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# IJPLC | INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PRESENCING LEADERSHIP & COACHING

## EDITORIAL

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### Introductory Remarks

Welcome to the second issue of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching*. Following the inaugural theme of *Developing Presencing Mastery*, this issue delves into the inner terrain of *Presencing Embodiment*. Building on the first issue, this edition invites us to explore how embodiment deepens and enriches presencing, unfolding it as a fully lived and felt reality within leadership and coaching.

As the field of presencing leadership and coaching evolves, embodiment continues to play a central role in shaping presencing practices. This issue seeks to build on and clarify aspects of embodiment by exploring how the inner experiential senses of it participate in the presencing process. By rooting presencing in the lived experience of the practitioner's body, we open pathways for transformation that extend from the personal to the relational, and ultimately to the greater collective.

The inquiry guiding this issue invites us to consider:

- What new forms and interior processes illuminate the embodiment of presencing in leadership and coaching?
- What blind spots or limiting assumptions hinder deeper engagement with embodied presencing, individually and collectively?
- What subtle inner practices hold untapped potential for leaders and coaches seeking to integrate embodied presencing into their work?

Through these questions, the theme of Presencing Embodiment has been explored, inviting us into an integrative space where emerging forms are cultivated in leadership and coaching at multiple levels. With this second issue, we aim to deepen the dialogue and make new inroads into what constitutes presencing embodiment, offering insights, frameworks, and practices that in turn expand the horizons of presencing-based leadership and coaching.

## Embodiment as the Generative Ground of Presencing

Presencing embodiment invites practitioners to redirect as well as root their awareness in the body, offering a somatic foundation for engaging with the complexities of relational, systemic, and transformative dynamics. As part of an evolving exploration and understanding of presencing, different pathways of embodiment bring forward somatic intelligence that plays a vital role in shaping and informing presencing experience. Entering into the realm of embodied awareness creates conditions that enhance presencing, integrating individuals with both their inner somatic sense of being and the outer dimensions of their experience.

Throughout history, the body has been recognized as a central pathway into presence across diverse traditions. Eastern meditative practices emphasize the body's subtle sensations as an entry point into deeper states of awareness and connection. Indigenous wisdom traditions often center on the body as a bridge to relational and ecological interdependence, where embodiment fosters a profound sense of interconnectedness with the natural and communal worlds. In Western thought, thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eugene Gendlin, Francisco Varela and others have each explored how the lived experience of the body gives rise to presence and orients meaning somatically. Their work affirms the somatic dimension of felt-based knowing and offers a philosophical grounding for understanding embodiment as a generative source of insight and awareness.

Drawing on a shared recognition of embodiment's significance, this issue's submissions bring renewed attention to the transformative role of the body in presencing. Practices that cultivate somatic awareness, embodied stillness, and relational attunement are increasingly recognized as essential tools for leaders and coaches. These practices help practitioners align with the generative dynamics of presencing, enabling them to access new levels of coherence, creativity, and authenticity in their work. By grounding presencing in the body, practitioners not only deepen their capacity for transformative engagement, they also foster a more integrated presencing that bridges the personal and collective dimensions of leadership and coaching.

In this way, embodiment serves as a broader medium through which presencing is enacted, sensed and experienced, providing a dynamic and living foundation for the unfolding of presencing in action. As the field of presencing continues to evolve, the body remains a vital terrain of exploration, offering pathways into the deeper dimensions that presencing seeks to connect with, inhabit and express.

## Blind Spots and Overlooked Dimensions of Embodied Presencing

While the different roles and functions of embodiment are increasingly acknowledged in the fields of leadership and coaching, its deeper possibilities remain only partially understood. In many settings, embodiment is approached through techniques or physically oriented practices—gestures, postures, or breathwork that offer meaningful access points yet also risk reducing or fragmenting embodiment in different ways. Without a holistic awareness, one can bypass the subtle interior processes of embodiment including overlooking aspects of the felt rhythms, energetic shifts, and ontological grounding points that sustain a living continuity of presence.

As an example, stillness has various expressions in embodied contexts. As a cessation of inner movement, a calming of physical activity, and other variations, certain forms of embodied stillness can support a generative state of being that is alive with somatic attunement to one's inner sense of being and outer responsiveness to experience. When accessed and integrated in a multi-faceted way, stillness supports leaders and coaches in holding space, sensing into complexity, and responding with depth and discernment. Overall, when stillness is well embodied, it invites trust, creativity, and alignment

with others, hence the need to become literate with the ways stillness impacts embodiment.

An underexplored area of practice is how embodied attention unfolds within the individual versus relational dimension of presencing. While presencing comes to life in both contexts, there remains a deeper inquiry into how embodied awareness is shaped by, and in turn shapes, the dynamics of individual and relational spaces of engagement. Further, embodiment is not always contained in the physicality of the individual. As a felt dimension of our experience, it is informed across different interior and shared somatic spaces within, between as well as collectively. Presencing practitioners who become adept at navigating these interconnected domains of embodiment foster a capacity for whole engagement across individual and presencing field spaces.

Another omission to draw attention to is that of developmental framing. Much of the current discourse on presencing focuses on interior states of embodiment and temporary access to presencing without recognizing how it deepens and stabilizes over time through lived integration of adult development stage-based unfolding. From a developmental perspective, presencing transforms through ongoing practice and lived integration, supported in becoming a more stable orientation in how one leads, relates, and engages the world when developmental awareness is present.

Embodiment can be thought to be universal as a process, yet in practice it is deeply shaped by context. Cultural narratives, organizational norms, and systemic dynamics influence how various embodied understanding of presencing are expressed, received, and sustained. When these contextual layers are overlooked, embodiment strain into abstraction and become disconnected from the realities of our day to day living. A responsive embodiment, by contrast, attunes to the subtle texture of our inner and outer environments and relationality. It attunes to the cultural, interpersonal, situational and systemic dynamics at play, allowing presencing to arise more fully and in a grounded, relevant, and nuanced manner.

Finally for now, the depth-dimensions of embodiment have tended to remain unnamed in presencing practice. Beneath the surface of our experience lie more unknown registers of experience shaped by subtle forms of energetic attunement, vibrational resonance, and the felt-based wisdom of the inner body and consciousness. When cultivated and integrated, these subtle felt-based ways of knowing can support and guide practitioners into a more rooted ground of presencing contact, where the deeper latent wisdom of presencing becomes amplified. Including these deeper aspects in the scope of our embodied awareness helps more essential, wisdom-informed modes of presencing to emerge. To explore a broader spectrum of embodied presencing is to enter a richer phenomenological terrain where the richness and subtlety of somatic, emotional, intuitive and other dimensions of embodied presencing can be explored.

## Encouraging Emerging Presencing Approaches (EPAs)

In exploring the evolving terrain of presencing embodiment, this issue of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* touches on a number of the divergent pathways, orientations, and practices starting to emerge in the field. Given how presencing embodiment is developing and filling out, as the richness and complexity of presencing practice continues to develop and unfold, sometimes this points beyond established frameworks toward emerging frontiers in presencing leadership and coaching. As noted in the previous editorial of IJPLC, there is an increasing need to recognize and differentiate presencing practice along the respective stages of presencing theory and practice. Figure 1 below reflects this longer developmental historical evolution from the initial foundations of presencing prior to Theory U (Stage One), through its articulation in Theory U (Stage Two), to its current and still-forming expressions across Theory U-informed and emerging post-Theory U approaches (Stage Three: Theory U and EPAs).

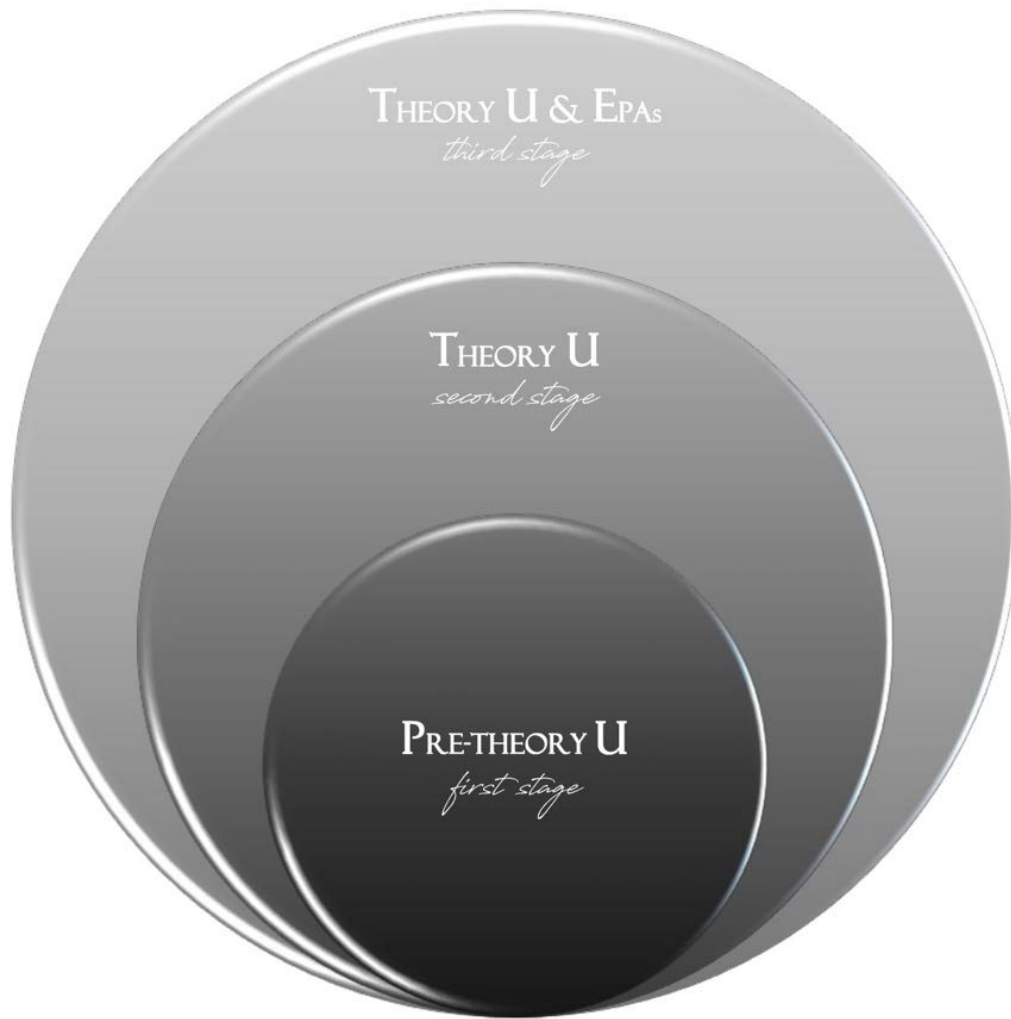


Figure 1.0 Three Stages in the Evolution of Presencing Theory & Practice

In this spirit, IJPLC remains dedicated to showcasing *Emerging Presencing Approaches* (EPAs) that bring fresh insights and novel expressions to presencing leadership and coaching. Through a continued development of a multiplicity of presencing perspectives, methodologies, and lived experiences, the journal aims to cultivate an ongoing dialogue that honors the older, current and emerging lineages of presencing in order to meaningfully evolve current horizons of practice in meaningful and transformative ways.

As a broad emerging category, EPAs reflect a deeper commitment to experimentation, inquiry, and methodological innovation. When presencing is innovating both process-and content-wise, it becomes a living practice. As such, it is important to continue illuminating the contours of respective presencing practices by exploring their application in dynamic and context-sensitive ways, particularly where somatic, relational, and field-based dimensions intersect. As these emergent pathways continue to unfold, they invite deeper exploration into how presencing is embodied, enacted, and cultivated across diverse disciplines and practices.

Recognizing the significance of this ongoing emergence, IJPLC provides a dedicated space for these explorations through both *Feature Articles* and the new *Exploratory Research* section. The latter, in particular, serves as an incubator for emerging presencing scholarship, offering a platform where



nascent inquiries can be articulated, critically examined, and advanced in ways that contribute to the field's ongoing evolution.

Building on the inaugural issue's theme of *Developing Presencing Mastery*, this current issue's exploration of *Presencing Embodiment* signals a continued deepening into exploring the interior dynamics of presencing. This thematic progression reflects IJPLC's ongoing commitment to advancing both theoretical and applied understandings of presencing as a lived and enacted process. Future issues, centered in the themes of *Collective Presencing Leadership* and *Presencing Approaches to Coaching*, will continue this trajectory, broadening and deepening the discourse and cultivating a dynamic platform where diverse voices, methodologies, and perspectives can emerge, converge and diverge. Through these intersections, the broader field of presencing is being resourced to grow into new territories of inquiry and emergent regions of practice—one of the chief aims of IJPLC.

As we curate contributions for these forthcoming issues, IJPLC invites submissions that engage with the evolving landscape of presencing in ways that bridge the leading edge of established scholarship and practice with emerging frontiers. We welcome work that refines existing applications while also illuminating the generative potential of new presencing approaches, contributing to the ongoing diversification and maturation of this emerging field.

At IJPLC, we recognize the importance of cultivating a generative space where presencing can be critically examined, creatively reinterpreted, and expanded beyond established paradigms. Rather than reinforcing current orthodoxies, we are committed to fostering a living discourse that remains open to inquiry, innovation, and deeper integration. This commitment includes welcoming EPAs that challenge or question prevailing norms, introduce novel methodologies, or reexamine foundational assumptions. By making room for diverse voices, we invite a rigorous yet generative exploration of presencing that honors both tradition and emerging practice.

The contributions featured in this current issue exemplify a range of Emerging Presencing Approaches that deepen embodiment across multiple dimensions of practice and inquiry. Each article brings forward distinct insights that illuminate how presencing becomes more fully lived through movement, stillness, inquiry, trauma healing, creative process, and developmental unfolding.

## Toward a Multi-Faceted Embodiment of Presencing Practices

This issue of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* showcases twelve contributions that explore embodiment as a gateway into presencing. Across these diverse perspectives, embodiment emerges as a multidimensional process that unfolds through somatic awareness, relational attunement, systemic engagement, imaginal resonance, and developmental depth. Together, these articles reflect the ongoing emergence of a third stage of presencing scholarship, one that roots presencing in a living immediacy while expanding its relevance through new practices, frameworks, and methodologies.

In the article *Cultivating Presencing Embodiment: Five Orientational Modes from the Performing Arts*, Bobby Ricketts distills years of experience in jazz improvisation and leadership facilitation into a vibrant model of embodied relational practice. He introduces five orientational modes: Deep Listening, Embodied Awareness, Embracing the Unknown, Co-Creation, and Playfulness through which presencing becomes an unfolding process of creative attunement. His work invites practitioners to experience presencing as a performative and rhythmic encounter.

Sam Hinds, in *Communal Reverie: Introducing an Imaginally-Inflected Presencing Approach*, offers a contemplative oriented presencing practice that opens participants to shared imaginal resonance. Drawing from Jungian psychology, mystical traditions, and phenomenological inquiry, Hinds presents

Communal Reverie as a mode of collective presencing that gives access to the symbolic interior of the group. Through this practice, groups are invited to sense and enter a subtle imaginal field in which deeper meaning and shared knowing become available beyond conceptual reflection.

Olen Gunnlaugson's article, *Presencing as a Way of Being: Inhabiting Fourth-Person Knowing in Dynamic Presencing Coaching*, offers a reframing and deeper integration of fourth-person knowing. Gunnlaugson introduces Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) as a fully embodied path that inhabits fourth-person knowing grounded in the presencing self-sense. Through this lens, the presencing field is reconceived as a living, co-arising dimensional conduit—accessed through the coherence of the Coach's inner presencing body and emerging presencing self. The article identifies five core contributions that reposition fourth-person knowing from an epistemic construct to an ontological practice—deepening its grounding within coaching, and the unfolding of presencing as a transformational way of being.

In the article *Being Embodied in Navigating Challenge: A Catalyst for Presencing Leadership*, Katharina Sell shares insights from a two-year action research collaboration with executives. Her findings emphasize grounding and felt sensing as micro-practices that stabilize awareness and open intuitive channels of leadership intelligence. Sell's approach to presencing reveals how deep embodiment allows complexity to be navigated through an ontological clarity that emerges from within the living presence of the body.

Markus Peschl, Peter Hochenauer, Gloria Bottaro, and Katharina Roetzer, in their article *How to Facilitate Presencing as an Embodied Transformative Learning Process: The Role of Embodied Practices in Future-Oriented Leadership in Innovation Teams* introduce a presencing-informed learning model grounded in 4E cognition. Their work highlights how embodied experience, relational synchronization, and attentional practices foster the conditions for collective emergence. Through case-based research in innovation and higher education contexts, they present a practice-based framework that supports future-generative leadership.

David Young, in *Presencing Embodied Leadership: Synchronizing and Integrating Trauma for Transformative Healing*, addresses the often-overlooked relationship between trauma and presence. He outlines a five-stage model for recognizing and integrating unresolved trauma patterns through body-based practices. This article contributes a trauma-informed orientation to presencing, where embodied resilience is reclaimed and presence becomes a healing and ethical act in leadership and coaching.

In *The Effectiveness of Equine-Assisted Learning to Develop Presencing Mastery*, Lissa Pohl explores how horses serve as relational mirrors in presencing-based leadership development. Through direct, nonverbal feedback, participants engage multisensory awareness and real-time alignment. Pohl's contribution frames Equine-Assisted Learning as a unique modality that brings forward immediate embodiment, somatic congruence, and authentic responsiveness to presencing in transformational learning settings.

Colin Skelton, in *Embodied Leadership Through Presencing: Unleashing Intelligence in the BodyMind*, draws on physical theatre and somatic performance techniques to reveal how leaders can cultivate embodied intelligence in presencing. He emphasizes the roles of interoception, proprioception, and perception as portals into real-time presence. Skelton's work underscores the expressive and perceptual capacities of the body as foundational to presencing in relational and organizational life.

Ute Weber-Woisetschläger's article in *Embodied Presencing Leadership: Midwifing Transformation through the Integral Art Lab*, presents an artistic and contemplative approach to collective presencing. The Integral Art Lab becomes a space where presence is activated through deep seeing, aesthetic resonance, and group sensing. Her work shows how the creative process can transmute habitual energies and constellate higher coherence through embodied attention and shared experience.



## Exploratory Research

For this second issue, the Exploratory Research section features three contributions. One arises from the final phase of my recent Sabbatical as Visiting Professor at the John Molson School of Business, Concordia University. The other two reflect lines of inquiry and practice within the field. Taken as a whole, these contributions embody the journal's exploratory spirit, exploring the evolving edges of presencing while inviting new dimensions of the practice into view.

In the first article, Olen Gunnlaugson, in *Advances in the Methodology of Presencing: Letting Be as a New Presencing Gesture, Interface and Transformative Path*, introduces letting be as a third presencing gesture that deepens and stabilizes the Dynamic Presencing process. Distinct from letting go and letting come, letting be anchors presence within its own depth-structure, cultivating coherence, relational clarity, and ontological grounding. This gesture supports the transformation of presencing into a generative way of being, opening new pathways for leadership, coaching, and collective practice.

In his second exploratory contribution, *Dynamic Presencing Coaching: Beyond Letting Go and Letting Come*, Gunnlaugson introduces three foundational holding gestures—Holding Presence, Holding Depth, and Holding Emergence—as a critical development within Dynamic Presencing Coaching. These gestures complement the established letting sequence—Letting Go, Letting Be, and Letting Come—forming a dynamic interplay that cultivates both receptive attunement and generative participation. Together, they stabilize the Coach's inner presencing body, strengthen coherence within the presencing self, and support the unfolding of emergence in the coaching field—enabling a more dimensional, embodied, and engaged presencing way of coaching.

In *Transforming the Presencing Self: A Threefold Developmental Movement*, Gunnlaugson introduces a framework for deepening our developmental relationship with presencing. This threefold movement begins with the meta-shift, which opens perspective-based awareness of the presencing self. It then moves through the mesa-turn, an ontological descent that grounds awareness in the embodied depths of one's presencing nature. The final gesture, unitive resting, stabilizes this realization as a generative state of being. These movements reorient presencing toward a living axis of coherence and integrative embodiment. The framework offers coaches and leaders a method for cultivating presencing as a way of being.

Each contribution in this issue reflects a broader maturation underway in the field of presencing leadership and coaching. Across diverse practices and perspectives, embodiment is becoming more integrally woven into how presencing is enacted, sensed and shared. This integration is giving rise to new possibilities for deeper transformation in how presencing is engaged. At the same time, presencing is reconnecting with its deeper roots as a living wisdom practice, resourcing leadership and coaching with capacities attuned to complexities and interdependencies of our current world.

## Presencing as an Emerging, Trans-Traditional Wisdom Practice

Beyond its contemporary applications in leadership and coaching, presencing is increasingly coming into view as a trans-traditional wisdom practice. Like mindfulness and meditation—now widely recognized disciplines—presencing is unfolding as a generate process and path for cultivating awareness, relational attunement, collective insight and transformative action across diverse domains of human inquiry and practice. Its emergence marks a vital development in the evolution of contemplative, transformative, emergent, and post-conventional ways of knowing and being.

While Theory U has contributed significantly to the articulation and dissemination of presencing practice over the past two decades, the underlying essence and core principles of presencing draw from much older, cross-cultural sources in contemplative, philosophical, and indigenous traditions.

In this light, contemporary articulations of presencing (whether Theory U or other EPAs) reflect a much wider developmental trajectory taking new form within present-day contexts. This deeper continuity of lineage clearly affirms that presencing is neither proprietary nor encompassed by any single institutional framework or model. Rather, it is a living, evolving practice with deep roots in multiple traditions and futures still emerging. Within such a trans-traditional context, the very notion of presencing as a proprietary construct dissolves—revealing instead a shared human inheritance that calls for ongoing co-stewardship.

To fully situate this discussion, nearly two decades ago, Scharmer's articulation of presencing as a disciplined practice of accessing emergent futures and co-shaping systemic transformation has been widely recognized as a novel contribution. More recently, with Pomeroy, he has framed presencing as a fourth-person structure and way of knowing, an effort to legitimate the social field as a source of knowledge. While these contributions mark important developments in the contemporary articulation of presencing, they also invite us to remember that the deeper movement of orienting from emergence—of attuning to the not-yet-manifest—is part of a much older and more diverse stream of human inquiry. Across cultures, traditions, and disciplines—including contemplative lineages, futures studies, visionary epistemologies, and strands of Western philosophy such as Heidegger's inquiry into the ontological conditions for the emergence of Being—diverse practices of future-sourcing, intuitive foresight, and participatory world-making have long participated in this inquiry. In this light, Theory U reflects an influential articulation of presencing within a much longer and broader lineage. What it and other EPAs contribute going forward are new forms, languages, and applications through which the underlying essence of presencing is being made newly visible.

When viewed in a broader historical context, presencing is a fundamental human potential and participatory way of knowing and being, one whose emerging individual and collective expressions now call for shared stewardship. As this wider field continues to mature, a growing ethical imperative arises: to cultivate presencing as it is—a trans-traditional wisdom approach. In this light, presencing requires open-source best practices that ensure its responsible evolution and optimal dissemination. To date, presencing has emerged as an adaptive, field-responsive discipline. Its essence has offered guidance in shaping moment to moment relational engagement, embodied awareness, and attunement to the living conditions of what is arising. This depth of responsiveness makes it especially resonant, vital and relevant amid the systemic challenges and uncertainties of contemporary life.

The *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* is committed to accompanying and supporting this ongoing evolutionary unfolding. As a generative scholarly space, IJPLC affirms the continued necessity of fostering multiple presencing approaches—each contributing to the articulation of presencing as a living, integrative, and transformational discipline. This includes methodologies that deepen the ontological grounding of practice, clarify the dimensionality of presence, and extend the relevance of presencing across a wide spectrum of current and emerging contexts.

Looking ahead, we invite future contributors to help shape what may be currently understood as the third emerging stage of presencing scholarship, as illustrated in Figure 1.0 above. This current phase encompasses both the continued evolution of Theory U and a broader ecology of Emerging Presencing Approaches, each offering distinct contributions to this growing field. These diverse perspectives are especially vital, as they open new pathways into presencing practice. As presencing continues to unfold as a trans-traditional domain of academic and applied inquiry, IJPLC remains committed to co-stewarding this next stage, accompanying the emergence of generative, integrative and inclusively grounded presencing theories, practices and methodologies.



OLEN GUNNLAUGSON, PH.D. As an Associate Professor of Leadership and Coaching at Université Laval's Business School in Québec, Canada, Olen specializes in transformative and wisdom-based leadership and coaching practice.

His current research in Dynamic Presencing explores how presence- and presencing-based mastery approaches support leaders and coaches in uncovering their signature way of being and cultivating resilient forms of thriving in today's destabilized and rapidly shifting world. Dynamic Presencing introduces a presence-sourced, presencing-guided, and field-attuned approach to leadership, coaching, and life as a whole. His latest book offers an accessible introduction to this emerging presencing approach, with two forthcoming volumes offering deeper guidance into its core practices and developmental frameworks.

To date, Olen has authored or co-authored over 55 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and 15 edited, authored, or forthcoming books, including the recent three-volume series *Advances in Presencing*, which showcases interdisciplinary research and applications from the global presencing community. A passionate educator, he has received five major faculty awards for excellence in teaching in both Canada and the United States. At Université Laval and other institutions internationally, he mentors MBA and PhD candidates in pioneering research across the evolving frontiers of presencing leadership and coaching.

He is the founding Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching*, a peer-reviewed, open-access journal that bridges emerging scholarship and practice in the fields of presencing-based leadership and coaching.

In parallel, Olen is the founder of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC), a deeply transformative coaching approach and living lineage. As an applied research focus, DPC integrates his teaching, coaching, and presencing-related scholarship into a unified body of work. Over the past five years, this approach has continued to evolve through coaching, teaching, and research within global MBA classrooms and international communities of practice.

Olen's research, publications, and latest contributions can be found here:

[Google Scholar](#), [ResearchGate](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Amazon Author page](#), [Faculty Page](#)

# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## CULTIVATING PRESENCING EMBODIMENT:

### *Five Orientational Modes for Improvising Collective Leading*

**Bobby Ricketts**

Adjunct Professor UMass (Boston)

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**Abstract:** This article explores Presencing Embodiment, a dynamic state of heightened sensory, emotional, and relational awareness, where individuals align perception, intention, and action in real time. This state fosters adaptive engagement with the present moment and deepens the potential for co-creative participation. Drawing on sensory input from both internal and external sources, Presencing Embodiment cultivates a deep, felt awareness that enables real-time responsiveness, creativity, and collaboration, allowing individuals and groups to navigate complexity and co-create emergent possibilities. Inspired by the developmental strategies of improvising musicians, the author draws upon extensive improvisational music performance experience to synthesize key theoretical frameworks—including Gunnlaugson’s *Dynamic Presencing* (2020), Ericsson’s *Deliberate Practice* (1993), Gallagher and Zahavi’s *Phenomenological Embodiment* (2012), Stacey’s *Emergence in Complex Systems* (2001), Csikszentmihalyi’s *Flow Theory* (1996), and Scharmer’s *Theory U* (2009). From this synthesis, five orientational modes are identified: Co-Creation, Embracing the Unknown, Deep Listening, Embodied Awareness, and Playfulness. Grounded in the context of improvisational music ensemble performance, these modes foster the capacities that enhance Presencing Embodiment. The article discusses how these modes, though originating in music, are applicable across domains such as leadership and education. Engaging with these modes enables practitioners to deepen their attunement to themselves, others, and the environment, fostering resilience, creativity, and adaptive leadership. Through the synthesis of lived musical experience and theory, the article presents a framework for enhancing collective capabilities to co-create transformative outcomes.

**Key words:** Leadership development, presencing, embodied leadership, transformative leadership, creative leadership

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## I. Introduction

This article addresses the challenge of fostering and enhancing collective, emergent leadership by drawing practical insights from music improvisation-based embodiment practices. By examining the developmental strategies and performance capabilities of master-level improvising musicians, I explore how their responsiveness, attunement, and co-creative interaction can model practices to deepen Presencing Embodiment for practitioners across various domains. Presencing Embodiment serves as a critical foundation for Presencing Leadership, which is relational, emergent, and rooted in collective action. Through these improvisational principles and practices, leadership is reframed as a co-creative and emergent process, transforming how it is enacted in contexts beyond music. In this process, perception begins to emerge not only as a byproduct of experience, but as a primary site of practice—a place where attention, relationship, and adaptive capacity converge in real time.

The challenges of leadership, particularly in organizational and team settings, often stem from the difficulty of fostering collective awareness, adaptability, and transformation. Traditional, top-down models frequently hinder the development of collaborative and co-creative dynamics (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). This article examines how the practice methodologies and performance capabilities of masterful improvisational music ensembles can inform Presencing Embodiment, a core element of Presencing Leadership. In striving for mastery, musicians in these settings organically develop heightened capacities for attunement, co-creation, and leadership (Ricketts, 2020). These embodied skills emerge as a natural by-product of the musicians' sustained engagement in ensemble improvisation and are foundational for Presencing Leadership, which thrives on collective attunement and intuitive participation.

## II. Reframing Leadership: From Directive to Collaborative

Presencing Leadership redefines leadership as relational and emergent, emphasizing distributed authority and the collective alignment of a group. This dynamic approach aligns with Gunnlaugson's (2020) practice of *Dynamic Presencing*, where leadership emerges organically from shared energy and intuitive engagement among participants as a way of being together. This stands in contrast to traditional, top-down leadership structures, which prioritize control over collective alignment and mutual engagement.

To illustrate how the principles of collaborative improvisational music performance manifest in practice, I will recount a pivotal moment during a rehearsal in Lagos, Nigeria. In this instance, deep listening, intuitive attunement, and collective resonance transformed a group of musicians into a cohesive, unified ensemble. This narrative highlights how the embodied capabilities of masterful improvisational musicians—cultivated through sensory engagement and adaptive responsiveness—can offer profound insights into the relational and emergent dynamics of Presencing Embodiment.

### II. 1. The Emergence of Collective Awareness: An Anecdote from Lagos

*"Do you feel it?"*

I was in Lagos, Nigeria, coaching an ad hoc group of the country's finest musicians, aiming to transform them into a cohesive unit for our upcoming performances. During one rehearsal, we reached an intangible milestone: something in the music shifted, creating a qualitative space where each player's unique expression could emerge freely. In that magic moment, a distinct new essence materialized—suddenly, we were a band. It felt as though we had spent weeks on the road together, rather than just a few hours in a rehearsal facility. The moment had an almost palpable sound effect: "*Oomph*." We were there.

I stopped the music to confirm: "Do you feel it?"

The musicians smiled, nodding as they exchanged glances. I turned to our small, supportive crew observing the session. "Do *you* feel it?" I asked. Everyone nodded in agreement. "Beautiful—hold on to that. Let's break for fifteen."

Two subtle yet key distinctions are embedded in my choice of words. I didn't ask, "*Can you hear it?*" Instead, I asked, "*Do you feel it?*"

First, this phrasing underscores that what we were striving to create sonically for the ear also resonated beyond auditory perception, engaging deeper sensory and emotional experiences. Second, the question didn't seem odd to anyone present. For musicians like us, it is natural to understand that the sounds we craft intentionally resonate physically, emotionally, spiritually, and beyond.

The phenomenon of felt sense in music is vividly demonstrated through dance, where movement translates sound into embodied expression, and sound, in turn, drives movement. Dancers synchronize with musical elements through bodily action, blending auditory and kinesthetic awareness to create a holistic sensory experience (Barnstaple, 2020; Van der Schyff & Schiavio, 2017).

## II. 2. Engaging Deeper Realms of Experience

The shift to engaging deeper realms of experience is integral to cultivating Presencing Embodiment. This practice enables practitioners to attune to the present moment, align with collective dynamics, and perform with authenticity and impact. Sensory experiences resonate across the body, fostering heightened awareness that directly supports this process.

In music, as in dance, sensory resonance facilitates a profound attunement to the present moment, allowing practitioners to transcend intellectual understanding and fully engage with their experiences. While the phrase "fully engage with experience" may sound lyrical, its implication is critical: to truly engage means to perceive and understand in ways that

extend beyond the intellectual. This capacity to embody and project felt energy forms the foundation for generative connection and transformative action within collectives (Gallagher, 2005; Colombetti, 2014).

For those of us who live to create music together, "embodied engagement" and "sensory resonance"—although often expressed more informally, as in “Do you feel it?”—are not abstract concepts but actionable states of being that can be practiced and realized in real-time.

Back in Lagos, each musician entered the music-making process with their own assumptions and expectations. My initial aim was to establish an intentional, supportive space where we could shed ego, bias, personal ambition, and other limiting tendencies, allowing our most authentic, open, and vulnerable performing selves to emerge in a shared exploration of sound. This endeavor aligns with the generative process of co-creation (Scharmer, 2009), where each individual's unique contributions are nurtured to produce outcomes far beyond what any one of us could achieve alone.

