., 2021).

Research shows that the human being is substantially a social being and not able to survive without others. Baumeister and Leary (1995) review how this need becomes relevant in various aspects of life, including physical and mental well-being, performance, emotional and cognitive functioning, and societal problem-solving and cooperation. Strikingly, Bregman (2021) even discusses how humans' need to be connected differentiates them from apes. In fact, it is not humans' mental capacity but their evolutionary advantage to signal their need for social connection, as well as their ability to search for and offer it. To survive, humankind must realize its social potential. Consistently, Baumeister summarizes that “inner processes serve interpersonal functions. What happens inside the single mind is a learned or evolved means of enabling us to work together.” (Allen et al., 2021, p. 1138). There is no separate individual. But we need to learn to attend to our deeper nature to be.

As I sought to exemplify in the first illustration, the prevalent suffering may, at least in parts, be due to the belonging need being unsatisfied. The ways we organize our livelihood, our institutions, social organizations, and systems often do not fit humans'

need to belong. They rarely encourage frequent, positive interactions or build long-term relationships towards some overarching goal of mutual well-being. Thus, despite all scientific knowledge about the need to belong, we continue to build systems that organize around the “knowing about” rather than “being with.” We organize our livelihood, institutions, and social systems in ways that disconnect us from each other and do not nurture our need to belong.

In the second illustration, I alluded to conditions that facilitate belonging. I described how suffering may be overcome if people become aware of the belonging need and live up to it, regardless of external adversities. Given the centrality of social connectedness, it is vital to satisfy this need to move from *knowing* problems into addressing them by feeling belonging. Moreover, satisfying the need to belong helps to open to potentiality, reconnect to ourselves, and ultimately facilitates social renewal. Satisfying this need will also remind us of our deeper nature. Thus, the initiatives discussed in the second illustration reflect the potential of what can happen if this human need is recognized and lived up to.

In the next section, I describe how mindfulness and compassion, presencing, and GNH serve to specifically practice these two skills of presencing mastery, such that they help becoming aware of our need to belong and help us design environments in line with this need.

IV. Recognizing and Facilitating the Need to Belong as two Presencing Mastering Skills in Light of Mindfulness, Presencing, and GNH

To recall, I consider the capacity to recognize our need to belong and the ability to build conditions that allow to work and live in line with it two essential skills of presencing mastery. The presencing process – applied in various contexts and with various tools – builds on the premise that stakeholders of the respective context move from an ego to eco-perspective (Scharmer 2018). This shift entails a shifting sense of independent self to a sense of self as being interdependent re-balancing our sense of individual and collective. Recognizing the need to belong is the result of ongoing contemplative cultivation to awaken and keep alive remembrance of our true nature as humankind: that the human mind itself expresses the universal drive to relate (Allen et al. 2021). Being related *is* our true nature. But then it seems we get distracted. The first skill of presencing mastery is to learn to see through the resulting suffering of not belonging as a kind reminder that we *need each other to sense our belonging* to one common source rather than to who we have become as our habituated self. The second skill of

presencing mastery is to create learning environments that cultivate awareness of the non-duality between the individual and the collective: that we are constantly influenced and shaped by the collective (i.e., other stakeholders) and are in turn co-creating the collective that conditions and influences us (i.e., a dysfunctional organization, food chain etc). The skill also entails the means to provide a healthy balance between being open to receive, sensing and being aware of the collective without becoming over-conditioned or burdened or otherwise alienated.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) originally framed the need to belong as forming one-to-one relationships that satisfy the human need to be seen and accepted. However, Leary argues that this one-to-one level framing likely applies to larger groups and organizations (Allen et al., 2021).

In short, *presencing mastery* is reflected in the advanced ability to facilitate the shift from ego- to eco-awareness by balancing awareness about the individual coming into being with the skill to *recognize* (i.e., contemplating awareness about the need to *be with*), that individuality is rooted in a common source that makes us feel included and belonging. To be clear, the first skill, *recognizing* our need to belong means more than rationally “knowing.” It is being mindful about one’s own inner search to *be with*, to take notice and to evolve with this deep longing is a universally shared need that in itself is a gateway transcending the boundaries of ego-awareness. The skill refers to the capacity to observe where belonging is absent and present, to experience the relevance of belonging for oneself and others, and to be aware of humans’ connectedness with others. Likewise, the skill to *facilitate* environments that nurture belonging does not mean to organize one-time social events. It rather pursues an enduring commitment to grow mindfulness and learn/teach social-emotional skills to build a resilient culture of well-being as a livelihood that prioritizes social exchange and service towards the well-being of all. The facilitators are skillful to maintain within the team and towards the participants a fluid navigation that balances care for the individual to become who she or he truly is with the apparent opposite that becoming oneself is interdependent with being seen and recognized by a community responding to one’s need to belong. Responding to the need to belong, they practice to let go of self-expression in order to receive, to be seen, to be supported by what others want to give. To express their own individuality, they let come what others may need them for and they give what is needed by the others to be seen and to belong. Together, the two skills complement each other balancing inner, individual development with societal transformation towards communities of well-being.

In the presencing process, these two skills unfold their contribution on two levels. On the individual level, presencing mastery skills maintain an inner practice to cultivate mindfulness and social-emotional skills to enable frequent positive or neutral interactions towards belonging and mutual care. On a collective level, it allows to design and facilitate learning environments conducive for multiple stakeholders to collectively engage with each other towards developing frameworks and structures of mutual care in their respective fields.

The final part of this article explores how presencing mastery can be understood from the perspective of the need to belong and how it can be developed as a skill to facilitate learning environments balancing inner development with social transformation. While presencing mastery as an ultimate goal obviously cannot be reached, I confine this exploration to mastering the journey by focusing on three key movements of the U-process that transform the relationship of self and other. Finally, I describe how mindfulness and compassion, presencing, and GNH are complementary practices and frameworks to embody presencing mastery as a way to *be* rather than to *do*.

V. Sensing: Expanding the Self from Transactional to Sentient Relationships

From the perspective of the five movements of the U-process (Scharmer, 2016) belonging means the progressing stages of assimilating individual and collective self-awareness with social reality as experienced from the perspective of self (seeing), other (sensing), and presence (presencing). To establish belonging according to the need to belong means to gradually expand one's sense of self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The stage of co-sensing implies to become aware of and connect to the stakeholders and players in the field, and to change one's sense of self by experiencing the challenge at stake from the other stakeholders' perspectives. The goal is to establish a social relationship between self and other that is open-minded and open-hearted (Scharmer, 2016). It requires the capacity to be present, connected to self and other, kind, and empathetic. Instead of seeing the system from the outside as something presumably known, detached, and given, scholars, facilitators, and practitioners move inwardly to a place of humble not-knowing. From this place, they can know from the heart and feel the beingness of the other as a sentient being they truly are interested in and want to feel with.

The process of opening the heart towards sensing as connecting can be supported by practicing loving kindness and gratitude (Macy & Johnstone, 2022;

Salzberg, 2004), gradually expanding the sense of self towards other-regarding motivations. Again, connectedness is not merely a superficial affiliation. Deep sensing and feeling into others changes the sense of self. Sensing is instrumental for gaining new insights, but also a fulfilling practice to be. It cultivates *being human* as a fundamental capacity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Rather than wanting to change the other person or situation, by connecting, we seek to change our relationship *to* the person or situation. We practice seeing and addressing someone's highest potential. Including into ourselves what seemed to appear outside of ourselves will open something new within ourselves. Mindfulness, "the capacity to be aware of what is going on and what is there" (Nhat Hanh, 2008), is the starting point for any sensing activity, listening and speaking. By calming our mind, connecting to body and breath, becoming still inwardly, we create the inner space to stand in the shoes of our counterparts to see and feel what they see and feel. Mutual understanding and care can arise and nurture belonging as recognizing that otherness may dissolve into "just like me."

Together, mindfulness and empathy deepen our sensing experience by becoming aware that we belong to a whole ecology of relationships. As becoming aware of connectedness is central to the presencing process, mindfulness and empathy are relevant capacities of presencing mastery. Gradually decentering from our ego-awareness, we start being embedded. Mindfulness and other social-emotional skills help us gather the percept or sentience quality of sensing. Becoming aware of the sentient quality of what surrounds us, for example, by feeling that a mountain is a being as much as a hiker walking on its surface, will move us from experiencing a world of transactional relationships of disconnect to a world of sentient, living relationships. Thus, sensing is a powerful way of connecting and belonging, as it shifts patterns of relationships from disconnect to connecting self-other (Versteegen & Versteegen, 2020; Scharmer, 2016; 2018), in turn building our relational presencing capacity. By practicing a change of perspective towards seeing and feeling from other and seeing oneself from the future possibility of the whole, self-awareness is activated and with it the potentiality of moving the sense of self towards an overarching collective motive.

VI. Presencing: Cultivating Compassion as a Transpersonal Motive for Pro-Social Action

Becoming aware of our interdependent relationships is one of the many outcomes of sensing. The experience of interdependent relationships is characterized by

mutual concern for the interest and outcomes of the other (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). When the self realizes belongingness and the concept of self changes, social motives shift, too. If we do not recognize that we are embedded in relationships, we help for egoistic reasons. If we experience connectedness, we help for selfless, altruistic reasons. We move from being social for self-interest to concerns for the well-being of others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). At the collective level, group welfare becomes an end in itself, even when it means to trade off personal gains against collective good (Brewer & Kramer, 1986). Presencing expounds the inner process motivating this shift from helping as a self-interest to selfless care for others as a shift in awareness. It moves from being attached to ego-self to letting go, subsequently to becoming aware of oneself as part of a network of similar natural beings (“eco”-awareness) and letting come (Scharmer, 2016). The sense of self and identity is changing and with it the purpose and meaning of being.

Presencing mastery draws upon the skill to facilitate social processes in support of the self as co-evolving with patterns of relationships fueling changes in self-perception that encourage eco-awareness. Recognizing each other as part of a network of similar beings motivates care. Presencing resonates with the need to belong as human nature is capable of culture. Here, we connect through our shared humanity from the perspective of how to cultivate our capacity to become aware of ourselves and be compassionate. Compassion motivates people to recognize and relieve others’ suffering (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). Unlike empathy, it is not just sensitive to the emotional aspects of suffering and mirroring a “feel as” but a “feel for.” Thus, it generates a motivation to alleviate suffering. Put differently, compassion motivates people to not only notice and feel but to change something for the better. Compassion as prosocial behavior aims at benefitting communities, organizations, or society. But practicing compassion needs a home, a community. While practitioners will not be surprised that community building is vital, I emphasize that its popularity and success may, at least in parts, be because they are in tune with humans’ need to belong.

The second skill of presencing mastery means to support community building as a second home for practitioners to cultivate awareness practices. Recent research shows that “compassion has to be understood in a social-interactional context, which it can “ripple” (Engert et al., 2023, p. 2) and that the cultivation of meditation-induced positive change can spread from practitioners to their social networks. To shift presencing leadership from a passing, temporary state of program towards being embodied in livelihood, it is vital to establish an individual practice and join a

community of practice. The community fulfills the need to belong as meaning and purpose of life are shifting, and the benefits of regular group practice will ripple across social networks in multiple ways. Presencing mastery means to embody a livelihood that connects practice and community in a way that both can shape each other towards long-term-relationships creating meaning and belonging. The sense of belonging, as it emerges from compassion, is a function of becoming aware that the individual and the collective are not two. We feel that the world is in us and we are part of the world.

VII. Prototyping: Measuring Holistic Development to Approximate the Quest for Happiness

Belongingness is a stronger predictor for happiness than any external circumstance (Baumeister, 2005). But our prevailing economic model values single-minded material growth, our institutions often hinder belonging, and we keep ourselves from developing individual agency and collective ability to respond. Measures like the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) barely account for and distract our attention from our need to belong. Economic reports mirror and reinforce our anxieties of scarcity and exclusion despite a factual abundance.

What societal model serves the need to belong as an essential quality of being human? Can we design systems in the pursuit of enduring happiness as ways of living in harmony with self, other, and nature that direct collective attention to what we value? In short, how can our collective actions be informed by the well-being of all? *Sensing* connects mindfulness and other practices to social reality by expanding the self from ego-awareness to whole-systems awareness. *Presencing* connects compassion as the practice to internalize a system's suffering to transforming it into a motivation to alleviate it. With *prototyping*, individual and collective action are informed by seeking well-being for all rather than pursuing self-interest. Belongingness research suggests that the concept of self will shift from self-interest to altruistic behavior when the individual feels seen and accepted (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, it remains unclear how collectives shift from accounting for the results of different parts of the whole seen as independent from each other to accounting for the impact they have on serving the well-being of the whole.

Bhutan is prototyping a new societal model that has inspired other countries to move from architectures of separation to architectures of connection (Scharmer, 2018). Gross National Happiness (GNH) manifests the idea of a holistic development framework based on mutual care among all living beings (Karma Ura & Karma Galay,

2004). As an assessment tool, it mirrors back to society how policy choices impact the interdependent balance of nine domains of life. The goal is to pursue enduring happiness and well-being for all, not as a transient state but as a social form of attending to harmonizing relationships to self, other, and nature (Ha Vinh, 2022). GNH is complementary to mindfulness and compassion practices, as well as to Theory U as a learning environment. It furthers participation and creates a system that aligns attention to intention and brings to awareness what is collectively valued. By means of national surveys, citizens state their currently experienced happiness and well-being, allowing the country to see itself through a multifaceted mirror (i.e., the GNH Index; Alkire et al., 2012). This creates a sense of belonging and support for ethical decision-making toward the well-being of all.

GNH shows how other-regarding motivations, such as collective well-being can be scaled up to a policy level. The leaders of Bhutan recognize the need to belong. They do not just “know” that belonging matters but have experienced and processed its relevance. In turn, they cultivate an understanding that governments should create happiness for their people: “If the government cannot create happiness for its people, then there is no purpose for government to exist.” (Bhutan’s ancient legal code: GNH Centre Bhutan, 2022; Bowman, 2000). Thus, they serve the happiness of their people and facilitate a national learning environment. Building a society based on belonging requires first to become aware of the need to belong. Second, it means to develop mindfulness and compassion to maintain the connection to self, other, and world. Third, it entails to establish conducive learning environments, where leaders and practitioners meet presencing masters who are guides on the path in service of happiness and well-being for all.

VIII. Conclusion

In this paper, I developed previous work on the disconnect between self and other, self and nature, and self and self (Versteegen & Versteegen 2020) by motivating the relevance of the need to belong. While many other skills of presencing mastery remain to be explored, *belonging* is both a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and essential to advance presencing from a more situational interventionist activity to understanding and mastering the causes and conditions for enduring well-being and happiness. I chose to root this exploration on the need to belong as a universal human need driving the underlying causes and conditions of well-being and happiness as I exemplified in two illustrations. If well contemplated and recognized,

satisfying the need to belong implies to develop a practice of mindfulness and social-emotional learning. It can support presencing leaders and facilitators to navigate between seeming dualities of individual and collective, doing and being, bringing together inner development with social transformation as a way of constant refinement and being, rather than a series of interventions along the U-Process. This is why I described the capacity to recognize our belonging need and to facilitate environments in line with it as central presencing mastery skills. Hence initiatives aiming to transform systems like education, business, or societies to attain well-being through the U-process or related frameworks will benefit from a more explicit emphasis of the belonging aspect. I expounded how attending to the need to belong and the cultivation of inner practices may advance presencing towards mastering a balance between inner development and social change as a way of *being* rather than *doing*.