Reaching that elevated state of collective awareness, my instinct was that taking a short pause would help us retain the essence of the experience. While extending the moment might have deepened our collective flow and allowed further exploration of this state in action, I trusted that we would return to it. Pausing after acknowledging that we felt “it”—and implicitly agreeing that “it” was an essential quality to access—was a deliberate move to test our ability to re-establish this heightened state of embodied collective awareness.

Decades of practice and performance preparation have taught me that this kind of “risk” is an essential component of mastery. The most effective way to verify that a skill—here, the willful capability to access deeper, collective attunement—has been acquired, maintained, or extended is through deliberate repetition under varied conditions, assessing performance efficacy along the way. Put simply: we must practice deliberately.

In improvisational music ensemble performance, collective awareness is often measured through the felt sense shared by the group, signaled by immediate, affirmative responses to a question like, “Do you feel it?” Intuitive recognition of mutual attunement serves as the first indicator of collective alignment. Consistently replicating this experience under varied conditions further confirms its depth and stability.

By revisiting this heightened state of awareness in future sessions, we could refine our collective awareness through sensory resonance and adaptive responsiveness, strengthening our ability to perform as a symbiotic ensemble. This process is inherent to improvisation, where feedback loops from the music itself provide real-time validation of the group’s



collective dynamics.

## II. 3. Leveraging Deliberate Practice

These insights align closely with Ericsson's (1993) framework of *Deliberate Practice*, a methodology for skill acquisition modeled on the practice habits of musicians who achieve mastery. From a theoretical perspective, Deliberate Practice emphasizes purposeful, focused repetition, where skills are refined through sustained effort, continuous assessment, and the meticulous testing of abilities under varied conditions. In the context of our rehearsal, an adaptation of Ericsson's concept allowed us to confirm and extend a newly developed capacity for collective awareness by deliberately pausing, stepping away from the state, and then re-engaging while adapting to the group's shifting dynamics. While we risked losing what we had gained, even that potential loss would have offered a valuable lesson for the group.

In our case, this new state of collective being—and the embodied confidence that we could replicate and enhance it—suddenly provided clarity and meaning to everything that had come before. Every step we had taken during the rehearsal process now made sense—most importantly, to the group as a whole. Until then, the path I had charted through method, intention, and presence-based leadership may have felt somewhat ambiguous to the uninitiated. The group had placed their faith in me almost by default, and now that faith had been affirmed. Any doubts about where we were headed creatively, or skepticism about our methodology, dissolved in that moment. It was a moment of knowing: knowing that no matter where the unfolding journey took us, we would face it together and be okay.

This kind of collective knowing arises from the dynamic, embodied interactions within a group, where intuition and tacit knowledge converge in real-time collaboration, enabling emergent creativity and action (Gunnlaugson, 2020; Sawyer, 2017). A shared faith in our mission had been established. The brief pause in the rehearsal created a necessary space for each of us to internalize this new awareness, with its subtle yet transformational effects, and reflect on its significance for our ongoing preparations. I could see the difference throughout the room—people standing taller, walking more confidently, and breathing more easily. An atmosphere of increased joviality had emerged.

This shift was not merely a change in body language or mood; it reflected a deeper, embodied awareness—a collective attunement that demonstrated the transformative power of Presencing Embodiment. We had moved beyond a concern for individual contributions to enter a unified state where collective energy and shared intentions guided us forward. This moment of mutual attunement marked a profound shift in how we, as musicians, related to

the music, and it underscored the power of co-creation in collective action.

The ability to sense and respond to shared intentions in real time is a foundational element of Presencing Embodiment. It is where participant engagement aligns to form a coherent whole, enabling collective energy to generate emergent possibilities.

### III. Co-Creation & Collective Awareness: *Key Elements of Transformative Practices*

This breakthrough of collective awareness demonstrates that we—as a group, including you and I—can co-create meaning and direction. My musician colleagues and I shared an intuitive sense of unified discernment that transcended individual being and aligned with an emergent future. The shift in sensory awareness illuminated our mutual trust and faith in the ongoing process, even without certainty about the precise outcome. This new state of awareness—one that helped “make sense” of the journey—reflected an unfolding attunement, where the efforts of each ensemble member merged into a coherent whole. I observed how the musicians listened—not just with their ears, but with their bodies, emotions, and intuition. It was through this alignment that co-creative potential revealed itself—not simply as collective effort coalescing, but as an emergent capacity grounded in presence, perception, and relational awareness.

The pause provided space for the mind, body, and emotions to synchronize, allowing a deeper understanding and integration of what had just taken place. Our shared, albeit not yet fully defined, intuitive knowing about the journey ahead highlighted the interplay of sensory dynamics: embodied trust, the emergence of shared meaning, and the early crystallization of collective coherence. These elements scaffold transformative practices that foster Presencing Embodiment.

What facilitated the emergence of this new state? The music had sounded great from the first downbeat—these were, after all, highly accomplished musicians. Yet, I sensed we could evolve beyond polished professionalism to reach something more profound and transcendent.

While vamping on a particular section of music that intuitively felt like a loose prototype of what I hoped would emerge, I began to suggest subtle tweaks in the musical interplay. The bass and kick drum needed to complement each other rather than compete for space. The harmonic frequencies between the keyboard and guitar roles could be distributed more effectively. The coordination of rhythmic phrases required adjustment to ensure the riffs complemented or counterpointed each other more purposefully.

These adjustments reflect and necessitate a specific mode of analytical and relational

listening (Raelin, 2011). While holistic attunement engages the emergent *we-space* (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016), focused listening homes in on the intricate dynamics of the collective soundscape. The dynamic interplay between broad attunement and focused listening is fundamental to Presencing Embodiment. This synergy balances collective awareness with individual contributions, fostering a collaborative environment. Both forms of attunement—one expansive, the other precise—along with sensitivity to their dynamic relationship, are integral to Presencing Embodiment. When integrated, practitioners can navigate the subtleties of interaction within the broader relational field, ensuring that adaptive refinements align with the group’s embodied resonance (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). Extending analytical and relational engagement into the embodied dimension unlocks a more integrated and nuanced awareness, central to accessing the full potential of Deep Listening (Ricketts, 2020).

Throughout the process, I listened attentively to identify potential blind spots in the collective performance while also validating each musician’s creative autonomy. This approach enabled them to respond to my input in ways that aligned with their individual musical strengths and personalities as they unfolded. The more we played together, the more layers of ourselves we revealed to one another. This multidimensional process—encompassing emotional vulnerability, focused analytical adjustments, holistic relational sensory awareness, and intentional practice—exemplifies how improvising musicians leverage embodied awareness and incremental development to uncover emergent possibilities.

This iterative process of exploration, where individuals remain grounded—albeit dynamically—in their authenticity while co-creating, reflects foundational principles for enhancing Presencing Embodiment. Through these dynamics, where each individual contribution is refined and integrated, the group collectively reaches its fullest potential for generative collaboration.

At this stage, my objective was to establish an embodied baseline of collective awareness that could be leveraged for adaptation across the diverse musical contexts of our repertoire. I sought to guide the group to this shared “place” so that we could, together, explore new possibilities beyond it. To facilitate this onward journey, I recognized the need to shift from a central leadership role to a more distributed form of leadership. This transition not only lightened my own burden but also allowed for greater freedom within the performance. Relinquishing control would ultimately empower the ensemble, enabling us to fully embrace the collaborative spirit of Presencing Embodiment.

The experience in Lagos not only highlights the emergent dynamics of collective

awareness within an improvisational music setting but also lays the groundwork for applying these dynamics to broader domains, particularly in leadership and collaboration (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). In improvisational music ensemble performance, collective awareness is nurtured through shared, embodied experiences involving sensory attunement, adaptive responsiveness, and trust (Scharmer, 2009; Gunnlaugson, 2020). While deeply rooted in improvisational music, the practices and dynamics described in the Lagos anecdote reflect universal principles of human connection, creativity, and agency—principles essential to transformative leadership and collaborative work across any field (Raelin, 2011).

This shift toward collective awareness, as demonstrated in improvisational music performance, points to a deeper, relational understanding of embodiment. To fully comprehend how these dynamics emerge, it is crucial to explore embodiment as a process that extends beyond the physical body. Embodiment encompasses how we relate to our environment, interact with others, and engage with our own sense of self. It is through this relational process that Presencing Embodiment is cultivated—a foundational pillar for transformative practices in both creative and leadership contexts.

### III. 2 Embodiment and Presencing: A Relational Process

Embodiment refers to experiencing the world through both physical and subtle senses, encompassing the holistic interplay of mind, body, emotion, spirit, and social context in shaping this experience. As Lakoff and Johnson (1999) proposed, cognitive processes are fundamentally shaped by bodily experiences, introducing the concept of the “embodied mind.” More recent theories have expanded this understanding, framing embodiment as a dynamic, relational process that emerges through continuous interaction with the environment and others (Fuchs, 2018; Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012).

This broader perspective, advanced by scholars such as Sheets-Johnstone (2011) and Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (2016), posits that cognition is not merely influenced by bodily sensations but is actively constituted through movements, emotions, and social engagements. Embodiment involves implicit, automatic, pre-reflective bodily knowledge and tacit awareness that shape experience and cognition, often operating below the level of conscious thought. Contemporary embodiment theories emphasize the interdependence of this multidimensional experience, highlighting its formation through personal histories and collective social contexts (Colombetti, 2014; Barrett, 2017).

Presencing Embodiment, by contrast, refers to the conscious cultivation of a state of being that integrates the body’s sensory experiences with a heightened awareness of the

present moment. This concept underscores an embodied presence that transcends intellectual analysis, fostering a deeper connection to the self, others, and the environment. Presencing involves accessing a deeper awareness and intelligence that lies beyond habitual thought patterns and behaviors (Gunnlaugson, 2020; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). In this sense, Presencing Embodiment reflects the ability to engage this heightened awareness through embodied experiences, encompassing physical sensations, emotions, and intuition.

The term “embodied experiences” here refers to lived experiences of being in the body, where cognition, perception, and action are rooted in physicality. It acknowledges that physical sensations, emotional states, and social interactions are central to shaping how we think, create, and relate to the world (Johnson, 2007; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 2016). In the context of Presencing Embodiment, embodied experience serves as the raw material for cultivating the awareness and presence that presencing seeks to enhance. The interplay between physical, emotional, and social dimensions of experience forms the foundation for deeper awareness and transformative action. These potentials are more fully realized when practitioners consciously engage with their embodied aspects.

The Lagos anecdote exemplifies Presencing Embodiment in action. Through emotional, physical, and auditory sensing, this experience demonstrates the capacity of a group to engage the *we-space*—an intersubjective space arising when individuals come together with shared intention or purpose (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016). Within this collective field, the musicians and I accessed a deeper level of awareness, sensing and responding to each other's subtle cues. The moment of crossing this threshold was physically palpable—felt through emotions, heart rate, and intuition—enabling us to register and build upon emergent qualities in our co-created musical performance. My question, “Do you feel it?” underscores the importance of collectively acknowledging embodied awareness in the moment, a practice that fosters access to more profound levels of consciousness through the senses and intuition.

This decisive moment represents more than a fleeting instance of Presencing Embodiment; it serves as a constellating event—a formative experience that can anchor and inform subsequent practice. Presencing Embodiment is not simply about accessing heightened awareness in isolated moments; it involves cultivating a sustained practice of being fully present and embodied in each moment. This requires the intentional development of embodied cognition through regular training—what I propose as *Deliberate Practice*—and focused attention to sensory, emotional, and bodily sensations. Music is an ideal medium for this: sound carries frequencies that are both physically felt and heard, reverberating in an environment and evoking emotional responses. For musicians, music at its best not only

sounds good but also *feels* good—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

While an initial experience of Presencing Embodiment may feel profound, the ultimate goal is to integrate this way of being into everyday life and interactions. Achieving this level of integration necessitates a shift from a *pro-ethos* concentration—emphasizing individual attitudes, beliefs, and achievements—toward an *empathic-generative* approach. This shift focuses on shared intention, mutual understanding, and collective well-being. It involves moving from prioritizing personal agendas to considering the collective impact of embodied awareness and how collaboration can harness this awareness to achieve desired outcomes. This transition reorients attention from the individual self to the *eco-self*, recognizing the interconnectedness of individuals with the larger systems in which they exist (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

### III. 3. From Sensory Awareness to Social Connection

Self-awareness and adaptive fluency are essential for facilitating the shift from personal to collective awareness. These qualities provide the stability and intuitive responsiveness necessary for engaging effectively with collective dynamics. For improvisational musicians, this shift is supported by advanced proficiency in our craft, enabling us to direct focus outward toward relational dynamics and shared goals without losing track of our individual performance capabilities. This fluid ability to navigate between personal and collective awareness is critical for cultivating generative co-creation, where each individual's refined contribution integrates seamlessly into the larger whole. In this way, developing individual skills lays the foundation for transformative collective interaction.

This integration of individual and collective awareness underpins a core principle of Presencing Embodiment (Gunnlaugson, 2020): by refining individual capabilities and aligning them with the collective, practitioners unlock the transformative potential of generative fields. These dynamics are vividly illustrated in improvisational music ensemble performance, where the interplay between individual musicians, the ensemble, and the resulting co-created outcome demonstrates the power of this integration. Generative fields give rise to emergent phenomena—such as shared intuition, amplified creativity, and synergistic action—that enable outcomes surpassing the sum of individual or collective efforts. As scholars of emergence and systems thinking suggest, these generative dynamics occur when relational interactions create a whole that is qualitatively distinct and more impactful than the simple aggregation of its parts (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007; Sawyer, 2006; Johnson, 2001).

These theoretical perspectives highlight the profound interconnection between

embodied experience, cognition, and social engagement, reinforcing how Presencing Embodiment arises through ongoing interaction with our environment and collective dynamics. By deepening our understanding of these processes, we can cultivate practices that enhance individual and collective transformation. Through engagement with generative fields of presence, this integrated approach demonstrates how practitioners can unlock the transformative potential inherent in collective awareness, fostering a dynamic where individual proficiency amplifies the collective's creative capacity.

Thus, the true power of collaboration lies not simply in its mechanics but in the intentional cultivation of presence, embodied awareness, and mutual attunement. This shift from transactional coordination to transformational connection—where the collective transcends its constraints—unlocks new creative potential.

The event described in the opening Lagos anecdote marked the beginning of a collective culture characterized by a felt sense of trust and mutual understanding among co-creators, enabling vulnerability and risk-taking in our playing. We were ready to explore the *place beyond the place* (Meadows, 2008), where new possibilities and potentials could be realized. It was an embodied, physical, and emotional benchmark—a moment of "knowing" that became our north star as we worked through the rest of the concert repertoire.

The underlying, informal, and intuitive framework of this collaboration was value-based. Initially, it required dissolving the inherent hierarchy and power structures within the group. The musicians understood that my name was on the marquee, that I had scouted and selected each of them from among several capable candidates, and that they were being paid to participate. Yet, such executive and administrative roles hold little weight onstage. In live improvisational music ensemble performance, leadership is not defined by formal titles but by the dynamic flow of skills, intuition, and collaboration.

As the formal leader, I naturally bore the responsibility of honoring all stakeholders—musicians, audience, technical crew, concert promoters, sponsors, venue owners, and local media. However, I've learned that facilitating conditions where I can release these practical concerns and focus on artistry is vital. In doing so, everyone thrives. This reflects the principle of distributed leadership, where leadership arises organically through collective collaboration rather than hierarchy.

After dissolving hierarchical structures, the next step is nurturing a collaborative, generative, co-creative *we-space*. Within this fertile space, everyone feels heard, valued, and comfortable enough to let go of ego- and angst-driven agendas. Here, there is room for fun, laughter, and love—elements that are not separate from the practical realities of the music



business but essential for maintaining a balanced and thriving creative environment.

Finally, I am energized by the potential for emergence—where something new, unexpected, or profound materializes from the ways musicians engage with each other and the music we co-create. Allowing for emergence requires embracing and even thriving in a state of not-knowing. This is why improvisational musicians practice and why we cultivate creative confidence: to prepare ourselves for traversing uncharted territory.

In Lagos, the group's capacity for Presencing Embodiment became the guiding force for our co-creative processes throughout the remainder of our time together. By prioritizing the collective experience and embracing our interconnectedness, we accessed a deeper level of awareness. This enabled us to transcend polished professionalism and achieve a more meaningful and impactful level of artistic expressiveness than we had previously imagined.

### III. 4. From Sensory Awareness to Collective Transformation

Embodiment theory (Gallagher, 2005) suggests that the body and its senses play a crucial role in shaping emotions, thoughts, and behaviors—a principle that applies directly to music performance. The auditory and physical sensations involved in playing music can evoke a range of emotions, influencing musicians' intuitive and cognitive reasoning as well as their actions (Van Der Schyff & Schiavio, 2017). For instance, the physical act of playing a musical instrument—such as feeling the vibrations of strings on a guitar or the pressure of keys on a piano—can foster a state of flow and embodiment, encouraging greater creativity and improvisation. Similarly, the aesthetic qualities of music can elicit powerful emotional responses in both performers and audiences, shaping cognitive processing and behavior (Scherer & Zentner, 2001). Recognizing the role of sensory experiences in music performance allows musicians to harness these elements to enhance their emotional and cognitive states, resulting in more engaging and impactful performances.

Building on the importance of sensory experiences in music performance and their impact on emotional and cognitive states (Van Der Schyff et al., 2018; Scherer & Zentner, 2001), it is vital to explore how these experiences can extend beyond music to enhance Presencing Embodiment. By modeling phenomena observed in improvisational music ensemble performance—such as prioritizing sensory experiences and embodied practices—leaders and practitioners can cultivate interconnectedness, trust, and mutual understanding within organizational cultures. This approach enables collectives to tap into deeper levels of awareness and generate outcomes with more profound and far-reaching impact.

The Lagos experience deepened as we continually tuned into each other's

contributions. The music guided us—each moment building on the next, transcending individual skill to create something greater. Roles became fluid, with each musician stepping forward or retreating as needed, trusting the group’s energy to lead. It was not about controlling the outcome but allowing the soundscapes to emerge organically, staying open to whatever came next. We embraced a state of not-knowing, where every note, chord, and beat invited discovery of the emerging future. In this spirit of openness, we co-created musical moments that were more profound than any of us could have planned.

As our connection strengthened, our awareness attuned to the subtle shifts in the room—emotions, energies, and small gestures that conveyed everything we needed to know. In responding to each other’s contributions, we weren’t merely hearing the music; we were feeling its energy, its impact, and its potential. This shared awareness brought our improvisational performance to life repeatedly.

At the heart of this process was embodied presence, manifesting through every aspect of our being. We aligned on multiple levels—physically rocking to the beat, emotionally expressing through our faces, closing our eyes to connect more intimately with the music’s spirituality—all while nurturing the space for the music to flow freely. Guided by sonic expression, there was no impulse for rigid structure or control—only a unified presence of authentic selves fully engaged in the act of co-creation.

And through it all, there was room for play. We weren’t afraid to venture into new territory, make mistakes, or allow the music to take us to unexpected places. It wasn’t about striving for perfection—it was about embracing the joy of discovery. The process of listening, letting go, trusting, responding, adapting, and co-creating together was transformative. It didn’t just enrich our connection to one another; it intensified our love for the music, for the moments of its unfolding, and for the collective energy that resonated to the core of our being. What emerged was something far greater than the sum of its parts—a shared, generative space where our collective energy transcended individual limits.

I recount this journey because it represents the manifestation of ideas that began crystallizing some fifteen years ago while serving as a television musical director. In that role, I functioned as an instrument of a top-down organizational culture, grappling with the creative constraints imposed by commercial expectations, tight deadlines, and budgeted resources. These experiences ultimately led to the unfolding of a more transformative philosophical vision—one that redefined how I approached my craft, not just as a skillset but as a way of being.

## IV. Five Exploratory Modes for Cultivating Presencing Embodiment

### *IV. 1 The Compounding Legacy of Practice*

Decades of creative endeavor have revealed a profound truth: when I cultivate ways of being that allow my artistry and creativity to thrive, the effects ripple far beyond the immediate outcomes. What I create or co-create with others does not merely touch its intended audience; it resonates, transforms, and returns, often in unexpected ways. Over time, this reciprocal process compounds into a living legacy—a dynamic interplay between what is offered to the world and what the world reflects back, often in ways that deeply influence my life. This observation underscores how such ways of being—rooted in Presencing Embodiment—nurture the conditions necessary for creativity to amplify and flourish, enabling what is created in the present to have a lasting impact. When rooted in Presencing Embodiment, these ways of being catalyze generative collaboration and collective action that transcend immediate outcomes, unfolding and extending their impact across contexts and time.

Ericsson's concept of deliberate practice provides a structured approach for practitioners to develop Presencing Embodiment by emphasizing sustained effort and feedback in acquiring and refining skills. By contrast, Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow highlights the essential role of deep engagement and presence in maintaining the developmental processes critical to cultivating Presencing Embodiment. Both principles align with processes that have been instrumental in my development as a musician and artist. Together, these concepts offer a framework for the ongoing evolution of Presencing Embodiment, enabling practitioners to refine and extend their creative and leadership capacities through sustained, immersive engagement and focused practice (Ericsson, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

### *IV.2 Deliberate Practice in Flow*

These insights transcend the domain of music. Building on the concept of embodied presence in improvisational music performance and its profound emotional, cognitive, and spiritual impact (Van Der Schyff et al., 2018; Scherer & Zentner, 2001), it becomes essential to explore how these sensory and embodied experiences can inform the cultivation of Presencing Embodiment in non-musical contexts. The spontaneity of improvisational music performance draws on a foundation of deliberate practice: focused repetition, cultivated awareness, and disciplined flexibility that enables masterful musicians to remain fluid and attuned in real time.

Flow emerges when preparation meets the immediacy of the moment through presence. It is a state of immersive engagement, where perception, action, and awareness cohere moment to moment. For improvising musicians, flow isn't accidental—it is invited through sustained attention, relational sensitivity, and dynamic interaction. In this way, flow becomes both a felt experience and a functional capacity, deepening trust, dissolving hesitation, and allowing co-creative possibilities to unfold.

By prioritizing these approaches, leaders and practitioners can foster deeper levels of collective awareness, enabling more resonant and generative outcomes across diverse fields (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). In this regard, the relational and emergent dynamics observed in improvisational music ensembles offer valuable insight into creating environments of mutual trust, engagement, and collaboration—key elements in fostering Presencing Embodiment. These dynamics provide a living model of practice that can be adapted across domains, supporting the development of presence-based leadership grounded in attunement, responsiveness, and co-creative flow.

#### *IV.3 Actionable Pathways for Cultivating Presencing Embodiment*

As pathways for cultivating and enhancing Presencing Embodiment, I propose five exploratory, orientational modes grounded in improvisational music ensemble performance, as revealed through the Lagos narrative: Co-creation, Embracing The Unknown, Deep Listening, Embodied Awareness, and Playfulness. By "mode," I refer to distinct ways of engaging with the world, each activating dynamic processes that unfold in real time. These modes are not rigid prescriptions; rather, they serve as invitations to explore and experiment. As practitioners deepen their connection to the present moment and the collective dynamics in play, these modes evolve, allowing for continuous adaptation and growth.

Each mode draws inspiration from the culture of improvisational ensemble musicianship, where adaptability, presence, and creative flow are essential. In the musical context, these modes naturally emerge through the collaborative act of creating sound. Outside of music, they function as tools for fostering connection, amplifying creativity, and catalyzing collective action by leveraging embodied qualities such as attunement to shared intentions, emotions, and relational dynamics.

The suggestion is to prototype ways—variable from practitioner to practitioner—to integrate the various modes into daily interactions, focusing on one mode at a time. This process can be viewed as a movement from crystallization to prototyping and, ultimately, to performance (Scharmer, 2009): first crystallizing the essential features, core themes, and

questions, then testing them in low-stakes situations, and finally integrating them into higher-stakes environments. For me, this reflects back into my work with music creation and performance, my graduate students, and business clients—as new qualities of Presencing Embodiment capability are refined.

Daily interactions offer low-stakes opportunities for experimentation. At this small scale, every personal encounter becomes a chance for Co-creation; the simplest plan for action can Embrace The Unknown as a fertile field of possibility; a random conversation opens space for Deep Listening; a solitary walk in nature invites exploration of Embodied Awareness; and a mindset of Playfulness reminds me that, although I take my creative, artistic, and professional pursuits seriously, I also make room for spontaneity, exploration, and the unexpected joys that naturally emerge.

Through sustained experimentation with these exploratory modes, I've observed that this simple approach allows for the gradual internalization of enhanced or newly emerging Presencing Embodiment capabilities. These capacities build from the ground up—starting in low-stakes environments and becoming more refined and transferable in higher-stakes settings over time. Although Co-creation is the central and foundational mode, the other modes—Embracing The Unknown, Deep Listening, Embodied Awareness, and Playfulness—enhance and enrich its application. Each mode uniquely contributes to aligning with the present moment, allowing practitioners to act with compassion, empathy, spontaneity, and intention. Combined, the modes work synergistically, creating an ecosystem where benefits emerge organically.

Exploration with and through these five exploratory modes is intended to cultivate and extend Presencing Embodiment as a skill that evolves over time, through focused practice and sustained engagement. Each mode facilitates this journey, enabling practitioners to navigate collective dynamics and respond with embodied presence in the moment. Continued experimentation with these modes seems to further the acquisition of Presencing Embodiment skill and its ongoing maintenance and refinement. The ultimate aim is that by working through the Five Exploratory Modes for Cultivating Presencing Embodiment, practitioners will be open to transformative shifts in their approaches to collaboration, creativity, and collective impact, leading to more resonant and impactful outcomes in personal, professional, and organizational settings.

## V. The Five Exploratory Modes: Core Themes and Features

### *V. 1. Co-creation*

As an exploratory mode, Co-creation is foundational to cultivating Presencing Embodiment. It involves the collective process through which participants shape the emerging future. This real-time interaction thrives on mutual responsiveness, shared intention, and openness to novel outcomes that could not exist through individual effort alone. Rooted in dynamic relational fields, Co-creation emphasizes intuition, collaboration, and adaptability, enabling personal contributions to guide the unfolding of creative possibilities (Scharmer, 2009). By embracing this mode, practitioners engage deeply with the present moment, fostering collective participation and unleashing the potential for emergent, creative outcomes (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016).

In improvisational music ensemble performance, Co-creation is an active, dynamic process where both the "creation" and the "co"—the mutual effort—are integral. Rather than adhering entirely to pre-composed structures—for example, we all know what's going to happen when we hear Beethoven's Fifth—an improvisational group essentially co-authors the music as it emerges in real-time performance, with each member contributing their expertise and intuition to the unfolding creation. This generative, collaborative process relies on trust, openness, and embodied awareness, allowing each musician's contribution to evolve through mutual responsiveness, while continually stretching the boundaries of individual creativity (Ricketts, 2020).

Similarly, in non-musical domains such as leadership or education, Co-creation flourishes when participants bring their unique contributions to the table, generating new ideas and solutions through collective engagement. This deepens attunement to both the self and relational dynamics, enhancing the presence necessary for collective flow (Heifetz et al., 2009).

The exploration of Co-creation can be understood through three interconnected dynamic processes that continually support its embodiment: the relational field (or we-space), discerning the new, and emergence. These processes form the foundation of Co-creation, enabling participants to navigate and contribute to the evolving collaborative endeavor (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016).

#### *V.2. The Relational Field or We-Space*

The relational field, or we-space, is the dynamic, shared space where individual contributions interweave and mutually shape the emerging creation. In improvisational music performance, this becomes evident when each musician's decisions and intentions influence the collective sound, while the collective energy, in turn, informs each musician's intuition.

The we-space emerges when participants gather with a shared purpose, allowing individual inputs to guide the collective direction (Gunnlaugson & Brabant, 2016). This shared dynamic space facilitates deep attunement and synchrony among participants, whether in music, leadership, or collaborative projects.

In my experience in Lagos, the relational field shifted as the group aligned around a shared purpose, moving beyond personal expression to create something far more complex and generative than any one participant could have envisioned alone. Prototyping Co-creation in everyday, low-stakes interactions—such as brainstorming sessions, group planning, or casual exchanges—offers opportunities to test and refine collaborative processes. These small-scale interactions provide a space for experimenting with mutual responsiveness and building trust, which can then scale up to support more complex collaborations (Schön, 1987).

### *V.3. Discerning the New*

Discerning the new involves recognizing and crystallizing latent possibilities as they emerge. In improvisational music ensemble performance, this process requires openness to the emerging future, as musicians listen not only to what is being played but also to what has yet to unfold. This dynamic is grounded in embodied expertise and intuition, where performers remain present and responsive, creating space for something entirely new to emerge (Ricketts, 2020).

Discerning the new requires practitioners to leave behind habitual responses, engaging fully with the present moment and the group's collective energy. Meadows (2008) captures this idea, describing 'the place beyond the place'—a liminal threshold where releasing habitual responses opens the way for the arrival of the unprecedented—something that redefines what is possible—as the group's intentions converge, preparing the ground for what wants to become.

By using low-risk environments to prototype conditions for unanticipated outcomes to take shape, practitioners can experiment with emergent dynamics and observe how they influence the unfolding process. These iterative experiments allow for the refinement of intuition and responsiveness within the group, enabling practitioners to adapt and integrate new possibilities effectively (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

### *V. 4. Emergence*

Emergence refers to the spontaneous arising of new patterns and possibilities as



individuals engage with one another. In an improvisational music ensemble, emergence occurs as each musician's offering of rhythm, melody, and harmony interlaces to form a cohesive whole—one that transcends any single player's input. Emergence is a property of complex systems, where interactions between parts create something greater than the sum of their components (Goldstein, 1999). Similarly, in Co-creation, emergence unfolds as participants' collective energy and engagement lead to new, unforeseen directions. In leadership, education, and collaboration, this process can guide teams toward innovative solutions that no individual could have anticipated. Whether in music or organizational contexts, emergence underscores the importance of remaining fully present in the unfolding process and trusting in the collaborative potential of the group.

Prototyping Co-creation allows practitioners to embrace the unpredictability of emergent processes while staying grounded in shared goals. Through iterative experiments, groups can gradually expand the scale and complexity of their collaborative efforts, cultivating trust and responsiveness (Heifetz et al., 2009).

Engaging with Co-creation as an exploratory mode is essential for cultivating Presencing Embodiment. This mode fosters deep engagement, mutual responsiveness, and collective flow, facilitating creative breakthroughs that arise from real-time group interaction. The core principles of Co-creation extend across diverse fields, including leadership, education, and organizational dynamics. When practitioners embrace Co-creation, they actively participate in shaping the future, generating novel solutions and directions that cannot be achieved through individual efforts alone. By embodying this practice, practitioners enhance their attunement to the relational field and deepen their embodied presence, resulting in transformative outcomes (Scharmer, 2009; Eisenberg, 2001).

Co-creation, as an exploratory mode, goes beyond collaboration; it involves actively engaging with and contributing to the emergent dynamics of the present moment. By integrating the practice of Co-creation into real-life contexts, individuals and groups can navigate complexity, foster trust, and generate innovative possibilities. This mode builds resilience, adaptability, and creativity, enabling practitioners to remain present in the unfolding dynamics of the world around them. In doing so, Co-creation opens pathways for personal and collective transformation, allowing creative potential to emerge and flourish in ways that transcend individual capacity (Scharmer, 2009; Eisenberg, 2001).

#### *V. 5. Embracing the Unknown*

Embracing the Unknown as an exploratory mode involves conscious engagement

with uncertainty and ambiguity, reframed as a generative field for creative emergence (Eisenberg, 2001). For improvising musicians, the practice is foundational, releasing preconceptions and habitual responses to cultivate fertile ground for spontaneous creation. In this mode, musicians actively embrace risk, navigating the unknown through the embodied mastery of their craft, which enables intuitive responsiveness in real time. This approach challenges musicians to view performance not as the execution of a predetermined design, but as participation in a dynamic, relational field of layered unfolding (Ricketts, 2020).

For practitioners across fields, the capacity to Embrace the Unknown rests on deep trust in foundational skills and an openness to what cannot be fully anticipated. As Schön (1987) notes, navigating complexity requires "reflection-in-action"—a disciplined presence that allows the practitioner to respond fluidly while letting go of the need for control. The unknown is encountered as a space of generative potential, rather than a disruption to avoid or resist. By relinquishing attachment to preconceived ideas, individuals can engage the field with presence and adaptability, allowing new patterns and schemas to emerge. This capacity is particularly relevant for leadership, where the unknown often represents a rich source of innovative and transformative solutions (Heifetz et al., 2009).

At the heart of Embracing the Unknown lies the release of the illusion of control, enabling greater fluidity in response to emergent dynamics. In improvisational music performance, this involves trusting technical skills and intuition to respond to the moment, allowing musical sound to unfold organically without rigid expectations. Similarly, practitioners in non-musical contexts can adopt this mindset by letting go of the need to dictate outcomes and remaining open to the organic evolution of ideas and solutions (Schön, 1987). This flexibility is vital in fields such as organizational leadership and education, where resisting premature clarity and attending to the edges of creative possibility support real-time innovation and adaptive response.