Arguably, most Theory U practitioners will be familiar with the idea that these practices have a vital function for community-building. What I sought to promote, however, is to recognize this function not as just one of several benefits but as a central and necessary one. Thus, presencing mastery draws upon the skill to embody the awareness and understanding of our most central human needs and to facilitate learning environments that help align our lives and institutions to be in harmony with these needs. While I hope that this understanding will help develop advanced presencing and presencing mastery, this article can only be a start into a larger exploration.

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AN EMERGING PATH OF PRESENCING MASTERY:
*Introducing a Framework for Exploring the Depth-Dimensions of Presencing
in a Coaching Context*

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Abstract: Drawing from the recent developments of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), I introduce a framework outlining an *embodied, phenomenological* and *ontological-based* (EPO) approach to cultivating new forms and expressions of presencing mastery. Through each of the three EPO dimensions of practice, it becomes possible to effectively immerse in, embody and transform one's way of navigating the depth regions of presencing coaching as an emerging frontier of mastery practice.

Keywords: Emerging presencing approaches, dynamic presencing, presencing awareness, ontological, epistemological, presencing coaching

I. Introductory Remarks

More broadly speaking, as many presencing practitioner's will attest, it is not uncommon to occasionally have deep presencing experiences that stand apart from ordinary practice. Whether arising in solitude, in a profound presencing conversation or while on retreat, such breakthroughs can inspire a felt connection, giving rise to a noted shift in one's depth and quality of presence as well as enhanced lucidity with the interior process of presencing itself. Often there is an amplified quality of clarified meaning and purpose, compelling further exploration. These and other alluring experiences have the potential to draw us into a noted deepening of both presence and presencing in ways that evoke wonder, even awe, catalyzing an immersion into the underlying depth-dimensions of presencing that bring forth new expressions of whole-human aliveness and possibility. While such potentially transformative experiences serve as significant

internal reference points for what is possible with presencing, there has been a longstanding need for developing in-depth methods that advance our capacity for accessing this underlying presencing territory directly and in a sustained manner (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2023, 2024, forthcoming), especially in leadership and coaching contexts where growth, development and mastery related concerns are of paramount value.

To a significant extent, the embodied level-depth of our coaching presence plays a formative role in shaping the overall quality and effectiveness of our coaching. From a mastery perspective, actively attending to and exploring these inner dimensions of presencing is essential to advancing our presencing capacities. To support further research in presencing mastery, this article introduces a framework for engaging and integrating three essential depth-dimensions of presencing. Summarized as EPO: *embodied, phenomenological, ontological*, (figure 1 below) each brings into focus important interior conditions that support the emergence and development of new forms of presencing mastery. Applied within coaching contexts, this framework serves as a template and guide for coaches to work with actively developing different facets of their presencing experience. Whether working in depth within one of the practice domains or combining two or more dimensions, as a guide for advanced practice this framework is useful in identifying the blind spots and limiting conditions of our existing presencing practice. In turn, it can be useful in identifying which underlying capacities are needed to help us discover new forms and expressions of presencing mastery, as well as deepening our overall approach.

II. EPO-Inspired Shifts in Dynamic Presencing Coaching

In this article, I draw from aspects of the recent work and research of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), a deeply presence-sustained, presencing-guided, field-based, transformative method of coaching from source. From the applied research to date, a number of EPO-related shifts have been observed and reported through a recent five-year period of research where I investigated the inner and intersubjective processes that optimally support a generative, presence- and presencing-based coaching culture in my local and global MBA classrooms.⁴

⁴ For further information on this research, please consult Gunnlaugson (2024a) in this IJPLC issue.

Within this period, the EPO framework was also developed in response to the coaching need for a lens that brings into focus the key depth-dimensions of presencing that shape the coach's overall capacity for and mastery of presencing as a generative way of being.

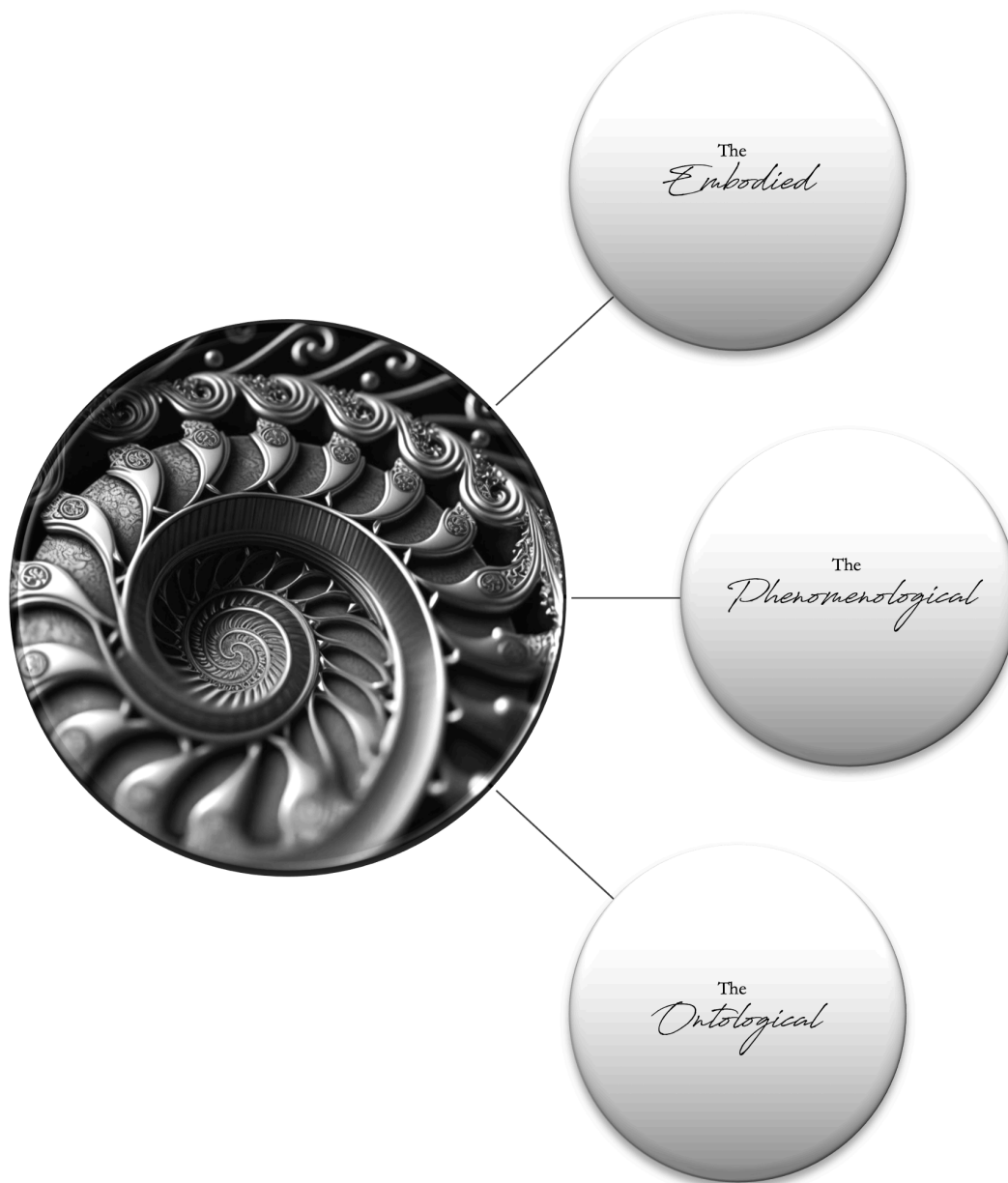


Figure 1. The Three EPO Depth-Dimensions of Presencing in DPC

During the course of this research, among the shifts noted, a more nuanced and in-depth presencing process was observed in coaching contexts as coach's learned to shift their inner ontological location and fill out their embodiment of presence. This particular development led to an increased capacity for a deeper, sustained presence which can be attributed to a more robust and developed *embodied, phenomenological* and *ontological* integration of one's presencing self at new levels. On the whole, this brought

about a noted deepening and clarity of the coach's interior location when engaging in presencing. Accompanying this advance was an increased capacity for embodied presencing self-awareness and wisdom, as well as an ability to access and sustain presence at greater depth for longer durations in coaching contexts. In accessing new level-depths of presence, a parallel deepening of self-awareness and self-knowledge grew out of an increased intrinsic valuing of the presencing process, which is essential to integrating presencing at core experiential levels of our identity. In a related way, a deepening into the territory of post-conventional values maturity was also acknowledged by practitioners who learned how to access inner presence-based forms of wisdom.

Additionally, observed increases in the depth and capacity for a presenced listening and speaking in coaching were noted with the integration of EPO practices and exercises, to the extent that coaches shifted to working inside the framework as an overall transformative process-method. In parallel, an increased fluidity in one's ability to access new sources of generativity personally and with one's client through the medium of presence has been observed as coaches learn how to embody and coach from new level-depths of presence within their presencing self. Following from the EPO cultivation of depth in one's presencing self has been a more accepting attitude towards the complex nature of change through a deepened and strengthened internal locus of control. With these noted developments has come a greater tolerance for being amidst different forms of uncertainty and ambiguity through a deeper personal integration of presencing at the core depths of one's being.

Building from these and related advances, preliminary data gathered to date (Gunnlaugson, 2024a) suggests the EPO framework provides insight into uncovering new means for engaging and sustaining presencing as a transformative way of coaching. As a case example of an emerging presencing approach (Gunnlaugson, 2023), Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024) actively works with each of the three EPO depth-dimensions of our presencing experience to establish a more resourceful and generative connection with one's self, one's client and the overall presencing process while coaching.

III. The *Embodied* Depth-Dimension of Presencing

The first *embodied* depth-dimension of the EPO framework brings into focus the subtle, interior-mediated forms of embodiment that await contact from deeper levels of one's presencing practice. As we become more attuned to the subtle felt nuances of stillness and inner movement, new sensemaking pathways begin to open, drawing us

into depth regions of our presence. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the theme of subtle embodiment is worked with in a continuous manner to help coaches experience a more interoceptive, inner-directed, felt-based presencing awareness that is lived into immersively and continuously as a way of being through the interface of one's inner body. The deeper somatic regions of our inner body become the site where these subtle, interior-mediated forms of embodiment are accessed and integrated as integral to the DPC process.

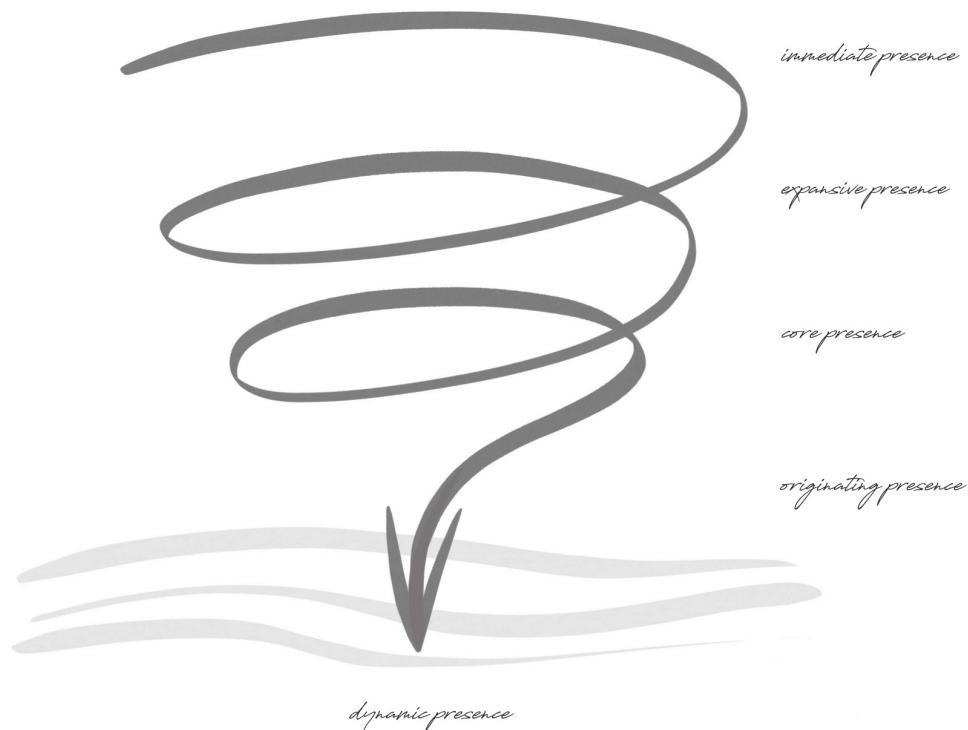


Figure 2. The five embodied levels of presence

In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the five embodied levels of presence (figure 2) are a site where the first embodiment depth-dimension becomes particularly active. The five level-depths of presence await the coach and client's embodied exploration and mastery in relation to the coaching inquiry. Guided by our still point, each of the initial four forms of *immediate*, *expansive*, *core* and *originating presence* represent the fully embodied presence-based nature of our presencing self. As these four forms of presence become active in our embodiment, they generate an overall subtle fifth form and movement of *dynamic presence* (Gunnlaugson, 2023)⁵.

The DPC Coach focuses on embodying and apprenticing with each level-

⁵ The five embodied levels of presence (figure 2) and the five ontological lifeworlds of DPC (figure 4) are part of the Five Level-Depths Method of Presence (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

depth of presence as a central dynamic of the DPC process, which gradually reveals new insights, realizations and breakthroughs for both coach and client. As the experience of *dynamic presence* develops into an embodied interface and seat of presence, it serves as a depth conduit that reveals a new graduated role for presence in the presencing process when explored in these subtly embodied ways. Through the medium of our deeply embodied presence, our presencing nature is re-discovered in the actual territory of our experience itself. The embodiment lens of the EPO framework offers valuable resourcing and assistance for coaches to ground, deepen and mature their presencing perception inside the overall presencing process. By developing a capacity to coach from each subtle embodied form of presence and being, coaches can discover firsthand the dormant transformative potential of reclaiming our presence at depth as a living dimension of who we are.

Given that creative emergence is integral to our presencing nature, the subtle embodied location from where we are listening and speaking from with our clients as we coach them matters a great deal. In exploring the subtle, interior embodied territory of presence directly amidst our arising experience with our coaching clients, a subtle inner path of presencing embodiment is cultivated. Here, the embodied dimension directs us towards a way of engaging our presencing self that is co-extensive and co-arising with the presencing process itself, where new paths to connecting-to, being-with, and finally becoming our presencing self as the locus of the presencing process directly (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming) await.

IV. The *Phenomenological* Depth-Dimension of Presencing

The next *phenomenological* depth-dimension of the EPO framework brings an overall closer discernment and excavation of the phenomenological territory of presencing. In DPC the phenomenological depth-dimension is particularly active between the presencing gestures of *letting go* and *letting come* in Theory U (Scharmer, 2016). Drawing from the initial research of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson 2020, 2021, 2023; Gunnlaugson and Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021), in Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), research with the EPO framework developed a third phenomenological gesture and presencing depth-dimension, *letting be* as depicted in figure 3 below. Between letting go to letting come, there has been an absence of a depth practice for entering into a nuanced phenomenological calibration with one's faculties and presencing experience.

This missing element is needed to actively apprentice with presence, the

presencing process and one's presencing self in the field directly. As an inner posture, letting be slows down the presencing process, giving us the chance to metabolize and digest our experience by stabilizing our presencing awareness at depth. This is essential when learning to develop our capacity for a more sustained and immersive presencing experience. In supporting the emergence of a dynamic way of *being presence* and being presenced in real time, letting be creates conditions for sustaining an essential phenomenological attitude, fostering a high-definition, suspended curiosity and immersive depth-way of relating with our presencing experience. This fundamental shift is needed if presencing is to reach the next mastery frontier as an inner movement and generative way of being.

As a subtle phenomenological practice, building from Jaworski's (2012) account of presencing as *indwelling*, the first phase {*enfoldment*} involves the movement from letting go to letting be (see figure 3 below). To enfold into presence is to envelope and immerse one's whole being in presence. The DPC practice of *enfolding into presence* shifts us inside a particular lifeworld of self-generating presence. As a DPC Coach, we work with developing our phenomenological discernment of presence in this first phase of enfoldment, so as to become embodied in it. In the second phase, {*unfoldment*} the movement reverses as we explore unfolding emergence from the enfolded state of being presence. From letting be, a DPC Coach works with resting and re-orienting themselves as presence. In becoming embodiments of presence as coaches, we then shift into *becoming presencing* in phase two, where the work is to unfold presencing emergence as we move from letting be to letting come. This is the foundational movement of Dynamic Presencing Coaching represented simply in the practice: *Enfolding presence; Unfolding presencing* (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Redirecting our awareness from the Theory U singular focus on letting come, the phenomenological gesture of letting be opens up a generative holding space of presencing with one's clients, shifting the very ground and path of presencing in a fundamental way. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, letting be offers a new path for orienting one's presencing experience at depth, where the level-depths of presence become the new context out of which one engages one's presencing coaching from. In 1) revealing this previously hidden depth realm, and 2) offering a path and method for accessing and actively working with it, a new presencing narrative and story await exploration.

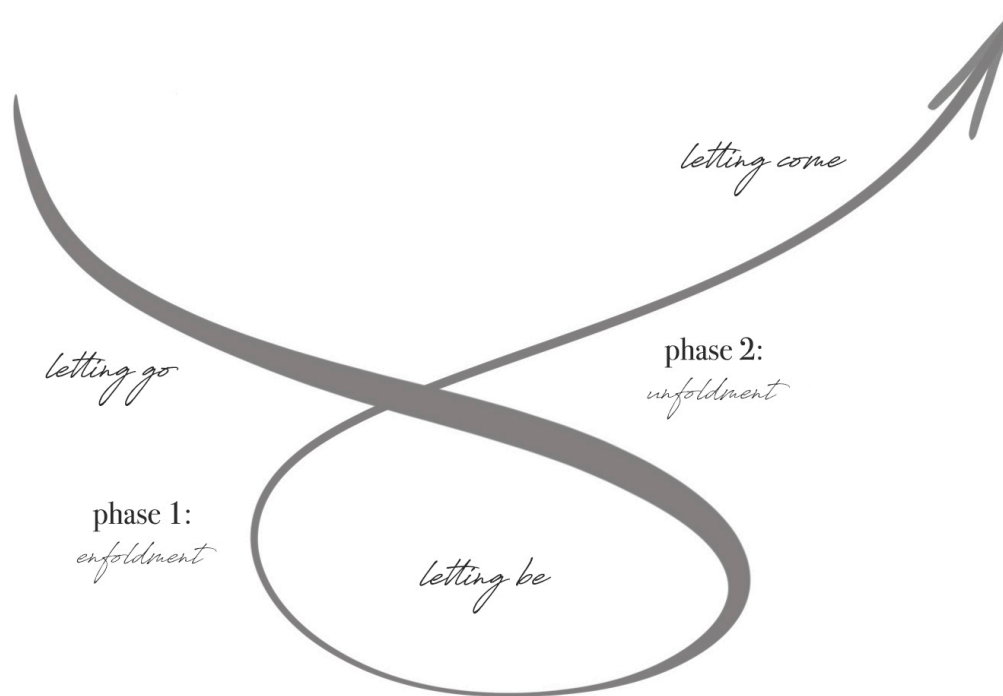


Figure 3. *Letting Be*: The hidden phenomenological gesture

As a wisdom way of working with the sensemaking crisis of our time, introducing the phenomenological gesture and method of letting be introduces coaches to a fundamentally different way of coaching from presencing. Letting be also opens a phenomenological space for new emergent wisdom processes to take the place of the traditional executive role(s) of the intellect. By offering a new direction and immersive experience of presencing that takes guidance from a deeper emergent wisdom way of being, letting be offers a safe harbor for the intellect to relax and re-discover itself in relation to a presenced way of knowing.

In shifting from the inner disposition of letting go to letting be in the first phase of enfoldment, the intellect as a traditionally dominant faculty of knowing steps back from taking a more active role in our experience, transitioning into a receptive mode of allowing, interpreting and stewarding the presencing process. Informing this step back, letting be opens space for other presenced forms of knowing and being to enter the coaching conversation with our clients. This involves a deeper trust and confidence in letting the unknown play a more active role in guiding the presencing process, as it diffuses surface tensions and pressures one might otherwise experience, offering an active suspension of these psychological factors. This develops an adeptness with what Keats (1899) described as *negative capability* or the ability to be amidst uncertainty with ourselves and our clients without recourse to reason to give one a false sense of security or buffering against that uncertainty by keeping certain control and

judgment-related functions of the intellect subdued and at bay.

In this way, the phenomenological gesture of letting be also re-purposes the intellect as a steward of the presencing process by developing a sustained phenomenological connection with the underlying territory of being itself. Signaling a shift to a bottom-up processing and sensemaking from the subtle inner senses and ground of presence, letting be develops and sustains a subtle and patient way of relating to the complexities of presencing practice. In learning to let our coaching develop in a more receptive way that is in synch with the rhythms of emergence, letting be returns us to contacting the essence of our direct experience at the root source, which is needed to uncover and reveal viable and sustainable pathways for our clients. By constituting and re-constituting ourselves from this place of deep allowing and receptivity, letting be opens a new generative path for Dynamic Presencing Coaching to regenerate and resource us and our clients at depth.

V. The *Ontological* Depth-Dimension of Presencing

The ontological depth-dimension of the EPO framework is reflected in research into the ontological categories of scientists and inventors who have made ground breaking scientific discoveries. What this research indicates is that key insights were possible when scientists were able to undertake a deeper ontological shift, enabling a re-representation of the problem at deeper levels, in turn developing a new relationship to the phenomenon they were investigating (Chi, Feltovich and Glaser, 1981). In the case of scientific discoveries predicated on deeper ontological shifts, new creative insight becomes possible via a noted shift in one's way of being, which in turn gives rise to a qualitative shift in one's way of knowing. From this point, the quality of one's knowing follows from the way one is orienting one's being in terms of their respective ontological location.

Because the quality of our presencing knowing follows from the depth and quality of our presencing being, there has been a longstanding need for an overall presencing-based coaching approach that facilitates an ontological development and mastery of presence in one's coaching practice as primary. That is, a process that enables coaches to embody and coach from different ontological depth-based forms of presence and in doing this, develop one's coaching capacity for becoming a dynamic instrument of presencing. To date, applications of presencing in coaching have yet to address how to establish a sustained ontological depth or duration of presencing with one's own interiority, the interiority of one's client, and the coaching process as a whole. Dynamic Presencing Coaching finally addresses this ontological blind spot within the EPO

framework.

In DPC, presence is not only uncovered and contacted, but apprenticed with and embodied as an interior attuned way of unfolding presencing as a way of being. As presence grows to become foundational in structuring one's being in the coaching process, a presenced way of knowing, seeing, communicating and relating through the coaching conversation are revealed. Here the coach works directly from their deeper presencing nature that reveals and guides one's way of coaching in the moment. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, research with the third EPO ontological dimension of presencing has shed insight into understanding how the nature and process of presencing changes at different level depths through each ontological shift—there are five in total (see figure 4 below). As each level-depth of presence is reclaimed by deepening into and establishing ontological rooting within these underlying grounds, this in turn amplifies our presencing awareness and perception in essential ways.

Within the Dynamic Presencing Coaching approach, research into the archetypal expressions of presence led to clarifying five ontological lifeworlds containing phenomenological grounds of being that coaches can develop the embodied capacity to access and resource their presence from. Each lifeworld (i.e., *being real*, *being witness*, *being essence*, *being source* and *being presence*) includes a specific depth location and that can be attuned to, and a modality of presence that can be entrained with (i.e., *immediate*, *expansive*, *core*, *originating* and *dynamic*). Initially, each of the five lifeworlds serve as an activation site where DPC Coaches uncover and establish fresh ontological rooting in our presencing nature, which as it becomes more a part of our experience, gradually reveals the deeper dynamism of our presencing nature as a way of being. Within the method as a whole, each lifeworld represents an essential archetypal ontological dimension and gateway into filling out our overall presencing nature.

As DPC Coaches journey through the five ontological lifeworlds, each plays a formative role in awakening coaches to their presencing nature. Learning to intimately contact and embody the ground of presence within each lifeworld opens a distinct inner presencing landscape or *inscape* that is colored by the distinct ontological qualities and state of consciousness that accompany each lifeworld. Learning how to discern the inner landscape of each lifeworld is described is needed to move towards ontological levels of presencing mastery.

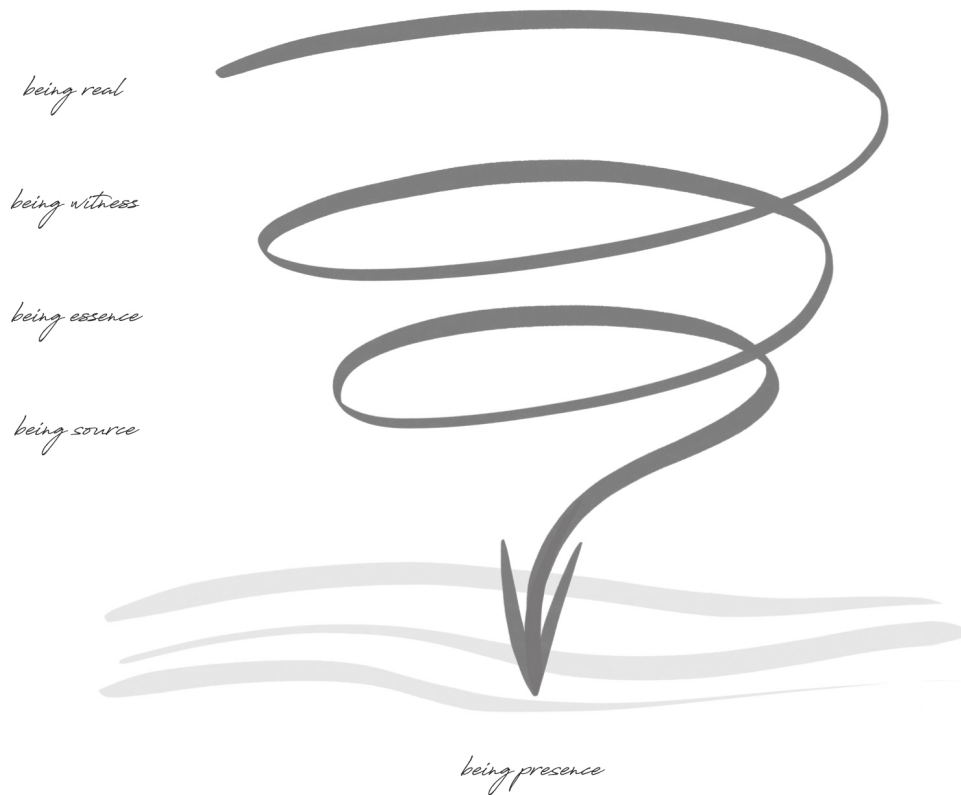


Figure 4. The five ontological lifeworlds of DPC

From the DPC Coaches perspective, the lifeworld of *being real* connects us with our existential ground at the level of our *immediate presence*. As DPC Coaches, we initially work with contacting this elemental experience of being human with our clients and their experience on its terms. From here, the lifeworld *being witness* introduces an effortless spacious quality of being from *expansive presence*. Where being real activated the inner gravity of an existential experience of ourselves and our clients, being witness releases us into a more transcendent witnessing of our own as well as our client's experience from a relaxed and de-centered expansive presence. The next lifeworld *being essence* brings us down a level-depth into *core presence*. Inside being essence, we bring our faculties into a coherent state of felt contact with our essential nature. In doing this, our embodiment of essence flows forth as we learn to uncover where we experience ourselves most essentially and centrally. Continuing our descent, in the next lifeworld *being source*, we connect with the emerging not-yet-manifest dimension of who we are via *originating presence*. Surrendering further into being source uncovers a tangible and actionable way of relating with and actively presencing from source. Finally, in contacting the fifth lifeworld *being presence*, we shift into a meta-view and mesa-embodiment of all four of the prior lifeworlds, which creates key conditions for embodying our presencing nature through each of the four prior forms of presence

while coaching. Inside the lifeworld of being presence, DPC Coaches apprentice with embodying and leading our coaching from a movement within, and between each of the four prior lifeworlds, which as each grows to become second nature, eventually transforms into a *homeworld* for coaches to source and resource their presence from while coaching their clients. Making the shift to understanding presence in this ontologically nuanced way sheds insight into understanding what is possible from each distinct archetypal form of presence at its respective depth address. Learning how to self-generate each form of presence offers a powerful set of presencing interfaces for DPC Coaches to engage their clients with. By engaging the five ontological lifeworlds as a path into presence, this activates essential conditions for coaching from presencing as a way of being.

In contrast to the singular eye of the needle or presencing gate at the bottom of the U (Scharmer, 2016), in the work of DPC, ontological shifts of this nature require passing through a series of five inner gates or thresholds that exist between each lifeworld as an inner milieu of presence. As each inner threshold is crossed, new presenced way of being await our exploration. With practice, these five ontological shifts offer an in depth ground for our presencing self to take root in and grow out from as a living, immersive reality. When this deeper ontological process is left unaddressed in presencing as has been the case in the work of Theory U to date, a significant ontological gap tends to develop between our presencing self and everyday sense of self. We need to bridge and eventually close this gap to reach a more advanced stage of presencing mastery. More specifically, this method helps develop a level where presence can be restored as a viable generative ground that, in being lived into, integrated and deeply embodied, grows to become co-extensive of who we are.