Crucially, remaining in this space—individually or collectively—requires a shared orientation toward discovery. As Bohm (1996) suggests, a common purpose offers coherence without constriction. In improvisational music performance, this shared purpose enables members of the ensemble to move beyond personal creative instincts and sustain collective flow amid ambiguity. In broader contexts, a clear, shared purpose aligns teams or communities around a flexible but meaningful center—allowing uncertainty to function as a medium for alignment and co-creation (Heifetz et al., 2009).

As the ground is prepared for what wants to become, Embracing the Unknown calls for a deeper trust in unfolding. Here, a willingness to release control does not equate to

retreating from engagement. Scharmer (2009) describes this orientation as "letting go to let come," a principle of emergent leadership in which uncertainty becomes a field of possibility rather than a condition to control. This stance enables individuals and groups to approach the unknown as a creative catalyst—meeting the present moment with discernment, intuition, and agency, and in doing so, opening conditions for innovation and unanticipated insight.

Through the lens of improvisational music, Embracing the Unknown reveals how performing musicians navigate uncertainty and complexity in real time, listening for the space between notes, responding to shifts in tempo, and attuning to unspoken cues. In this mode, experimentation and exploration become essential tools for navigating what has not yet taken form. Research across domains confirms that environments which welcome ambiguity as a condition for creative risk and shared discovery enable individuals to contribute more fully and adaptively to emerging situations (Proyer et al., 2013).

Embracing the Unknown transforms how we approach the emerging future and plays a vital role in cultivating Presencing Embodiment. It empowers practitioners to confidently venture into uncharted territory, drawing on presence and intuition to navigate new challenges. Engaging this exploratory mode creates space for collective emergence, enabling attunement, adaptability, and discernment to unfold as moment-to-moment perceptual capacities—fluid, relational, and responsive to context. These qualities quietly prepare us to meet what follows with increased receptivity and relational sensitivity.

#### *V. 6. Deep Listening*

Improvising musicians engage in Deep Listening by attuning to the sound, silence, and subtle emotional, physical, and intuitive dynamics within the group. This practice moves beyond hearing alone; it invites the whole self into the act of listening, integrating multiple perceptual channels into a unified awareness. Through this heightened attentiveness, musicians remain fully present, responsive to relational shifts and unfolding possibilities. Within an improvisational music ensemble, Deep Listening supports real-time co-creation, where individual contributions interweave, and collective flow emerges through a dynamic exchange of presence and perception (Scharmer, 2009).

Our rehearsal in Lagos exemplified Deep Listening. As the group released assumptions about what might unfold, a deeper attentiveness emerged—subtle, embodied, and immediate. The question, "Do you feel it?" marked this shift: an affirmation that we were no longer just hearing—we were sensing into a shared field of presence. In this space, sound carried more than melody or rhythm; it moved through us, revealing emotion, shifting relational tone, transmitting intention. Sometimes it landed as a thump in the chest, a tremble

in the gut, a sudden catch in the throat. It was its own mode of perception. Listening extended beyond the ears—through skin and breath, bones and fingertips, through the instruments we held and the vibrations that touched us, moved us. What emerged from each musician arose in dialogue with the whole, allowing the music to evolve beyond preconception. This was listening through sound and silence—feeling, sensing, and intuiting the ensemble’s dynamic interior—in a manner aligned with Gunnlaugson’s (2020) practice of Dynamic Presencing: a disciplined, moment-to-moment way of attuning to the unfolding relational field through embodied awareness, subtle perception, and presence-guided responsiveness.

Pauline Oliveros (2005) describes Deep Listening as listening with the whole self, encompassing auditory, emotional, physical, and intuitive awareness. This expanded sensitivity enables the listener to take in not only sound but also silence, movement, and emotional resonance, fostering deeper connections to the self and the collective. In practice, this orientation nurtures openness to what is emerging, enabling participants to respond in ways that sustain the unfolding creative process.

Deep Listening supports Presencing Embodiment by cultivating presence in the relational field. It invites practitioners to notice what is unfolding—whether in a musical ensemble, leadership context, or collaborative setting—and to sense how their presence shapes the dynamics of the collective. This heightened sensitivity helps detect subtle cues and emergent possibilities, creating conditions where both individual and shared potential can be realized (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Engaging in Deep Listening during smaller-scale interactions—whether in rehearsals, meetings, or casual conversations—offers a space to rehearse presence. It’s where we prototype responses, refine how we relate, and build the perceptual capacity to attune more precisely over time. Just as registering subtle shifts in sound can guide an ensemble toward new creative spaces, Deep Listening in other domains sharpens awareness of relational cues, allowing new possibilities for interaction and insight to take shape. This kind of iterative engagement aligns with Prototype Methodology and the principles of Presencing Embodiment, where small, low-stakes actions are tested, tuned, and gradually extended into more complex environments (Scharmer, 2009; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007).

Deep Listening invites leaders, educators, and creatives to engage more fully with team dynamics and collaborative processes. For leaders, it reveals underlying tensions, aspirations, and unspoken needs—opening space for more grounded and responsive leadership. Educators who listen deeply can sense shifts in students’ emotional and cognitive

engagement, shaping learning environments that support curiosity, trust, and growth. In creative contexts, Deep Listening fosters attuned collaboration, allowing groups to co-create work that resonates through alignment with the deeper coherence of the collective (Raelin, 2011; Meadows, 2008).

As an exploratory mode, Deep Listening opens a lived pathway into Presencing Embodiment. It invites us into full presence with the moment, into attunement with relational dynamics, and into readiness for what may arise through the collective. Rooted in real-time engagement with others and the surrounding environment, this mode strengthens the perceptual clarity and responsiveness essential for navigating both individual and collective transformation (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012). As we listen more deeply, we begin to notice how perception itself lives in the body—how presence is felt, not only sensed, and how awareness begins to take on weight, texture, and form.

#### *V.7. Embodied Awareness*

Embodied Awareness, as an exploratory mode, centers the body as a site of real-time knowing. Where other modes emphasize perception, interaction, or uncertainty, this mode draws attention inward—toward sensation, muscular tension, breath, posture, and emotional texture as immediate data. It is through these lived signals that practitioners locate themselves in the moment, refine alignment, and participate more fully in whatever is unfolding. This somatic orientation is foundational to Presencing Embodiment, anchoring awareness in felt experience and allowing intention to arise from within. In improvisational music performance, for example, musicians don't just hear or see one another—they register timing, direction, and energetic momentum through the body, shaping their response from a place of interior attunement (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012).

Central to Embodied Awareness is the capacity to notice how internal states—tension, ease, anticipation, or hesitation—shape the way we move, speak, and relate. Such awareness supports congruence between intention and expression, allowing our actions to emerge in alignment with what the moment calls for (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 2016). In ensemble music performance, for example, this shows up when bodies begin pulsing to the beat—subtly syncing through shared rhythm before any conscious coordination occurs. Coherence becomes physically legible through breath, pacing, and small postural shifts. Practicing this mode means pausing long enough to sense what our body is doing—before default patterns take over. It helps us regulate presence from within, choosing when to lean in, hold back, or move with a group in ways that stabilize shared momentum. Over time, this

embodied steadiness becomes perceptible to others, as trustable responsiveness.

A critical aspect of Embodied Awareness is the ability to sense the field of interaction—not just as interpersonal dynamics, but as a shared atmosphere of movement, tone, and readiness. Practitioners learn to register shifts in energy, posture, breath, and pacing that signal when the group is aligning—or drifting. Responding well requires full presence, a felt connection to the group’s rhythm, and a willingness to follow where the moment leads. In collaborative contexts, this kind of sensitivity builds trust and cohesion—laying the ground for generative flow and shared direction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Staying grounded in embodied experience helps practitioners move in ways that are not only timely, but resonant—strengthening the group’s capacity to stay connected and adaptive as conditions change.

In improvisational music performance, Embodied Awareness helps musicians register the moment just before a shift—the breath before an entrance, the lean that signals a new direction. These embodied thresholds shape how performers adjust in real time, maintaining cohesion even as the music evolves. Similarly, in leadership and education, this form of sensitivity supports practitioners in sensing inflection points—moments to pause, pivot, or re-engage. Attending to these subtle cues helps guide the group with responsiveness and precision, even amid uncertainty or change (Johnson, 2007).

For practitioners exploring Embodied Awareness, small, everyday interactions offer rich ground for practice. This might involve noticing how a slight shift in posture changes the tone of a conversation, or how breath tightens just before speaking. By experimenting with these embodied cues—pausing, adjusting, or softening—practitioners begin to sense how their internal state shapes the group atmosphere. These micro-adjustments build capacity for centered responsiveness, especially in high-stakes or fast-moving environments. As the practice deepens, awareness extends into the shared field—where subtle shifts are sensed and responded to from within, and where clarity arises through resonance and relational attunement (Gunnlaugson, 2020).

Embodied Awareness lays the groundwork for responsive leadership, collaborative fluency, and creative integrity. By carrying embodied practices into daily routines—meetings, decision-making, conversations—practitioners learn to track how their physical presence influences group rhythm, emotional tone, and shared direction. Such ongoing practice cultivates a grounded kind of presence—authentic, responsive, and rooted in real-time engagement. It enables individuals to act from alignment, listen with their whole system, and sense the larger field in which their choices unfold. Over time, this embodied sensitivity

becomes a resource for collective insight and timely, meaningful contribution (Scharmer, 2009).

More than an inward practice, Embodied Awareness evolves into a participatory relationship with the collective field. By tuning into both bodily signals and shared dynamics, practitioners learn to respond from a presence that supports coherence, adaptability, and real-time creativity. As a core practice for cultivating Presencing Embodiment, Embodied Awareness anchors perception in the body and opens pathways for meaningful participation—where new possibilities emerge through alignment with what is already unfolding. With this orientation in place, practitioners are better able to move with the unexpected—navigating complexity with steadiness, openness, improvisation, and ease.

#### *V. 8. Playfulness*

Playfulness, as an exploratory mode for cultivating Presencing Embodiment, invites practitioners to engage their craft and environment with spontaneity, curiosity, and lightness. While other modes engage uncertainty through depth or discipline, Playfulness does so with ease—allowing for experimentation without the pressure of outcome. Rooted in embodied expertise, it doesn't bypass skill or structure, but expands creative boundaries from within the scaffolding that skill and structure provide. In improvisational music performance, for example, musicians draw on technical proficiency to take risks, explore new directions, and let the music lead into uncharted terrain. This willingness to explore — unburdened by fear of failure — creates fertile ground for real-time innovation and unanticipated outcomes to emerge (Bakker et al., 2011).

Playfulness embodies creative freedom that grows from deep familiarity with one's craft. Across fields like music, leadership, and design, it arises through the confidence to explore without rigid expectation. Leaders, for instance, who bring a playful orientation into their teams can foster experimentation, adaptability, and shared risk. When psychological safety is present, individuals are more likely to explore bold ideas without fear of judgment — creating conditions for innovation and co-creative problem-solving (Proyer et al., 2013). Just as musicians use mastery to unlock improvisational possibilities, leaders and creative professionals can draw on their expertise to support exploration, growth, and emergence within collaborative environments.

In an improvisational music ensemble, Playfulness is a dynamic force that animates interaction and invites the unexpected. Musicians embody this mode by attuning to one another's shifts—responding fluidly to evolving patterns in rhythm, melody, and harmony.



This shared Playfulness allows the group to explore ideas that might never surface in more controlled or outcome-driven settings, opening space for creative breakthroughs and generative exchange (Kark, 2011). Similarly, in leadership or creative work, Playfulness fosters the kind of responsiveness that helps teams pivot, adapt, and experiment together, generating solutions that emerge through shared exploration and relational flow.

Playfulness supports embodied presence by inviting practitioners to follow what resonates—physically, emotionally, and relationally—in the moment. It encourages improvisation grounded in sensation and intuitive movement. This orientation enables practitioners to move fluidly with shifting dynamics, cultivating group flow without forcing direction. In such states, individual contributions often spark surprising breakthroughs that carry the collective somewhere unplanned, yet meaningful (Proyer et al., 2013).

Fostering Playfulness in structured or hierarchical environments requires deliberate intention. In many professional settings, it is still perceived as a distraction or dismissed as incompatible with seriousness. For Playfulness to take root, it must be framed and positioned as a driver of creativity and adaptive thinking. Psychological safety is essential: when individuals feel secure enough to take risks and explore without fear of judgment, Playfulness becomes a vital condition for growth and collaborative problem-solving (Duncan, 2002). Without that foundation, it is easily suppressed, limiting innovation and constraining group potential (Moran & Johnstone, 2001).

Playfulness cultivates the capacity to navigate with agility between structured focus and generative openness. This flexibility enables teams to access fresh perspectives, deepen group flow, and move past creative blocks. Whether in a brainstorming session, performance, or team-building exchange, playful engagement invites novel perspectives and adaptive solutions. As individuals and teams engage this mode, they begin to generate new ways of thinking, relating, and creating, often reaching outcomes that would remain inaccessible through conventional problem-solving alone (Kelley & Littman, 2001).

Playfulness encourages creative risk and spontaneous discovery, allowing practitioners to explore unfamiliar terrain with a sense of lightness and trust. When practiced with attentiveness, this mode invites new relational patterns, surprising insights, and energized participation. It contributes to the ongoing cultivation of Presencing Embodiment by loosening rigid habits of thought and behavior, making room for emergence. Playfulness opens pathways that structure alone cannot reach, inviting participation that is present, responsive, and alive.

## VI. The Five Exploratory Modes: Reflective Questions

Pairing the five exploratory modes for cultivating Presencing Embodiment with reflective questions highlights their unique pathways for deepening presence and expanding relational creativity:

- Co-creation involves navigating relational dynamics, forging connections that guide the unfolding of creative possibilities.

*Q: How can I deepen my connection with others in this moment, allowing our collective creativity to guide the unfolding process?*

- Embracing The Unknown challenges us to step into uncertainty with openness, cultivating a mindset that invites innovation and the emergence of new solutions.

*Q: How might embracing uncertainty with openness and curiosity shift my awareness of what is taking form?*

- Deep Listening enhances our ability to attune to subtle cues within ourselves and the collective, ensuring we respond to unfolding dynamics with presence and care.

*Q: How can I tune into the subtle cues within and around me, allowing my response to support attunement and deepen shared flow?*

- Embodied Awareness strengthens our capacity to align intention with action, grounding us in felt experience and real-time alignment.

*Q: Cueing into my body as a tool for sensing, what new kinds of input or awareness begin to surface?*

- Playfulness invites us to engage the unexpected with lightness, encouraging creative breakthroughs and a willingness to move beyond familiar patterns.

*Q: How can I bring a sense of lightness and curiosity into this moment, allowing creativity to unfold without attachment to the outcome?*

These exploratory modes function as interwoven pathways, each enhancing the others to form a living, dynamic approach to Presencing Embodiment. Together, they cultivate a responsive presence rooted in mutual attunement, bodily awareness, and co-creative movement.

Whether in music, leadership, education, or daily life, these five exploratory modes for cultivating Presencing Embodiment offer more than a framework—they invite ongoing practice. They provide ways to navigate complexity with clarity, enter uncertainty with agency, and participate in shaping outcomes that:

- emerge from alignment with what most deeply matters,
- remain responsive to the relational dynamics of the moment, and
- sustain generative movement over time through attuned, embodied presence.

Through continuous engagement, the exploratory modes help deepen the coherence between self, other, and context, fostering conditions where innovation becomes relational and transformation becomes lived.

## VII. Concluding Thoughts

Presencing Embodiment, as a deliberate practice, is dynamic and evolving. It integrates embodied awareness, relational sensitivity, and real-time engagement with the collective field. It unfolds through interaction, improvisation, and intentional choice, emerging in lived moments rather than abstract ideals. This article has explored five improvisational music performance-based orientational modes for cultivating Presencing Embodiment: Co-Creation, Embracing the Unknown, Deep Listening, Embodied Awareness, and Playfulness. Together, these modes provide pathways for deepening presence and amplifying generative capacity. Practitioners who explore these modes can cultivate a more grounded connection to their own lived experience, while enhancing their responsiveness within shared situations.

The insights explored in this article are grounded in field-based practice and informed by a constellation of theoretical frameworks. While Deliberate Practice (Ericsson, 1993), Phenomenological Embodiment (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2012), Emergence in Complex Systems (Stacey, 2001), and Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) serve as the primary interpretive lenses—offering language for how focused repetition refines skill, how perception and action arise through lived experience, how group dynamics evolve unpredictably, and how immersive states of engagement unfold—this foundation is further enriched by Gunnlaugson’s Dynamic Presencing (2020) and Scharmer’s Theory U (2009), which frame Presencing Embodiment as both a perceptual discipline and a developmental pathway. Together, these frameworks help name and interpret the patterns observed in improvisational music ensemble practice and performance—while also revealing their relevance across fields such as leadership, education, and collaborative innovation.

Presencing Embodiment invites practitioners to connect their internal awareness with the relational dynamics of the group in real time. When actions arise from this alignment, individuals become more fluid in navigating uncertainty, more responsive to complexity, and

more capable of entering co-creative flow. This shift energizes collective creativity, strengthens trust, and supports generative movement within teams, partnerships, and learning communities.

The practice of Presencing Embodiment carries important considerations for access and adaptation. For individuals affected by trauma or chronic conditions that impact sensory processing, reconnecting with embodied awareness may require trauma-informed approaches that support safety and regulation (Ogden et al., 2006). Cultural context also plays a key role in how these practices are perceived and integrated. In traditions with established somatic or contemplative lineages, embodied engagement may be more readily embraced; in others, it may call for careful adaptation to align with local values and lived experience (Wilson, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2011). Additionally, abstract concepts such as "emergence" or "relational fields" may feel inaccessible to those without exposure to systems thinking or phenomenological frameworks. Approaches like Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) and Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) can serve as useful bridges, translating complex ideas into grounded practices that support attuned action in dynamic, relational settings.

The principles of Presencing Embodiment extend across disciplines, anchoring creative, relational, and adaptive engagement. In improvisational music performance, they enhance co-creativity and deepen emotional resonance within ensembles. Exploratory modes such as Embracing the Unknown and Deep Listening support musicians in attuning more fully to one another and to their audiences, enabling intuitive interplay and emergent expression. In education, particularly in the arts, Embodied Awareness fosters presence, creative risk-taking, and authenticity in student learning. In healthcare, these practices cultivate trust and attunement in therapeutic relationships, while strengthening collaboration and resilience within care teams. In organizational settings, leaders who embody these orientations can help shape adaptive cultures that prioritize creativity, shared sensemaking, and responsive problem-solving.

Presencing Embodiment continues to evolve as a living orientation—one that deepens our capacity to engage physical, emotional, and relational experience with presence and integrity. This integrative approach prepares individuals to meet complexity with attunement, responsiveness, and grounded clarity. Cultivating Presencing Embodiment is an ongoing way of inhabiting the moment, one that invites growth, deepens connection, and helps translate awareness into meaningful action. In doing so, practitioners expand their capacity to lead, to co-create, and to shape resilient, life-giving cultures and communities.

In composing and engaging this work, I found that the very modes I was seeking to

describe began shaping me as I practiced articulating them. What had started as a framework for presence gradually revealed itself as a recalibration of perception itself—not as a solely cognitive process, but as a full-bodied, relational sensitivity to what is taking form. Through the interplay of listening, sensing, and co-creating across diverse, embodied settings—musical, interpersonal, and professional—I came to recognize perception as a living interface where attunement, emergence, and action arise as one. In this light, the five exploratory modes may not merely support embodied leadership—they may perhaps collectively cultivate perceptual fluency. This insight has reframed my own understanding of practice as the refinement of how we perceive and participate in the unfolding relational field.

For me, what began as a way of describing practice has become a deeper way of entering it. As practitioners refine their own perceptual field—through these modes or others—new methods of co-creation and relational intelligence may begin to emerge from within their own domains of expertise.

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## COMMUNAL REVERIE:

### *Introducing an Imaginally Inflected Presencing Approach*

**Sam Hinds, Ph.D.**

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**Abstract:** Communal Reverie can be described as an emerging presencing approach (EPA) initiated at the beginning of 2021 (Gunnlaugson, 2023; Hinds, 2023). Its closest predecessor and influence amongst the presencing practice ecosystem is Baeck's (2018) *Collective Presencing*, from which key elements in its original procedures and guiding protocols were sourced. Adding to the myriad streams of indigenous knowledges, wisdom traditions, and integral philosophies and life practices that have informed presencing up to date, Communal Reverie has incorporated influences from mystical streams and philosophical frames emphasizing engagement with the autonomous productions of the deep imagination (Anzladua, 1987; Bosnak, 2007; Bourgeault, 2020; Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Corbin, 1969, 1977, 1999; Jung, 1966a, 1966b, 1969, 1980; Segall, 2023). My understanding of the potentials of Communal Reverie practice are informed, at the deepest level, by a variety of convergent visions set forth by philosophers contending that imaginal practice, in its most realized forms, enables conscious participation with transpersonal influences of a subtle nature (Barfield, 1988; Bernstein, 2005; Ferrer, 2017; Gebser, 1985, 2024; Tarnas, 1991). Communal Reverie, to my present knowledge, is distinct amongst EPAs insofar as it is framed explicitly as a *collective imaginal practice* and, likewise, distinct amongst imaginal practices insofar as it approaches the group field as a source of communal imaginal revelation. This article will introduce Communal Reverie with specific focus on the theme of presencing embodiment (Gunnlaugson, 2023).

**Keywords:** collective presencing, imaginal, collective imaginal attunement, communal reverie, participation, presencing embodiment

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## I. Foundations of Presencing Embodiment in Communal Reverie

Gunnlaugson's (2023) call for an expansion of presencing embodiment research to include a more in-depth inquiry into subtle interior *processes* and *forms* of embodied movement that are not directed by or mediated through physical movement opens a rich space for inquiry into the intersections between embodied dimensions of imaginal and presencing practices, including how these intersections pertain to Communal Reverie (p. 199). Communal Reverie could be described as an EPA that advances an explicitly imaginal inflection of presencing practice through a unique approach to *presencing embodiment* (Gunnlaugson, 2023). Before explicating Communal Reverie's distinct approach to subtle embodiment, a brief exploration of the embodied dimensions of Collective Presencing will be necessary.

*Collective Presencing* relies on two interrelated embodied capacities that Baeck (2018) has described as *subtle sensing* and *sourcing*:

It is of course in and through the body that we register and identify our physical sensations, and that we are in relationship with what is all around us. But thinking and reflecting, on the one hand, and subtle sensing on the other, also only become possible through the body – because this is where you become conscious of them. Nonetheless, neither is happening in the physical body in the same way as our physical senses can be tracked; rather, both are beyond, or perhaps implied or enfolded. (p. 22)

Sourcing, fundamentally, is an embodied posture that intentionally orients toward *connecting with*, or *expressing from*, subtle energetic expressions of source. Baeck (2018) builds upon Scharmer's conception of source, describing it as a deep wellspring of *generativity*, a “place of infinite potential that is always present but that we tend to forget in our habitual way of living and thinking,” with which we may develop and strengthen our capacities for conscious participation (p. 119). Baeck has closely followed Scharmer (2009) in emphasizing that embodying source connection can facilitate the process of *emergence*. Sourcing, as approached in the context of Collective Presencing, takes place among relatively small groups or “circles” and unfolds as “participants in the circle speak to and from the middle” (p. 339). The *middle* corresponds with “the inner dimension, the inner collective, the inner plane of a group – for lack of a better word, the group's field” (Baeck, 2018, p. 211). Mutual attunement to the group field, then, becomes a medium for accessing the generative influences springing from source.

Trying to verbally explain *how* subtle sensing and sourcing are engaged is like trying to verbally explain how one opens and closes their hand. The knowledge is not abstract and propositional, but *embodied* and *enactive*. Even so, if I were to craft a guided practice for use in small group contexts that I believe would help lead practitioners into the nonphysical posture required for subtle sensing, it would be as follows:

*Feel*, fully, into the entire field of your bodily sensations and begin to tune into the space inside you as though you were *listening*, very closely, from the tip of every nerve.

Extend that sensitive listening out beyond the borders of your skin, to pervade the space surrounding your body.

Now, begin to listen to the *shared space*, the space around and between the group. Listen very closely to this shared space until you are listening *from* the space. Listen even more deeply, until you are listening *as* the space.

Now, feel the thickness, the depth, of this field of listening that you are, that *we* are. Allow this spacious listening to *expand* in all directions until it is *boundless*.<sup>1</sup>

In the early stages of Collective Presencing practice, what Baeck (2018) has called the *circle of presence*, the group aims to speak to and from the middle, engaging their subtle sensing capacities and mutually attuning to source, giving words to whatever emerges. This might be described as a *general* modality of subtle sensing and sourcing. It should be noted here that encountering imaginal content sometimes occurs spontaneously in the context of Collective Presencing practice. It may be said, then, that general sourcing may lead to encounters with imaginal phenomena.

Communal Reverie, however, aims explicitly at *focusing* the practice of sourcing toward a *shared experience of imaginal disclosure*. It is in this sense that Communal Reverie is an *imaginally inflected* EPA. I describe the foundational subtle embodied posture enacted in Communal Reverie practice as *collective imaginal attunement*. Before introducing this subtle posture, however, it will be necessary to introduce imaginal modes embodiment more generally.

## II. Modes of Imaginal Embodiment

Henry Corbin's (1999) introduction of the term *imaginal*, as distinguished from *imaginary*, has been increasingly influential in the contemporary cultural milieu. Direct experience of the *imaginal*, as I would frame it, has three primary characteristics. First: imaginal experience involves encounters, mediated by the imagination, with subtle phenomena that have a relatively *independent* existence from that of the imager. Second: imaginal experience demonstrates an *autonomy* and *intelligence* capable of acting independently of the conscious intentions of the individual who encounters them while also remaining *responsive* to the individual's active participation in the encounter. In other words, where there is imaginal experience, there is *relationship*. Third: skillful, conscious participation in the unfolding of imaginal encounters can play critical a role in service of realizing *dormant potentials*. In other words, wherever there is imaginal experience, the alluring pull of the *latent future* is potentially accessible. Drawing from and variously innovating upon ancient traditions, a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> This guided prompt is drawn from para-academic writing I have published via Substack (<https://reverician.substack.com/p/dispatches-from-collective-presencing>).

contemporary *imaginal practices*<sup>2</sup> make use of the autonomous productions of the deep imagination (Bosnak 2007; Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Corbin, 1969, 1977, 1999; Jung, 1966a, 1969, 1979, 1980, 1989).

Imaginal practices always entail deliberate engagement with various embodied postures. While these postures may include ways of attending to physical sensations and kinesthetic movement, they also include a range of increasingly subtle forms of nonphysical embodied processes, ranging from ways of attending to energy body awareness to even more subtle modulations of mind and attention. These postures can entail a variety of deliberate shifts: into deeper ontological levels of embodied presence; in where and how attention is directed; in the intentionality brought to a given situation.

The essential foundation of imaginal embodiment occurs through an intentional posture that, while typically also entailing a relaxation of the physical body, first and foremost requires subtle shifts in one's mental state. A central premise here is that any act of shifting our mental disposition is always fundamentally embodied. Because imaginal contents are understood as continuously present and active, though ordinarily obscured by the activity of the waking mind, a posture of intentional restraint of mental activity is necessary for imaginal practice to proceed. Temporarily relaxing and suspending intentional thinking and critical judgement can reduce their usual veiling effect with respect to autonomous imaginal phenomena.

As Jung (1966a) has made clear, one of the major obstacles when engaging in imaginal practice is the tendency of the critical intellect to either judge and doubt whatever imagery spontaneously emerges or otherwise hasten toward formulating explicit interpretations of its meaning. Wherever such tendencies arise it can be helpful to notice this and deliberately relax the mind, suspending intentional thinking and critical judgement while remaining receptive to the spontaneous emergence of imagery. Romanyshyn (2007) has nicely described this intentional posture as *a gesture of hospitality*. While this is typically easier, especially for beginners, with eyes closed, imaginal contents can and do emerge even with eyes open when the mind assumes such a posture of imaginal hospitality.

Another subtle, nonphysical embodied posture that greatly enhances and enriches the practice of attuning to imaginal phenomena entails the deliberate sensitization of awareness to the *energy body*. Imaginal phenomena have been widely linked to conceptions of a subtle body, often

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<sup>2</sup> For readers interested in accessible entry points for directly exploring imaginal practice, I would make note here of two figures in the para-academic sphere who are making significant practical contributions to the field of imaginal practice, including instruction for beginners. The first is Rosa Lewis (<https://rosalewis.co.uk/>). The second, River Kenna (<https://www.riverkenna.com/>).

conceived as being irreducible to physical bodily phenomena (Bosnak, 2007; Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Corbin, 1969; Cox, 2022; Mindell, 1998). Burbea (2014) has advanced a purely phenomenological way of approaching the “subtle body” or “energy body” that may be more accessible for modern individuals, setting aside any ontological claims about it and simply stating that “it is a perception, a way the body can be perceived which can be helpful” (p. 53). Extant recordings<sup>3</sup> of Rob Burbea’s (2015) teachings contain excellent guided practices for cultivating energy body awareness as a *way of perceiving* the body. These practices are valuable for imaginal practice because any subtle imagery encountered generally corresponds with felt qualities in the energy body, and thus deliberate attunement to the energy body can result in the spontaneous arising, enrichment, or transformation of imagery.

One may, for instance, engage in visualizations connected with the breath, imagining an ether of breath filling the whole body and extending some distance beyond the borders of the skin with each inbreath. Another helpful approach begins with imagining a column of light extending through the spine, perhaps extending indefinitely both upwards and downwards, and then imagining a bright aura of warm, colored light radiating out from the spine to fill the body and gradually extend beyond to generate a bubble or cloud of light surrounding the body. An approach I have frequently used, to great effect, is imagining a large bell suspended above me which begins to loudly chime and resonate, causing subtle vibrations to tingle my spinal column and every nerve fiber in my body, eventually extending into subtle vibrations in the air surrounding my skin which I can also feel with great sensitivity. In each of these exercises, the imaginative process should not be limited to visualizations (i.e., “seeing in the mind’s eye”) but also be *sensorially rich* (i.e., “feeling with the subtle body”). This sensorially rich engagement with the imagination provides a vehicle for awakening the direct experience of a subtle felt sense suffusing through and extending beyond the borders of the physical body.

Finally, imaginal practice may readily incorporate physical sensation and movement (Bosnak, 2007; Mindell, 1998). Although the level of energy body awareness corresponds with what Corbin (1977) described as the “subtle corporeity” of imaginal phenomena—acknowledging that both the energy body and imaginal phenomena are experienced as more subtle than physical phenomena yet more substantial than abstract thought—subtle and physical levels embodiment can and do intermingle and it is possible to actively participate in the interface between them.

Tuning into the subtle felt sense in relevant regions of the energy body can bring us into sympathy with the styles of embodiment displayed by autonomous imaginal presences, which we

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<sup>3</sup> For guided energy body practice instructions, see Burbea’s (2015) recordings titled “Energy Body Instructions” (1 and 2) in the retreat titled *Path of the Imaginal* (<https://dharmafeed.org/retreats/2678>).  
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can invite into our own physical embodiment through imitation. “To become infused with alien intelligence,” Bosnak (2007) has asserted, “the habitual self has to apprentice itself to the alien presence through mimicry” (Bosnak, 2007, p. 52). While such physical mimicry may be undertaken deliberately during imaginal practice, it sometimes occurs through spontaneous impulses whereby the body mirrors or enacts movements or mannerisms associated with various imaginal presences. In other words, imaginal presences can autonomously cross the barrier from subtle to physical embodiment wherever a practitioner is receptive.<sup>4</sup> This will be discussed in richer detail below.

### III. Collective Imaginal Attunement

We may identify clear correlations between the subtle modes of embodiment informing both imaginal practices and Collective Presencing: emphasis on deliberate habitual thought activity; affirmation of a subtle energetic layer of embodiment that both permeates and exceeds our physical embodiment; recognition of subtle sources of meaning, information, and creative allurements with which we may exercise an increasingly sophisticated degree of conscious participation.

Having acknowledged these convergences, we may also note crucial differences in the frameworks typically surrounding imaginal practices versus those informing Collective Presencing and other similar practices (Martineau & Martineau, 2016; Steininger & Debold, 2016). Typical approaches to imaginal practice have overwhelmingly foregrounded *the individual as the locus of imaginal experience* (Bosnak, 2007; Corbin, 1969; Jung, 1966a). This orientation, which I have called *imaginal privatism*,<sup>5</sup> corresponds with the recognition that imaginal phenomena are deeply involved in the process of *individuation*. In none of the cases outlined above are multiple participants encouraged to simultaneously attune to a shared field and source of imaginal disclosure. At most, the individual engaged in imaginal practice may be accompanied by an experienced guide or facilitator who assists the process by prompting subtle embodied movements<sup>6</sup> that help to further the unfolding of the imaginal encounter.