Again, in Dynamic Presencing Coaching, all communicating, knowing, seeing and relating with our clients follow forth from a foundational presenced way of being. In this sense, the third ontological dimension of the EPO framework plays an indispensable role in connecting us directly with the living ontological source of being that exists at these deeper levels of presence within us, as us. Through our latent ontological depths, a new path for presencing-based coaching reveals a heretofore dormant world where our inner depth-dimensions of presence and being can play a primary role in the coaching process. Having a significant impact on the quality and effectiveness of our coaching on a moment-to-moment basis, the ontological depth-dimension of presencing is an foundational realm out of which new unforetold possibilities for presencing await.

VII. Closing Remarks

The EPO framework introduced in this article reveals new underlying territory for presencing that hasn't been well addressed in the literature to date. With the first *embodied* depth-dimension, in Dynamic Presencing Coaching presencing awareness is explored in a distinct way that is subtly embodied at the level of our inner body and interiority through felt, inner-directed, stillness-mediated forms of subtle movement. With the second *phenomenological* depth-dimension, presencing awareness becomes accessible phenomenologically as the deeper experiential context that holds our immediate presencing experience through the gesture of letting be. In DPC Coaching, letting be plays a central role in helping us discern and apprehend the arising new by learning to indwell with presencing as a generative way of being. With the third *ontological* depth-dimension, we connect to the five, nested, ontological lifeworlds. Through the DPC apprenticeship, our presencing nature takes root in each of these lifeworlds, activating an overall presenced perception from *being presence*. With practice, these foundational lifeworlds serve as the interior environments where we embody each form of presence that develops through an in-depth integration of three EPO depth-dimensions of our presencing coaching practice.

Overall, this article addresses the critical need for developing a mastery path of presencing that is immersive and immediately accessible to coaches. Introducing the three embodied, phenomenological and ontological-based depth dimensions, this article makes a case for integrating an EPO approach to presencing in one's coaching practice. Each of the three depth-dimensions introduced provide a brief introduction to the mastery path of presencing as reflected in the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching. In outlining how these three depth-dimensions engage the Dynamic Presencing Coaching method, the EPO lens is designed to catalyze new thinking and awareness that can be applied within the greater journey of presencing mastery in one's current presencing coaching practice.

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Globally, his current research focuses on supporting those leaders, managers and coaches who aspire to develop personal mastery in leading their lives and work from an inner place of deeply resourced presence, presencing and embodied practical wisdom. Connected with this work, over the past decade he has served as lead editor of the academic-practitioner book, "Perspectives on Theory U: Insights from the Field" as well as the three volume book series, "Advances in Presencing." Recently he stepped into the thought leadership role as editor in chief of the new *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* to continue building this exciting new field of applied practice.

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RETHINKING VARELA'S PRESENCING IDEAL:
*Introducing a Three-Stage Method for Cultivating Presencing
Mastery*

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Abstract: This article addresses Francisco Varela's epistemological ideal of presencing mastery. For some time, further clarification has been needed to explore its feasibility, the methodological means to it as well as its cultivation in contexts of practice. As a response, drawing from the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson 2020, 2021, 2023; Gunnlaugson and Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021), I introduce a three-stage ontological process-method for cultivating presencing mastery by developing one's *presencing self* from the *ground of presence* in the *presencing field*. In contrast to Varela's ideal, this ontological method serves as an internal, subtle yet robust scaffolding structure, that when applied as a transformative method, introduces a new form of presencing mastery as a generative way of being in leadership and coaching contexts.

Keywords: Dynamic Presencing, presencing, presencing awareness, presencing mastery, ontological

I. Introductory Remarks

In interviews with Francisco Varela a little over two decades ago, he briefly touched on his epistemological ideal of presencing, "a fully developed human is presencing constantly," (Senge et al., 2004, p.101), where he suggests that presencing mastery follows naturally as a by-product from more advanced stages of human development. Though Varela did not share his views of presencing mastery in his

published writings while alive, it is important to note that Scharmer (2016) applied his structural dynamics model (Depraz et al., 2003) with the three phenomenological gestures of becoming aware, *suspension*, *redirection*, *letting go* and its corollary *letting come* as the main presencing method of Theory U. Given how central Varela's approach is to Theory U-based presencing, his presencing mastery ideal merits further inquiry and research. To reach a level of presencing that flows forth as a continuous, effortless way of being as Varela alludes to, there has been a longstanding need to clarify what is involved ontologically at the level of our experience and how such a mastery level can be supported and sustained methodologically. Towards this end, in this article I offer a shorthand re-framing of the five foundational journeys in Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2021, 2023) as a three-zone ontological method for developing presencing mastery (figure 1).

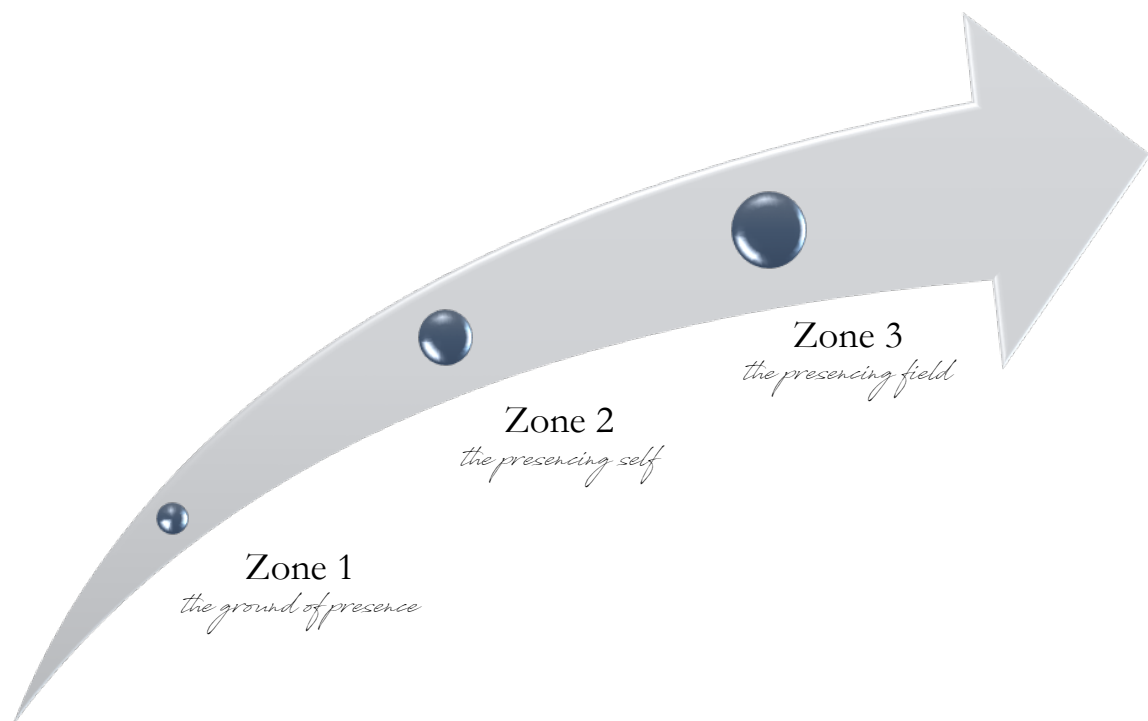


Figure 1. The three-zone ontological method for cultivating presencing mastery (Gunnlaugson, 2020)

Once awakened and sufficiently developed, this singular inner presencing movement supports the fluid embodiment of our *presencing self* from the *ground of presence* in the *presencing field*. As practitioners learn to activate their presencing nature from this ground of presence, a more in-depth presencing embodiment gradually becomes second nature as a generative way of being, which is the core mastery aim of Dynamic Presencing.

This mastery method outlines the three main zones that our *presencing awareness* develops through in a sequential way. Beginning from the dynamic ground of presence initially, to enfolding presence inside the inner body of one's presencing nature and finally, connecting our presencing self into the presencing field through one's still point. As each zone is uncovered, activated and lived into, there is an awakening of our presencing nature in the presencing field through the inner scaffolding provided by each zone that supports and guides the embodied emergence of our presencing awareness from the ground up. With practice, the three zones support practitioners in uncovering and embodying new forms of presencing mastery, with *presencing as a way of being* foremost among them. From the first zone where we explore enfolding our awareness into the ground of presence, this work is critical for stabilizing our presence at depth. In the second zone, we connect with our inner body as a means to anchoring our presencing nature from the five level-depths of presence. And in the third zone, we work with the still point of our presencing self from inside the presencing field as the nexus route for developing the capacities of our overall presencing awareness.

II. A Process-View of the Three Zone Ontological Method

Collectively, each point of connection with the ground of presence via the inner body of our presencing self in the presencing field serves as an internal nexus bridge in establishing interior linkages within and between each of the three zones. Supporting *continuous* forms of presencing as a flowing movement as well as *discontinuous* forms of presencing that involve *indwelling*, *resting* and *letting be* from stillness, the three zones serve as a reference and internal guide for self-managing and self-directing the presencing process from the ground up of our experience. As a process model, the three zones are interconnected and nested. Each subsequent zone emerges from the groundwork and activation of the previous zone. In this way, the three zones can be depicted as a three-staged path that is accessed interiorly as a presenced way of being:

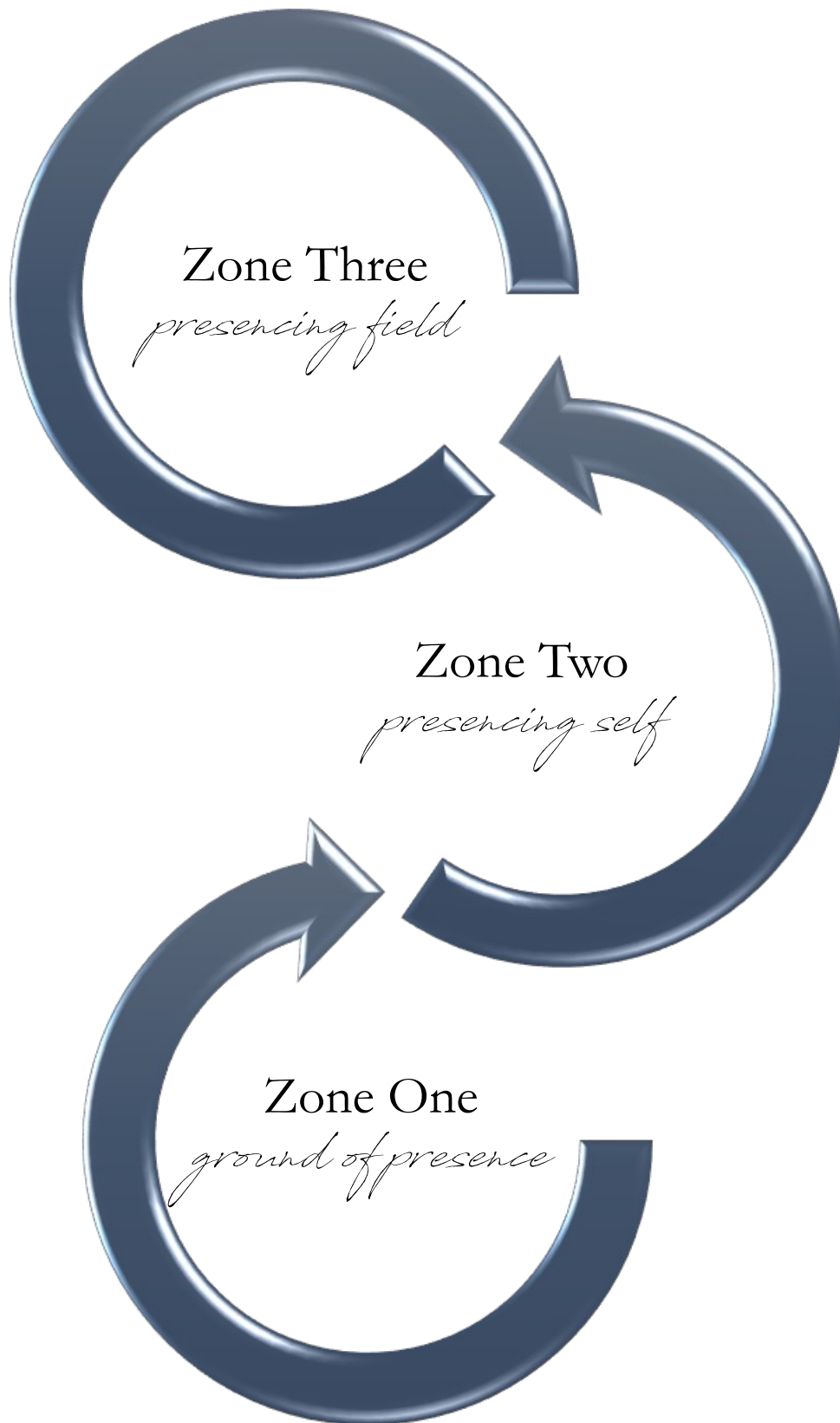


Figure 2. A process view of the three mastery zones of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020)

In this process view, there is an initial contact and activation of zone one, the ground of presence. This first zone is the deep foundation from which the whole presencing movement is sourced out of and plays a crucial role in resourcing the presencing self, which becomes active in zone two. As our presencing self becomes active and resourced, we then move interiorly through the nexus threshold between zone two and finally zone three to establish contact with the presencing field. This embodied route ensures our presencing self is well-resourced before contacting the presencing field, whether individually in one's *i-space*, or collectively into the *you-space*, *we-space* or *all-space* (i.e., the four presencing field locations in Dynamic Presencing). Regardless of which of the four spaces one connects with in the presencing field, the three zones provide an essential scaffolding means for accessing the inner territory that supports a robust and deeply embodied presencing awareness directly through the integration of our presencing self. Enfolding into presence in zone one ensures we are sufficiently contacting the ground of presence as our initial step. From here, in establishing subtle contact with our inner body in zone two, we continue the interior movement into zone three, where our presencing self connects with the presencing field.

In this enfoldment process, we explore learning how to uncover, access and engage the ground of our presence more subtly as the active source of our presencing self. This ensures our presencing awareness is well rooted from the ground of presence, a step that is needed to sustain presencing. Enfoldment is typically, directionally speaking, *down* and *in*. Enfolding into presence ensures that our listening, speaking and sensemaking are sufficiently grounded inside these regions of our deeper presencing nature. This activates a vertical shift in the depth of our state of being and presencing awareness as we immerse into activating the core grounds and forms of presence that constitute this experience in Dynamic Presencing. When we connect with being presence in zone one, each ground of presence serves as an embodied interface that we access and then transmit in our presenced way of being. This makes it possible to become resourced at the deepest level of our being while engaging presencing. From here, we continue the embodiment process of developing our presencing self by deepening our capacity to integrate and actualize presence at the core of who we are. This creates conditions for being our presencing self inside the presencing field in zone three. In Zone three, we work with accessing our still point from within our presencing self, which is resourced from the ground of presence.

To develop towards new stages of mastery, Dynamic Presencing works with

developing our presencing self through the transformation of our conventional self-identity. For Varela, a fully developed human being draws from his notion of a virtual self, which he characterized as distributed, creative, groundless, fragile, and enacted (Varela, 1999). From the point of view of Dynamic Presencing, our presencing self is characterized by embodied presence at the level of our physiology, sourced via one's inner body from each ontological depth of presence (Gunnlaugson, 2020). Where Varela works with an awareness-based modality of self that is epistemological in nature, Dynamic Presencing focuses on developing an embodied, consciousness based, presencing self that is ontological in nature.

In this way, presencing awareness becomes active from the ground of presence, ensuring that our presence is well anchored in the phenomenological dimensions of our physiology and being. This approach stands in contrast to both Varela's and Scharmer's conception which leave this underlying ontological territory largely unaddressed. Following from this point, Varela's notions of a *fully developed human being* and *presencing constantly* lean towards being idealizations of peak experience that like an asymptote, one approaches but never really completely realizes or embodies. Unlike a mathematical line or curve, human nature, and behavior in the actual existential everyday sense are not well accounted for within this ideal of presencing mastery. Because the domain of mastery for presencing originates out of the very living imperfect fabric of everyday experience, further thought needs to be given to what considerations are needed to make different forms and approaches to presencing mastery viable in both theory and more importantly, practice. In the sections that follow, I will give an overview of the condensed three-zone method that establishes a process-method and path for presencing mastery that is related with, yet also advances Varela's initial ideal.

III. Zone 1: *Deepening into the Ontological Ground of Presence*

To date, there has been a longstanding need to develop upon the initial role and function of presence in presencing. The ground of presence has been described in different ways within the contemplative world wisdom traditions (Hart, T. 2014). As the *groundless ground* in Buddhist traditions (Radier, C. 2018), as a site of still rootedness within the Zen traditions (Abe, M. 1997), as an ontological orientation towards presence with Heidegger (Braver, L. 2012), as a site of spiritual wellbeing, deeper anchoring and indwelling in mindfulness meditation (Stanley, S. 2013) among others.

In contexts of advanced practice, presence extends beyond the Theory U framing as a by-product of simply being present. In Dynamic Presencing, presence is a foundational ontological ground that plays a central role in developing a more advanced

presencing capacity and mastery. Here, our ground of presence serves as a holding environment for developing depth and stillness through which our presencing self, inside the presencing field, can orient itself in a more dimensional and embodied manner. Within zone one, this foundational ground is needed to discover, uncover, attune to, and become entrained with presence as a fundamental dimension and experience of who we are. From this inner depth location, it becomes possible to rediscover the unfamiliar as well as unknown dimensions of our presencing nature. In exploring this immersive ground of presence in an embodied, relational, and subtle consciousness-attuned way, it becomes possible to learn how to *root, be* and *ultimately orient* our presencing practice from the depths of our ground of presence. By making subtle inner adjustments, there is an attunement to the *figure* of what is emerging from this generative *ground* as it emerges, via presence. Our ground of presence comes alive when re-routed through our deeper being. When we source presence without this foundational ground, the quality of our presencing awareness is less embodied and tends to be comparatively thin. To become thickly and dimensionally present, practitioners need a re-immersion with the very ground of presence itself as the underlying foundation of our presencing nature and primary driver of the presencing process, again, *as a way of being*.

By learning how to work with each ground of presence as a phenomenological site of discovery and revelation, we open into a process of coming-to-be-presence via an ontological movement of becoming embodied *in*, and *from*, the ground of presence itself. From this place of re-inhabiting the full depths of presence, the journey into growing and developing our presencing self follows forth. Why is this important? Unless there is a deeper ground of presence through which our presencing awareness can be sourced from, embodying presencing as a way of being is less feasible in that the ground of presence phenomenologically supports the presencing field and presencing self, a connection that has yet to be explored within the presencing literature to date. Without the activation of this connection, it becomes challenging to sustain the presencing process as a singular undivided flowing movement.

Zone one, when fully active, helps us anchor our deepest presencing nature in *what-is*, in the essential tangible, felt, experiential ground of reality itself. As an ontological ground, presence provides a promising alternative to one's ego and separate sense of self, offering an active reference for cohering our being as the deeper home of our presencing self. As a tangible embodiment site, region or place that is accessible in any moment, even in sleep, when we learn to resource ourselves in and from presence,

zone one generates key conditions for being presence. In the work of Dynamic Presencing, there are five deeper archetypal ground levels of presence awaiting our discovery and integration beneath our ordinary, everyday self-sense. Learning to engage presencing from each ground of presence opens up a new path for deeper wisdom-based modalities of presencing. By immersing into being presence, practitioners develop a foundation from which to engage each form of presence as it gradually awakens our presencing self in zone one.

IV. Zone Two: *Embodying the Ontological nature of our Presencing Self*

In apprenticing with the ground of presence, presencing practitioners connect to their presencing nature in zone two through an embodied felt-sensing and sensemaking process via their inner body. As we have been exploring, our presencing self is cultivated phenomenologically by a process of embodied immersion with each ground of presence. Through the training journey of primary presence, practitioners work at identifying as well as bridging the *ontological gaps* that potentially exist between our familiar, everyday sense of self and our presencing nature. In zone two, we connect to our presencing self with its distinct self-sense and way of being authentic, offering a depth-attuned inner compass of presence to guide our presencing self from as an instrument of presencing.

Letting go of our ordinary sense of self connects us to the presencing self that begins to emerge as we anchor our presencing awareness in the ground of presence as a site of regeneration, as a place that we can re-orient our presencing sense of self from. The next inner turn is to experience the wisdom transmission from the ground of presence through our inner body. Doing this is more a *being this*. As we open into each form of presence, this fills out different level-depths of our presencing experience. The quality of *being-ness*, of rootedness literally grounds us inside the liminal experience of presence. As our presencing self takes root in this ground of presence, this fosters a deeper equanimity from finding our foundation in this ground of presence directly.

While the experience of presence varies as we connect into each lifeworld (i.e., *immediate, expansive, core, originating and dynamic*), the archetypal process of enfolding into presence can be accessed directly with immediacy and practice, as our presencing self becomes active in zone two. Each lifeworld unveils a distinct form of presence that deepens our quality of inner connection, resting and interconnection. By learning to establish ontological rooting from our ground of presence, an inner structure gradually develops and grows with time much like an inner shell or armature. With practice, this inner form of support becomes active in a subtly embodied way as an emerging

presencing structure. What might be experienced as a kind of self-sense, this presencing dimension of who we are serves as a resting ground from which to acclimate to a deeper sense of identity and being-ness. As a kind of subtle structure of being, our ground of presence develops through our deeper awareness and receptivity to presence as a constituting and re-constituting medium.

From this inner depth of being presence, deeper somatic qualities open us into different dimensions and ground-levels of presencing awareness. The first is more corporeal and existential via *the real*. The next is numinous and outwardly transcendent via *the witness*. Followed by an immanent quality from our core via *essence*, inwardly transcendent via *source* and finally in an encompassing sense with *dynamic*. Enfolding into each of these five grounds of presence provides distinct subtle armatures of being and a presencing sense of self-hood that can be presenced from. By connecting into the immediacy of our felt-body (*being real*) only to dissolve up through to witnessing it (*being witness*), then re-descending into a deeper layer of what is essential (*being essence*), releasing into source (*being source*) finally opens us to a presence-guided pathway into our presencing self (*being presence*). This journey into being presence draws us from our immanent depths as well as our transcendent heights, creating optimizing conditions for embodying the full range and depth of our presencing nature. When presence develops into a foundational support in zone one, it strengthens our overall ability to resource our inner body from presence. From here, we learn to reside inside our presencing self in zone two and engage presencing in a more stable manner as we transition to zone three.

V. Zone Three: *Engaging the Four Presencing Field Locations*

In zone three we connect with the presencing field through our *still point*. Our still point serves as a deeper nexus or core interface for accessing presencing awareness from within our presencing self via our inner body. Once we are connected at a felt level of our experience with our presencing self in zone two, we then connect into the presencing field via our still point in zone three. As an embodied nexus, our still point ensures that we are 1) adequately enfolded into presence (i.e., our presencing nature/self is active) and 2) we are adequately imbedded into and connected with the presencing field. Both conditions are essential to give rise to a more continuous presencing. Enfolding into the ground of presence through the inner body of our presencing nature in zone two provides an inner GPS for supporting our presencing self in the presencing field in zone three.

The presencing self and field can be thought as supportive interfaces that are necessary for the full engagement of presencing. Enfolding into presence (zone one) establishes the preconditions for embodying our presencing self via our inner body (zone two), which in turn makes it possible to connect into the presencing field (zone three). As a fluid movement, each interface is important in ensuring that *the quality, form, and ground* of our presence are congruent and coherent. Grounding in our seat of presence with our inner body inside our presencing self in zone two, we then move to connecting into the presencing field in zone three, which keeps us in touch with what-is from a place of inner stillness. As I continue to narrate this movement conceptually, the intent here is to introduce subtle distinctions in order to arrive at a richer understanding of the model.

In Dynamic Presencing, presencing is no longer depicted as a single social field as in Theory U. Instead, it expands to include four distinct yet interconnected field locations or generative spaces for presencing engagement. Each presencing space represents a phenomenological location and specific geography within the greater presencing field. Experientially, each location helps us engage the field dynamics of presencing at the subtle felt-sense-making level of our experience. Within this new presencing field geography (figure 3), we are introduced to a new individual field location or *i-space* and three new collective field locations of presencing: *you-space*, *we-space* and *all-space*. With a grasp and understanding of how to work with these four new locations, practitioners can engage a more situational-precise mode of presencing in their day-to-day work and lives. This gives rise to more differentiated presencing field dynamics and a new presencing field awareness that can be explored in different ways and contexts where presencing is being applied.

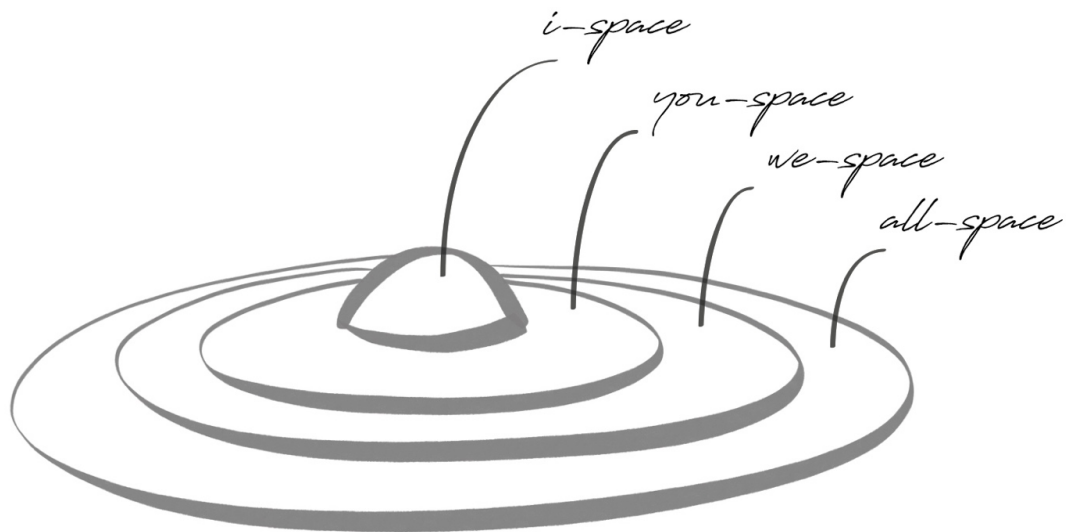


Figure 3. The four field locations of *Dynamic Presencing* (Gunnlaugson, 2020).

Each presencing field location connects us to a region in the presencing field where we can develop a more relationally precise and contextually aligned presencing process. As practitioners learn to engage presencing in unique and varied ways across each field horizon, this increases our overall awareness and capacity for a fluid engagement of presencing inside and across various workplace and life situations. Because organizational life in the twenty-first century increasingly asks for our participation and leadership from these four locations, there is a growing need to develop our presencing field mastery in this new way.

As an encompassing map of the presencing field, each field location contains a set of spatial and relational reference points for engaging presencing in context, developing an increased field acuity and capacity for working with presencing in different situations. Overall, the four fields help Theory U practitioners foster greater awareness of how our emerging presencing self interfaces through the particular presencing field we are engaging.

VI. Bridging the Gaps within Each Zone

A core focus of the three-zone method is to help bridge the gaps that may exist for presencing practitioners. In the first zone, there is a possible ontological gap between our current level of presence and the underlying grounds of presence. In the second zone, there is a potential embodied gap between our inner body and our presencing self, and in the third zone, a phenomenological distance or sense of disconnect between our presencing self and presencing field.

In the first zone, bridging the possible gap between our current level of presence and the deeper underlying ground of presence extends our capacity for presence, deepening its quality, duration and range of depth. By deepening our access to the underlying ontological grounds of presence, in the first zone we apprentice with presence directly as a new depth frontier of being. Not actively being present to these ontological depths leaves us disconnected from our presencing nature. When these level-depths of presence are bypassed, presence risks becoming instrumentalized as a leverage point for learning from the emerging future. In contacting the level-depths of presence, a coherent embodied sense of presence begins to take root and grow within. The emotional power of being absent to these depths is comparatively speaking akin to a felt disconnect from within, something presencing practitioners can feel and that others feel when we are out of touch with these depths of presence. As such the imperative of the first zone from a presencing mastery perspective is to learn how to enfold into each depth of presence as a direct path to awakening and embodying our presencing nature.

In the second zone, closing the embodied gap between our inner body and our presencing nature involves training our presencing awareness to develop our interoception and to learn to experience presence from within by anchoring these grounds of presence in the subtle terrain of our felt, embodied experience. Developing the ability to sense into the inner body of our presencing nature and to sense the co-extensive outer body of the presencing field opens an embodied path to reclaiming the felt-sense of our presencing self. Developing our presencing awareness through our inner body connects us also with a deeper soul sovereignty and freedom from within by rooting down into our deeper essence and presencing nature. Here any gap between our inner body and presencing nature begins to close as we become receptive to resonance and feeling from within to our own experience in solitude and relation. By reintegrating our inner body as an inner GPS, this uncovers the generative source of our presencing self that is rooted in our deeper being and ground of presence, returning presencing to being sourced from our presencing nature within.

In the third zone, a possible phenomenological gap exists between our presencing self and the presencing field. As we begin to develop our awareness of how our presencing self is sourced from within, there are at least four realizations to consider. One, as our presencing self becomes as an embodied reference point, there is a distinct and discernable self-sense we can attend to. Unlike the social field, this helps ground our presencing awareness in our immediate experience. Two, the

phenomenological presencing self in Dynamic Presencing provides a more seamless means to connect with the presencing field. With the Theory U focus of accessing source in the social field, there has been a collective blindspot in the role our presencing self plays in accessing the presencing field. Alternatively, when the focus shifts to the place where our presencing self and field connect and synchronize, we can begin to enact conditions that help us sustain the presencing process alone in our i-space and with others depending on which collective presencing field we are working with: you-space, we-space or all-space. Three, this synchrony offers a nexus point through which we can align, adjust and optimally unfold our presencing awareness into. Having activated our ground of presence and presencing nature inside the presencing field, we are ensuring that each dimension of the presencing process is accessed and fully connected with in a relational manner.