By contrast, as numerous practitioners of varied collective sourcing modalities have attested, there is *an intensified awareness of shared interiority* that can emerge amongst the group under proper conditions that does not negate, but rather *reinforces and enhances*, each constituent member’s

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<sup>4</sup> It bears noting that Jung (1969) was quite cautious here, expressing concerns that a person’s conscious personality can in some instances be displaced and overtaken by autonomous imaginal presences, a phenomenon he described as an *archetypal possession state*. Psychologically speaking, he considered this a great danger. While other theorists and practitioners (Bosnak, 2007; Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Hillman, 1975; Mindell, 1996) are considerably less cautious about this than Jung, an essential safeguard against the loss of conscious autonomy can be maintained by deliberately and continuously regarding imaginal presences as *radically other than self*—that is, resisting any temptation to *merge or identify* with them.

<sup>5</sup> (<https://reverician.substack.com/p/beyond-imaginal-privatism-pt-i>).

<sup>6</sup> See Burbea’s (2017) recorded retreat entitled “The Mirrored Gates” for a detailed account of movements in subtle embodied postures that can influence the unfolding of imaginal encounters (<https://dharmafeed.org/retreats/3918/>).  
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experience of uniquely individuated selfhood (Baeck, 2018; Martineau & Martineau, 2018; Steininger & Debold, 2016). I believe this orientation hints at possibilities for the emergence of novel modalities of imaginal practice that reach beyond imaginal privatism through collective imaginal attunement.

Communal Reverie proceeds from the assumption that the basic embodied postures of presencing can be supplemented and modified by imaginal modes of embodiment. In other words, *the latent potentials sourced through presencing embodiment that pull for collective emergence may be inflected into imaginal phenomena that are sensed and disclosed collectively* (Hinds, 2023).

#### IV. Introducing Communal Reverie

Communal Reverie has drawn significant inspiration from Collective Presencing's basic protocol as a practical and foundational framework supporting groups toward development of basic capacities for collective imaginal attunement. The subtle posture for engaging this mode of imaginal attunement begins with all members turning their subtle sensing capacities toward the group field while simultaneously adopting a receptive posture of hospitality toward the spontaneous emergence of imaginal phenomena (Hinds, 2023). As an addendum to the guided practice provided above, I would add this final nonphysical embodied gesture as the key step toward shifting into collective imaginal attunement, with the caveat that other adept practitioners may take diverging approaches:

Having engaged your embodied capacities for connecting with the group field through subtle sensing, now make yourself receptive to any *imagery* that may spontaneously emerge. If any doubts or judgements about the imagery arise in the mind, expressing thoughts like “this isn’t real” or “I am just making this up,” release those thoughts while *remaining curious and hospitable* to the imagery. Just for now, see what happens if you remain open to what spontaneously arises through the imagination, *staying with it and trusting it*.

As participants mutually engage this subtle embodied posture, the first person in the group who feels ready then verbalizes whatever imaginal phenomena are emerging for them. Generally, there comes a time when a person's imaginal encounter feels experientially “ripe” for sharing with the group. Reports may include a mutually implicated and intermingling awareness of bodily sensations, subtle body sensing, and imagery. When the first report of imaginal phenomena is complete, the speaker indicates this to the group to signal that the floor is open again for the next person who feels ready to share. This protocol is intended to modulate the collective attention of the group by limiting the field to one speaker at any given time for the sake of generating a higher degree of collective coherence.

One core invitation in Communal Reverie is to engage the practice as an opportunity to discover directly how, when practicing collective imaginal attunement, *spontaneously arising imagery*

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*encountered and verbalized by another can come alive in your own direct experience*, subsequently unfolding in new and unexpected directions autonomously. In most cases the session continues progressing in this way, resulting in a relatively continuous and coherent unfolding of spontaneously arising imagery from one participant to the next. However, there is no insistence that all subsequent imaginal content must always connect immediately or directly with what has come before. Even during instances where seemingly disjointed imagery is described, I have observed a general trend toward a gradually unfolding imaginal coherence in the field as the session proceeds, with initially disconnected imagery either coalescing in the imaginal space or otherwise seemingly expressing meanings that are intuited as symbolically related. There are, however, less frequent instances where imagery is shared that appears relatively or completely disjointed from the rest. While the ultimate reasons behind these varying degrees of collective imaginal coherence remain mysterious, I suspect it may be related to the degree of overall coherence in the field and the depth of subtle sensing capacity being exercised in the moment.

The full spectrum of imaginal modes of embodiment have been encountered during Communal Reverie practice. Reports of sensations or bodily phenomena at times ambiguously straddle the subtle and physical levels of embodiment. To take one example, a relatively recent Communal Reverie session included reports of imagery of jet-black printer ink in an office space with fluorescent lighting, invoking resonances with contemporary businesses and their operations, values, and objectives. Amid reports of subtly embodied imagery of *drinking* this ink, one participant reported feeling a predominantly “imaginative” nausea, whereas another began spitting into a cup, reporting that he was physically purging. In other instances, imaginal phenomena may very clearly cross the threshold into kinesthetic enactment. During an early Communal Reverie session, for example, one participant reported an image of a mother dragon fiercely guarding her egg. Amid this report, he spontaneously began baring his teeth, positioning his hands like claws, and making roaring gestures. There was a distinct impression that these physical, kinesthetic embodied actions imparted insights about the image that would not otherwise have been accessible.

Participants in Communal Reverie have regularly reported experiences marked by awe, beauty, wonder, and sacredness amid the unfolding of sessions. The overriding sense during and after imaginal practice is typically one of inherent mystery that resists yielding immediately recognizable outcomes or benefits that can be articulated in clear, rational terms. This, it appears, is not a defect but rather a feature of imaginal practice as such and therefore warrants some commentary and reflection.

## V. The Fruits of Imaginal Presencing

The difficulty of articulating the outcomes of imaginal practice reflects the character of the



imaginal as such, which entails a shift away from the register of rational-conceptual cognition and into a register of richly *metaphorical* and *symbolic* meanings that are both deeply mysterious and inexhaustible (Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Corbin, 1969; Jung, 1969, 1980, 1989). The very process of bringing imaginal phenomena to consciousness implies opening the possibility for rational-conceptual cognition to interface with non-rational phenomena. This dynamic interface between rational and non-rational elements may be construed as a *transrational* process (Bernstein, 2005; Gebser, 1985, 2024; Hinds, 2023).

While often leading to various conceptually expressed insights, imaginal meaning is fundamentally glimpsed *intuitively* and engages the practitioner in an infinite hermeneutic process. In other words, archetypal influences portray themselves autonomously in the form of imagery expressing a vast plurality of meanings that can never be exhaustively grasped, but are vastly enriched through a combination of conceptual, interoceptive, kinesthetic, energetic, emotional, aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual or religious resonances (Burbea, 2015, 2016, 2017; Corbin, 1969; Jung, 1966b). Even amid its inexhaustible mysteriousness, the partial glimpses of apprehensible significance disclosed through dedicated imaginal practice gradually yields evident impacts. Practitioners may experience greater levels of *beauty*, *wonder*, and *sacredness*, as well more consistent contact with *desire* and *eros* connected with *values* and *duties* felt to be deeply meaningful. These experiences can deeply inspire and influence courses of action and behavior in the world.

An essential dimension of the way imaginal practice yields its fruits also involves the cumulative unfolding of imagery as it recurs across *time* (Bourgeault, 2020; Hinds, 2023). Spontaneously arising imagery tends to reemerge through repeated imaginal practice—also, at times, outside of formal practice. While consistent meanings are imparted, new and unexpected facets of meaningfulness are also disclosed at different times, deepening and enriching the desires, values, and commitments connected with the imagery. As imagery echoes, recurring and reverberating across time, the experience of time as a linear process unfolding from past toward future is increasingly complemented, and at times overtaken, by a different experience of time as a complex and nonlinear tapestry of moments, entangled through shared archetypal meanings (Bourgeault, 2020; Hinds, 2023). Gradually, the impression of involving oneself in participation with imaginal phenomena begins to be counterbalanced by *a sense of autonomous archetypal influences involved with oneself*. Bourgeault (2020) has introduced the term *imaginal causality* to describe this temporally rich experience of transrational influences disclosed through imaginal practice.

When imaginal modes of embodiment are positioned as a way of inflecting presencing embodiment, such archetypal influences may be recognized as holding implications beyond the dormant potentials of practitioners' individual personalities, as imaginal paradigms have traditionally

emphasized. The intuitively inspiring and alluring pull of archetypal imagery disclosed through collective imaginal attunement find its deepest value in the possible disclosure of *synergetic potential*. Seen from this standpoint, imaginal phenomena lend poetic expression to *shared creative impulses* that enlist, inspire, and dynamically combine the individuated capacities of all participants in service of future possibilities relevant to the flourishing of the greater whole.

## VI. Two Examples from My Own Practice

To elucidate the foregoing descriptions of the fruits of imaginal practice and deepen the present inquiry into modes of embodiment, I will offer two examples from my own practice—one arising in the context of my ongoing unfoldment through personal imaginal work, the second in the context of Communal Reverie. These examples will hopefully elucidate the continuities between these two modes of imaginal practice while also offering a humble glimpse into novel potentials made available through collective imaginal attunement.

### VI.1 Whom Does the Grail Serve?

While on a Soulmaking Dharma<sup>7</sup> retreat during January of 2024, amid sustained practice of energy body awareness and imaginal attunement, I encountered a familiar sensation that I can only describe as concentrated energy just below my left breast. As I continued attending to this point of subtle sensation, keeping my attention focused attention upon it as it built in intensity, I was surprised by a sudden upwelling of imagery connected with the grail legend. The imagery was rich with resonances invoking the Christian mythos—the original context in which the legend originally emerged. Initially, I was not only surprised but admittedly repelled by this imagery, given that my personal emotional associations with Christianity were not particularly positive. Despite my aversive reactions, the imagery continued to flood in. *Christ. Blood. The Crucifixion. The unbearable totality of suffering in our world. A king. A crown. The mystery of the holy grail. The sacred commitment to serve what is good and sacred in this world.*

Gradually, as imagery of stained-glass windows and elaborate church iconography streamed into my awareness, the resistance began to soften. My heart opened to a profound sense of reverence, and I began feeling an all-embracing sense of numinosity that I imagined ancestors of mine had once experienced. While I felt no impulse, following the retreat, to claim Christianity as a literal or exclusive religious identity, I did feel as though the image of Christ and the grail were woven in as living mysteries in my still-unfolding spiritual orientation.

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<sup>7</sup> Burbea's *Soulmaking Dharma* stands out as one of the most sophisticated paths of contemporary imaginal practice of which I am presently aware, presenting a novel (and rather unorthodox) lineage of Buddhist thought and practice that incorporates innovations in occidental imaginal traditions (<https://hermesamara.org/teachings/soulmaking-dharma>). *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* | June 2025 | Vol. 2, No. 1

Months later, I was in conversation with my friend Rosa Lewis, also a dedicated imaginal practitioner. I was telling her about a challenging situation in my life which felt profoundly daunting, confronting me with the limits of my capabilities. Despite painful feelings of defeat, I was on the verge of giving up and backing away from the challenge, convinced that I was in over my head. As Rosa expressed her opinion that I should persist despite my difficulties, I experienced an unprompted upwelling of imagery, reiterating the imagery that originally emerged during the retreat. As the visage of the king and the grail autonomously saturated my imagination, an unexpected thought entered my mind with surprising conviction: “I *am* the wounded Fisher King, I am *living* the grail legend.”

Suddenly, the apparently mundane situation at hand assumed a deeply numinous quality, as if exemplifying something sacred and timeless. The image of the wounded king resonated with my own experience of psychological disorientation and apparent lack of capacity to bring order to my lived situation so that I could competently oversee and achieve what life was asking of me. The accompanying image of the grail intuitively hinted at the possibility of healing and renewal, luring my attention away from self-preoccupation and toward the value of what I was being asked to serve. I recognized that my task was tied to lineages and communities in relation to whom I felt a loving sense of duty. As I connected with a sense of commitment to these values of courage and service, my view of the task suddenly took on a devotional quality and the idea of willingly persevering despite my seeming incapacity draped itself with metaphoric resonances of restoring a faltering kingdom in the name of serving what deeply matters. My whole experience of the situation radically transubstantiated itself in the light of this image-laden fantasy, and a fresh influx of energy and courage became available to me. While my doubts did not vanish, I was moved to persist with the challenge before me. Ultimately, I carried out my task with surprising success.

## VI.2 Lineages of Regeneration

My second example comes from a more recent Communal Reverie session that was held during a retreat that I co-facilitated, which also incorporated other group practices including Collective Presencing and Surrendered Leadership.<sup>8</sup> Amid the successive contributions of the participants involved in the session, a compelling world of imagery and subtle narrative was disclosed. Below is a partial, but sufficiently substantial, summary:

A caravan of travelers was journeying across the desert, in search of suitable lands to settle upon.

There was no water in this place. One of the travelers was the disciple of a recently deceased teacher.

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<sup>8</sup> Surrendered Leadership is connected with Transformational Connection approach of John Thompson and Sean Wilkinson (<https://www.transformationalconnection.com/what-is-surrendered-leadership>).

The teacher, on approaching death, had bestowed crucial teachings to this student in a sealed wax envelope. The teacher knew the disciple was not yet fully prepared to carry the teachings. However, being close to death, the teacher lovingly entrusted the envelope to the disciple anyway, trusting that the situation as given would have to be good enough. Deep beneath the barren desert, in a lightless subterranean cave accessible by a crevice in the ground, a vast source of water could be found. Below the water's surface, there was glowing orb of light. The orb pulsed with vibrations. This pulsing felt resonant with the image of a beating heart. There were intimations of profound grief in connection with this orb hidden in these waters deep underground. An intuition emerged: if this grief could be felt, if proper tears could be shed, then a corresponding rain would pour down over the desert and restore the barren landscape with verdant life.

This Communal Reverie session occurred close to the midpoint of the retreat, bookended by multiple sessions of other collective practice modalities. While there was a short debriefing period following the session, no hasty attempts were made to interpret or make deliberate use of the imagery.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until the conclusion of the retreat that I had my own experience of meaningful resonance connected with the imagery. After reflecting on the retreat as a group, including the dynamic contrasts and potential synergy between the various practices we had been engaging, I was suddenly struck by deep feelings of grief, unexpectedly sparking a felt sense of resonance with the imaginal disciple. I was spontaneously drawn into the fantasy that *I, too, am inheriting teachings from various elders. Like the disciple, I saw myself as being unprepared to the role of carrying these teachings out into the world and was gripped by a sense of *how far we as a collective have yet to go* with these various practices, including the collective development of our presencing capacities. The imagery brought me into attunement with my own conviction that these practices have a role to play in the regeneration of our ailing world, which in turn brought forth a deep commitment to honoring these traditions as best as I am able. I felt my love for these lineages and the elders who have transmitted them, catalyzing resonant intuitions of a bond of love binding the disciple to the teacher in the imaginal realm.*

At the deepest level, the imagery brought me into connection with a profound depth of grief about the urgency of our planetary situation—a grief to which I generally remain alarmingly numb. The image of the water deep below the surface of the desert lands came back to me, along with the image of the beating heart which, as I tuned into it, became synonymous with my own heart. Sensing further into the heart, I could not restrain the tears and began weeping for the immense suffering and destruction yielded by the extractive industrial growth imperatives that, despite our

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<sup>9</sup> Deliberately restraining the waking mind's haste toward explicit meaning making is an essential capacity for imaginal practice and exemplifies what the English Romantic poet Keats (1973) called *negative capability*, meaning the ability to patiently remain "in un-certainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (p. 539). *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* | June 2025 | Vol. 2, No. 1

growing awareness, continue to drive our civilization. The tears also expressed immense feelings *care* for humanity, and for the many living species of our planet. I recognized just how desensitized I am to this care, and how the care and the grief are inextricably bonded. I could vividly feel my longing to assist in the birth of regenerative models of social organization that currently feel profoundly challenging to enact, given the pressures and demands of our culture as we find it, mourning the gap between the world I feel many reaching for and the world we presently inhabit and co-create. I intuited that *feeling this grief* was crucial in service to the world's regeneration, just as the tears in this imaginal world were bound to the restorative rains on the barren desert.

While this experience was profoundly personal, placing the imagery in resonance with my individual orientation, imbuing it with meaning and narrative orientation and amplifying depths of emotion that typically remain out of reach, I was not the only one for whom the imagery took on such resonances. Another participant later shared with me that he, too, felt a deep personal connection with imagery that surfaced during the Communal Reverie session, which for him took on resonances that, while metaphorically consonant with my own, were also very particular to his own concrete situation. He and I were connected in a sense of solidarity through our shared resonance with this fantasy, yet the distinctness of our concrete situations remained intact. Even in our distinctions, our shared experience of the imagery brought us into connection with a common sense of care and commitment. Another participant has shared, on similar note, that she felt a profound sense of *intimacy* with the group during Communal Reverie, as though we were venturing together through deeply primordial terrain. In appropriate resonance with the imaginal fantasy in this example, I believe this example demonstrates that there is much further to go with the degree of collective coherence possible in Communal Reverie, a topic I will address below.

### VII.3 Reflections: Imaginal Attunement as Gateway to Multiple Modes of Embodiment

Both examples above share some essential features. First, both cases involve dimensions of *physical as well as subtle somatic embodiment*: the unfolding of the emergent imagery was dynamically connected with somatic-energetic phenomena (the subtle sensation below the left breast in the first case, the heart center in the second). Secondly, both examples involved a dynamic entanglement of archetypal imagery dispersed across *time*: imagery that had been encountered in one moment later reemerged autonomously, resonating with a new range meanings and personal associations that had not originally been intuited. Finally, both cases involved the imaginal disclosure of *value*: the imagery demonstrated poetical resonances with my own concrete experience, which in one sense made the imagery more *real*, and in another served to disclose *metaphorical* possibilities within the situation at

hand. I could suddenly view my situation “as if” I were the wounded king, or the traveling disciple. While these fantasies drawn from the imaginal practice weren’t taken literally, this did not mean that the sense of meaningfulness disclosed through participation metaphors felt untrue. Rather, the images carried symbolic truths serving to disclose and amplify orienting *values* imbuing the situation at hand. Participation in the metaphorical fantasies enabled contact with grief and care that were quite real—and perhaps, too, the values informing the sense of commitment catalyzed by the imaginal encounters.

We might consider that imaginal attunement can act as a gateway into what Iain McGilchrist (2021), drawing from German philosopher Max Scheler, has called *value-ception*.<sup>10</sup> This idea is based on the premises that 1) value is not merely a human fabrication, but a deep feature of the cosmos itself, and 2) is only perceptible when the more embodied and poetically imaginative mode of perception associated with the right hemisphere of the brain is granted cognitive priority. Values, according to McGilchrist (2021), are timeless factors that “evoke a response in us and call us to some end,” and thereby “command our allegiance” (pp. 1122-1123). This description certainly applies to the examples above and adds another dimension to the modes of embodiment germane to imaginal practice—the *embodiment of values*.

At a basic level, value corresponds with what features of the present are deemed relevant and worthy of attention, as well as which possible futures are worth striving for and realizing. At a richer level, values orient our care as known by the heart, summoning from us those ways of being that we describe as virtuous. To embody values is perhaps the most demanding mode of imaginal embodiment, as it not only requires deep sensitivity and skillful attention but also commitment, and ongoing recommitment, to values through choice and action. It is one thing to glimpse value through imaginal practice, quite another to live in accordance with it. Yet, as we have seen in the above examples, the *grace* of spontaneous imaginal encounter—beyond what can be deliberately controlled—carries with it the potential to furnish an influx of energy, courage, love, and renewed capacity to commit to values even in the face of hardship.

The above examples of imaginally-mediated disclosures of value have a largely individual emphasis. The final example merely hinted at the possibility that collective imaginal attunement may draw multiple people into a common experience of values in direct connection with spontaneously encountered imagery. I anticipate that such experiences may reach more profound depths where

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<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Burbea (2017) has included *values* as a typical feature in his account of the phenomenology of imaginal perception. The idea of value, it seems, is emerging as a motif in contemporary thought from multiple angles. Temple (2024) has recently introduced the notion of a *field of value* that is genuinely cosmological in basis. Both Temple and McGilchrist’s perspectives on value have been deeply influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, who posited value as a fundamental feature of reality, establishing what unmanifest possibilities hold deeper relevance in the ongoing creative advance of cosmological evolution.

Communal Reverie approaches the further reaches of group field coherence reported by practitioners of collective wisdom practices, including Collective Presencing (Baeck, 2018; Steininger & Debold, 2016). Further practice, discovery, and development remain necessary to explore these potentials.

## VII. Directions for Further Development

Originally, Communal Reverie implemented protocols emphasizing the maintenance of a *receptive* posture in relation to the imaginal. Generally, the aim was to cultivate basic capacities for collective imaginal attunement without any specific guiding question or foregoing intentionality. This approach entails yielding to the autonomous appearance of imaginal phenomena and privileging the *descriptive* mode when sharing. Verbalization is limited to direct description of imaginal phenomena, excluding any personal reactions to, or thoughts about, the imagery. I would certainly regard this approach as strongly advisable for beginning practitioners.

More recently, however, new experiments in Communal Reverie have drawn inspiration from Baeck's (2018) suggestion that "by setting an intention, and then speaking and articulating it, we make an energetic connection with the potential implicit therein" (p. 582). Considering that "intention and potential are different facets of the same whole," the group field may be responsive to any guiding intentions brought to the process of sourcing (Baeck, 2018, p. 582). Prior to initiating these experiments, I speculated that guiding intentions for Communal Reverie related to a particular project or creative endeavor may enable imaginal disclosure of "future potential announcing itself in the form of symbol, metaphor, dream, or myth from which the wisdom group can receive insight, inspiration, and guidance" (Hinds, 2023, pp. 313-314). This could be imagined as something akin to holding space for a *collective making dream* related to *the soul of a project*, suggesting that certain creative impulses receive their determination and ordination at the subtle level, having their own ensoulment and relative autonomy vis-à-vis those who steward the projects (Baeck, 2018; Nixon, 2021).

Along these lines, the community surrounding Collective Presencing has in recent years introduced the term *sourcekeeper* to designate individuals with a source connection to a particular initiative or creative impulse (Hinds, 2024).<sup>11</sup> I have speculated that there may be *two degrees of group sourcing* with respect to creative emergent processes: collectives answering the call of individual sourcekeepers, and collectives answering the call what Ria Baeck has called the *group soul* (Hinds, 2023). The latter mode of sourcing marks a far deeper achievement and corresponds more closely

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<sup>11</sup> See Tucker Walsh's dialogue on sourcekeeping with Cheryl Hsu and Daniel Thorson (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doCiqK8g-ec>).

with what Baeck (2018) has called the *circle of creation*, where the group converges upon and commits to a common creative purpose sourced from the group field. According to Baeck (2018), truly achieving the circle of creation marks an evolutionary advance in consciousness.

Since completing my dissertation, I have embarked on a small number of experiments with intention-focused Communal Reverie sessions in support of initiatives sourced and stewarded both by individuals and small collectives. The most recent instance of Communal Reverie being applied in service of intention-guided sourcing took place within Paul's (2023) emerging organizational model called the *Regenerative Community Organism* (RCO).<sup>12</sup>

Following the work of Anzaldua (1987), collective imaginal attunement also carries great potential in service of artistic movements seeking both to reflect and to effect cultural and social change while drawing from transpersonal sources. While Communal Reverie *per se* has not been closely applied in this spirit, Hsu's (2022) praxis experiment known as *Participation Mystique* stands out as a bold application of sourcing practices toward collective art generation.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the Second Renaissance Collective's art manifesto and magazine appears as a movement toward source-derived creation of art, explicitly centering *interbeing* as a guiding principle, with the intention of both reflecting and reinforcing deep currents of cultural transformation (Barbier, 2024).<sup>14</sup> Processes rooted in collective imaginal attunement may be included as a generative embodied practice in service of such collective artistic endeavors.

Finally, deliberate practices aimed at fostering increased *collective imaginal agility* stands out as perhaps one of the most crucial domains for further development of Communal Reverie. Considering this aspiration raises a host of questions. For example, what basic practice protocols may be provisionally established for the differential distribution of roles whereby certain practitioners consciously prompt certain subtle embodied moves and postures for other participants who may thereby maintain more receptive postures of imaginal attunement? How might such role differentiation support conscious collective participation in imaginal unfoldment? How might such differential distribution of roles be skillfully enacted in a more *dynamic* fashion, with practitioners remaining open to shifting or trading roles amid the flow of practice? What sorts of guidelines and heuristics may be appropriately applied amidst the differential flow of roles in service of a more sophisticated approach to collective imaginal attunement? And, finally, in what ways might the usefulness of explicit protocols be outgrown, or even become counterproductive, where further

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<sup>12</sup> (<https://rco.life/>).

<sup>13</sup> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcK-fu6BtZ0>).

<sup>14</sup> (<https://secondrenaissance.net/art/>).



depths of imaginal *presencing embodiment* (Gunnlaugson, 2023) are reached?

These questions may only be answered in light of further practice and direct experience.

## Concluding Summary

Communal Reverie, as an emerging presencing approach that distinctly turns presencing capacities toward collective imaginal practice, engages presencing discourse and extant imaginal traditions while leading both in novel directions (Hinds, 2021, 2023). While the emphasis on individuation that has long characterized philosophical discourses surrounding the imaginal is retained, Communal Reverie opens to novel explorations in collective imaginal attunement potentially superseding the drive toward individuation in service of collective creative possibilities (Gebser, 1985; Steininger & Debold, 2016). While collective imaginal attunement has been thoroughly practiced and explored, there remains a wide array of potential directions for further refinement of skillful conscious participation in collective imaginal disclosure in service of creative enactments across a variety of contexts ranging from regenerative organizations to artistic movements and beyond (Barbier, 2024; Hsu, 2022; Paul, 2023).

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## PRESENCING AS A WAY OF BEING:

### *Inhabiting Fourth-Person Knowing in Dynamic Presencing Coaching*

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**Abstract:** This article responds to the fourth-person perspective introduced by Scharmer and Pomeroy (2024), which positions the social field as a new epistemological category of collective knowing. In contrast, it introduces Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a–2025) in contributing to evolving development of fourth-person knowing by offering a fully embodied and inhabitable approach to presencing in both individual and collective coaching contexts. Central to this contribution is the presencing self-sense—a lived, phenomenological orientation that functions as a dynamic conduit of presence. In DPC, this self-sense is enacted through the coach’s inner presencing body as it connects their presencing self in the presencing field as a living, self-generating circulation and flow of presence. From this perspective, the accessibility and depth of fourth-person knowing emerges through an inner enactment of five dimensional, embodied level-depths of presence. To support this reframing, the article articulates five critical contributions of DPC: (1) recasting embodied participation in relation to the presencing field; (2) providing a cohesive ontological framework for field engagement; (3) integrating individual and collective dynamics through presence; (4) reconfiguring the temporal architecture of presencing to integrate past, present, emerging future, and eternal dimensions of deep time; and (5) restoring practitioner agency as a co-creative force in shaping the field. These contributions build upon the ontological foundations of Dynamic Presencing (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020–2025), which affirms the presencing field as an emergent, immanent dimension of presence. Overall, Dynamic Presencing Coaching contributes to a reframing of fourth-person knowing as an embodied generative way of presencing within coaching and the whole of daily life.

**Key words:** presencing, fourth-person perspective, ontological presencing, field-based presencing

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## I. Introduction

Scharmer and Pomeroy (2024) recently introduced "fourth-person knowing" as an extension beyond traditional first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. This emerging category establishes a new epistemological orientation by legitimating the collective interiority of social systems as a valid space of knowledge creation. This advances a trans-subjective view that integrates intersubjective and objective dimensions of knowing (Scharmer and Pomeroy, 2024). According to their formulation, fourth-person knowing is marked by five distinct phenomena: (1) it emerges as something beyond the individual while simultaneously arising through individual participation; (2) it involves a decentering of perception that uniquely integrates time, space, and sensation; (3) it fosters a heightened sense of possibility; (4) it aligns individual and collective attention, intention, and agency; and (5) it activates generative social fields (Scharmer and Pomeroy, 2024). Framed through this epistemic lens, they explore how fourth-person knowing seeks to provide new pathways for societal regeneration and helpful responses to contemporary global challenges. Their contribution builds on the framework of Theory U (TU) (Scharmer 2007-2018), expanding its horizon to include a more explicit engagement with the social field as a distinct source of collective intelligence.

Dynamic Presencing (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020–2025) offers an ontological response to the fourth-person by reframing it through a fully inhabitable and embodied approach. While Scharmer and Pomeroy position the social field as a trans-subjective source of emergent intelligence, DP reconceives the presencing field through one individual and three collective locations, situating it in ontological terrain that co-arises through the embodied integration of the practitioner's presence and presencing nature. This reorientation emphasizes the inner conditions through which the field becomes coherently accessible and dynamically participatory—transforming presencing from a mode of knowing into a dimensional way of being.

Building upon this ontological foundation, Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a-2025) introduces the presencing-self-sense as a developmental and phenomenological refinement of the practitioner's role within the presencing process. In DPC, this is enacted through the *inner presencing body*, coheres within the *presencing self*, and is attuned through the *presencing field* in both individual and collective coaching contexts. This integrated movement gives rise to what DPC introduces as the *presencing self-sense*: a lived, phenomenological way of structuring the presencing self that functions as a living conduit of presence that one accesses on a moment to moment basis. From the DPC perspective, the ontological conditions through which fourth-person knowing becomes coherently accessible and meaningfully embodied arise through the coherence of this emerging presencing self-sense. As a practical extension of DP, DPC offers a distinct coaching methodology and developmental apprenticeship that enacts its ontological commitments in applied

contexts, offering a living transmission of its deeper emerging wisdom through transformational presence-sourced, presencing-guided, field-attuned practice.

While Theory U has been instrumental in advancing the practice of presencing within organizational and systemic change contexts, its primary concern lies in catalyzing collective transformation, where presencing functions as a way of knowing that activates generative social fields. In contrast, Dynamic Presencing Coaching develops presencing as a generative way of being—both individually and collectively—through a dimensional integration of the practitioner’s inner presencing body, presencing self, and presencing field as noted above. This shift from epistemic activation to ontological inhabitation informs the differing onto-epistemological commitments underlying each respective approaches to presencing.

Notably, Scharmer and Pomeroy’s (2024) articulation of fourth-person knowing makes minimal reference to presencing as an individual state of being or practice. For Scharmer, presencing is primarily a way of knowing from the emerging future. Whereas for DPC, presencing is a depth-dimensional practice of being through which presencing knowing unfolds. From this standpoint, Dynamic Presencing Coaching offers a complementary yet distinct response. Rather than ground fourth-person knowing in the field as a separate intelligence, it identifies the conditions through which the field becomes an inhabitable dimension of presence, accessed through the attuned alignment of the coach’s presencing self-sense as conduit in the presencing field.

By naming the social field as a distinct dimension of awareness beyond first-, second-, and third-person perspectives, Scharmer and Pomeroy’s articulation of fourth-person knowing contributes significantly to the evolving landscape of presencing practice. Overall, this framing opens new pathways for understanding how generative knowing arises through collective and systemic dynamics, introducing a vital epistemological advance by positioning the social field as a source of emergent intelligence. At the same time, it invites deeper reflection on how such knowing becomes experientially accessible and coherently embodied, particularly when viewed through the lens of presencing as a developmental and ontological practice.

While Theory U provides a valuable though primarily epistemological orientation, Dynamic Presencing Coaching complements and deepens this view by introducing new ontological categories: the inner presencing body and presencing self as the generative condition through which the field becomes inhabitable. In DPC, the field arises co-emergently through the embodied integration of these inner dimensions enacted in and through presencing practice. This reframing foregrounds the dimensional coherence of DPC—where presence is sourced in the inner presencing body, integrates within the presencing self, and extends into subtle field attunement. From this view, any fourth-person way of knowing that seeks to unfold as a generative way of being necessarily involves a deep

ontological inhabitation for the field to become a tangible dimension of lived experience.

## II. Dynamic Presencing Coaching

Dynamic Presencing Coaching both affirms and critically expands upon aspects of how the presencing field<sup>1</sup> is conceptualized in Scharmer and Pomeroy's (2024) recent work. Their reference to the social field as possessing an "autonomous beingness" (p. 28) gestures toward its emergent distinctiveness and subtle intelligibility. While this language points to the generative character of the field, it leaves open important questions about how such beingness comes into form and becomes inhabitable in practice. Their formulation of fourth-person knowing positions the presencing field as a distinct epistemological source of knowledge that transcends first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. Although they outline participatory pathways, the emphasis on transcendence risks obscuring the field's accessibility as an immanent, lived, and relational experience.

As presencing-based approaches continue to evolve, new methodologies are emerging that deepen the ontological accessibility of the presencing field and expand its integration into transformational practice. Dynamic Presencing Coaching integrates the presencing field as an ontologically accessible dimension of experience in individual and collective coaching contexts. Whereas Theory U frames the field as a distinct domain of emergent knowing, DPC enfoldes the field into a dynamic interplay with the coach's presencing nature and inner presencing body to form an embodied, participatory conduit. This integration gives rise to a presenced form of knowing from a way of being that arises within the coaching field,<sup>2</sup> in which first-, second-, third-, and fourth-person perspectives become directly accessible. In DPC, the coaching field is initially catalyzed through the coach's stabilized presencing, which anchors the dimensional coherence of the session and opens the field as a coaching environment. The client then gains access to this field through their own immediacy of experience. As the client's presencing deepens over time, they may begin to participate more actively in sustaining and shaping the generative dynamics of the coaching field.