Four, in placing presence as the foundation from which the presencing self and presencing field arise out of, this ensures a filling out of both the interiority of our presencing self and field are taking place in a way that supports relational mutuality and individual empowerment. In doing this, we open into service of a more complex and nuanced movement of presencing collectively that at more subtle levels is still in contact with our agency, voice and individual location. This empowers presencing practitioners to shift into a more choiceful way of engaging ourselves, others, and each of the four field locations in both a sovereign and relational manner. In this third zone, our presencing self assists us in becoming a transparent instrument in discerning the arising new through felt-shifts and felt-openings in the space of each presencing field. Through our presencing self, our inner body merges and becomes co-extensive with each field-space. From this nexus point, there is no longer a gap between our inner body and the space of each presencing field location. The two simply merge and begin to synchronize through our still point.

VII. Building from Varela's ideal of presencing

Dynamic Presencing builds from Varela's ideal of presencing constantly as a fluid form of *presencing awareness* that we embody and become present to through an in-depth immersion into the three zones depicted above. Phenomenologically-speaking, presencing has both a continuous and a discontinuous expression. In Theory U, presencing is applied as an epistemological a way of knowing with a tendency to frame presencing as a peak instant that one approaches or contacts at the bottom of the U. Alternatively, in Dynamic Presencing embodying the ground of presence inside our presencing nature opens up a deep ontological pathway for supporting, holding and

being with both the continuous and discontinuous movements of presencing awareness as a mastery aim.

With Varela's epistemological mastery ideal, the aim of continuous presencing needs further unpacking. In practice, it is critical to recognize the more subtle ways that presencing may be present in our awareness. In cultivating presencing awareness through the three zones, a mastery space opens for practitioners to relate to the presencing process in a more immersive and embodied manner: lingering, waiting, resting and in essence, being-with the in-between transitional stages of presencing where it may appear that nothing much is happening. These liminal in-between phases of presencing are among the more passive, inner varieties that can go unacknowledged. Their value is revealed through a more subtle embodied way of experiencing, as part of a slower movement that can be attuned to and felt via the inner body of our presencing nature. In becoming receptive to qualities of stillness, indwelling, waiting, resting, ruminating, what is understood in Dynamic Presencing as the *letting be* stage of presencing, one works with acclimating to the fullness of what is emerging—not only persistently or worse, fixating on the emerging future, which inadvertently diminishes abiding in the deep present as the source ground for the emerging future.

Fostering an immersive rather than continuous presencing awareness as Varela advocated develops an inner receptivity to one's presencing as a felt-guided way of being versus aspiring to either the mastery ideal of a continuous presencing awareness or a peak series of moments. In Dynamic Presencing, there is a paradigmatic shift underway as practitioners connect to presence as their inhabitable ontological ground that becomes the place from which our presencing nature and its way of knowing unfold from moment to moment. When our embodiment of the depths of presence develop to the stage of becoming an inner abode for our *presencing self*, our presencing-awareness begins to arise effortlessly as a deeper continuous expression of who we are.

In the early accounts of presencing, Senge et. al (2004), Scharmer (2008) Jaworski (2012) and others tended to elevate presencing as a rare pristine state of profound breakthrough. Such moments required special performative retreat conditions, deeply held containers of solitude, nature-based vision quests, among other conditions where practitioners were invited to attune to deeper synchronicities with the land, natural elements, or wildlife, and so forth to access presencing. Interestingly, during this period, the focus was more on the transcendent variations of presencing entering into our awareness through contacting source in the presencing field. In focusing on the epistemological dimensions of presencing as a way of knowing, the deeper ontological

dimensions that sustain presencing as a way of being were not addressed (Gunnlaugson, 2023).

To this end, Dynamic Presencing was designed to foster presencing mastery at the level of our way of being. At this level, it becomes possible for our lives and identity to shift into becoming a creative emergent process when these grounds of presence are sufficiently active and embodied. *Creative being* was David Bohm's (Bohm, 2004) language for what a person whose creative nature has eclipsed their identified nature, what is referred to as the *ordinary, familiar, or old self* in Theory U (Scharmer, 2016). Bohm's notion of creative being reflects the deeper dynamism of presencing as a way of being in the work of Dynamic Presencing. In aspiring to a dynamically presenced way of engaging our professional practice, it is less about a continuous letting go into letting come, which presumes a flowing continuity.

Instead, with Dynamic Presencing, the emphasis is in making the depth transition into letting be, of nurturing a more fluid presencing identity and way of orienting one's receptivity to emergence between the spaces of letting go and letting come. In this way, the ontological emphasis of Dynamic Presencing shifts to occupying one's presence and deeper ground of being as an instrument for presencing discernment and disclosure. To uncover a presenced way of experiencing in Dynamic Presencing as embodied creative being, one needs to learn how to integrate their presence and sensemaking faculties in a nuanced, integrated, and embodied manner. This takes place at different depths of one's presence, supported by our inner body, physiology and presencing self as a means of engaging the presencing process inside the presencing field. Through an embodied activation of the three zones, presencing awareness is distilled and lived into as an anchorable state and persistent way of being with sufficient practice.

IX. Dynamic Presencing as an apprenticeship into presencing mastery

A guiding aim of Dynamic Presencing is to provide an in-depth journey into transforming the deeper capacity, function, and purpose of our existing presencing practice. By opening up new interior pathways to cultivating a more embodied and lived-into presencing awareness that grows to become an orienting way of being, Dynamic Presencing offers an apprenticeship into presencing mastery by setting out from the *near shore* of one's existing presencing practice as depicted by the dark line in the foreground of the image in figure 4 below. From here, the work delves into a series

of five transformative journeys that offer a path, set of core movements and overall vision for the *far shore* milestone of presencing mastery as an experiential accolade.



Figure 4. Artistic rendering of the far shore of presencing mastery in *Dynamic Presencing*

As a whole, Dynamic Presencing introduces a new language and overall approach for developing advanced presencing mastery in our work and lives. As noted above, for the purposes of this article, the above three zone method has been distilled from these five practitioner journeys. The intent here is to make a case for building the energetic and attentional capacities for an ontologically-sustained presencing. Learning to flexibly source presencing awareness from these three zones builds capacity for our mastery of presencing as a generative way of being and experiencing in our work and lives. There are a number of milestones here, including a more agile ability to access presencing in our day to day functioning at work and an increased awareness of the core conditions that are needed to sustain presencing in different contexts of engagement. From this ability comes a more in-depth embodiment and capacity to resource from the ground of presence, our presencing self and the presencing field.

As our presencing awareness is developed and strengthened through the three-zone model, practitioners are supported in transforming previous memory-, psychological-, and content-based structures of our identified and limited selves. When we are rooted in the ground of presence in zone one, our attention is well resourced there. This builds our capacity to rest well in the presencing process as it reveals itself through each subsequent stage. When we are discerning *what-is* in our presencing self in zone two and discerning *what-is-emerging* in the presencing field in zone three, it is possible to become resourced at the level of our embodied perception. Here we explore

an embodied presencing way of seeing. In zone three, when this is expanded into the four fields of presencing, we move into a more precise relationship with the different contexts that presencing unfolds in, optimally serving the creative process as it unfolds in the moment. Being with the presencing process in this multi-faceted and dynamic way keeps our presencing self-sense supple by being less identified with emergence or the future in psychologically attached or identified ways, re-opening the path to new advanced forms of presencing mastery.

X. Closing Remarks

In outlining Francisco Varela's epistemological mastery ideal of presencing, this article has clarified its importance and value, pointing out ways to build from it. Distilled from the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020, 2021, 2023), I introduce the three-zone method for developing our presencing self through a fluidly embodied presencing awareness. Given that presencing mastery has not been a focus of Theory U (Scharmer, 2016) and as Varela's brief articulation didn't elaborate methodologically on what is involved when he was alive or in his published work, my intent in introducing a three-zone ontological process-ideal is to continue the larger work of uncovering and advancing paths of presencing mastery in leadership and coaching contexts.

As an apprenticeship model, this three-zone method helps presencing practitioners cultivate a way of becoming subtly embodied instruments of presencing, where the practice is integrated as a core inner movement and orienting way of being, relating and communicating. Instead of focusing on a constant mode of presencing as Varela suggests, our attention expands inwardly and somatically on subtle levels to include a felt reconnection with the nested depth locations of our presence, and presencing nature in the presencing field. In integrating our presencing nature as a stable inner foundation from which to draw our presencing from, only then does it become possible to access a dynamic way of presenced knowing from this inner place of deeper dynamic presence and being that encompasses both continuous and discontinuous varieties of presencing.

Overall, the three zone path discloses itself moment to moment as a living revelatory process. By immersing in our presencing nature as the locus and medium of our presencing awareness, new orders of presencing generativity become accessible to us both individually and collectively. As an ontological mastery ideal, the three-zone method builds from Varela's initial contribution by supporting a deepening of our

ground of presence, as well as learning how to integrate our presencing self within the presencing field by outlining a mastery path where advanced forms of presencing can with sufficient dedication and practice, take root as a generative way of being in our lives and work.

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RECLAIMING THE ONTOTELIC DEPTHS OF OUR PRESENCING NATURE:

An Onto-Perceptual Approach to Presencing Mastery in Dynamic Presencing Coaching

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Abstract: In this article, I introduce the notion of the Ontotelic to bring attention to a significant blindspot within existing presencing theory and practice: the ontological nature and source of the presencing self, which plays a formative role in activating as well as sustaining a deeply embodied overall presencing perception in the presencing field. Foundational to reclaiming the depths of presence of our presencing self in the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), apprenticing with the Ontotelic depth-dimensions of our being plays a critical role in establishing necessary preconditions for developing a robust presencing perception from the five level-depths of presence that constitute our deeper presencing nature within the presencing field (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

Keywords: presencing, Ontotelic, soul, flow, presencing mastery, transformational way of being

I. Introduction

This article introduces the *Ontotelic* as a way to optimally support those presencing practitioners who value presencing as a transformative way of being and are working at cultivating a sustained level of ontological presencing mastery in their work and lives as a whole. As addressed (Gunnlaugson, 2023), given that the change process of Theory U has been predominantly epistemological in its focus, there has been a longstanding need for establishing presencing approaches that offer an in-depth account of the ontological dimensions of presencing practice to make important advances within the larger project of presencing mastery in other contexts such as leadership and

coaching. From the work of Dynamic Presenting (2020), our ontological depths are far from theoretical, they are near to our experience and become deeply foundational in the guiding as well as sustaining of the overall presenting process when integrated. For the purposes of presenting mastery, these depths of presence serve as a living ground and container that holds the deeper pre-existing as well as emergent generative seeds of the future, which are uncovered, discerned and revealed through the Dynamic Presenting method. By learning how to descend into and embody these ontological depths, essential conditions that support a deeper presenting perception of these very seeds becomes possible. Within the work of Dynamic Presenting Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, forthcoming; Proches, C. et al., 2024), conditions for this deeper presenting perception are activated during what I call the *letting embody phase* explored in the *letting go to letting be* cycle (figure 1 below).

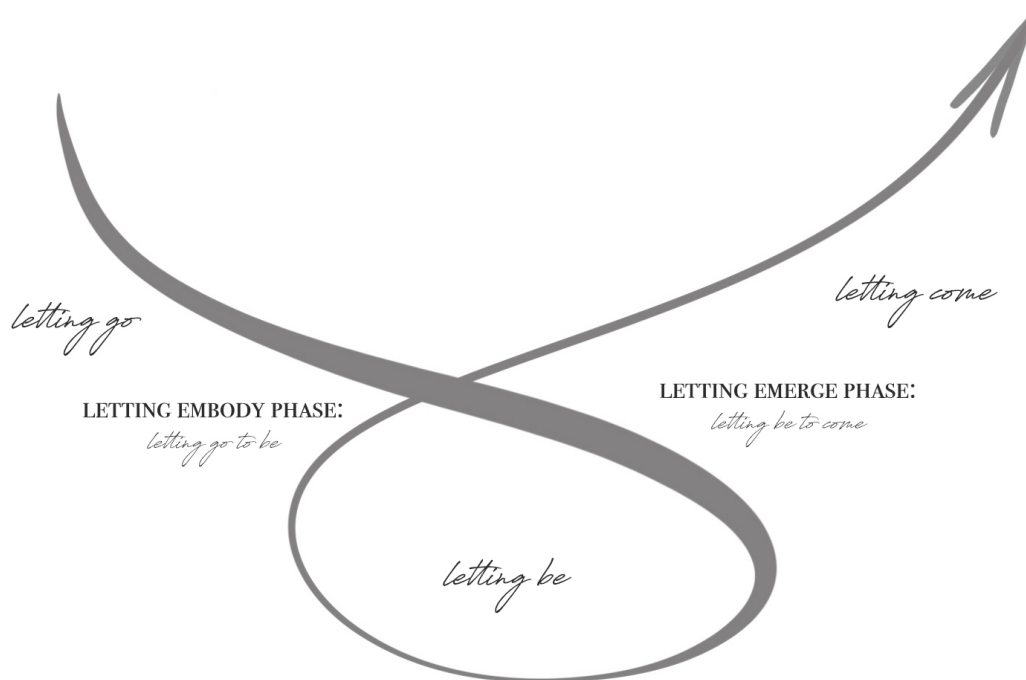


Figure 1: The *Letting Embody* and *Letting Emerge* phase of Dynamic Presenting Coaching

Letting be serves as an ontological holding environment and means for awakening a presenting way of perceiving from being in the deep present. In the DPC approach, coaches apprentice with the embodied, phenomenological and ontological (EPO) dimensions of our presenting nature (Gunnlaugson, 2024b)⁶ as well as the wisdom depths of presence that are co-constitutive of our presenting nature. This has the

⁶ The EPO framework of presenting mastery is introduced in another article, published within this Special Issue of the International Journal of Presenting Leadership and Coaching.

overall benefit in developing a deeper receptivity to the underlying generativity of our presence and presencing nature. During the initial letting embody phase, the DPC Coach connects with their presencing nature by activating each form of *immediate, expansive* and *core presence*. When we let go into letting be from each of these three level-depths of presence, each representing the essential *existential, spiritual and soul-level* dimensions of one's presencing self, an ontological rooting is established within our presencing self in the deep present. By drawing our ontological roots into these regions, conditions are put in place to stabilize our presence and provide an active foundation for our presencing self. In turn, with practice it becomes possible to engage presencing as a sustained and sustaining way of being and experiencing.

II. Opening an Ontological Path into The Future that Presences

Building from the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson 2020, 2021, 2023; Gunnlaugson and Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021), Dynamic Presencing Coaching draws on the immanent level-depths of our presence and presencing nature, which plays a central and formative role in accessing at a source level, what I call the future that presences (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). The future that presences is qualitatively different from the emerging future in that we access it through the depth activation of our ontological presence and presencing nature, which is enfolded into and embodied from the immanent depths of our being. In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the future that presences is accessed at the deepest level of our source presence (what is called *originating presence*) from the inner ground and ontological way of *being source*. Here we explore resting in and from a deeper causal source level embodiment of presence as a profound underlying dimension and living sense of who we are. From this depth, a presenced source infused way of perceiving becomes ontologically supported. In Theory U, the step of connecting to source at the bottom of the U takes place at the level of one's awareness and isn't generally sufficient to awaken a sustained presencing perception from an ontologically sourced way of being to support it. From the point of view of advanced presencing mastery, the challenge is to learn how to rest and be *as source* in order to stabilize an actively sourced and resourced presencing perception that becomes integral to the overall presencing process.

In learning to rest *as source* at the self released depth and ontological level of our subtle embodied experience, presencing shifts from an epistemological awareness-based process as a way of knowing to an ontological process, which orients as a transformative way of being. In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching we explore

connecting interiorly to our deep seat of being presence, *as source*. In having descended to an immanent depth beneath our embeddedness within our ordinary separate self-sense, which inadvertently obscures a source based perception, the future that presences becomes tangible at subtle felt levels within the presencing process. This is not an imagined nor projected future that is conditioned from the past but a real not-yet-manifested sense of the future that is subtly experienced, discerned and connected with phenomenologically at a deep source level. In this way, the underlying depths of presence open up a powerful sensory conduit for accessing this sense of future ontologically from the inner expanse and way of being source. As we learn to stabilize our presencing being from the depths of source, this awakens a knowing as well as a source-based perception that is ontologically supported.

The inner descent into being source takes place within the five level-depths of presence method (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming), a process that is activated in the initial letting embody phase. Within Dynamic Presencing Coaching, this letting embody phase (Figure 1) connects us at depth into the ontological seat of being source, which becomes the interface or nexus to the future that presences as an intrinsic dimension of who we are. Rather than think of the future as an abstract construct of time we are trying to reach or connect with, the future that presences becomes an ontologically accessible experience of the future that changes not only how we think about the future, but how we access it, opening up a qualitatively different path, possibility and realm for exploring presencing going forward. When our ontological wisdom depths are integrated in our participating, shaping and discerning the presencing process, this supports an overall in-depth, immersive experience of presencing that is lived into from our Ontotelic depths.

III. Uncovering a new form of Presencing Seeing from the Ontotelic Depths of Presence

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2014) termed the Autotelic Self one's flow self. *Autotelicity* is the love for a way of doing an activity, practicing or working for its own sake with a purpose and end in and of itself. The autotelic self is characterized by meta-skills and competencies that enable individuals to find deeper enjoyment in the face of certain challenges. That is, to enter and stay in flow through emergent forms of motivation that meaningfully arise in the dynamic interaction between the person and their environment. The flow self is Autotelic, in that the experience of finding and staying in flow is inherently satisfying in and of itself. Similarly, in the work of Dynamic Presencing when we awaken to the interior depths of our presencing self by connecting

to our underlying depth-dimensions of presence and being, this Ontotelic experience tends to awaken a profound sense of re-enchantment and possibility.

Building from the Autotelic, in this article the Ontotelic represents the deeper connection with the level-depths of our presence and inner being for its own sake as an inherently meaningful process in and of itself. When our presencing self is sourced from the immanent depths of our presence and connected into the deeper resonant Ontotelic realms of being, as a presencing practitioner there is the possibility for becoming internally sustained, sourced, and led forth from a vitalizing sense of renewing purpose and curiosity that emanates from within. To grow towards the mastery accolade of experiencing presencing as a sustained and sustaining way of being, Ontotelic paths of presencing benefit from immersing in both the *immanent wisdom depths* of our being as well as the *self-transcendent heights*. Rather than assign those heights to the presencing field, in Dynamic Presencing Coaching they are integrated as a constitutive dimension of our presencing nature.

This orientation and way of engaging presencing stands in striking contrast to the Theory U approach, which prioritizes a transcendent, expansive and distributed way of knowing from the emerging future in the social field (Pomeroy & Hermann, 2023). From a Theory U presencing perspective, the *letting go* move is the lead self-transcendent gesture that enables practitioners to move out and beyond identification and embeddedness within both their ordinary sense of self and deeper, immanent presencing nature. To put this visually, this *up and out* attentional move fosters a distributed sense of one's presencing self in or *as* the social field. In Theory U there isn't an *in and down* indwelling practice such as letting be, as the interiority and level-depths of our presence and our presencing nature are not the focus, nor are they cultivated nor drawn from as the focus within the main Theory U letting go to letting come core method.

Scharmer's transcendent field-based account of the presencing self reflects Varela's (Varela, 2001; Varela et al., 1991) Indo-Tibetan Buddhist enactivist perspective that depicts its nature as emergent, de-centered and essentially ontologically empty. Scharmer describes the location of the presencing self as "from the future that wants to emerge" (2016, p.184) as "our highest or best future possibility" (2016, p.371). This epistemological framing is based in a tacit presencing *self-as-field* view that posits one's presencing self as existing in the not-yet-embodied emerging future in the social field—a transcendent entity with a quality of sentience, mind or presence of its own that one potentially accesses with others within collective contexts (Pomeroy & Hermann, 2023).

Though Theory U's approach to presencing represents a number of important

breakthroughs as a field-based learning and change methodology, as I will discuss in the upcoming sections, from a deeper Ontotelic perspective, when the ontological depths of our presence and presencing nature in the deep present are deeply integrated rather than bypassed, this transforms rather than obstructs a way of abiding immanently in and from our deeper presence and presencing nature. In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the slower modalities of being, indwelling and contemplative as well as meditative varieties of presencing are essential for developing the full depth potential of this work in leadership and coaching contexts.

IV. Awakening Key Ground Conditions for a Presencing Perception from the Ontotelic regions of being

In growing and developing our capacity for sustaining presence at depth, the Ontotelic regions of our being provide a robust inner ground source and foundation that supports a new ontological-based presencing perception. In Dynamic Presencing, this is supported through two main stages. The initial stage activates key ground conditions for *being presence* by awakening the ontological nature of the presencing self through a shift inside the level-depths of presence during the *letting embody phase* (figure 1 above). In shifting interiorly from letting go to letting be, this inner depth shift facilitates the arrival inside the depths of presence and awakens our presencing self through embodied, phenomenological and ontological forms of presencing practice (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

The second stage takes place in the *letting emerge phase* (figure 1), where presencing practitioners explore a seeing from being at each level-depth of presence. Put simply, the first stage of the method activates the full depths of our presence from being and in the second stage, we explore the possibilities for a presenced seeing from these Ontotelic regions. The initial embodied activation of presence during the letting embody phase is needed for support, though it alone does not ensure an embodied perception from presencing is active. In the second letting emerge phase, practitioners work with attunement and entrainment processes to assist them in their discernment and eventual contact with a deeper order of presencing seeing. When applied through the full presencing cycle of letting embody and letting emerge, grounds are established for engaging a presencing seeing from the depths of our presencing self in the presencing field.

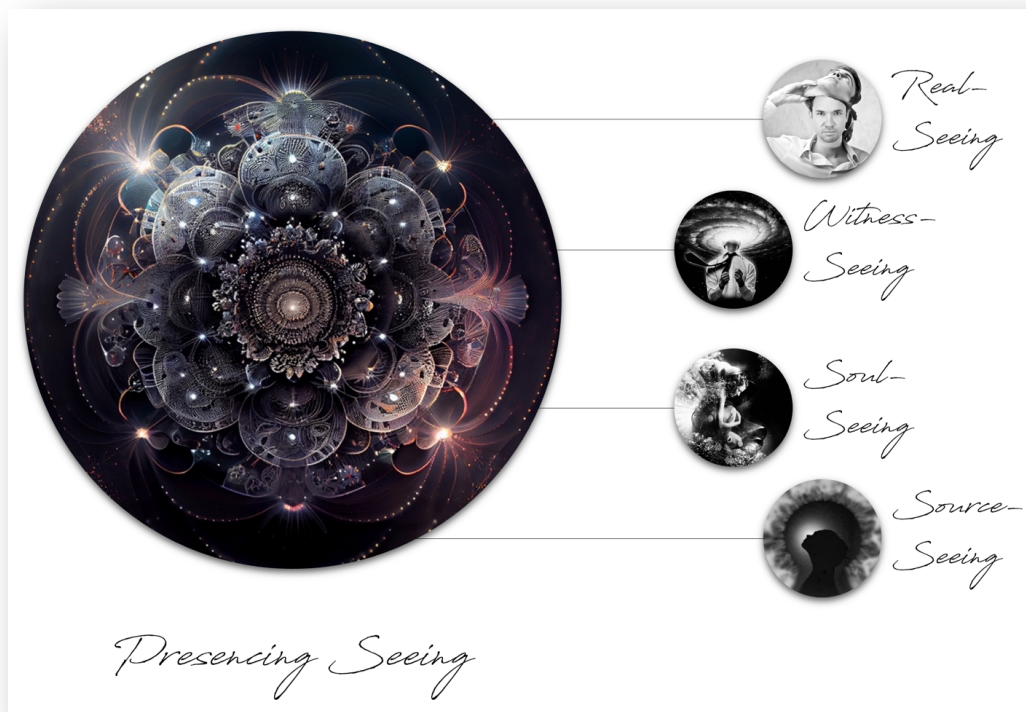


Figure 2. The *Ontotelic* Level-Depths of Presence that establish grounds for a Presencing Seeing

IV.1 Seeing from the Real

As we make our descent into these ontological level-depths of being, we begin with uncovering the first presencing lifeworld, *the real*. Through the process of *being real*, we begin to develop our presencing as an embodied organ of perception. Here, a seeing from the real or *real-seeing* becomes accessible when we make subtle interior contact with this deeper existential lifeworld. In the lifeworld of the real, we work with uncovering the first level-depth of immediate presence. Letting go of our ordinary sense of self and descending into the fullness of immediate presence, there is a way of shifting our self-sense to being more inside reality as it is. This first inner shift emerges in a number of ways. The main aim here is to establish immersive contact with our living sense of being in and from reality first (vs as our ordinary sense of self) in a way where we directly experience its gravitational anchoring pull down into our being. In attuning at the level of our immediate presence to this existential place, we are invited to explore the inner realm of being real as a way of becoming anchored inside reality as an immersive experience and apprenticeship with learning directly from it. In attuning to the fullness of *what-is* and our experience of *reality as it is*, a process of becoming real awakens a form of seeing from the real that is forged from an underlying trust in and love for the underlying nature of reality in its depths, fullness, and beauty, again, *as it is*. Learning to

see from the real is steeped in a commitment as well as a courage to be with what is seen and felt as co-extensive of a seeing that connects us directly to reality and the depths of our immediate presence in a way that is non-separate, inclusive, and co-constitutive of who we actually are.

Awakening a seeing from the real in part follows from unmasking our individual and socialized experience, facing whatever aspects of our self may have been previously avoided or neglected. In compassionately turning towards ourselves, there is a deliberate welcoming of whatever needs to be faced, especially forms of detachment or disassociation that remove us from being well grounded in reality and anchored in our deeper existential nature. Coming into contact with a way of seeing from the real works with the realm of the senses and our perennial human experience—that we each are born, live and die to this one life that eventually comes to pass. Real-seeing establishes a relationship to these inexorable and relentless truths in a way that awakens a deeper courage through felt contact and being with the vulnerabilities of being alive at this time. In the work of being real, the full weight of what-is is felt and invited into presence in the immediacy of every moment. Seeing from the real requires a fierce willingness as well as a deeper vulnerability to being this and only this human with this experience. Real-seeing is a turning toward a full commitment to being with our lives as they are within this single uncertain lifetime, to what is most real and meaningful in our lives and to what really matters. The aim here is to let this commitment to being with the full presence of reality in order to calibrate and refine our seeing from this lifeworld. The apprenticeship with being real eventually awakens a fearless courage and willingness to seeing into, with and from reality, creating conditions for an immersive exploration of our presencing nature through the depths of our immediate presence.

IV.2 Seeing from the Witness

In the next phase of our Ontotelic journey, we begin to transition into the second lifeworld of the witness. The witness is introduced through a process of being witness, where it begins to develop the next iteration of a possible order of presencing seeing as a transcendent yet embodied organ of perception. Here, we explore shifting our inner location into an embodied expansive witnessing awareness of our immediate experience, calling forth a subtly transcendent wisdom way of relating to ourselves and others. *Witness-seeing* is a compassionate seeing that is not filtered through the constructed nature of the separate self, our egoic self or the deeper existential sense of who we are. Witness-seeing re-associates us with the transcendent realm of spirit that is

subtly woven into the fabric of all of life. Being embraced in our existential vulnerability through being witness touches the deeper nature of reality and consciousness itself, unveiling the timeless transcendent dimension of who we are. This compassionate gesture of finding our seat in being witness is intimately part of an at once heightened, expansive state of being that pulls us up and above the real, awakening an ascendent seeing that is metaphorically akin to seeing from the great mythical heights of the rising sun.

Symbolically, *witness-seeing* represents the glory of transcendent spiritual realities, though in practice it is much more subtle than that. Mythologically, witness-seeing is a way of perceiving from the upperworld, from the realm and land of the gods. As a whole, witness-seeing involves awakening an order of seeing from our more inclusive expansive presence, the next-level of presence. Seeing from expansive presence is capable of a quality of detachment from our usual sense of identification with the separate nature of ourselves. This transcendent detachment opens up a space for a wide embrace, freeing us from the barbs, entanglements and complexities that accompany psychological attachment with the existential sense of self. This welcomes a process of ontological healing as we begin to uncover our seat from the inner wisdom vista of being witness, eliciting an order of seeing from inside the compassionate wisdom of transcendent spirit. The lifeworld of being witness awakens our innate expansive presence that continues to fill out our presencing nature as we continue our descent.

IV.3 Seeing from Soul

In the next phase of our Ontotelic journey into our deeper presencing nature, the third lifeworld of being essence draws us into contact with our innermost essence, establishing conditions for developing the next level-depth of our presencing seeing. Here a seeing begins to emerge from one's deeper soul-essence or soul nature. With the term soul, I am not referring to the theological or religious sense of the term. Rather I am referring to the deeper profound sense of who we are, which is indispensable to making progress with being able to sustain presencing as a way of being. *Soul-seeing* connects us to our felt-embodied, inner-sense of soul essence and is vital to understanding who we are. Soul-seeing arises with a way of being in touch with our own unique essence and the unique essence of others. Interoceptively related to our deepest sense of who we are personally, being essence connects us into why we are and how this one lifetime potentially offers an artist canvas and transformational journey into deep soul expression for those who are called to it. Soul-seeing from being essence connects

us to the beautiful inherent mystery of human life and touches the deeper universal personal (vs universal impersonal emphasis of the witness) dimensions of life. Soul-seeing also connects us to our soul's embodied nature here amidst the imperfections of day to day life. When we experience different forms of psychological suffering, it can sometimes stem from a loss of contact with soul, feeling cut off from our core essence within ourselves and with each other in the world. Soul bridges us to this deep, core innermost dimension of our lives. Soul-seeing fosters a quality of longed for intimacy, depth, richness and meaning that lives deeply and patiently within the human condition.