Rather than positing the presencing field as an autonomous ontological entity with its own discrete beingness or intentionality—an orientation that may support its framing as a distinct epistemic category but proves limiting in practice—Dynamic Presencing Coaching understands the field as a co-arising dimension of presence, immanently accessible through the embodied participation of both coach and client. In DPC, the coaching field emerges through their shared

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<sup>1</sup> Scharmer and Pomeroy refer to the presencing field as the social field; I use the term presencing field or field to maintain continuity with the framing of DPC.

<sup>2</sup> In DPC, the term coaching field refers to the presencing field as it becomes accessible and co-inhabited within the immediacy of the DPC coaching process. I use them interchangeably in this article depending on the theoretical or practical context.



presencing, constellating in the intersubjective space between them. While the coach's stabilized depth of presence and capacity for presencing initially activates and helps ground the field, it arises relationally with the client and becomes inhabitable through embodied integration.

While *Theory U* offers helpful participatory practices for engaging the social field, it places comparatively less emphasis on the somatic and immanent dimensions of the practitioner's presence, dimensions that DPC foregrounds as essential to the field's co-emergence. By attuning to the field in this way, DPC avoids subtly reifying or anthropomorphizing the field as a sentient transcendent entity, instead embedding it more fully within the textures of the coach and client's lived experience, where presencing knowing arises through embodied reciprocity and attuned presence.

More generally, DPC aspires to foster a seamless integration of knowing, being, and becoming within the presencing process. In this view, knowing from the field arises through the dynamic interplay of embodied first-person awareness, relational second-person attunement, and systemic third-person discernment—each offering distinct yet complementary dimension of presenced knowing. As these dimensions deepen and cohere through the presencing process, a fourth-person mode of knowing may emerge that integrates these dimensions within the coach and client's lived experience.

Whereas Scharmer and Pomeroy frame fourth-person knowing as emerging from a distinct source that transcends these core perspectives, ways of knowing and individuals within the field, DPC reorients the presencing field as an emergent dimension that integrates and deepens the field through these three perspectives from within and between each participant. Rather than a higher-order category, fourth-person knowing in DPC is understood as a participatory coherence—an integrative unfolding of depth that emerges through the embodied interplay of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. This coherence arises through the alignment of each participant's presencing body, presencing nature, and their shared presence in the coaching field.

Rather than transcending the self to access the field as a distinct or higher category of knowing, DPC invites both coach and client to attune to the field through their presencing nature. In doing so, DPC reconfigures the presencing process by rooting generative knowing in the immediacy of ontological inhabitation. What DPC contributes is a clarifying ontological shift: presencing becomes generative not by drawing upon an external field intelligence, but through the coherence of one's presencing nature, enfolded in presence. In this sense, presencing is not accessed from beyond—it is co-inhabited and co-cultivated by coach and client as a generative capacity that deepens, stabilizes, and expresses itself through a shared way of being.

From this perspective, any knowing that arises “from the field” in DPC is always mediated

through the presencing self-sense of the coach and client—through their embodied first-person awareness, second-person attunement, and third-person discernment. This marks a key divergence from Scharmer and Pomeroy’s framing of fourth-person knowing as sourced from a domain beyond or transcendent of these perspectives. In DPC, the field’s knowing does not emerge as a transcendent or independent domain. Instead, it becomes inhabitable as an emergent dimension of who we are.

### III. Integrating the Presencing Field into Lived Practice

Within Theory U, presencing is framed as a process of learning from the emerging future—a directional gesture that orients the practitioner toward sensing and actualizing what wants to arise. While this temporal framing has offered a powerful developmental metaphor, Dynamic Presencing Coaching invites a reconfiguration of how time functions within the presencing process. Rather than privileging the emerging future as the leading edge, DPC introduces a dimensional architecture in which the *emerging past*, *present*, *future*, and *the eternal* co-arise within the coaching field.

In this view, the emerging future becomes a thread within the deeper DPC process. Generativity arises from deepening into a sourced wholeness already moving *as* and *through* us. Presencing in DPC becomes a depth-dimensional way of being cultivated through the presencing self as generative conduit. Rather than orienting presencing exclusively through the emerging future, the coach indwells in the deep present as the generative locus where all modes of time—past, present, future and eternal—converge and constellate. This reorientation invites a new apprenticeship with presencing in time, one grounded in inhabiting a unified temporal wholeness that coheres through the layered depth of the present.

In DPC, the presencing field is both individually and collectively inhabitable by the coach and client. It arises through a distinct ontological pathway embedded within the coaching process. The presencing self-sense of the Coach aligns intimately with the subtle architecture of this field, revealing presencing as a participatory movement that is sourced, enacted, and deepened through attuned coaching practice. Rather than treating the field as independent and transcendent, DPC grounds it in embodied and relational immediacy. What may feel expansive or beyond the self is revealed as continuous with the coach’s and client’s own presencing. By framing the field as immanent, accessible, and dynamic, DPC offers a middle path: the generative power of the field unfolds through the coach’s capacity to sustain dimensional presence while attuning to its emergent collective intelligence. This framing preserves the field’s transformative potential while making clear that it arises through embodied participation—not as a separate or quasi-autonomous source of insight.

This re-conceptualization carries important implications for presencing practitioners. In DPC, the coaching field is catalyzed and enacted through the coach's presencing self-sense, forming the ontological ground of the session. Over time, deeper dimensions of the field may begin to constellate through the client as well, as they attune to the dimensional presence being sustained in the session. In this view, the coaching field arises first through the coach's embodiment and becomes accessible to the client through shared presence, allowing the coaching session to unfold as a space of mutual generativity grounded in ontological inhabitation.

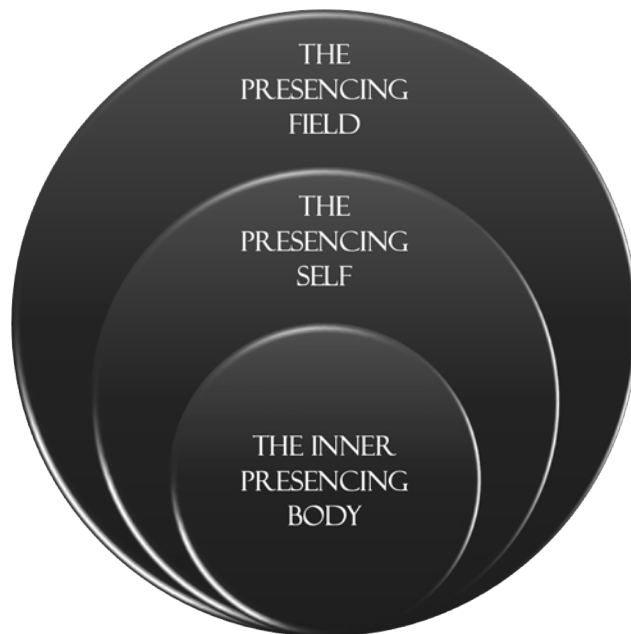


Figure 1.0: The DPC Prototype of the Presencing Self-Sense

In response to this need, Dynamic Presencing Coaching reconfigures Scharmer's fourth-person perspective by embedding the presencing field within the presencing self-sense of both coach and client. This integration forms the basis of a living conduit through which presence circulates in a self-generating movement of being. While a transcendent quality may be sensed in the coaching field, it becomes available through the coherence of this embodied presencing process. The client typically enters the coaching field with the coach through the immediacy of felt experience, where the coach's inhabitation of presence creates conditions that support the client's generative unfolding. In this view, presencing becomes an inhabitable way of being for the coach and a receptive presencing environment for the client, enabling transformational movement across personal, relational, and collective dimensions.

The DPC Prototype of the presencing self depicts three nested layers of presencing embodiment (Figure 1.0 above). At the center is the inner presencing body—the foundational

layer—where presence is anchored in the somatic immediacy of felt experience, establishing a stable seat of awareness and stillness. Surrounding this is the presencing self, the integrative layer through which embodied presence and emerging insight cohere, enabling the self to function as a dimensional conduit of presencing. Encompassing both is the presencing field, the expansive outer layer that constellates the relational and generative space shared between coach and client(s). These three layers illustrate a developmental and dimensional progression, guiding coaches to progressively attune, embody and integrate their presencing nature as indispensable to their self- and field-sense. This nested prototype supports the coach in sustaining presencing as a generative way of being while inviting the client into resonant contact with the field through the immediacy of their own lived experience.

#### IV. Critical Perspectives on the Fourth-Person Perspective

As we have been exploring, the presencing self-sense forms the ontological interface through which the coach apprentices with the field as a lived, inhabitable dimension of presence. From this vantage point, it becomes possible to engage more critically and generatively with the framing of fourth-person knowing introduced by Scharmer and Pomeroy (2024). Overall, their contribution offers a valuable epistemological lens for understanding how collective interiority becomes a locus for generative transformation, particularly through its emphasis on the social field as a source of emergent knowing. By situating the presencing field as a transcendent phenomenon arising from relational and systemic dynamics, the fourth-person perspective shifts focus from individual practice to broader currents of collective intelligence. While this opens important vistas, it also introduces conceptual and methodological challenges in DPC. The following section explores these tensions in greater depth, bringing them into dialogue with the methodological foundations of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020-25) and Dynamic Presencing Coaching (Gunnlaugson, 2024a-2024) to illuminate key points of convergence and divergence in the evolving ecosystem of presencing-based approaches.

##### IV.1 Embodiment in TU and DPC: Contrasting Approaches

A central divergence between Theory U and Dynamic Presencing Coaching lies in how each engages embodiment in relation to the presencing field. While both recognize its transformative potential, they are grounded in distinct philosophical lineages and experiential practices. In Theory U, embodiment is directed toward attunement and alignment with the presencing field, understood as a transcendent realm of intelligence arising from social and relational dynamics. Practices such as mindfulness, co-sensing, and dialogue are designed to facilitate access to this field through *letting go*

and *letting come* in order to connect with the emerging future. Here, embodiment serves as a participatory threshold to the field.

In contrast, DPC engages embodiment as an intrinsic, co-creative process through which the presencing field is enacted within the lived experience of the coach and becomes accessible to the client through the immediacy of their own experience. DPC recognizes embodiment as the interior medium through which presencing unfolds as a dimensional process of presence: sourced through the inner presencing body, cohering within the presencing self, and attuning to the presencing field in a living, self-generating circulation and flow. This integrated orientation draws together the immediacy of first-person awareness, the generative resonance of second-person engagement, the structural clarity of third-person discernment, and the field-sensitivity of fourth-person awareness. Together, these dimensions give rise to an inhabitable presencing practice that is immanent, emergent, and co-constituted within the field between coach and client(s).

This deeper integration of embodiment in DPC highlights a key limitation in Theory U's framing of the presencing field. By conceptualizing the field as a quasi-autonomous social phenomenon emerging primarily through relational interactions, TU risks sidelining or downplaying the practitioner's interiority in accessing and co-creating this space. While TU acknowledges embodiment as part of presencing, its teleological orientation toward the emerging future tends to frame embodiment as a means of access, rather than as the ontological medium through which the field unfolds. This perspective positions embodiment as a tool for connecting with the field, instead of being an intrinsic dimension of the presencing process and our presencing nature. As a result, the depth of the presencing practitioner's own embodied presence and their capacity to sustain engagement with the field remains underexplored. More critically, this orientation may subtly instrumentalize embodiment, treating it primarily as a vehicle for attunement rather than recognizing it as the inner felt region of one's presencing nature through which the presencing process emerges.

Instead of conceptualizing the presencing field as an externalized realm of intelligence to be accessed, DPC recognizes it as a living, co-creative dimension of presence that unfolds emergently through the coach and client. This perspective fosters a sustained engagement with presence, continuous in flow and integrative in orientation, where the field is internally and co-enacted. DPC practices emphasize grounding presence as a lived extension of embodied, relational, and field geographies of knowing. Supported by the coach, the client accesses the field through the immediacy of their own experience. In this view, embodiment becomes an inherent mode and function of one's way of presencing that enacts and grounds the field in our lived experience.

A key methodological distinction between TU and DPC lies in how embodiment is cultivated as a means of engaging the presencing field. In TU, the practitioner is conceptualized

primarily as a vessel for accessing wisdom and intelligence from the social field. This orientation is reflected in concepts such as the social body and Social Presencing Theater (SPT), a social art form that integrates movement, stillness, and embodied enactment to help communities sense and prototype their emerging futures (Scharmer, 2018). These practices emphasize the primacy of the social field as a construct that represents the relational, systemic, and intersubjective dimensions of awareness. TU's methodology orients embodiment toward collective attunement, framing it as a means of synchronizing with and drawing insight from the social field. This reinforces TU's broader focus on systemic transformation through shared awareness (Scharmer, 2016).

In contrast, DPC situates the coach's inner presencing body as the initial somatic interface through which individual and collective awareness is catalyzed within the coaching field. Rather than treating embodiment as a means of attuning to a transcendent social field, DPC works with the coach's presencing nature to generate a feedback loop: the more fully the coach inhabits stillness and presence within their inner presencing body, the more effectively they can engage the presencing field with and for the client. In DPC, inner, relational, and systemic attunements are enfolded expressions of a single embodied movement. By rooting presencing in the immediacy of lived experience, DPC addresses TU's tendency to prioritize a collective framing of embodiment. This reorientation helps balance and integrate the individual dimension of embodiment as a viable pathway for engaging the presencing field—particularly suited to one-on-one coaching and leadership contexts, where the coach's embodied presence serves as a generative medium for facilitating and supporting transformation.

The implications of these differing approaches to embodiment are significant. While Theory U enables practitioners to momentarily align with the generative potential of the presencing field—often through embodied practices of sensing and collective attunement—it tends to frame the field as an externalized domain to be accessed or opened to. In contrast, Dynamic Presencing Coaching reframes the presencing field as an inhabitable dimension that both coach and client engage from within. In this view, presencing in DPC shifts from a transient, state-dependent event into a sustained, embodied condition—supporting continuous generative engagement across diverse coaching and leadership contexts.

## IV.2 Ontological and Methodological Divergences

Theory U's conceptualization of the social dimensions of the presencing field creates a teleological orientation to presencing, positioning the presencing self as a future prototype shaped through interaction with the collective field. While this framing opens important pathways for understanding collective dynamics, it leaves unresolved how practitioners stabilize their engagement

with the field through the immediacy of lived presence. The fourth-person framing advanced by Scharmer and Pomeroy extends this orientation by viewing the field as a trans-subjective phenomenon co-arising through relational and systemic interaction. Yet this perspective risks abstraction, reification as well as mystification, as it tends to prioritize collective resonance over the embodied interiority, developmental as well as consciousness capacity of individual practitioners.

A key distinction within Dynamic Presencing Coaching lies in its orientation toward the presencing field as a subtle, participatory dimension rather than an autonomous source with seemingly separate intentionality. Instead, DPC understands the field as co-arising through the embodied presence of the coach and is dynamically engaged in the immediacy of the coaching encounter. This framing avoids separating the field from the practitioner's consciousness as an external collective intelligence. In DPC, the field is recognized as a relational unfolding—immanently lived and continuously constellated through the coherence of the coach's presencing nature in attunement with the client's experience. In doing so, DPC sidesteps metaphysical abstraction while preserving the felt sense of vitality, coherence, and responsiveness that arises when the presencing field is anchored in and through the immediacy of presence. Rather than functioning as an autonomous source of intelligence, the field becomes an emergent extension of the presencing process itself—alive through the embodied resonance of coach and client within the depth of their shared presence.

Theory U emphasizes the field's transcendent, collective nature, highlighting how shared awareness and relational dynamics contribute to systemic transformation. On the other hand, Dynamic Presencing Coaching orients presencing through the practitioner's interior development. This grounds the process developmentally as a realizable way of being. This distinction becomes evident through five key methodological principles that differentiate DPC from Theory U.

First, DPC asserts that knowing arises through direct, embodied engagement with the presencing field. Second, it integrates ontology and epistemology, recognizing presencing knowing as inseparable from the practitioner's state, way, and depth-location of being. Third, DPC emphasizes relational and co-creative knowing, where transformation emerges through the dynamic interweaving of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. Fourth, it adopts a pragmatic orientation, prioritizing somatic grounding to stabilize the practitioner's sustained engagement with the field. Fifth, DPC avoids abstracting the field as a separate category of knowing, instead embedding it within the immediacy of lived experience as a participatory dimension of one's presencing nature.

These methodological differences reveal deeper ontological divergences between TU and DPC. TU's framing of the presencing field as a distinct category aligns with its systems orientation,

emphasizing collective dynamics yet offering practitioners limited guidance for integrating the field within their own embodied interiority. By contrast, DPC situates the presencing field as a lived, participatory dimension—where the coach’s presence becomes the generative ground for relational engagement with the client. Practices in DPC center on aligning the coach’s inner presencing body with the unfolding coherence of the presencing field to lead and draw the client into the session. This ensures that transformation is attended to in an immediate and embodied way that opens up possibilities for integrating, sustaining, and sourcing embodiment directly in the coaching field.

DPC avoids projecting autonomous agency onto the presencing field as a way of knowing, understanding it instead as a subtle, participatory dimension that co-arises through the coach’s embodied presence rather than as a transcendent, externalized entity. Rather than conceptualizing the presencing self as a future prototype, DPC views it as a dynamic interplay of presence and becoming, cultivated through the five level-depths of presence (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, 2025). This developmental framework bridges inner depth with relational engagement, dissolving the boundary between self and field and fostering a coherence of knowing grounded in lived immediacy. By integrating individual, relational, and field dimensions, DPC reframes the presencing field as a participatory unfolding within the coach’s and client’s shared experience. In doing so, the result is a mode of presencing that serves as both a phenomenological anchor and a generative interface for transformation across personal, relational, and collective domains of coaching practice.

### IV.3 Integrating Individual and Collective Dynamics

As we have been exploring, Theory U emphasizes the autonomy and generative potential of the social field, framing it as an emergent phenomenon that practitioners engage with through alignment and relational interaction. TU conceptualizes the presencing field as possessing “its own autonomous beingness,” drawing from cosmologies and epistemologies such as Daoism and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (Scharmer and Pomeroy, 2024, p. 8). This framing is further reinforced by the metaphor of the “Circle Being,” which illustrates how the field arises through shared attention and intention yet is understood as a distinct entity with its own knowing and intentionality (Scharmer and Pomeroy, 2024, p. 12). Additionally, the experience of “something looking at me that isn’t me” is described as a core aspect of fourth-person knowing, emphasizing the presencing field’s relational, quasi-autonomous dynamics (Scharmer and Pomeroy, 2024, p. 10). These descriptions highlight how TU externalizes the presencing field as existing independently, portraying it as a transcendent phenomenon that interacts with practitioners as an intentional and source-like presence.

While this view reflects the relational and systemic dimensions of TU’s conceptualization of the social field, it risks abstracting the role of the individual, framing their engagement as one

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principally concerned with alignment rather than active embodiment and co-creation. Further, by privileging transcendent relational resonance, this collective-first orientation can overshadow the sovereignty of the presencing self and displace the embodied depth of one's immanent presencing nature. By treating the social field as possessing a quasi-autonomous presence, this framing introduces a subtle tension between embodied interiority and the relational dynamics of the field. Such a differentiation deprioritizes the developmental depth of presence, positioning transformation as something that originates in a transcendent domain rather than co-arising from within the immediacy of one's lived experience.

Dynamic Presencing Coaching resolves this imbalance by reframing the presencing field as a co-emergent phenomenon that arises through the coach's embodied presence, relational resonance, and engagement. Central to DPC's methodology is the Axis of Being Stillness, which provides a source-based framework for integrating individual and collective dimensions of presence. By working with the *Presence Point* (embodied awareness of stillness in the presencing field), *Still Point* (informing the coach's seat of presence), and *Source Point* (somatic location of one's ground of presence), the coach anchors their engagement with the field in a way that facilitates embodied coherence. This anchoring stabilizes the coach's capacity to integrate their developmental depth.

DPC's integrative approach bridges individual depth and collective resonance. By situating the presencing field within the embodied realities of both coach and client—though accessed and integrated differently—DPC establishes a continuum of engagement that spans the inner dimensions (“*I-space*”) and its relational expression in the coaching field (the “*We-space*”). Rather than treat the field as something external, this framing affirms its dynamic presence within and between the coach and client. By positioning the coach as an active catalyst and co-creator, DPC emphasizes how embodied presence informs and shapes the field, creating a generative holding environment that invites the client into their own immediate experience of presence and presencing.

Through this reframing, DPC offers a balanced and integrated presencing orientation. By restoring agency to both the coach and client, and emphasizing the co-creative nature of the presencing field, DPC counters the fourth-person tendency to abstract or separate the field from lived experience. Instead, DPC presents a perspective in which individual depth and collective dynamics mutually inform and reinforce one another. This interplay is vital in coaching and leadership practice, enabling the coach to remain fluid and responsive while engaging the client's unfolding process.

## IV.4 Rethinking the Temporal Orientation of Presencing

In the Theory U approach, presencing is framed as a teleological process, emphasizing learning from the emerging future as its defining gesture of transformation. This future-oriented focus positions the presencing self as a prototype of one's highest potential—an idealized becoming that is accessed through alignment with the collective field and future possibility. While this framing highlights emergence, it can obscure the deeper generative potential that arises within the lived depths of presence. TU often treats the present as an aperture through which the future emerges, yet this orientation may under-resource both coach and client in stabilizing their awareness within the grounded fullness and depth of embodied presence. By privileging the emergent future, the subtle wisdom capacities of the present risk being bypassed, resulting in a presencing practice that orients more toward possibility than toward a deep inhabitation of the present.

The absence of a fully integrated temporal framework in Theory U raises concerns about the sustainability of its approach. By privileging alignment with the future, TU tends to underemphasize the embodied wisdom of the present, the integrative function of the past, and the enduring insight of the eternal. This forward-leaning orientation can draw practitioners out of their current depth, bypassing the coherence that emerges from fully inhabiting lived experience. As a result, engagement with the presencing field in a future-dominant mode risks fragmentation—oscillating between efforts to dissolve past conditioning and gain fleeting glimpses of the emerging future—without anchoring transformation in the immediacy, depth, and sustaining wisdom of embodied presence.

Dynamic Presencing Coaching addresses these limitations by introducing the *Four Lenses of Deep Time*—the *Past*, *Present*, *Future*, and *Eternal that Presences*—as integral dimensions of the presencing process. These lenses expand and deepen the temporal architecture of presencing, inviting a participatory dynamic through the interplay of each time modalities. Central to this reorientation is the third presencing gesture: *letting be*, bridging the gap between TU's focus on letting go and letting come. *Letting be* creates conditions for presencing practitioners to inhabit the depth-dimensions of the present, where each mode of time co-arises.

The *Past that Presences* in DPC reclaims the past as a living temporal dimension, one that holds integrity, continuity, and significance when presenced from depth. While Theory U frames the past primarily through the lens of *downloading*, emphasizing habitual memory patterns to be suspended or released, DPC affirms the past as meaningful and sacred stratum of experience. Through the *Past that Presences* lens, the past becomes a vital source of insight and guidance that supports transformation.

The *Present that Presences* emphasizes the immediacy, depth, and generative wisdom of the

living present. While Theory U positions the present as a transitional phase—a corridor through which one passes to the emerging future—DPC elevates the deep present as the central generative dimension of the presencing process. It is here that practitioners stabilize their awareness and root their presencing nature. Through practices that attune the inner presencing body to the stillness and coherence of the now, the present becomes more than a temporal waypoint. It reveals itself as a vibrant, multidimensional field where presencing actively unfolds.

The *Future that Presences* repositions the future as a participatory and emergent dimension, discerned from within the depths of embodied presence. Rather than projecting the presencing self toward a distant or idealized potential, practitioners engage the future as a subtle arising—one that unfolds through the coherence of being and becoming. In this orientation, the future presences not from ahead, but from within. DPC reframes the seeds of the future as emerging from the deep present, ensuring that transformation remains grounded, integrative, and attuned to the living immediacy of presencing.

The *Eternal that Presences* introduces a timeless and sacred dimension to presencing, connecting practitioners to the ontological ground that holds and integrates all other temporal modalities. This lens serves as an abiding ground of interconnectedness, offering access to a depth that enfolds and harmonizes the movement of past, present, and future. Engaging the eternal allows practitioners to deepen their resonance with the presencing field through a continuity of presence that transcends linear temporality. This connection strengthens their capacity to presence each temporal lens within the encompassing rhythm of the eternal, cultivating a coherence that supports transformation across all dimensions of time.

Through the *Four Lenses of Deep Time*, DPC offers a cohesive, balanced, and generative temporal framework that opens presencing to the varied wisdom expressions of the living past, present, future, and eternal dimensions. This integrated approach addresses the limitations of TU's teleological orientation by reclaiming the deeper value of often de-prioritized temporal dimensions. DPC grounds the coach in the generative presence of the now, honors the formative presence of the past, attunes to the unfolding of the future, and aligns with the timeless coherence of the eternal. From this orientation, the client is met within the immediacy of their lived experience—without needing to conceptualize or prioritize specific dimensions of time, they are invited into a more stable and whole contact with presence. By drawing from the full spectrum of temporal experience, DPC enables the coach to engage the presencing field as a living phenomenon—one constellated through the embodied coherence of their presencing nature, and attuned responsively to the relational timing and depth of the client's unfolding.

This rethinking of the temporal orientation of presencing has profound implications for

coaching and presence-based leadership. By restoring the immediacy and stability of the present while engaging the aspirational qualities of future alignment, DPC supports coaches in presencing across the full dimensionality and wisdom of deep time. They can draw from the Past that Presences to surface formative patterns and meaning; stabilize awareness in the Present that Presences to foster clarity, connection, and coherence; discern emergent possibilities through the Future that Presences to support innovation and unfolding direction; and align with the Eternal that Presences to ground vision, values, and depth orientation. This temporal integration invites the coach and client into a presencing practice that is grounded, expansive, and guided by the full living wisdom of time.

#### IV.5 Agency and the Hermeneutics of Trust

At the heart of Theory U lies a persistent tension with the practitioner's present self, often referred to as the ordinary self (Scharmer, 2007). By framing this ordinary self as an egoic construct that must be "let go of," TU positions aspects of the individual's interior life as obstacles to be transcended. The pathway to generativity in this framing, lies in shedding those layers of the self to align with the deeper intelligence of the presencing field. This is especially evident in TU's core gestures of *letting go* and *letting come*, which prioritize releasing one's ordinary self to access a higher order field of knowing and wisdom.

While these gestures encourage openness to collective dynamics, they also risk subtly dividing the self, framing the practitioner's present reality as something to be overcome. This framing inadvertently devalues the non-egoic, personal dimensions of the practitioner's present self, suggesting that it is inadequate and limiting in comparison to the transcendent wisdom of the social field. Such a stance introduces a hermeneutics of mistrust toward the self: positioning transformation as contingent on bypassing rather than integrating, the practitioner's lived way of being. This internal split risks undermining the practitioner's own lived presence as a generative source. What is called for, then, is a reframing of agency itself. In DPC, this involves reclaiming the ordinary self as a valid and essential ground of transformation, capable of participating creatively in the unfolding of the presencing process.

Further complicating this dynamic is TU's depiction of the social field as a quasi-autonomous phenomenon, described in mystical terms as noted previously as "something looking at me that isn't me" (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2024, p. 45) or the "presence of the Circle Being" (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2024, p. 52). These characterizations imply that the field possesses a distinct sentience, distinct from the practitioner's embodied presence. While these framings may evoke a sacred or reverential resonance for some, they may also invite interpretive ambiguity, particularly for

practitioners seeking a grounded and phenomenologically coherent account of presencing. The tendency to mystify or reify the social field as a metaphysical presence risks overshadowing the immediacy of presencing as a deeply embodied and relational process.

DPC responds to this ambiguity by clarifying that the vitality sensed in high-coherence states need not point to or assume a separate being, but rather reflects the vibrancy of embodied states of experience—enacted, constellated, and sustained through embodied participation. By subtly externalizing the generative process and locating agency within the social field, TU risks positioning both coach and client as passive receptors of an external intelligence rather than as active co-creative participants. Though such framings may inspire reverence, they also—at a subtle level—undermine the coach’s embodied trust in their capacity to engage the field as a dimension of their presencing nature. This, in turn, may limit the client’s capacity to discover and unfold their own emerging presence within the coaching field.

In contrast, Dynamic Presencing Coaching adopts a hermeneutics of trust toward the self, affirming the embodied interiority of both coach and client as the foundational site of transformation. While Theory U emphasizes the need to let go of conditioned aspects of the present self to access a deeper source, DPC reorients this gesture by recognizing the present self as a vital entry point into deeper presence. Rather than conceiving the presencing field as an external source of intelligence, DPC understands it as an emergent relational phenomenon—co-enacted through embodied alignment and attuned interaction. By grounding both participants in this participatory process, DPC restores agency to each, allowing the presencing process to be shaped from within while remaining dynamically responsive to the individual, relational, and field dimensions unfolding between them.

By shifting from a potential hermeneutics of mistrust toward the present self to one of grounded trust, Dynamic Presencing Coaching affirms self-trust and individual sovereignty as essential capacities for engaging the presencing field with confidence and clarity. This reorientation recognizes the generative potential of embodied depth as a living source of transformation—bridging personal sovereignty with collective resonance. In this light, DPC fosters a co-creative dynamic in which the presencing field is experienced as an accessible and integrative phenomenon—intimately connected to the unfolding presencing of both coach and client.

This shift is crucial in both coaching and leadership contexts, where self-trust forms the foundation for relational depth and transformational impact. In reclaiming agency and sovereignty, both practitioners and clients become conduits of generative presence—modeling presencing as it unfolds within, between, and through the field. While Theory U affirms the value of self-awareness, its emphasis on letting go of the present self can, at times, inadvertently fragment self-trust by

privileging access to a transcendent field over embodied coherence. In contrast, DPC offers a presencing trajectory rooted in grounded trust—reorienting the practitioner’s relationship to the field from passive receptivity to active co-creation.

## V. The Presencing Self-Sense as the Ontological Interface of Fourth-Person Knowing

At the generative core of Dynamic Presencing Coaching is the emergence of a new presencing self-sense—a lived, phenomenological orientation through which coaches and clients interface with the presencing field as a participatory dimension of presencing. Drawing from Wilber’s (2000) notion of *self-sense* in *Integral Psychology*, where it denotes the felt center of identity at various developmental stages, DPC recontextualizes this term ontologically. In this view, the presencing self-sense is neither a developmental stage structure nor a developmental altitude, but a subtle, embodied structure that constellates as the inner presencing body and presencing self and presencing field begin to align generatively.

This self-sense gradually emerges as the coach learns to inhabit, source, and sustain presence as an ontological act. It functions as a dynamic interface—interior, relational, and field-aware—through which the presencing field is engaged as a lived dimension of being. While this orientation primarily develops through the coach’s deep apprenticeship into presencing, the client may begin to sense and stabilize elements of this. What follows explores how this presencing self-sense expands fourth-person knowing as a key dimension of an embodied way of coaching that unfolds within, between, and through the presencing field.

In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the *presencing self-sense* serves as a central embodied interface that resolves key challenges associated with fourth-person framing by integrating the presencing field as an accessible, participatory, and experientially inhabitable dimension of being. First, it grounds the field within the coach’s inner presencing body, ensuring that embodied depth sufficiently anchors the presencing process. In this orientation, the coach co-activates it through their seat of presence. In DPC, the presencing self is the conductor and the presencing field is a resonant space, enacted and sustained through the interior alignment of coach and client. Second, the presencing self-sense restores agency to the coach, positioning them with the client as an active co-creator of the field’s unfolding through relational attunement and somatic presence. Third, it offers a coherent ontological structure that unifies being and becoming, resolving fragmentation in the presencing process and enabling a seamless interplay between both the coach and client’s depth and their collective emergence in the coaching field. Fourth, it integrates the past, present, future, and eternal as active dimensions of deep time, allowing both coach and client to unfold their presencing through the full temporal spectrum rather than remaining tethered to a future-oriented trajectory. Finally, it reframes the presencing field as a lived and participatory reality, dissolving

abstraction and allowing relational dynamics to emerge naturally through stabilized, embodied presence—shared, sensed and shaped in real time by both coach and client.

Taken together, these innovations support the emergence of a presencing self-sense—a phenomenological coherence that arises through sustained alignment with the inner presencing body and presencing field. This coherence opens into a new ontological orientation: a presencing way of being that integrates fourth-person knowing alongside first-, second-, and third-person ways of knowing. In this unfolding, both coach and client no longer relate to the field as something to access (whether an object or subject), but participates in its unfolding from within, as a living dimension of their embodied presencing nature. Dynamic Presencing Coaching thus affirms fourth-person knowing as a vital dimension of an emerging, integrative presencing-based way of being.

## VI. Closing and Forward Looking Remarks

This article has offered both a critical and generative reframing of fourth-person knowing, expanding its relevance within contemporary presencing contexts. By foregrounding the embodied and participatory foundations of the presencing process, Dynamic Presencing Coaching advances a new trajectory for how presencing is understood, practiced, and lived.