From a larger vantage point, soul-seeing connects us to the deepest embodiment of the real (what is personal) and the most transcendent part of the witness (what is spiritual). This deep passion for life here *existentially* in its imperfection coupled with a freedom for life here spiritually in all its transcendent perfection connects us intimately to soul. To engage soul-seeing as integral to our presencing nature is to symbolically descend into the depths of the presencing abyss, with the setting sun and darkness drawing us into a deeper undisclosed place within. Soul-seeing from a stable contact with being essence arises out of a deep descent into an inward way of being that connects us to our most meaningful sense of depth that in weaving the *personal-existential* with the *impersonal-spiritual*, connects us into a unique space of presence and being. Soul-seeing arises out of a way of being sensorily and poetically attuned to our experience. There are many varied expressions of soul ranging from earthy, pensive, sensual, sacred, wild, yet rooted, grounded, deeply rested and at ease. Our soul nature connects us to the profound depths of what in us yearns to be lived and expressed, rooting us in the immediacy of here and now as well as the timeless and eternal depths. Establishing our ground of presence from our deepest essence connects us to our innermost authentic nature, sense of vocation, calling and home. Coming home to our soul essence is its own inner illuminating light unto itself. Aligned with our most essential meaning, the apprenticeship of being essence awakens the possibilities for a presencing perception from the depths of our core presence.

IV.4 Seeing from Source

In our final Ontotelic descent, we release from our essence into source, which becomes subtly and causally embodied through the process of being source. From this final depth of our presencing nature, the possibility of a presencing seeing from source develops and fills out our presencing organ of perception, a seeing in and from source and the deep impersonal awareness of the formless implicate dimension of reality.

Source-seeing is a hidden order of seeing from the unseen level depths of reality, an inner seeing from what underlies the manifest dimensions of reality. Source-seeing re-sensitizes us to the deeper unknown, befriends and trusting this form of relatedness from the final level-depth of originating presence. Source-seeing grounds us in the negative capability arts (Gunnlaugson, 2021), of what it means to be amidst uncertainty and sustaining our not-knowing, keeping our desire to know at bay, deeply suspending our judgment and seeing upstream to what is animating our seeing to begin with. Source-seeing is at its deepest root, a non-dual, non-separate, unitive seeing. Source-seeing is also a deeply inter-connected seeing in the most profound sense of the term, drawing on a deeper impersonal intimacy to the causative principles of life, reality, and existence itself. Source-seeing connects us to the originating depths of presence, regenerating us at very deep levels of being from the ultimate nature of all things, both seen and unseen, known and unknown. Source-seeing liberates us, like witness-seeing from an attachment to our experience, it guides our seeing to a place that is no longer personal, that comes before personal. In contrast, witnessing-seeing liberates us to a kind of post-personal seeing, freeing ourselves after being identified with our existence that has implications with how we understand ourselves, each other, reality, and life as a whole.

Source-seeing connects us to the deepest level of reality, the empty groundless ground of all that is, arising from an unmanifest dimension of experience that simply is. Awakening a seeing from being source, we connect to the unchanging sense of what is eternal in this formless depth, from not-yet-embodied reality. Yet source-seeing is also connecting us to what is, to what exists in the world of form. This makes being source possible from our embodied personal location in reality. Finally, source-seeing connects us to a deeper evolutionary drive for emergence itself, the arising new, descending new and the future that presences (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming). Here our source-seeing is connected directly to the generative process of presencing, has its own felt-sense of aliveness that empowers the nature of the presencing process. In this expression, source-seeing connects us to the underlying evolutionary creative impulse itself as a living energetic expression of presence and being. The apprenticeship within the lifeworld of being source awakens a source-seeing from this deeply immanent level-depth of originating presence.

IV.5 Towards a Presenced Seeing from the whole of our Presencing Being

In apprenticing with a journey into the possibility of an embodied presencing

seeing as a way of being, this brings us to the final fifth Ontotelic form, being presence. In journeying into the real, we contacted immediate presence. This awakened a real-seeing sourced from within. From here, we descended further into a witness-seeing from expansive presence, followed by a soul-seeing from core presence and finally a source-seeing from originating presence. Each level-depth of presence has its own inflection and form of seeing from presence. In working through these ontological lifeworlds that have their own inner culture and ethos, as an example, being real and being witness brought a deeper integration with the spiritual and existential dimensions of our experience. Further on, being essence and being source brought us into contact with the soulful and finally self-transcendent dimensions of reality. In integrating these four ground levels of presence, each awakens a particular ontological depth-dimension of our presencing self, and in turn the possibility for a presenced way of seeing.

Given that the ground of presence that supports our presencing self has multiple depths, as we embody each level of presence from being real, being witness, being essence and being source, this creates conditions for integrating our presencing self. From here, there is a fifth Ontotelic meta-level where we can return in an instant to any of the four grounds of presence to resource our presencing awareness and seeing there in a more emergent way. This involves accessing the lifeworld and form of presence that is most needed in the situation we are engaging as presencing practitioners. In developing a presencing embodied organ of perception that is resourced from each form of presence, from each level-depth of being, as presence is restored as the ground of our deeper presencing nature, it becomes a powerful conduit and channel through which we can begin exploring how to develop a foundational structural capacity for sustaining our overall presencing seeing from being. In learning to contact presence as our foundational ground, rather than a byproduct of being present, new generative pathways for engaging and sustaining a presencing seeing from being await. In mastering the five Ontotelic depths of presence, we begin to awaken our presencing self in a way that makes it possible to grow and develop our capacity for an interior-based order of presencing perception that is sourced within and engaged co-extensively with two or more in the presencing field.

V. Awakening our presence-based sense of soul as a gateway to a transformed presencing

As noted above, our presence-based sense of soul plays a key role in integrating our presencing nature. Soul, when contacted and embodied enroute to

source changes the nature of the presencing experience by relocating us inside our innermost essential ground of being. When our presence reaches this core depth of our being and shared humanity, the separate socialized self's relationship to reality shifts from being an obstacle to presencing embodiment to becoming an aspect of it. In the depths of our unique essence, soul serves as the deepest personal origin point of presence as foundational to who we are. In passing through its liminal threshold, new forms and inscapes of creativity become accessible to us both individually and collectively. These new forms and inscapes are awakened through our descent into core presence. To the extent that we can learn how to connect with and rest inside core presence as foundational to our presencing nature, is the extent to which we can begin to connect with our essential-most humanity where real depth, meeting, meaning, motivation, purpose, inspiration and the promise of presencing can take root and grow forth from the depths within.

From these inner depths of our core presence, a flowing movement that is a conduit to a deep life source of creativity can be contacted and begin to unfold. As presencing descends into the depths of our soul essence, this enriches our presencing seeing from a deeper wisdom order of perception from both the temporal (dual) and timeless (nondual) dimensions of reality. Instead of wondering how to sustain presencing as an inner flowing movement, uncovering our soul essence as foundational to our presencing self in part addresses this challenge. Immersing into being essence as an inner bridging path enroute to source connects us to the deeper inner authority of our experience that is in touch with a much older timeless dimension of who we are, as well as the ego and separate self. As this innermost space, both primal and particular to our unique essence, in connecting our inner being and feeling to this depth of presence, a new ontological source for presencing is revealed (Gunnlaugson, forthcoming).

When presencing is explored through the Ontotelic depths of our presencing nature and being at the level of our soul nature and core presence, the profoundly integrative holding capacity of soul makes it possible to experience ourselves most intimately and most essentially as we are, as well as in our real and imperfect human condition. In being drawn into the depths of our essence, tensions and frictions with the separate self can begin to release and be reconfigured. Soul as a way of being-with our own experience and others in and as core presence, brings us intimately into contact with all that is.

This soul attunement process leads to a deeper re-synchronization with our core presence, which has its own unique discernable coming-to-know and coming-to-be

process. Put more simply, as this presence-based sense of soul is deeply in accord with what is, there is a seamless reconnect with what is emerging from this vantage point. To take the seat of our soul as the germinating point of core presence is to come into contact with the generative source point of being itself. Presence from a soul-mediated vantage point re-orient and returns the self to an embodied, real contact with the grounding seat of our deeper presencing nature, and so in turn the deeper inner foundation of our organizations, communities and sense of place in this world and life.

The deeper authenticating process for the soul's dimension of our presencing nature is necessary to advance our realization and embodiment of presence. The separate self, held in time, conditioned by past experience and reified through complex processes of identification is fundamentally limited in its capacity to be with the essence of what is. AND the soul is capable of compassionately honoring this separate self as part of the overall sacred movement of being. In being connected to the arising dynamism of *what is*, soul is radically inclusive of *all-that-is*. Because essence permeates all-that-is, including our ordinary separate selves, soul offers us the wisdom means to be with all of who we are through its radical to-the-root capacity for apprehension and beholding what is. In the context of presencing mastery, by reclaiming the roots of our presencing nature in soul, we reconnect to the deeper common ground of life, existence and all-that-is. As a constituting milieu of our deepest being, the apprenticeship with soul in the lifeworld of being essence engages our presencing nature by initiating a deeper letting go into the creative process, which arises as a by-product of a way of being steeped in the depth dimensions of core presence.

For the purposes of this article, in highlighting the deepest level of empowerment of our presencing nature, soul provides a powerful integrating container for holding the key tensions and seemingly irreconcilable opposites in our immediate experience. As a crucible space where polarities can be held with particular qualities and modes of attention for the purposes of transmutation (i.e. spiritual and material, mind and body, self and culture), soul reveals itself as a wisdom space of wholeness that allows the superficial, conventional and profound aspects of our experience to co-exist and co-engage without conflict. Here our presencing nature is uncovered and rediscovered as being integral to *each* and *all* of who we are, not only the transcendent, aspects. As soul is uncovered as a deep ground for our presencing self to take root in, it becomes a space to be and fundamentally re-orient our presence from.

As the constituting locus of our presencing experience, the soul again is connected to the timeless, non-local, non-dimensional wisdom and in being this fully,

ALSO becomes the region of our being where we experience ourselves most fundamentally amidst our everyday, local, dimensional, time and space-based experiences. As a beacon for what is at once deeply beyond this world, but also deeply immersed in it, through a reconnect with soul, the presencing self is rediscovered at the innermost connection with our deepest ground of being. To come to know soul as the locus of our presencing experience requires an uncommon courage and inner strength—hence the framing of the journey into presence as a deep apprenticeship, calling and uniquely personal way of experiencing presencing. From our still point, contacting soul returns us to the inner presencing movement of being essence. As a flowing form of presence, soul becomes a dynamic conduit to a deeper source and inner presenced movement of generativity.

In the work of Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the level-depth of soul is apprenticed with to embody core presence before contacting source. There are a number of reasons for this as contacting source without first immersing in one's soul-essence bypasses a rich and essential region of our living, wisdom nature and experience. Without the intermediary presence of soul that resides in both the temporal and timeless, our presencing awareness may pass over the underlying wisdom depth-dimension of our experience. When we reroute our presencing awareness to reconnect with the depth-level of our soul-essence, the deepest part of our presencing nature becomes active and alive to us, *as us*. As discussed earlier, the Theory U practice of letting go from self to source in the social field bypasses our core presence and soul, which are needed to ground, stabilize, and guide our presencing awareness from its inherent wisdom way of being. In part, the pervasive focus on the emerging future, what is ahead, what is coming, what is not yet here removes presencing practitioners from a deeper central dimension of soul realization and embodiment. In learning to integrate our presencing nature from the soul level-depth of our core presence, we can begin to bridge the otherwise significant ontological gaps that exists between our separate self and source and our presencing nature and the presencing field. Our soul-essence, when we are present to it, infuses our perception and seeing with a deeper order of soul-based wisdom and intelligence, becoming a site of our most authentic real sense of meaning. To engage presencing in a way that becomes sourced in and from these depths is to engage a wholly transformed way of engaging the practice.

VI. Reclaiming the Ontotelic Path of Presencing

In reclaiming the full range of Ontotelic depth-dimension that constitute our

presencing self and nature, the inner place from which we engage our presencing awareness from changes in a significant way. Descending into immediate presence in the real, we then journey through into the expansive presence of the witness, which brings us into contact with our core presence of our soul-essence, a three level-depth move that significantly changes the quality of our presence and opens a significant new presencing path resourced from an in-depth, nuanced and soul-sustaining way of being.

In contrast, going to source in the social field from our ordinary sense of self and bypassing these three level-depths of our presencing nature creates an inadvertent ontological reductionism. Further, pathways of presencing that prioritize or elevate the social field risk bypassing the deeper embodied wisdom grounds of our presencing nature and soul essence. Source, like the social field, is an impersonal dimension of our experience. Soul on the other hand, offers a critical rebalancing of our *presencing nature* in that our soul essence is at the heart of what is uniquely and distinctively personal, connecting us to *both* the wisdom depths of what is innermost and personal *as well as* the transcendent heights of presencing nature and social field. In contrast to the separate self, our soul-essence holds the awareness of simultaneity, of a way of being that is at once in touch with our deep interiority and the transcendent interior of the presencing field deep within, between and beyond us. In contrast to source, our soul-essence connects us with the depths of our inner nature, bringing forth a unique and sacred personal sense of who we are, which it turns out is highly relevant in activating and renewing our creative perception in ways that are particular to each of our paths and experience.

In Theory U, Scharmer (2016) works with the visual metaphor of building a path over the presencing abyss to let go of one's current self to connect with one's emerging future self in the social field. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the source of our presencing self lies in the abyss and is reclaimed by descending into it, not journeying over it. While source connects us with the ground floor of our presence and who we are, it does not adequately connect us with the innermost nature of who we are, removing us from an otherwise profound presencing perception and wisdom source of being. Soul-based seeing draws directly from the depths of who we are whereas source-based seeing emphasizes more the primary impersonal context or ground out of which this generative seeing emerges. In DPC, both are needed, and with an Ontotelic approach, both are co-activated alongside the level-depths of the real, witness and soul that constitute our presencing self and nature. In awakening to the depths of soul-seeing, a new transformed order of presencing perception becomes possible.

VII. Closing Remarks

Throughout this article, my inquiry has revisited the possibilities of integrating the Ontotelic depths of our presence as a transformational process, path and language for engaging advanced capacities for presencing mastery. In the absence of this path, the deeper embodied, ontological wisdom depths of consciousness have to date been for the most part overlooked (Gunnlaugson, 2023, forthcoming). In the presence of this path, these depths can become integrated in as foundational to our presencing practices and lives, opening up unforetold regions of possibility and transformation.

As I have pointed out, to make progress in developing ontological forms of presencing mastery, the Ontotelic plays a key role in creating conditions for a more continuous, sustained and in-depth experience of presencing. In apprenticing with presencing as a dynamic and generative way of being in Dynamic Presencing Coaching, as a depth-attuned Ontotelic path, DPC integrates the innermost ontological dimensions of our being as an essential missing piece to a transformed presencing self and path of presencing mastery.

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