At the generative core of this approach is the interplay between the inner presencing body, presencing self, and presencing field, which together form a dynamic and relational conduit for emergence. Unlike Theory U, which frames the social field as a transcendent collective intelligence, DPC reorients the presencing field as a participatory dimension that is immanently accessible within both individual and collective experience. This reorientation restores embodied presence of both coach and client as central to the unfolding of fourth-person knowing. By reconceiving the presencing field in this way, DPC resolves a core tension within TU's framing; the displacement of individual interiority. DPC affirms that presencing can stabilize and become actionable both in one's solitude, and in collective practice.

The article also introduced DPC's ontological response to TU's teleological emphasis on the emerging future. Through the integration of the Axis of Being Stillness, DPC anchors presence in the immediacy of the practitioner's embodied experience while remaining attuned to relational and field dynamics. This foundation is further expanded by DPC's Four Lenses of Deep Time, which reconfigure the temporal scope and architecture of presencing by reclaiming the past as a source of wisdom and meaning (versus downloading and memory), grounding in the richness of the living present, discerning pathways of future becoming, and opening to a timeless depth of the eternal. These temporal distinctions allow presencing to unfold across the full spectrum of time, restoring its generativity within the whole of one's life.

Another core contribution of DPC lies in how its integration of individual sovereignty with collective resonance. While Theory U often emphasizes the autonomy of the presencing field as a source of knowing, Dynamic Presencing Coaching positions the coach as a conscious co-creator of the field through their embodied coherence. Central to this integration is the emergence of the DPC's presencing self-sense, a prototype and orientation through which personal depth, relational immediacy, and field awareness cohere into a presencing way of being. From this interface, presencing becomes a generative process for accessing this space of becoming, grounded in lived immediacy and attuned to the unfolding dynamics of emergence. No longer confined to collective practice, the field emerges as a fluid, inhabitable dimension of reality that spans both individual and shared experience. Within the coaching process, this enables both coach and client to engage the coaching field as a shared space of transformation.

As a whole, Dynamic Presencing Coaching reframes fourth-person knowing as being part of a dimensional unfolding that coheres first-, second-, and third-person perspectives within the presencing self of the coach and client. While the field retains generative potential, any knowing that arises through it becomes intelligible and meaningful only through the embodied integration of first-person immediacy, second-person attunement, and third-person discernment. In this view, fourth-person knowing is more a convergence, a singular unfolding source of knowing from presence, through presence, as presence.

Looking ahead, Dynamic Presencing Coaching invites a new trajectory for presencing practice. By integrating the co-arising dynamic of the field with the immanent depth of the presencing self, DPC shifts presencing from a temporary state into a dynamically emerging way of being. In coaching contexts, this development supports both coach and client in entering a shared depth of contact with their presencing nature. What emerges is an expanded discourse and practice of fourth-person knowing, grounded in deep ontological coherence—a living source from which a new presencing way of experiencing, relating and transforming may unfold for those called to apprentice with the living wisdom of this coaching path and approach.



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[Google Scholar](#), [ResearchGate](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Amazon Author page](#), [Faculty Page](#)

# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## BEING EMBODIED IN NAVIGATING CHALLENGE:

### *A Catalyst for Presencing Leadership*

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**Abstract:** The challenges of our complex, uncertain and ambiguous world take us to the limits of conventional ways of knowing and being in leadership. We might see this as an invitation to move beyond the conventional and attune to our wider senses and field consciousness, which allows us to access presenced ways of knowing and navigating that hold generative potential. Integrating a presencing disposition in our leadership, however, is not a temporary practice to add to our toolbox; it requires an ontological apprenticeship of grounding our being in deeper realms of presence from where new answers and resources may arise. These states of presence are not accessible or sustainable without being deeply connected to our bodies and -through that- to our deeper essence and source. Based on a two-year collaborative action research process with a group of executive leaders, this article highlights the catalysing role of embodiment in navigating leadership challenge – not only to facilitate a presencing disposition on a day-to-day basis, but also to ground us in an ontological paradigm that enables a way of being and relating to reality in a generative presencing way. In particular, this article suggests two practices that facilitate our deep embodiment in this apprenticeship: The regular practice of grounding, and the practice of navigating with the felt sense of a presencing insight over time. Both micro practices, being implemented into day-to-day leadership long-term, they appear to have the potential to enable us to navigate the complex and unknown with an embodied compass, to ground us in an ontological paradigm that allows us to access resources and insights beyond the rational-analytic realm, and to tap into the generative potential inherent in our given reality.

**Key words:** Presencing, leadership, embodiment, process ontology, presencing mastery, presence

## I. Introduction

As an executive coach and presencing practitioner, I often witness leaders, including those

with presencing experience, being stuck in recurring crises as they run up against the boundaries of analytical thinking in their approach to complexity and challenge. Being the very strength that got many executives to where they are, limiting ourselves to analytical thinking tends to be a barrier to harness ways of knowing, and more importantly, ways of being, that hold more generative potential in a complex environment and that are only accessible through deep embodiment. These presenced ways of knowing connect us to a realm of insight and clarity that is not accessible through the analytic mind and offer new possibilities of leading amidst complexity and uncertainty (Scharmer, 2016; Scharmer & Kaeufer, 2013). Integrating a presencing disposition in our leadership, however, is not a temporary practice to add to our toolbox; it requires an ontological apprenticeship of grounding our being in deeper realms of presence from where new resources and ways of knowing can arise. These states of presence are not accessible or sustainable without being deeply connected to our bodies and -through that- to our deeper essence and source. Based on a two-year collaborative action research process with a group of executive leaders which was part of a more extensive research project (Sell, 2021), this article suggests two embodiment practices that seem to catalyse an ontological apprenticeship of presencing leadership.

What makes embodiment a central aspect for a presencing way of being and leading? And why is the apprenticeship of embodied presencing leadership an ontological one? Phenomenologist 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. Transpersonal psychologist Rosemarie Anderson argues that “[l]iving in a body is to live fully attuned to the sensual matrix of the world. We are situated in an animate world within and without.” (Anderson, 2001, p. 90). This attunement to the sensual matrix of the world, the hidden dynamics within and around us, links to physicist David Bohm’s ideas of an underlying wholeness and implicate order (Bohm, 1980), seeing the essence of the cosmos as pure process – a flowing movement of the whole. Within this order (which as presencing practitioners we might call the realm of source) mind and matter are not separate, the entire universe is intricately connected in a relationship. Based on this interconnectedness, systems thinker Gregory Bateson (1972) claims that nothing can be understood in isolation, everything has to be seen as part of the unified whole. This stance grounds us in the interdependent ontology of a participative paradigm (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011), which “allows us... to know that we are part of the whole rather than separated as mind over and against matter” (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 275). Within the participative ontology, our body has a central role in making contact with the realm of wholeness. Philosophers Lakoff and Johnson argue that our mind is embodied, that our “conceptual systems arise from, are shaped by, and are given meaning through living bodies” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p.

6). Hence, our body operates as a source of “human meaning- making through our visceral connection to our world” (Johnson, 2007, p. 3). Being embodied is therefore much more than having a body with its internal processes; it is a way of experiencing the world and interacting with it with all our senses. And these senses appear to be wider and more refined than our five biological senses. As Anderson argues,

*[o]ur bodies are a web, a delicate filament of senses coupled to the world. (...) There are a myriad of subtle senses, not five. (...) I need only slow down and listen and Wow! the world starts to reach out to me, bending to my knowing as I yield gently to its whispers. (Anderson, 2001, p. 98, emphasis in original)*

Accessing these senses requires us to slow down and listen – in presencing terms, letting go of our habitual mental models and redirect our attention from thinking to sensing. Then we might tap into our body’s capacity to naturally “apprehend insights and solutions that are not accessible through our thinking minds” Anderson (2001, p. 98). Incorporating presencing more deeply in our leadership therefore asks for a way of being that keeps the contact to our wider senses alive on a day-to-day basis. Harvesting the learnings of two years of action research in our leadership group, the following section introduces two embodiment practices that seem to catalyse our apprenticeship of presencing leadership and enable us to co-create with reality through a participative paradigm.

## II. Grounding: The transformative potential of a regular embodiment practice

Our habitual thinking, our downloading mental models (Scharmer, 2016), is not just an isolated mental activity, it affects our entire body system. We are particularly prone to downloading default mental models in times of pressure or challenge – ironically often precisely the time when new ways of thinking and perceiving would be needed. If we don’t pause to become present and embodied, we then tend to find ourselves in a state where all the energy is accumulated in our heads, our minds spinning with thoughts, concerns, anticipations, and strategies. We often lose contact to our lower bodies, feeling as if we were floating in the air, susceptible to whatever way the proverbial wind is blowing. This is neither a state that gives us the resources to *be with* challenge, nor one that allows for deeper knowing to arise. Having experienced the effect of embodied grounding practices on my ability to step out of habitual thinking patterns and become more deeply present, I opened each of our inquiry group meetings with a simple grounding ritual: preferably barefoot, consciously connecting our feet to the ground and feeling our physical rootedness in the earth. Once we sense the contact of our feet with the earth, we can release our body weight into that contact and breathe into the quiet holding and solidity from below. With every outbreath, any tension in mind or body can be released into the holding ground; with every inbreath fresh energy can arise from the center

of the earth through our feet into our body. Gradually we become more at ease, more present, notice more space in our mind. Our leaders experienced this micro-practice as a catalyst for arriving in the present moment, relaxing body and mind and becoming clearer and more focused on their intentions. This inspired them to experiment with individual variations of grounding in their daily lives.

Peter<sup>17</sup>, a busy strategy executive, implemented a daily grounding practice of standing barefoot on the grass of his backyard for a couple of minutes each morning, finding the freshness of the damp grass to awaken his senses in a profound way. At the dawn of one day which held a make-or-break business conversation he experienced how his awakened embodied presence through grounding allowed him to tap into a way of knowing that transformed his view on reality. Up to this moment his concerns had pulled him into an internal world of fears, hopes and plans about the critical 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, catapulted him out of his mental world and he suddenly found himself in an intimate encounter with the aesthetic power of the moment. His whole system relaxed into a realisation of being re-plugged into the real world where the mental distractions gave way to a profound sense of aliveness and unity with the world. This intimate encounter with the underlying wholeness brought forward new resources to make the upcoming conversation a generative one. And so he did, leading to a result that he hadn't even thought possible.

Just the simple act of physically connecting to the earth and opening up the senses had the potential not just to calm Peter's mind but also to gain a new perspective and way of knowing. Seeing this through the lens of dynamic presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020), the shift towards an embodied awareness (being real) enabled him to have a fresh, pre-conceptual look at reality (being witness). This openness invited an epiphanic moment of being deeply touched by the quiet beauty of here-and-now (being essence). The fresh sense of embodied reality filled him with a lively stillness (being source), which yielded resources beyond the scope of the immediate challenge. His embodied presence, together with his visceral receptivity of the aesthetics surrounding him, seems to have functioned like a catalyst for contacting the generative realm of source in a short period of time. It appears to have unlocked the ontological ground of a participative experience of reality and, through that resource, a more relaxed and confident response to challenge. As Peter reflected, "For me

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<sup>17</sup> The identity of group members has been disguised and names have been changed.

embodiment has become important because it's a new way of knowing yourself and where you are in the world. It takes me out of these unconscious beliefs around what I must do or be." To make these new ways of knowing yourself and reality a second nature in our presencing leadership, an ongoing practice attuning to our embodied senses is needed.

Dora, a CEO in the healthcare sector, had insightful experiences with an ongoing grounding practice. Whilst going through a period of significant distress and uncertainty in her life, she became aware of how disembodied she had become. "All the energy was around my headspace, and it was just all going very crazy (...) And so, every time I went back into the head and got all panicky, I stopped and brought the attention to my legs, just being aware of any sensations in my legs. And I felt a lot calmer, something had definitely shifted." Dora's experiences with her grounding practice speak to its calming effect on the mind, which is affirmed by conventional science (Chevalier, 2015) and helps us redirect our attention to bring us into a presencing disposition. In her case, the effect of grounding did not even require any active exercise; bringing her attention to the legs and observing the sensations was enough for her to tap into the benefits of grounding and reach a calmer state. Peter Levine's work on body therapy and somatic experiencing (Levine, 2012) highlights the role of somatic practices in healing trauma and restoring emotional wellbeing. But more than that, the grounding practice appears to have facilitated further outcomes.

After several weeks of increased embodied awareness, Dora discovered in herself a pattern of running away from situations of emotional discomfort. Feeling more grounded enabled her to not give in to that impulse but to stand back and reflect on what alternative responses might look like. This led to her conscious choice of staying with ambiguity and discomfort as long as a deeper knowing from inside would emerge. Being present in her body had given her the resources to dim down anxiety and embrace the unknown. "That's what's changed, this innate sense that I've got the resources." Even more than being able to stay with discomfort, Dora discovered how her continuous embodied presence in a period of challenge held unexpected potential. Without her embodied way of being, she realised, "I don't think I would be able to show up in my leadership in the way I do." Reflecting on this period of embodied apprenticeship, she realises that "If we can see discomfort as a source of creativity, then it becomes very generative."

A simple, regular grounding practice appears to assist us in several ways to incorporate presencing more deeply in our leadership: Embodiment takes us out of mental overactivity and anxiety; it enables us to stop downloading mental models and instead make contact with the deeper levels of our inner reality. In that ontological realm, not knowing ceases to be a problem but can be understood as the necessary ground to eventually presence generative realisations and insights. A regular embodiment practice appears to make us more relaxed and confident in the unknown and

moreover, bring us closer to contacting a generative reality that we can co-create with amid mundane challenges.

### III. Navigating with the embodied felt sense of primary knowing, not with the conceptualized abstraction of it.

Embodying presencing leadership isn't just a question of accessing primary knowing in a given leadership context. Making sustainable impact with this knowing in our leadership often requires us to navigate with a presencing insight as long as it will take to have the new manifest. This can be a tricky period to navigate. As our leaders became aware of, there is a potential conflict between the nature of primary knowing and the nature of conventional approaches to decision-making and action in leadership. Primary knowing comes as an all-encompassing embodied sense, an expanded awareness that connects us to reality in a fresh and intimate way and points us into a generative direction (Rosch, 1999). This knowing is not intellectual capital that can be owned and transferred, but rather an encounter with an aspect of the underlying wholeness which we can sense in its meaning, but which cannot be nailed down to a conceptual thing or actionable step. As we participate in a dynamic and evolving complex reality, action researcher Coleman says, “[o]ur knowledge of it will always be partial because we are part of the unfolding process we are seeking to understand” (2015, p. 396). This suggests that navigating with a presencing insight over time is fundamentally different to implementing or applying a piece of knowledge. And here is where embodiment comes in: If presencing is not embodied *as a way of being* and we remain loyal to the belief that robust decisions need to be backed by facts and figures, we are likely to lose contact with the power of the original insight - even though we might have had a deep encounter with that presencing insight in the first place. To keep presencing knowing alive as a guiding quality, our embodiment plays a key role.

In a collective presencing session, Andrew, a founding partner of a sustainable business, experienced an epiphanic discovery of 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 pointed to the critical “how” of navigating the current uncertainty in service of a most generative development – but not to a direct solution, tangible instruction, or outer manifestation. Three months after the presencing session, despite his deep inspiration and excitement at the time, Andrew reported how he had fallen back in the trap of his habitual analytic approach of trying to control and predict things, suffering from the pressure and frustration of being stuck. If we keep operating with the conventional rational-analytic mental models and haven't found a way to stay connected to primary knowing over time, we risk losing touch from or discounting the knowing. How can we keep a profound presencing insight alive over time, so it can keep serving as a guiding



quality, a compass in times of uncertainty and challenge?

In cycles of action and reflection, we realised that the act of keeping primary knowing alive is not a mental one; it is an embodied one. The power of primary knowing, we found, is not in our interpretation of it but in its *felt sense*, the specific nature of sensual qualities that arise from it and change our inner reality. As part of our apprenticeship in deepening our embodiment of presencing, we developed a routine of *repeatedly re-connecting to the felt sense* of the presencing insight (e.g., the sense of utter aliveness, possibility and expansion that Andrew had experienced) and taming our mental desire to pin it down to an abstract or actionable thing. The mental 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 is beyond rationality and able to grasp holistic meaning and generative potential. When Andrew started to repeatedly re-connect to the felt sense of playful, emergent exploration and to allow for unplanned co-creation with the wider system, his presencing insight became more than a one-off revelation and turned into a crucial guiding quality for his professional future.

If presencing remains a situational practice where we connect with primary knowing only momentarily and subsequently return to our habitual patterns of sense-making and acting, we are not likely to live and breathe the generative potential that a presencing disposition holds. The gift of presencing in our leadership and life appears to be less about providing us with tangible, actionable knowledge, but rather about *pointing us to some form of truth* - personal or perhaps interpersonal. Our body, more than our mind, is able to recognize this form of truth. As Lakoff & Johnson (1999, p. 6) state, “truth is mediated by embodied understanding and imagination.” Heidegger (1999) saw truth as a process of un-concealing, a progress towards something which is in sight, but never fully seen. We can experience an intimate contact with this ontological realm through our embodied senses but by nature this world is never fully graspable for our mind. As we participate in a dynamic and evolving complex reality, we have to renounce the idea of having or needing absolute knowledge of this reality to navigate life. Incorporating presencing in our way of navigating leadership choices asks us to deeply ground the experiential qualities of truth in our body, so that they become an ongoing guiding quality in our leadership and life.

#### IV. Conclusion

Presencing can be more than a practice to momentarily connect us to wider ways of knowing. It can be a generative way of being and navigating amidst complex and uncertain leadership environments. In the apprenticeship of presencing leadership as a way of being, an ongoing connection with our embodiment appears to be key, for once because it brings us into the

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necessary presencing disposition in our way of being and keeps the contact to our wider senses alive on a day-to-day basis. Moreover, an embodied apprenticeship of presencing leadership appears to ground us in experiencing reality through a participative ontological paradigm, which allows us to access resources and ways of knowing that exceed the rational-analytic realm. To facilitate this embodied apprenticeship of presencing as a way of being, integrating micro practices into our day-to-day leadership appears to make a difference. In particular, our research found a regular grounding practice to be able to help unlock a participative experience of reality and, through that, new resources and responses to challenge. Another micro practice has a key role in bringing a presencing insight to life over time – particularly relevant in a more long-term, strategic leadership context: The practice of navigating with the embodied felt sense of an insight appears to be essential, as it carries with it our connection to a more profound truth that is beyond rational-analytic grasp and that needs to be kept alive in our embodiment. As we commit ourselves to the apprenticeship of presencing leadership, we may find ourselves more and more grounded in an ontological paradigm of participating in an interconnected, source-inspired reality that offers new resources in navigating a complex, ambiguous and uncertain world. Embodying a participative paradigm enables ways of being and leading through generative co-creation that are guided by embodied truth and that hold profound levels of meaning in service of human flourishing.

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## Disclosure statement

The author confirms that there are no financial interests or benefits arising from the direct applications of her research.



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# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## HOW TO FACILITATE PRESENCING AS AN EMBODIED TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING PROCESS: *The Role of Embodied Practices in Future-Oriented Leadership in Innovation Teams*

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### Abstract:

In a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), traditional leadership and innovation strategies turn out to be insufficient. This paper explores how leaders can develop a future-driven mindset through the Theory U framework and, in particular, the process of presencing. Grounded in recent theoretical frameworks from cognitive science (4E/enactive cognition), we understand presencing as an *embodied* transformative learning process. We examine how embodied practices and social interactions foster the ability to sense and act upon emerging future potentials during presencing. Drawing from longitudinal empirical research in higher education settings, we analyze the role of leaders as facilitators for supporting individual process of presencing and, crucially, how to collectivize these experiences of individual transformations as a team in order to create sustainable innovations. Furthermore, we derive concrete embodied practices that enable individual and collective sense-making, key leadership skills, and mindsets that enable organizations to co-create a sustainable future.

**Key words:** Presencing, Theory U, transformational leadership, 4E cognition, transformative learning, innovation and knowledge creation, ontological and process ontology approaches, fourth-generation coaching/leadership

# I. Introduction

## I.1 Goals and Structure of the Paper

The goal of this paper is to develop and explore an alternative understanding and vision of what it means to be a(n innovation) leader who is *inherently future-driven* and who is practicing and engaged in Theory U and presencing to deal with a VUCA world and shape it in a purposeful manner.

Concretely, we will address the following questions: (i) What role do bodily/embodied and enacted practices as well as the physical and social environment play in the process of presencing? (ii) What are theoretical foundations for these concepts? (iii) As presencing always implies some kind of personal transformation, in which way should it be considered a transformative learning process on an individual and collective level? (iv) And, based on this understanding, what kind of leadership skills, practices, and mindsets are required to facilitate the presencing process for shaping a purposeful and thriving future?

The paper is structured as follows: The first part deals with the *theoretical* foundations necessary to develop such a vision of a future-oriented (innovation) leader. It draws on findings from recent approaches in cognitive science, such as *embodied, extended, embedded, and enactive cognition* (more generally, *4E cognition*), as well as on the theory of *transformative learning*. The second part is concerned with refocusing on key stages of the presencing process. We will reframe them in the light of the theoretical insights from part one and the empirical findings from our research in this field. On the basis of our empirical research findings, we will focus on the stages of letting go (including “creating collective sense organs”), presencing, and letting come (including crystallizing) (Scharmer, 2016). Finally, we will derive and discuss implications as well concrete embodied practices, routines, and mindsets for developing the *leadership* skills required to facilitate the above-mentioned processes.

## I.2. Presencing as a Framework for Leadership in Uncertain Times

The world we currently live in is evolving and changing rapidly on a societal, technological, and economic level, while, at the same time, facing increasingly complex (global) challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, inflation, geopolitical changes, etc. In other words, we are living in a “VUCA” world (Baran & Woznyj, 2020; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Johansen & Euchner, 2013): a world that is highly Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous. Today, VUCA has become the “new normal”. Yet, findings from cognitive science and neuroscience indicate that humans do in fact have difficulty dealing with novelty, uncertainty, or unpredictability, as is shown, for instance, by the predictive mind hypothesis (Clark, 2016; Hohwy, 2013, 2020). In general, humans have a strong

tendency to make use of problem-solving strategies based on *past experiences* to predict or shape their future. Such strategies do, however, no longer suffice when facing the dynamics of a VUCA environment, because past problems and their solutions can neither adequately capture current circumstances, nor serve as a basis for anticipating or solving future challenges (Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019).

In this context, Theory U and presencing (Scharmer, 2016) do not only provide a framework for overcoming these limitations but also for enabling individuals and organizations to cope with and navigate the complexities of a VUCA world more sovereignly. This is achieved by emphasizing the importance of shifting from habitual, past-driven patterns of thinking and acting to a deeper, more embodied process of awareness, reflection, reframing, and future-oriented co-creation and co-becoming, i.e. a transformative learning process (both within the team and in cooperation with an emerging world). For future-oriented innovation leaders, this implies that they will not only have to acquire, radically different skills and mindsets than those taught in traditional business education, but also *enact* them.

Our claim is that (i) we need to base them on alternative *theoretical foundations* (such as 4E approaches from cognitive science and transformative learning) and (ii) that we have to *(re-)focus on the key stages in the process of presencing* (Scharmer, 2016):

1. *Letting-go*: We propose to approach this phase as an entry point encouraging and enabling a process of personal transformation. By reflecting, questioning, and eventually abandoning patterns of perception, thinking, and sometimes whole worldviews, the creative agent is not only transformed, but also readied for the subsequent steps in the presencing process. We will show how this personal transformation can be achieved by confronting an individual both with the world and other team members in engaging them in observation, dialogical, and reframing settings. Ultimately, this phase aims to bring the mind into a state in which it reduces or abandons epistemic control and opens itself to an emerging future.
2. *Presencing*: Engaging with future potentials is the core of presencing; this is the moment in which true novelty emerges by reconnecting and co-becoming with an unfolding world and the Self. As Ingold (2013) suggests, we are no longer inter-acting with the world, but enter into a relationship of *correspondence* with the world (in the sense of an “*engaged epistemology*”; De Jaegher 2021). Besides radical openness, this requires the development and use of alternative skills, mindsets, and embodied practices resulting in fragile knowledge about future potentials.
3. *Letting come & crystallizing*: In this phase we face two major challenges: (i) how can we provide space for *cultivating* these fragile potentials and bringing them into the world, and (ii) how can

we *collectivize* individual insights from the phase of presencing? In this context, insights from 4E cognition and related approaches turn out to be crucial; among others, we will explore the following concepts: embodied practices and participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007), emotional engagement (Brinck & Reddy, 2020), and and prototyping as collaborative effort of creating and learning from artifacts (in the sense of “understanding by making” (Ingold, 2013)) and Material Engagement Theory (Malafouris, 2013; 2014)). They help us to not only understand innovation and transformation as socio-epistemic processes that are driven by unfolding future potentials in the environment, but also how we can shape them.

We will complement these conceptual approaches with empirical findings stemming from our long-term research on innovation and knowledge creation processes from a higher education context (e.g. Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2018; Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019).

### I.3. Challenges (and opportunities) in today’s world

In the current global situation, it has become evident that we are undergoing significant changes, crises, and transformations, such as political and climate crises, a war in Europe, the experiences of a global pandemic, crises of democratic systems, and fast-paced developments in the area of ubiquitous digital technologies and artificial intelligence, that transform our society, including the political, educational, and economic system. Almost every domain of our lives is affected; established values, mindsets, behaviors, routines, worldviews, and strategies are breaking down and are being disrupted. Consequently, we are confronted with an unprecedented increase in complexity, speed, and uncertainty and we need to learn how to deal with them to develop strategies for co-creating a sustainable future.. In VUCA environments, neither the problem space nor the solution space are usually known in advance; both are constantly changing and the classic strategy of “problem solving” no longer works, as we are mostly confronted with wicked problems and with having difficulties understanding what the actual problems are in the first place (Rittel and Webber, 1973; Camillus, 2008; Buchanan, 1992; Coyne, 2005). While these dynamics have been around ever since the world has existed, the intensity and impact on our daily lives has increased exponentially with the advent of modern (digital and cognitive) technologies. However, neither our cognitive capacities nor our educational systems have prepared us well for these challenges (see our discussion on 21st century illiteracies; Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019). Numerous authors have addressed these issues in various domains, including Miller (2015), Ehlers (2020), Harari (2018), Rifkin (2022), Schoemaker et al. (2018), Teece et al. (2016). This applies even more to the field of leadership (e.g., Laszlo, 2018; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2019; Scharmer, 2016; Schoemaker et al., 2018) so that we “both



individually and collectively can learn how to have change happen through us, not to us! But we must find out how to look, listen, and learn – to really see and hear and understand the underlying patterns of change so that we can distinguish between those dynamics that are destabilizing and those that forward the thrivable futures of protopia.“ (Laszlo, 2018, p 385).

Apart from the VUCA-properties of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, we can identify the following challenges that are relevant for the context of *organizations*, and are central for *leadership*:

- Our inability to deal with *discontinuity* in a world that is characterized by disruptions and unpredictability. As we are trained and biologically hardwired to make predictions that are based on our past experiences, we have to *acknowledge* that discontinuity means that our future is inherently uncertain and *unknowable*.
- We have to learn to see this uncertainty as an *opportunity* rather than a threat (e.g., Scharmer, 2016; Conn & McLean, 2020; Sarasvathy et al., 2003).
- If we are confronted with such a VUCA environment, we have to accept that our *learning* starts with *not knowing* (and not with the intent to test pre-existing hypotheses, to predict, or to solve known problems with existing solutions).
- We need approaches that are oriented *toward and driven by the future* and the opportunities and *potentials* it offers.

In other words, it takes leaders with radically future-oriented skills and mindsets that can be summarized by the term *futures literacies* (e.g., Miller, 2015; 2018; OECD, 2018; Poli, 2021; UNESCO, 2021; Peschl, 2022; Peschl & Fundneider, 2023). A crucial ability that is lacking in most of today's organizations and leaders is the *capacity of anticipating what does not yet exist*. Our human cognition is very good at perceiving and understanding what already exists in the world. Insights from cognitive science and neuroscience show that whenever we are dealing with future-issues, predicting the future, planning for future events or behaviors, dealing with surprise or the unexpected, etc., our cognition heavily relies on knowledge from past experiences. This dynamics is referred to as the *predictive mind* (hypothesis) which states that our brain works like a “prediction machine” by making use of past experiences to deal with (novel) states of the world; for further details see Hohwy (2013; 2020), A. Clark (2013; 2016), or Grisold & Peschl (2017a; 2017b) (for implications on the organizational level). As long as the world follows more or less “linear” dynamics, this strategy works fine for predicting the cognitive system's future (and its environment). As soon as disruptive, unexpected and exponential (VUCA) dynamics enter the scene, this strategy of relying on past experiences, does not only become ineffective, but sometimes even dangerous, as it can lull us into a sense of certainty we do not have. In order to overcome this, an organization and/or a leader has to

go beyond the realm of already existing “actuals” and develop a sense of what is “not here yet”, of what wants to emerge, or what “wants” to come into being (e.g. Bloch, 1975; Scharmer, 2016; Peschl, 2020; Poli, 2010; 2017) and not remain only in the realm of (predicting by extrapolating) already existing “actuals”.

Leaders assume a high level of responsibility for the outcomes of their organization and, even more importantly, for the humans they are guiding through today’s VUCA dynamics. In this paper, we will demonstrate that acquiring a new set of cognitive abilities, practices as well as epistemological attitudes and mindsets is essential especially in the field of leadership.

#### I.4. Theory U: Going beyond a regime of (organizational and epistemic) control for shaping a sustainable future

As we will show in this paper, we have to seek alternative styles of leadership that are more sensitive with respect to the goals, purposes, and means of changing and transforming our environment and as well as leading our organizations in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

We emphasize understanding the VUCA world as an *opportunity* rather than a menace (e.g., Laszlo, 2018; Johansen & Euchner, 2013). In this context, an approach of being responsive to an unfolding future, of learning from future potentials, as well as of co-becoming and correspondence with reality (e.g., Scharmer, 2016; Ingold, 2013; Malafouris, 2014; De Jaegher, 2021; Peschl, 2019; UNESCO, 2021) proves pivotal.

To achieve this, novel skills, attitudes, and mindsets, practices as well as alternative strategies for leadership are necessary. This is especially true for organizational contexts, as their activities and operations are frequently at the root of many of the problems mentioned above. Future-oriented leaders will have to overcome their innovation illiteracies (Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019) and have to acquire what is referred to as futures literacies (e.g., Miller, 2015; 2018; Peschl, 2022; Poli, 2021).

In this context, *Theory U*, particularly, the process of *presencing* and “*learning from the future*” (Scharmer, 2016) play a prominent role; they provide a powerful and proven conceptual framework for engaging in a truly future-oriented and thriving transformation (process) going beyond the purely cognitive domain. It has turned out that these processes, when combined with *enactive* and *bodily practices*, have a much greater impact on personal/individual and collective *transformative* processes.

Despite existing research and practical experiences related to presencing (e.g., Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2019; 2020; Peschl & Fundneider, 2013; Peschl, 2020; or the Journal of Awareness-Based Systems Change (JASC)), there remains a need for further clarification of the foundations and processes involved. “Presencing”, in particular, often remains somewhat “mysterious” as it is difficult to capture this process in words and it heavily depends on personally, bodily, and

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existentially experiencing it. We will try to shed some more light on presencing and how to design/facilitate this experience as a key capacity of future leaders in order to support them “...to let go, to lean into the unknown – and take the leap...” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p.162) and afterwards to “re-connect” with the world by engaging in a process of purposefully co-creating and co-becoming with it (UNESCO, 2021).

## II. Theoretical Foundations: Embodiment, 4E Cognition, and Embodied Transformative Learning

To enhance and perhaps reframe both our understanding as well as practices of presencing, it is necessary to take a look at some of its possibly not-so-familiar theoretical foundations and recent findings that underpin this way of conducting future-oriented transformation processes.

### II.1. Recent findings in cognitive science: Thinking with the body and thinking with the unfolding environment by enacting the world

Classic approaches to cognition, such as *cognitivism*, take a primarily *representational* perspective to cognition: the idea is that cognition “represents” or “is about” the world (in knowledge structures) and operates on these (abstract) representations (e.g., by applying rules to propositional knowledge) (Bermudez, 2020; Friedenberg & Silverman, 2016; Newell & Simon, 1976). While this perspective is closely related to a rational, logic-based, and problem-solving approach to cognition, this leads to rather classic forms of managing, leading, or transformation. This is in contrast to the Theory U framework calling for an alternative approach that accommodates and focuses more on the role of the *body* and the *interaction* with the environment in cognitive processes.

For this reason, we propose to abandon the cognitivist perspective and instead adopt the “4E approach to cognition” in cognitive science. Being a more recent development in the field, this approach suggests that cognition can be characterized as being *embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive* (more generally, “4E” cognition; e.g., Newen et al., 2018; A. Clark, 1999; 2008; Menary, 2010; Rowlands, 2010; Gallagher, 2023; Chemero, 2013; Varela et al., 2016s). Cognition always involves the body and is not limited to the functions of the brain only (“*embodied*”). This implies that our perception, thinking, and actions are not merely the product of internal (neural) cognitive processes, but rather, are influenced, shaped, enabled, and limited by the physical properties, capabilities as well as constraints of the body (Chemero, 2013; A. Clark, 1997; Shapiro, 2014).

Furthermore, every cognitive system is – through its body – always *embedded* in its environment. This environment comprises both the material world (e.g., natural objects or artifacts) and other cognitive systems (social dimension). The environment is the source for a cognitive system’s perception and the field of its actions (i.e., the cognitive system experiences and transforms

the environmental structures through its bodily (inter-)actions). However, the environment does not only play a rather passive role, as cognition itself *extends* to this environment; this means that cognitive processes themselves extend beyond the boundaries of the individual organism into the external world. "...the actual local operations that realize certain forms of human cognizing include... loops that promiscuously criss-cross the boundaries of brain, body, and world. The local mechanisms of mind... are not all in the head. Cognition leaks out into body and world... This matters because it drives home the degree to which environmental engineering is also self-engineering. In building our physical and social worlds, we build (or rather, we massively reconfigure) our minds and our capacities of thought and reason" (A. Clark, 2008, p xxviii). This view recognizes that cognitive processes often "extend" into the world through the involvement of tools, technologies, and other resources in the social and physical environment, that are essential for completing a cognitive task. In this sense, the external environment is – temporarily – part of and *constitutive* of cognitive processes.

Finally, cognitive systems do not only interact with their environments via their cognitive/neural processes and bodies; rather they actively engage with and co-create both their environments and themselves qua living organisms in a closed feedback loop. Hence, they shape their (internal and external) environment; i.e., by shaping their environment, their cognition and experiences are shaped by it (and vice versa) in being closely coupled with it. In other words, "*enactive*" means that cognitive systems actively and mutually co-shape and co-create both their environments and themselves by establishing a stable coupling and forming a joint system. The 4E approach, and in particular the enactivist perspective, takes a radically *action- and interaction-oriented* position. The purpose of cognition is to generate meaningful behavior, to act in the world and by producing "things" and (social) practices producing themselves.

Focusing on action and interaction with the world as well as including the social dimension make the 4E approach to cognition a valuable contribution both as a theoretical foundation and practical guideline for the framework of Theory U and, as we will show below, to the process of presencing in particular. Presencing calls for sensing future potentials and making sense of them, not only cognitively, but also through the use of (individual and collective) bodily practices and/or art-based approaches (Scharmer, 2016; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2019; 2020). Among many other skills, presencing requires a strong capability of *being present in the moment* and of being aware of the current situation, of *being bodily connected to the world*, of listening and being open to what exists in the world as well as to what wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2016), i.e. to *sense future potentials*. An important prerequisite for this is to engage in a profound process of learning and *personal transformation*, as it is

not only about knowledge or skills, but also concerns attitudes, mindsets and worldviews (see section on transformative learning below).

## II.2. Embodiment As Integrated Part of the 4E Approach to Cognition: Implications for Designing and Intervening in Presencing Settings

Embodiment in cognitive science—in those versions that give an interesting twist to or oppose the traditional picture of cognitivism—is the view that cognition in its broadest sense, i.e., our thoughts, affects/emotions and volitions, not just a product of our brains, but is shaped by the physical processes and states of our bodies (Gallagher, 2023). In other words, the forms, contents, or qualities of our cognitive acts such as attending, sensing, perceiving, imagining, remembering, etc., are not independent of our bodies' current structures, functions and states. Moreover, the postures, movements, facial gestures, etc., of another person's body within our perceptuion affect our own behavior and experience *directly*, i.e., without any inference (cf. "direct cognition", Gallagher, 2005).. Understanding the body as constitutive of cognition motivates new considerations on how to promote deeper explorations of our mental lives. A prominent way to use the body as a source for learning and knowledge is, for instance, via mindfulness-based bodily practices to bring awareness to subtle physical sensations (e.g., when moving one's body, adopting certain postures, being watched, touched, or held by others) and consciously engage with them (e.g., Eddy, 2016).

An example of such a mindfulness-based approach in Theory U and presencing is exemplified by the well-established Social Presencing Theater (SPT) methodology (Hayashi, 2021). The SPT is an embodied practice developed by Arawana Hayashi that uses the body and its emotional responses to reveal hidden dynamics within the social field for the purpose of fostering deeper connections and the exploration of emerging future possibilities (Hayashi, 2021). At the heart of the various practices within the SPT is a moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness of bodily sensations and experiences arising from the movement of one's body and attunement to the bodies of others (Hayashi, 2021). SPT participants thus engage in close and intimate physical encounters with themselves and others. Such practices can be interpreted as *embodied forms of transformative learning* (see, e.g., Briciu, 2024 and following chapter).

While the SPT methodology is a prototypical example of implicitly utilizing insights from embodied cognition through mindfulness, we aim to redirect attention to lesser-discussed aspects of embodiment that can play a significant role in Theory U and presencing. These aspects become particularly evident when embodiment is considered in the broader context of the 4E approach to cognition. The central insight of embodied and enactive cognition is that bodily movement through the world is not merely necessary for perception, but that an agent's *interaction* with the world plays a constitutive role in the very emergence of the world, i.e., how the world is perceived and made sense

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of (Varela et al., 2016). This sense-making of the world is not a passive reception of external stimuli, but a dynamic and bi-directional process shaped by the agent's engagement and active entanglement with its environment. As such, enactive, embedded, and extended cognition gives rise to the understanding of an agent and its environment as an interconnected, complex dynamical system (Chemero, 2009; Hutto & Myin, 2017). An agent's environment encompasses both material elements, including natural and cultural/artificial components, as well as social elements, such as other agents and their behaviors and practices.

From the perspective of creating settings for presencing, the components of the cognitive agent-environment system can be understood as design elements aiming at fostering cognitive states conducive to presencing. Moreover, facilitators can intervene in presencing settings by deliberately modifying the agent-environment relationships, whether between participants, between participants and the material environment, or between participants and facilitators, to enable and encourage desired attitudes.

The following analogy aims to make these abstract ideas more tangible: Imagine a group of people on a guided nature walk with a nonspeaking tour guide. The guide is unable to offer verbal instructions but instead relies on bodily expressions and the natural surroundings to guide the experience. For example, the guide might lead the group down a winding, secluded path to encourage reflection, or stop at a clearing to foster conversation and interaction among the participants. In a similar way, a facilitator in a presencing session may use the environment (including the participants' bodies) to shape the experience by adjusting spatial and temporal dynamics to influence participants' attitudes. By thoughtfully selecting where to stop, how much time to spend at each location, and how participants are positioned relative to one another and the environment, the facilitator can help them to engage more deeply with the present moment and with each other. A walk through a quiet forest might invite contemplation and introspection, while sitting in an open field could promote openness and shared reflection. In presencing, the facilitator intentionally shapes the environment—including their own and the participants' bodily presence—to evoke specific states of mind and foster transformation.

### II.3. Embodied Transformative Learning in Presencing

Like Briciu (2024), we propose to understand the kind of profound learning and change associated with Theory U and, particularly, presencing, as a process of *transformative learning* (TL). In contrast to other forms of learning, TL entails some kind of *personal change* or *transformation* that is often triggered by inevitable—sometimes even crisis-like—situations, which cannot be successfully overcome without reshaping one's sense of self (Illeris, 2018, p. 7). TL results in significant and often irreversible changes in how an individual experiences, understands, and interacts with the

world (Hoggan, 2016). In other words, a person's felt experience, worldview, and actions change in tightly integrated ways at the same point in time.

Our main interest is to understand TL as an essential learning process involved in presencing. The original theory of TL (Mezirow, 1978; 1991; 2000; 2006; 2009) highlights the importance of critically reflecting on our existing “meaning perspectives” or “frames of reference”. These internal frames are the lenses through which we interpret ourselves and the world, shaped over time by our background, experiences, beliefs, and emotions (e.g., Mezirow, 2000). The original theory posits that transformation is triggered when a challenging experience compels us to examine and revise these often-unconscious assumptions and biases. The aim, in this view, is to move towards meaning perspectives that are considered more rational and appropriate with respect to the new situation, primarily through critical self-reflection and reasoned discourse. This traditional approach largely focuses on rational and discursive processes involved in restructuring our understanding.

However, drawing upon the 4E framework, a more complex understanding of TL emerges. The 4E perspective suggests that transformation is not primarily a rational or intellectual endeavor. Instead, as argued by Maiese (2017), transformative learning is deeply embedded in our *habituated bodily-affective patterns*. In this view, cognition is seen as fully embodied and deeply entangled with our feelings and emotions. Our physical and emotional states are not separate from our thinking, but an integral part of it; they are grounding, and partially even constituting, our reflection and reasoning (Maiese, 2017). In other words, TL is essentially embodied. Moreover, building on the understanding of embodiment as a constitutive element of cognition within the 4E framework, the physical and social environment is constitutive of TL as well. TL emerges from concrete bodily interactions between agents and their environment.

The 4E understanding of TL as an essential learning process involved in presencing has immediate practical consequences. By highlighting the bodily and environmental entanglement of TL within a dynamical agent-environment system, new means of facilitating the learning process—and thus presencing—can be applied, adapted, or developed. In line with Briciu (2024), we consider the liminal experience in *presencing as an embodied transformative learning* process. However, within the 4E approach to cognition, the *environment serves as an equal partner to the body in constituting learning*. The intertwined bodily and environmental aspects of TL require special attention and skills from future-driven leaders to prepare and conduct successful presencing sessions.

### III. Empirical Insights and Implications for Future-Driven Leadership

“The essence of leadership is about connecting, stepping into, and acting from the field of the future that wants to emerge. The question is, how do we do it?” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p.114)

To effectively steer organizations towards sustainable and thriving success in a VUCA world, leaders have to go beyond classic leadership skills and mindsets, such as decision-making, goal-setting and monitoring, controlling, or strategic planning. They have to embrace approaches that empower them to tap into the transformative potential of the future. Theory U provides a highly effective framework for achieving such a form of transformation that is driven by the future. It implies both a personal transformation and profound changes on the organizational level, as well as in the context of leadership.

In order to illustrate the theoretical concepts having been discussed above, we will first present empirical insights from a longitudinal study of innovation and knowledge creation processes in which the Theory U framework was applied; although these processes took place in a higher education setting, we will show that the role and interventions of the instructors can be translated to the context of leadership. In a second step, we will derive implications for future-driven leadership and discuss concrete practices, routines, and mindsets in the final section.

#### III.1. Research Setting and Methodology

Our data stems from a longitudinal research project that began in 2014. In a mixed methods research setting that applies action research methods, we investigate innovation and knowledge creation processes in a higher education setting (for details on the research setting, see e.g. Peschl, Bottaro, Hartner-Tiefenthaler, et al. 2014; Peschl, Bottaro, Roetzer, et al., 2014, Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2018). In the observed university courses, students work in groups of 3 to 8 people who go through an innovation process that is based on Theory U and results in the creation of a prototype. We refer to these groups as “Knowledge Creation Teams” (KCTs). With the exception of presencing, where participants work individually, they go through the entire process as a KCT.

The collected data comprises qualitative instructor observations, group interviews with the KCTs, individual diary entries from both students and instructors, as well as quantitative survey questions, expert ratings of the prototypes by the instructors, and socio-demographic data. The diary entries, which we refer to as “learning journals”, contain subjective reflections and reports on the course. They are collected at seven points in time per course. The current article is based on the analyses of qualitative data collected in the winter terms of 2014/15, 2015/16, 2018/19, and



We employ a constructivist grounded theory methodology for both data collection and analysis. Through a systematic, multi-step coding and diagramming/mapping process of data, the theory is built; it is thereby “grounded” in the data. The inductively developed codes and concepts are critically “tested” through continuous data analysis of (newly) collected and coded data, that is compared to each other on different levels of abstraction (‘constant comparative method’, cf. Glaser, 1978; Charmaz, 2006; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014 ).

This process comprises three (iterative) phases: (i) initial, (ii) focussed, and (iii) theoretical coding (for details, see Charmaz, 2006). In the first two phases, the “building blocks” of the theory are built through inductive coding. Previous publications have reported on findings from focussed coding: the phenomenon of emergent collective knowledge creation and the collectivisation of presencing experiences (Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019), the role of uncertainty (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2018) and enabling attitudes (Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019; Bottaro et al., 2021) in and for innovation projects, how to facilitate innovation in online teaching/learning (Bottaro et al., 2021), as well as the importance of collective prototyping as learning and understanding by making ( Peschl, Roetzer, et al., 2019; Bottaro et al., 2021).

In the third coding phase (theoretical coding), theoretical codes are created to integrate the results from focussed coding into a coherent theory. The result of this process of theoretical coding is reported in the present paper.

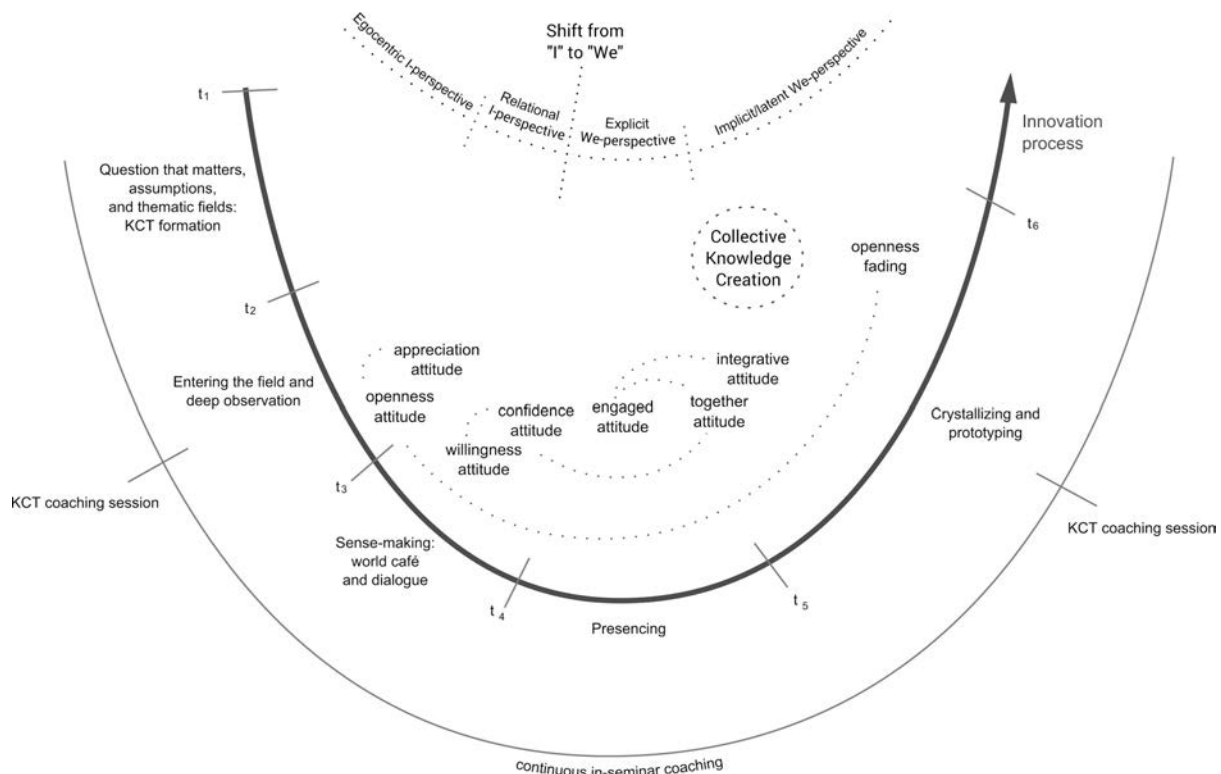


Figure 1: Visualization of results from previous work (Peschl, Roetzer, et al. 2019) on the shift from I-to-We and enabling/beneficial attitudes and their occurrence in relation to collective knowledge creation

Our previous work was focused on exploring and investigating the teams' processes of knowledge creation through the phases of Theory U from the participants perspective (see Figure 1). For the present paper, we “interrogated” our data anew to further our understanding of the *role of instructors and the environment*. I.e., we focused on the perspective of the instructors in their *leadership role* as facilitators and coaches of the innovation teams. We then systematically contrasted our findings with current theories on cognition (4E), innovation, and leadership through theoretical coding (using ATLAS.ti, v.22 and v.23). Additionally, we complemented the constructivist grounded theory approach – which is particularly suited to analyze (social) processes and interaction (Charmaz, 2006) – with Situational Analysis (SA, Clarke et al., 2018; Clarke et al., 2015). In SA, relational and positional mappings and diagramming allows to flesh out relations on a situational basis. In particular, we focussed on the relations and embodied interactions between humans and the environment, including non-human elements in it. SA assumes that human and non-human entities, including their interactions and engagements, co-constitute each other (see our theoretical discussion on 4E approaches in cognitive science above). Pertinent non-human elements structurally condition the interactions in a given situation through their specific (material) properties and

through engagements with them (Clarke et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2018; Roetzer, 2022). This allowed us to better grasp the individual phases of letting go, presencing, and letting come with regard to the non-human (environmental) elements and their role.

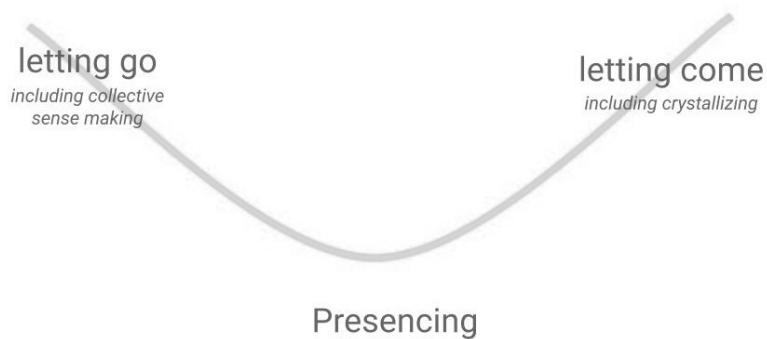


Figure 2: The bottom of the U: letting go (including collective sense making), Presencing, and letting come (including crystallizing)

### III.2. Empirical Findings and Discussion

In general, throughout the process of Theory U, we have to consider two intertwined dimensions along which (novel) knowledge is created: the *epistemological* dimension and the *social* dimension. Our findings indicate that instructors in their role as leaders have to be aware and focus their interventions on both dimensions simultaneously when facilitating embodied practices, especially at the bottom of the U.

However, there are some situations that require increased attention, interventions, and coaching. The first one is related to the *epistemological* dimension of the innovation process, particularly before and during presencing. Here, the instructors need to act as *role-models* and coach students with regard to beneficial attitudes and mindsets. If KCTs or their members have not yet adopted an attitude of openness and a *willingness to accept a decrease in epistemic control*, they appear to be less likely to have positive experiences and insights during presencing, to integrate their individual presencing experiences only partially (or not at all) at the group level, and generally to have difficulty in the crystallizing phase, resulting in low to average levels of innovativeness with respect to their final prototype. This is related to the second situation, in which instructor intervention is needed; it concerns the *social* dimension: groups that have not yet resolved conflicts or tensions on the level of group dynamics, also seem to struggle with uncertainty on the epistemological level. However, it appears that resolving their issues on the social level enables and accelerates resolving epistemological issues within their group. Therefore, instructors must pay more attention to the

group dynamics of a KCT.

Groups that establish a degree of certainty with regard to the social level before presencing, do manage to fully (or for the most part) integrate individual presencing experiences. This involves rapidly repeating shifts from individual reflection and thinking to collective reflection and idea-development, in which all members build upon each other's experiences, thoughts, and ideas. This, in turn, may lead to the emergence of collectively created novel knowledge. KCTs that have such an experience also tend to create highly innovative prototypes. The biggest challenge with all KCTs, regardless of how innovative the final prototype they create, seems to be the letting go and crystallizing phase. As we will show, the root of students' struggle seems to be the challenge of transitioning from collective knowledge creation to individual knowledge creation and back again—in the phases before, and during, but especially after the presencing phase at the bottom of the U process. (see Figure 2)

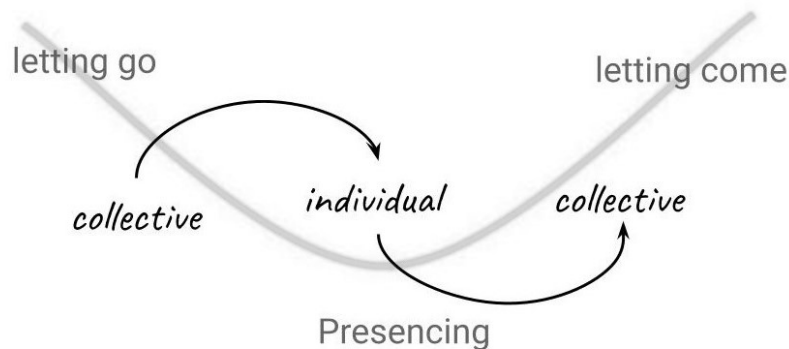


Figure 3: Shift from collective knowledge creation to individual knowledge creation and back before, during and after presencing

Figure 3 shows the shifts in cognizing modes around the presencing experience. Within the entire Theory U process, the phase that necessarily has to be carried out individually is the presencing phase. In contrast, the phases before and after presencing are characterized by collectivizing knowledge and experiences. Before presencing, establishing collective sense organs is crucial. After presencing, the challenge is to merge and consolidate the individual presencing experiences into collective crystallizing. This results in a shift from collective to individual and back to collective modes of cognition. As our research shows, these changes between different modes of cognizing are challenging both on the individual and the group level. Such shifts in cognition afford particular action regarding leader's roles and interventions.

As instructors, we support these processes through embodied and enactive interventions in various ways. For example, we act as *role models* (cf. Peschl et al. 2014; Peschl et al., 2018), showing things in such a way that the students can imitate them. This does not only concern processes, such as leading the way or exemplifying by making, but it is also about culture. For example, we openly address mistakes we make, inviting our colleagues to address them too and establishing a culture of mutual respect and understanding. Another way to encourage desired attitudes and behaviors is to *use our bodies to communicate non-verbally*. For instance, we modify our status/role through our body position: we stand up, when we give instructions, we lower our body when building trust. We also *use the environment and time* as design elements by carefully choosing where and when (and how long) we plan certain activities. And, we encourage participants to *enact their knowledge in embodied practices*. We, for example, facilitate that they express their ideas and insights non-verbally and materialized through sketching, mood-boarding, or materially building something (prototyping).

### III.2.1. Letting Go

In our course design, at the end of the observation phase and the day before presencing we enable the creation of *collective sense organs* with the world café method (Brown and Isaacs, 2005), followed by a dialogue session in the plenum using the dialogue technique (Bohm, 1996) in order to (i) establish a general mode of talking/listening/sensing akin to dialogue, and (ii) enable a feeling of belonging on a level, or as Scharmer calls it a "moment of transcending connection" (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p.162). Both methods are carried out on site and in person in a workshop setting. During the world café, students share their so far experience with other colleagues from other KCTs by sitting together in mixed groups and not only talking about it, but also writing and sketching their insights on flipcharts. The groups get mixed again and again, until a joint understanding emerges within the whole group/plenum, which we refer to as collective sense organs, as participants talk about their insights from the observation phase, but also about their feelings.

In the dialogue sessions, the feeling of belonging increases. In a circle of chairs, the whole group/plenum shares their feelings and thoughts about the process with the instructors, who are now joining the group on the same level (sitting, as equal participants in the circle), using a talking object, to reduce the speed of communication and make sure, everybody can talk as long as they need to. Our research indicates that this special form of connection leads to high levels of *trust* and *safety* within the teams but also within the whole group and towards the facilitators. Emphasizing this connection helps individuals to reduce anxiety and to let go of the need for control; these are important prerequisites for presencing. As instructors, we try to establish a *safe space* or "holding the space", as Scharmer & Kaufer (2013) describe it, in order to initiate and enable the letting-go phase

(cf. Bottaro et al., 2021).

Letting-go is an important prerequisite for the presencing experience (Scharmer, 2016). By reflecting, questioning, and eventually abandoning patterns of perception, thinking, and sometimes whole worldviews, the creative agent is readied for the subsequent steps in the presencing process, where ideally *transformative learning* can happen. In this context, this happens by confronting an individual both with the world and other team members in engaging them in connecting and dialogical settings. Ultimately, this phase aims at bringing the mind in a state of *openness* to an emerging future.

As our data shows, participants hesitate to expose themselves to such reframing and transformation experiences. Establishing a connection within their team and/or the whole group helps them to overcome their resistance. In this phase, the role of instructors is to facilitate establishing these connections and to form a safe space for the whole team to become open, permeable, and vulnerable. The goal is to encourage them “... to not hold on to the old, [but] to let go and lean into what wants to emerge through us.” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013, p.163)

To best foster this phase in our role as facilitators and leaders, we use *servant leadership methods* and approaches (e.g., Iqbal et al., 2023). In our course settings, instructors try to help students lower anxiety and give up control. One effective way to achieve this is by “lowering our status” (Bottaro et al., 2021). Facilitators flatten the hierarchy intentionally in an embodied manner. For instance, by positioning their body on a lower level than the students’, e.g. they are sitting or kneeling on the floor, they have to look up to the students sitting on chairs. Or they encourage participants to stand up or even sit on desks or stand on chairs. On a social and linguistic level, instructors avoid commands or harsh communication. They rather make suggestions, foster a friendly and light atmosphere and encourage and motivate students, as this increases the level of creative self efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Furthermore, instructors act as *role models*. They exhibit low status behavior within the instructors’ team and in front of the students, by openly criticizing each other, interrupting the others, and interacting in a playful and humorous manner.

As studies show, servant leadership style is strongly related to “subordinates’ innovative behavior” (Iqbal et al., 2023, p.45). Servant leadership is related to the social context, helping to establish a trustworthy environment and safe space (Chughtai, 2016) and results in encouragement, fostering creative self-efficacy (Iqbal et al., 2023).

### III.2.2. Presencing and Sensing Emerging Potentials

At the very bottom of the U, the presencing phase is the most promising phase for transformative learning, but also the most challenging phase for individuals. Engaging with future

potentials is the core of presencing; this is the moment in which true novelty may emerge by reconnecting and co-becoming with an unfolding world (on an individual level). As Ingold (2013) suggests, we are no longer inter-acting with the world, but rather enter into a relationship of *correspondence* with the world (in the sense of an “engaged epistemology”; De Jaegher, 2021). Besides radical openness, this requires the development and use of alternative skills and mindsets resulting in fragile knowledge about future potentials.

To help participants to acquire and explore these alternative skills and to engage in this unfamiliar experience of presencing, we integrate a transformational leadership style within our course design. Studies show that transformational leadership has not such a strong influence on innovative behavior as servant leadership, but it inspires and enhances intrinsic motivation (Iqbal et al., 2023). Thus, while servant leadership focuses on empowering and encouraging as well as creating a safe space, transformational leadership is correlated with feelings of excitement and optimism, exploring novelty and experimenting with new ideas (Carmeli et al., 2014; Groselj et al., 2021).

Presencing is the moment where participants experience a shift from collective to individual (see Figure 2). They have to not only let go of their already existing ideas, concepts, or visions (letting-go). To support this process, we use embodied and enacted practices, such as asking participants to write down their previous thoughts and ideas and then having them crumple up the sheets and throw them away and, by that, letting go of them also in a physical manner.

They also have to leave the comfort and “safe space” of the group, as presencing is an *individual* experience. Our data shows that students hesitate to do so. They often start the presencing phase by walking together as a group or in pairs and only separate later on. The facilitators support this process by walking with them, often leading the way, and acting as role models by also separating and walking alone.

In order to embark on this potentially transformative journey, individuals require guidance and inspiration from their instructors, along with explicit encouragement and the assurance of assistance in making sense of their experiences upon their return. Here the *environment* plays a crucial role in the design. In order to really let go, to change perspective and find into this mode of “*listening to what wants to emerge from the future*” (Scharmer, 2016), it is imperative to design the presencing phase as an *outdoor excursion* in a natural environment (woods or natural landscapes). The goal is to disconnect from routines and everyday life as well as from technologies, engage with the inner self (Scharmer, 2016; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), and bring the body, bodily sensations and observation of nature in the center of attention. Such a setting radically reduces distraction and the possibilities to “cheat”, enabling a profound confrontation with oneself. We choose locations so that they can’t, for example, run off to a café. As we have discussed above, this is an ideal framework to enable

processes of transformative learning. As for embodied practices, participants are guided in engaging in various forms of sitting, walking, lying on the ground, or how to deal with silence and distractions by breathing exercises during the phase of experiencing emerging future potentials.

In addition, the instructors provide inputs on the theoretical background of presencing, meditation and mindfulness and actively shape the mood and mindset for this phase through motivational speech. Still, our data shows different levels of reluctance regarding this experience. Theory also suggests that there can be defense against too much transformative learning (Illeris 2014).

This implies that leadership has to support two dynamics. On the one hand, leaders have to be inspiring and activate individuals to get the necessary energy and courage to actually go out, go into nature, and leave the group to engage in an individual experience in this phase. On the other hand, leaders must not push too hard on the goal of transformation. They have to *reduce the pressure* that something spectacular can or should happen in this phase. Only then participants can manage this inner state of “energetic relaxation” that is a prerequisite *for sensing future potentials*.

### III.2.3. Letting Come and Crystallizing

In the phase of letting-come and crystallizing, we face three major challenges: (i) how can we provide space for *cultivating* the fragile potentials having emerged during the process of presencing and (ii) how can we collectivize individual insights from the phase of presencing in order to (iii) bring them into the world? In this context, insights from 4E cognition and related approaches turn out to be crucial; among others, we use the following concepts: participatory sense-making (De Jaegher & Di Paolo, 2007), embodied practices, emotional engagement (Brinck & Reddy, 2020), as well as “making” (Ingold, 2013) and Material Engagement Theory (Malafouris, 2013, 2014) in the form of prototyping as collaborative effort of creating and learning from artifacts. These concepts help us to not only understand innovation and transformation as socio-epistemic processes that are driven by unfolding future potentials in the environment, but also explicitly focus on the *material* and *bodily* dimension of how we can shape innovation artifacts by bodily interacting and transforming the environment.

As our data shows, this phase is the most challenging for the students. Coming back from their individual presencing experiences, many face enormous difficulties to re-connect as a team and to collectivize their individual insights and experiences. The shift back from individual to collective knowledge creation (see Figure 2) is accompanied by feelings of tension and fear. Participants are anxious about telling others what they experienced, what they (really) feel and think. Furthermore, they sometimes cannot even talk about their experience properly, as the insights and emerging ideas are vague, non-verbal, intuitive, and fragile. We address this by design *using the environment and time*.



As the presencing experience is a whole day excursion, participants are often hungry when they return and intuitively sit together in their groups to share a meal (and are encouraged to do so). This helps lowering tensions between the group members and smoothening the transition from individual experience to collective cognizing again by sharing their experiences in an informal setting.

In order to deal with these challenges, instructors encourage the KCTs to switch from abstract and language-based communication to concrete, embodied and enacted cognition (see our discussion about 4E cognition above). This means *doing instead of talking*, co-creating and learning from extending and enacting their knowledge in the form of physical and/or conceptual artifacts. Often, participants bring back items they collected during the presencing in nature. Oftentimes, these items work as starting points for sharing their insights with their group. These objects act as *boundary objects* enabling joint sense-making by bodily engaging with them (e.g., Caccamo, Pittino, and Tell, 2022).

Instructors propose different prototyping methods (e.g., Yu, Pasinelli, and Brem, 2018; BenMahmoud-Jouini and Midler, 2020), like moodboarding, storyboarding, or method collections like Ideo method cards (ideo.com). Still, students fear the judgment and misinterpretation and therefore need further encouragement to externalize their emergent future potentials. Instructors, therefore, have to provide the KCTs with a lot of coaching time and patience, sometimes just sitting with them for 30 or more minutes and just listening to them, subtly ensuring that dialogue formats and deep listening practices are re-established within the group communication. In this phase, we engage in embodied activities, such as wandering around between the groups all the time, subtly offering coaching by passing by and/or asking non-verbally for permission to approach the groups. Participants sometimes ignore us or use signs or nodding/head shaking to communicate their needs.

From a leadership perspective, *kindness* (Haskins et al., 2018) and *compassion* (Hill & Stephens, 2003) play a major role in this phase, as participants have to deal with confusion, frustration, and even tendencies to resign when the presencing phase has not gone well and/or the shift from individual back to collective knowledge creation does not work out well. As we will show, although the focus in this phase is on “doing, doing, doing” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), group dynamics and conflicts may play a major role in this phase, especially within the groups that have negated their conflicts so far. Here at the latest, unsolved issues on a social level cannot be ignored any longer.

### III.2.4. Social Dimension: The Importance of “Holding the Space” in an Uncertain Environment

From an instructor’s perspective, the innovation process follows the U in a fairly linear manner. Our course design is set up in this linear way, as depicted in Figure 1. Instructors in our

course continuously highlight the phases of the U Process and clearly differentiate between them. However, this differentiation is *not reflected* in the participants' learning journals. Students do not report experiencing phases of letting-go, presencing, and letting-come/crystallizing as a linear process or even as distinct phases. Instead, they report rapid changes between the phases and iterating back and forth between letting-go and letting-come when collectivizing their individual presencing experiences in the group (see Figure 3). Actually, they only differentiate between group experiences and individual experiences. This is accompanied by a resistance toward these transitions (from one experience to the other) that they are “forced” to follow by the course design and instructors.

Our data suggests that, from a participant's perspective, the only thing that remains stable throughout the process are the instructors. *In their role as leaders, they act as a constant*, as point of reference in an innovation/transformation process that is experienced as ambiguous, uncertain, and ambivalent.

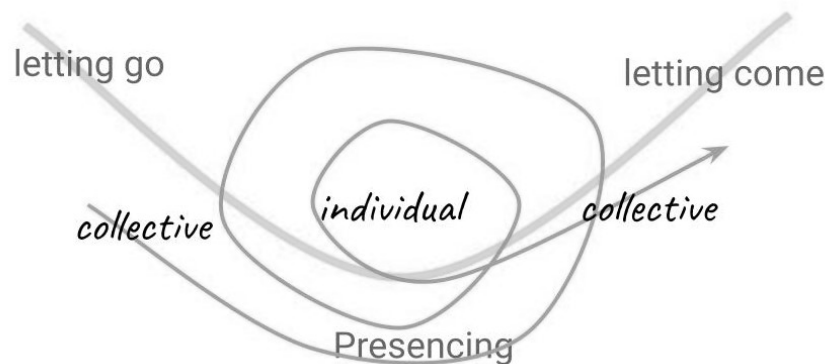


Figure 4: Students experience the “linear process” of Theory U as an iterative shifting back and forth between the phases.

Previous research (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2018, Peschl et al., 2019, Bottaro et al. 2021) indicated that instructors should act as coaches/facilitators, and that they must not involve themselves on the content-level of the KCT's innovation projects. Rather, they should only coach KCT's by facilitating the process, thereby providing security and a clear framework or “path” towards the innovation/prototype. Of course, the KCT's do tell the instructors about the content of their ideas, but the coaching regarding the content of the KCT's' work is done with a mindset of *open mind*, coming from a *deep place of listening* and without *voice of judgment* (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2016). Instructors coach participants by asking questions to help the KCT's better understand and reflect upon their project and its premises on the content-level. They guide students

to externalize their individual thoughts in order to share and reflect them with the group, and provide them with adequate methods, tools, and techniques as well as spatial and bodily settings suited to the phases of the U process (like dialogue, mindfulness, design techniques, an atelier-like environment, providing materials for engaging in prototyping material artifacts and models, embodied practices of making, etc.). Instructors are encouraged not to force their own ideas onto the KCTs, but rather, to ask (open) why-questions. They do all this in a constructive and curious manner, and without judging the KCTs' outcomes.

In the courses we analyzed, instructors were explicit and open in addressing conflicts from very early on, framing group conflicts as normal and even as necessary within every teamwork. In fact, instructors even openly disagree about e.g. interventions during coaching and discuss it on the spot (*acting as role models*), which appears to have a positive impact on students. Rather than creating an uncertain or unsafe atmosphere due to not disagreeing, students experience this as relaxing and welcoming, because it suggests to them that they too can and are allowed to disagree and will be able to sort it out. Furthermore, inputs regarding group dynamics are given in an early stage of the process, and participants are trained in non-aggressive communication and how to manage conflicts. Moreover, the teams are coached on group dynamics before, and even more after, presencing.

As we have seen, the bottom of the U is marked by a high level of uncertainty. Letting go of the old and stepping into an emergent field of potentialities is per se extremely uncertain and vague. Still, as is shown in research, uncertainty can also act as a driving force for innovation (e.g., Laszlo, 2018; Sarasvathy et al., 2003). In our own research we could show that there are two dimensions of uncertainty: (i) uncertainty regarding the *process* itself and the interactions with others (relational uncertainty) and (ii) uncertainty regarding the *content* level of the process (epistemological uncertainty) (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al., 2018). We found out that instructors have to set out a clear process framework and continuously intervene on this framework level (i.e., to coach on the process level, and not on the content-level), in order to create an uncertain, but safe space for students to innovate (Hartner-Tiefenthaler et al. 2018, Bottaro et al., 2021). Our most recent analysis suggests that there is a third kind of coaching that is even more crucial: *coaching regarding relational uncertainty on the social/group* dynamic level. Having now analyzed the role of instructors in more detail, we discovered that instructors do have a strong impact regarding the social level of the U process.

As Figure 4 shows, students do not experience the U process as linear, but iteratively jump back and forth within the U. The only difference between the phases they can perceive is the change from collective to individual and back to collective forms of knowledge creation, as well as a difference in speed or pacing with regard to (collective) knowledge creation. As shown above, students need assistance in overcoming their resistances with regard to these changes. Along with

these changes, the probability of conflicts within the teams rises. Especially *after* presencing, KCTs have to deal with a high level of epistemic uncertainty. They have to re-organise and re-integrate everyone's insights and sometimes have to deal with the frustration of not having experienced anything special at all. When participants have to share these very intimate individual experiences within the team, KCTs often do not need assistance with content, but rather on the level of group dynamics.

Our data shows that, if groups overcome their conflicts on a social level before presencing, they experience the individual presencing experience as a bit of a loss (due to having to “leave behind” the group), but they have *confidence* in their group and *trust* that they will manage to reintegrate their experiences and ideas after presencing. Interaction with the environment (making use of tools, externalization, etc.; see our discussion on the extended approach to cognition in which parts of our thinking and cognitive workload is “outsourced” to the environment) seem to further accelerate and support their process.

Groups that cannot resolve (entirely) their conflicts before presencing, require a lot of coaching and support from facilitators on a social/groups dynamics level. This is because the individual presencing and the associated increase in epistemological uncertainty divides the team further. For these groups, crystallizing is a neutral or even negative experience, they don't feel like they can openly share their ideas or experiences, they are concerned that others might judge them, or find their ideas silly. They often reach an *impasse* in the letting-come and crystallizing phase; their engagement for the whole process starts declining, leaving the process of idea-development and knowledge creation, as well as decisions, to a single or only few group members. In order to address this and the “drifting apart” on a content-level, the *social level needs to be addressed first*. These groups experience the social dimension of their teamwork as uncertain, unsupportive, closed off, and stressful. Facilitators then tend to involve themselves more on a practical level—making suggestions about how to organize group work, providing structures, and even make decisions for them; but only on a process and organizational level. Students in these groups often do not appreciate instructor interventions, or do not agree on whether to follow the instructions or not. Their individuals do not want to give up control and cannot let go of their ego.

Still, instructor's interventions and coaching do provide them with a chance for personal transformation. They need concrete assistance for what Scharmer refers to as a “holding the space” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2016). Instructors are involved more emotionally with these groups. They themselves get more touched by not only opening their mind, but also their heart and their will (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013), in order to appreciate and support the group members within

their struggle. Paradoxically, those groups who fight most against the transformative experiences, provide the highest chance for transformative learning for the facilitators themselves.

#### IV. Implications: Guiding Principles for Embodied Presencing Practices

Humanity is entering a new historical phase, requiring responses to the challenges of a VUCA world that emphasize collaboration and co-becoming rather than competition (Ingold, 2013). Rather than predicting the future based on the past, we must focus on sensing and co-creating emerging future potentials. Achieving this necessitates disruptive and radical innovation through profound transformation at individual, organizational, societal, and planetary levels (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013; Scharmer, 2016). To reach these goals, we need leaders who do *not primarily strive for control*, but leaders who *engage and enable sensing and unfolding of future potentials*.

##### IV.1. Developing a Sense for Future Potentials

As we have seen, presencing is not only a highly fragile process, but also a challenging one (both epistemologically/cognitively and socially), as it is primarily about identifying and engaging with *future potentials* (something for which we are not trained in most cases). This is especially true in the field of leadership where we are confronted with this challenge in a twofold manner: first, it concerns sensing future potentials with regard to the development of the organizational dynamics and the employees for whom leaders are responsible. Second, it is about sensing future potentials in the context of future-oriented innovation processes directed towards the outside of the organization (e.g., products, services, etc.).

What does it mean to develop a sense for future potentials of an unfolding world (or an organization) that is mostly unpredictable? The challenge consists partly in the fact that potentials are, in most cases, not visible, they are “not yet”, or more generally, not directly perceivable through our senses. As we have seen above, this introduces a high level of uncertainty. What can be perceived, however, are slight and subtle changes or latents (Poli, 2006, 2010) in the environment. Contrary to actuals, possibles or potentials are open to develop in various ways and directions that are partially intrinsic to this phenomenon/object and partially dependent on environmental stimuli, influences, or changes; they are latent (Poli, 2006), they are yet to develop and they “want” to break forth (under appropriate circumstances, contexts, or influences). From a leadership perspective, what is both interesting and challenging about potentials is that we need to learn how to (i) sense and identify such latent possibilities and (ii) to make sense of them, (iii) to cultivate them in a non-imposing way so that they (iv) can (co-)develop into new “interesting”, meaningful, and purposeful patterns of interaction, innovations or transformation.

More specifically, this involves the capacity for engaging in a process of *deep observation* leading to “*sensing and seeing/ knowing from within*” (Depraz et al., 2003; Scharmer, 2016). Potentials can be derived from a profound understanding of the core of a specific phenomenon or object (to be innovated or transformed). In most cases, it will be necessary to identify a whole bundle of potentials that is relevant for a particular field in which one would like to initiate innovation or transformation. Some of these potentials may be surprising, as—at first glance—they may not be considered important or relevant for this area. However, it is vital to follow up on them in a process of sense-making. By bringing them in and relating them to the context of other potentials, it might turn out that they become crucial in such a changed/novel context.

This bundle of “potentials in context” forms a field of not-yet developed possibilities and opportunities—the concrete realizations are not known yet, as they are still latent. However, through them, we know a kind of relevant “corridor of emergence” leading and guiding us through this process of “learning from the future” (Scharmer, 2016). Hence, we have to bring these future potentials into the present and start creating an enabling environment supporting these processes of emergence to happen (we refer to such environments as “Enabling Spaces”; Peschl & Fundneider 2012; 2014;). In biological/evolutionary terms, this can be compared to a *niche creation* process or the creation of (enabling) ecosystems (e.g., Cazzolla Gatti et al., 2020).

What does this mean for our discussion on the relationship between Theory U, necessary leadership skills and (future) potentials? First of all, we have to be aware that we are discussing here a perspective on innovation and transformation that is intrinsically driven by the future (vs. being driven by past experiences). Second, it calls for changing the perspective on what a leader or an organization needs to concentrate on in such a future-oriented innovation/transformation process: the focus has to shift from already existing knowledge (i.e., actuals) to (future) potentials. Deeply rooted in the environment, they become the source for our learning processes. Thus, novelty has its origin *not* primarily in the creative mind (of the innovator or leader), but rather can be found in the *creative agency of the world* (Peschl, 2024). Third, this implies that the mode of learning and creating has to change as well, shifting from downloading and predicting to *proactive learning* and *anticipation*, being receptive and sensitive to future potentials, engaging with the world, and entering in a *relationship of co-becoming* (Ingold, 2013) by making sense and use of these potentials. In this sense, leadership plays an important role in preparing the ground and facilitating such learning processes (both on the level of the leader him-/herself and of his/her team).

## IV.2. Becoming a Future-Driven Leader

A 4.0 stage of leadership requires a new set of enabling infrastructures that can support an eco-system to

engage in co-sensing (sense-making), co-inspiring (connecting to the source), and co-creating (prototyping) new possibilities together.” (Scharmer & Kaufmann, 2013, p.114)

Aligning these 3 modes of engagement or interaction (and/or cognition) before, during, and after presencing with leadership styles, different modes of leadership can be applied to each phase of the U process.

*Creating collective sense organs* and *letting-go* require a framework of trust and safe space. This has a lot to do with what Scharmer calls “holding the space” (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). The main task of leadership in this phase is to enable people to become vulnerable and connect with each other on a deeper level. The leadership style best suited for this phase is the *servant leadership style* (Iqbal et al., 2023).

The next mode of engagement, co-inspiring and/or connecting to the source, requires an encouraging, stirring, and visionary lead that helps people to make a step out of their comfort zone, immerse in the environment and truly engage in the presencing experience. This is best framed by a *transformative or transformational leadership style* (Iqbal et al., 2023; Groselj et al., 2021).

Thirdly, letting-come and crystallizing are first steps towards co-creation and prototyping. The challenge here is twofold. On the one hand, the leader has to help people to re-connect with each other after their individual, and in best case profound transformative presencing experience. On the other hand, leadership has to encourage people to engage in a mode of *doing/making* (Ingold, 2013), or “*thinging*” (Malafouris, 2013; 2014), in order to co-create new possibilities. *Kindness* (Haskins et al., 2018) and a *compassionate leadership style* (Hill, & Stephens, 2003) are best suited for this phase.

Additionally, we have shown that these phases of the Theory U process may not be experienced in a linear way. As we have seen, participants in an innovation team jump iteratively back and forth within the process, having a hard time to cope with the changes between collective and individual knowledge creation at the bottom of the U. Therefore, leaders must pay attention to the social dimension, orientation, and “holding the space” throughout all three phases.

In order to get a more hands-on understanding and a practical perspective of the concepts and processes having been discussed here, we will develop concrete design principles and intervention strategies for leaders in the following section. They are mostly based on both our theoretical considerations and the empirical insights having been discussed in this paper and provide concrete leadership guidelines of how these insights can be implemented in a Theory U process/setting.

### IV.3. Leadership Intervention Strategies and Embodied Design Principles for Presencing Settings

When looking at presencing from an integrated perspective of embodiment within the 4E approach to cognition as a complex agent-environment system, the emphasis shifts from facilitating participants' bodily awareness towards designing environments and interventions that *implicitly* shape and enable the participants' experiences. For the participants, the goal is to *intuitively align* with the desired mental states for presencing through (making use of) the structure of the environment and their embodied interactions that occur within it. For leaders, this means observing and intervening in the agent-environment system to guide the participants' embodied transformative learning process. In the following, we develop design principles and corresponding leadership intervention strategies that are based on such an integrated and dynamic perspective of embodiment. The goal is to guide participants into an engaged presencing experience:

#### 1. *Design for the emergence of coherence in agent-environment interaction*

- *Design Principle:* Recognize that cognition is embedded in the environment and is shaped by the particular context in which it unfolds. By designing environments and experiences that subtly align with the desired cognitive state, participants can be encouraged to experience presencing intuitively.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Use the environment—spatial design, social dynamics, and temporal pacing—to encourage an intuitive, emergent alignment of participants' actions and mental states. For example, organizing the space in such a way that participants may naturally engage with each other in an organic flow, rather than imposing rigid structures, can subtly promote openness to emergent novelty and collective presence.

Design the environment in such a way that participants are gently guided into present-moment awareness through subtle sensory cues—such as variations in lighting, ambient sounds, temperature, or textures—that do not explicitly capture attention but instead evoke specific cognitive and emotional states. For example, activities like walking in natural settings or resting within a minimalist, quiet space can foster reflective contemplation. Similarly, incorporating ambient soundscapes, such as the sounds of flowing water or nature, can cultivate a sense of calm that prepares participants for deep listening and openness.



## 2. *Leverage dynamic spatial and temporal structuring*

- *Design Principle:* Space and time should be regarded as *active elements* within the agent-environment system, capable of influencing participants' mental states with minimal reliance on conscious effort. The configuration of the physical environment plays a critical role in shaping how participants interact with one another and attune to the present moment.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Vary the dynamics of space and time subtly to create moments of pause, flow, or transformation. For instance, slow, undirected movements through natural spaces can draw participants into an embodied experience without direct verbal guidance. By intentionally designing moments of non-intervention, such as allowing pauses for contemplation or placing the group in a setting with open vistas, participants can intuitively tune into the present moment and each other.

## 3. *Cultivate implicit engagement through social interactions*

- *Design Principle:* Social dynamics within the group should be designed to subtly encourage implicit relational coherence. The bodily presence of the facilitator, and the interactions among participants, can guide participants toward the shared, emergent mental states required for presencing.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Create spaces for social interaction that foster an unspoken attunement to one another. For example, facilitating informal or unstructured conversational exchanges allows participants to act without the pressure of performing for an audience, creating a subtle relational energy that can orient them toward the present moment. Facilitators can model calm, grounded energy, which subtly affects the group dynamic and invites participants to mirror these embodied cues, creating an implicit alignment toward (collective) presencing.

## 4. *Create subtle feedback loops through action and environment*

- *Design Principle:* Incorporate feedback loops that connect the participants' actions (their bodily movements) with the environment. The interactivity between agent and environment should guide the participants toward mental states that support presencing.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Use embodied feedback mechanisms to guide participants through the process. For example, facilitating movement practices where participants' bodies and collective rhythms naturally adapt to the space (such as synchronized breathing or walking) allows the embodied system to shape their mental states. As they move through different spaces or change the rhythms of their

actions, they receive immediate feedback from the environment, subtly guiding their embodied responses toward presencing.

5. *Facilitate implicit shifts through the dynamics of the group*

- *Design Principle:* Group dynamics, especially in a collective environment, can be leveraged to implicitly attune participants to the collective energy and presence of the group. The mental states required for presencing emerge from the emergent effects and dynamical interplay between the individuals and the collective.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Foster group activities that naturally encourage mutual support, where the social dynamics of group behavior nudge participants toward embodied synchronization. For instance, in a shared movement or creative process, the group gradually shifts from individual actions to a collective flow, where each individual is guided by the actions of the others. By providing opportunities for co-creation in an embodied way (such as in joint modeling exercises), the facilitator helps to subtly align the group with the unfolding collective future.

6. *Foster implicit shared attention through synchronization*

- *Design Principle:* Design activities that encourage implicit synchronization of participants' attention and bodily states. This promotes collective attunement to the present moment and to each other, helping the group enter a (shared) experience of presencing.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Integrate collective practices that naturally promote synchrony—such as shared breathing, rhythmic movement, or mirroring exercises. The group, without needing explicit instructions, will naturally align their attention and bodily states, fostering a shared present-moment experience.

7. *Design for flow states through environmental continuity*

- *Design Principle:* Understand that cognition emerges from the continuity of experiences between participants and the environment. By ensuring smooth transitions and consistent environmental cues, facilitators can guide participants into mental states that support presencing without disrupting the flow.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Create environments where transitions between different activities or phases of Theory U are smooth and intuitive. This could involve gradually changing the energy of the space, from quiet contemplation to more active engagement, without abrupt shifts. The continuity in design ensures that participants stay connected to the process and naturally orient towards presencing, supported by the natural flow of activities, sensory changes, and group interactions.

## 8. *Design for embodied openness to emergent futures*

- *Design Principle:* The design of the environment and interventions should support an open-endedness that encourages participants to embrace uncertainty and allow future possibilities to emerge through bodily interaction.
- *Intervention Strategy:* Use subtle design elements that encourage an openness to the unknown. This might involve creating opportunities for participants to physically and mentally “let go” of predefined outcomes. For example, facilitating activities that allow for open-ended exploration of ideas—such as physically generating ideas through bodily movement, interacting with objects, or creating ephemeral group sculptures—can create a space where participants feel a sense of possibility emerging in an embodied way.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, we discussed what it means to be a(n innovation) leader that is *intrinsically future-driven/oriented* in a VUCA world. Concretely, we addressed the following questions: (i) What role does the body and the physical as well as social environment play in presencing in the sense of a transformative learning process? And (ii) based on this understanding, what kind of leadership skills and mindsets are required to facilitate the presencing process? We elaborated on the relevance of leadership in the phases of Theory-U/presencing and reported on experiences and results from our own empirical research.

To conclude, we tried to show that cultivating a future-driven innovation leadership mindset necessitates a fundamental shift in how we perceive and engage with emerging possibilities. By integrating presencing with recent approaches from cognitive science and transformative learning, leaders can cultivate an openness to latent potentials, transitioning from habitual, past-driven problem-solving to an anticipatory, co-creative and radically future-oriented approach. We have argued that a (leadership) paradigm of control has to be replaced by a mindset of co-becoming with the world and sensing (and making use of) their future potentials. We have shown that this requires not only cognitive skills but also an embodied engagement with both social and material environments. As our findings suggest, the key to such an approach to leadership lies in the ability to sense, unlock, and enact the creative agency of the world rather than merely relying on predefined strategies and projections of our own ideas.

## V.1. Limitations and Future Work

Drawing on empirical data from educational settings, the present study highlights the relevance of design principles in fostering adaptive leadership competencies to deal with today's VUCA-world. However, it has to be noted that the insights and implications presented in this paper stem from research based on purely qualitative methods (GTM and SA, see chapter on research setting above) and conceptual research. Thus, important considerations regarding (i) generalizability, i.e. the possibility of generalising our findings to higher education settings as a whole, and (ii) transferability, i.e. transferring our findings to the context of organizations and organizational leadership, need to be raised.

Future research should further explore if and how the design principles derived in this paper can be systematically cultivated across diverse organizational, as well as different cultural environments. Importantly, existing data were collected prior to the recent surge in generative AI tools and the broader wave of rapid technological change, raising questions about the ongoing relevance and applicability of these findings. The interaction with generative AI tools represents a qualitatively different form of agent–environment coupling, suggesting that traditional models may be insufficient to account for the dynamic, co-constructive nature of such engagements. Consequently, future research should prioritize the collection of more temporally relevant data. It appears necessary to critically examine the implications of these tools for both practice and theory. This includes our empirical findings, as well as revisiting foundational theoretical frameworks such as 4E cognition and transformative learning, which may require adaptation or extension to adequately address the evolving complexity of human–technology interactions in organizational and leadership contexts.

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# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## PRESENCING EMBODIED LEADERSHIP:

### *Synchronizing and Integrating Trauma for Transformative Healing*

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Consultant at Being Whole Hearted

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**Abstract:** For presencing leadership to become a deeply embodied way of being, the practice of trauma presencing must be consciously integrated within embodiment practices. Without this integration, practitioners risk misinterpreting unresolved trauma, remaining unaware of its presence, mis-attuning to trauma in themselves and others, or becoming hyper- or hypo-activated in trauma-related time loops. As these risks often go unrecognized, practitioners may inadvertently address only surface-level symptoms while missing subtler, unresolved trauma processes. This article highlights the importance of trauma presencing in the development of presencing leadership and calls for a deeper examination of disembodiment as a somatic phenomenon that can be integrated through trauma-sensitive practices. By examining trauma as a “blind spot” in the body and field, this work explores trauma’s time-looped, relational nature within the soma as processes that can be felt, synchronized with, and integrated. Trauma presencing enhances embodiment capacities, allowing presencing leadership to emerge as a deeply lived experience on individual and collective levels.

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

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## I. Introduction

*“Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering.”*

- Peter Levine

Where other forms of leadership may offer temporary, segmented, or superficial solutions, presencing leadership provides an expanded capacity to address seemingly insurmountable challenges and facilitate awareness-based systems change at a profound level. How, then, can presencing leadership develop as a deeply embodied practice and way of being? This inquiry often leads to refining presencing distinctions, such as those within the five journeys of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020): *Primary Presence*, *Primary Knowing*, *Primary Perceiving*, *Primary Communicating*, and *Primary Leading*. Each journey comprises distinct movements that guide practitioners in their respective explorations. While advancing these distinctions is essential, this article aims to draw attention to related under-explored areas, particularly the role of trauma within embodiment contexts of presencing leadership.

This article argues that a leader's capacity to presence trauma is critical and that this ability is anchored primarily in the subtle realms of embodiment. Without trauma presencing practices, practitioners face increased risks, including unawareness of trauma, mislabeling or bypassing trauma responses, mis-attuning to trauma in themselves and others, overlooking disembodied information, and hyperactivation in past-based trauma loops. Beyond these specific risks, there exists an overall vulnerability to unconscious gaps within presencing leadership that even regular embodiment practices may fail to address. Trauma presencing, therefore, not only mitigates these risks but serves as a crucial process in maturing embodiment wisdom, thereby enriching presencing leadership as a deeper, more integrated way of being.

## II. What Is Trauma Presencing?

When we hear the word “trauma,” we often think of catastrophic events such as natural disasters, war, abuse, or political upheaval, which can misleadingly confine trauma to the realm of the abnormal or exceptional. In reality, trauma—particularly developmental trauma—pervades modern society, influencing personal functioning, social relationships, parenting, economics, politics, and education. Rather than searching for isolated cases, it may be more insightful to ask, “Where do we all fit on the broad, surprisingly inclusive spectrum of trauma?”

This article does not aim to address trauma from therapeutic, medical, or policy perspectives; those perspectives are comprehensively covered in the work of experts such as Dr. Christina Bethell (Bethell et al., 2022), Gabor Maté (Maté, 2022), Peter Levine (Levine, 2012), Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (Van der Kolk, 2015), Dr. Richard Schwartz (Schwartz, 2021), and Thomas Hübl (Hübl, 2023). Instead, we focus on trauma's role in presencing leadership as an embodiment practice and introduce trauma presencing as a crucial addition to the practice, aimed at addressing potential blind spots in presencing leadership.

For a trauma presencing practitioner, trauma often remains “invisible” within embodiment practices. This invisibility means that we may initially fail to perceive trauma somatically, emotionally, or mentally. Trauma, by its nature, is an absenced experience and thus frequently presents as a blind spot in embodiment practices. For instance, a practitioner may notice certain thought patterns while practicing presencing but, upon tuning into her emotional state, finds herself not sensing any emotions. She might think, “I don’t feel anything” and move on. Typically, this experience is overlooked; however, from a trauma presencing perspective, this “not feeling” becomes a focal point. Trauma presencing involves staying with this experience of “not feeling,” “numbness,” or “partial feeling,” and filling it with awareness. This practice of attuning subtle awareness to areas of numbness is what we refer to as trauma presencing. It is based on three interwoven embodiment competencies: (1) presencing trauma, (2) synchronizing with trauma, and (3) integrating trauma.

### III. Trauma as Muted Experience

Trauma represents the most intensified internal stress response to overwhelming experiences in the absence of an attuned witness. Typically, experiences arise, take form, express themselves, and pass within our mental, emotional, and somatic channels of perception. However, when an experience overwhelms the system, the body and emotions require an attuned witness to help co-process the experience. In the absence of this relational presence, the nervous system over-regulates or under-regulates into a fight, flight, or freeze response (Levine, 2012). If these responses are insufficient, particularly under chronic developmental stress, the nervous system “mutes” the experience, effectively disembodimenting and isolating it from the individual’s holistic sense of self. As a result, the overwhelming experience is not only hidden from our perception but is also disconnected from our awareness that such absencing has taken place. This allows the individual to continue functioning with relative stability, although this muting within the body and psyche can be so profound that the original trauma is obscured, leaving only symptomatic behaviors or “trigger episodes” that reflect this underlying muted trauma. This phenomenon of absencing in trauma is the focus of various trauma healing approaches, including Somatic Experiencing, the NeuroAffective Relational Model (NARM), and Comprehensive Resource Modeling (CRM) (Bohleber, 2007; Levine, 2012; Hübl, 2023; Heller et al., 2020; Schwarz et al., 2017).

While deep states of presence can be accessed by stabilizing awareness through presencing practices, sustaining this state as a consistent daily experience often proves difficult. Presencing leadership practitioners, in particular, may experience moments of disconnection, self-detachment, or “triggering” that leaves them feeling out of sync in leadership contexts. This article posits that

such occurrences are not simply random events pulling us out of presence; rather, they often arise from pre-existing somatic fields of trauma that are muted and, thus, outside our awareness (Hübl, 2023). In the context of Dynamic Presencing, we may believe we are failing to engage with the “arising new” during the transition from letting be to letting come, as described in the journey of Primary Perceiving, or we may think we are falling short in embodying the movement of “being real” within Primary Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2020). In reality, we are “tripping over” unresolved, disembodied aspects of the past—moving through imperceptible shadow fields generated by unintegrated trauma (Hübl, 2023).

These trauma fields extend across individual, relational, and collective spaces—*the you-space, we-space, and all-space* (Gunnlaugson, 2020). They represent “gaps” in our presence that often go undetected, as presencing practices primarily focus on connecting to presence rather than absence. This oversight presents a significant challenge for presencing leadership, as many core issues in leadership situations stem from the absence of presence rather than its direct presence. The ability to connect with the absence of presence, rather than solely with presence itself, is essential to the effectiveness of presencing as an embodied leadership practice, especially since group dysfunction is often rooted in trauma and its absencing.

Developing the ability to presence trauma and its absencing allows presencing leadership practitioners to synchronize their awareness with the developmental arc of trauma integration. This practice can lead to new forms of insight, ethical discernment, and innovation within leadership contexts. In what follows, this article will address the “absence of presence” as a phenomenon that can be presenced and will delve into the three phases of trauma presencing: presencing absence, synchronizing with trauma as movement, and integrating trauma.

#### IV. The Absence of Presence as a Presence-able Phenomenon Within the Soma and Embodiment Process

In my personal practice and work with clients and organizations, I have observed that trauma, much like light bending around the gravity of an invisible mass, “bends” presence around itself. This allows us to presence trauma by becoming attuned to where we “cannot feel” or “cannot sense” parts of our experience. We develop an awareness of moments when our presence feels reduced, as if parts of our physical or emotional experience were suddenly missing. By cultivating sensitivity to this absence or numbness, we become aware of gaps in our own perception. For example, during a meditation or presencing practice, a practitioner might notice mental activity around an event without any corresponding emotion or bodily sensation, indicating a gap in awareness. In trauma presencing, rather than bypassing or attempting to “will” underlying

experiences to surface, we are called to gently hold these gaps within our awareness. This gentle holding can allow previously disembodied sensations or emotions to reveal themselves as trauma. The gap is not forcibly closed but gradually “filled in” by what was present all along.

The ability to presence absence without force or agenda represents a subtle but profound refinement in presencing practice. This approach does not seek to “heal” or “fix” the past but rather to allow the absence of presence to be included within our somatic embodiment. Trauma presencing asks us to respectfully acknowledge and re-embody disembodiment that was initially too overwhelming to integrate fully within the i-space, you-space, and we-space (Gunnlaugson, 2020). For presencing leadership, this can be transformative.

As practitioners refine this capacity, they begin to realize that trauma exists not only within their own i-space but also permeates the larger relational fields of the you-space, we-space, and all-space. Muted trauma, rather than presence, forms the foundation of many social structures. Practitioners come to see these fields as interwoven and interdependent, understanding that their individual trauma presencing process contributes to a collective trauma healing process. Receiving this understanding without judgment, they can approach it as a sacred aspect of their practice. Over time, they can not only *let be* (Gunnlaugson, 2020) the present moment and receive the emerging future, but also embody the disembodied, unintegrated past. What emerges is a growing depth of presence and embodied wisdom—unassuming, constant, and effortless. This way of being becomes part of an expansive planetary process of re-embodiment and emergence, inviting a profound new depth to presencing leadership.

## V. Presencing Trauma, Synchronizing with Trauma, and Integrating Trauma: Cultivating the Three Capacities

### V.1 Presencing Absence – The First Capacity

The first phase of trauma presencing is *presencing absence*, a subtle capacity that enables practitioners to sense a break, gap, or absence in their own mental, emotional, or somatic experience—or within the collective experience of a group they are working with. This absence often exists beneath more overt symptomatic patterns that act as mechanisms to maintain the underlying absence. These patterns may manifest as mental, emotional, or somatic behaviors or as habits mislabeled as stress, personality traits, irritation, disconnection, or other forms of hyper- or hypo-regulation. In a presencing practice, these mechanisms frequently distract practitioners from the underlying absence or trauma. In some instances, collective trauma embedded in the we-space even enables certain mechanisms to pass unnoticed or, in some cultures, to be celebrated—such as workaholism in the United States. Given the complexity and variety of these manifestations, it is

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easy to mistake them as root causes or to attribute their origins solely to environmental factors. Such an approach addresses the “smoke” of the issue rather than the “fire” of trauma, which expresses itself as absence within presence.

As practitioners cultivate this subtle attunement to absence, they begin to recognize the underlying “invisible trauma root system” of various personal, relational, and organizational issues. What previously appeared as a web of isolated problems now reveals itself as a network of inner and outer resources keeping trauma frozen, suppressed, numbed, unfelt, and disembodied. Practitioners then start experiencing these areas of absence as disembodied aspects contained within a larger, embodied experience. In this expanded presencing space, practitioners learn to hold the areas of non-presence, allowing them to gradually fill in and become integrated within the practitioner’s awareness.

As this subtle, expanded presence develops, practitioners realize that these areas of absence are not static but are instead dynamic, living movements within the soma, psyche, and emotional body, contextually rooted in developmental and relational space-time. At this point, trauma presencing shifts from *presencing absence* to the next phase, *synchronizing with trauma*, marking an emergent development in the process.

## V.2 Trauma Synchronization – The Second Capacity

At this phase in the trauma presencing process, what was once an area of absence, numbness, or muted presence now begins to emerge as a dynamic, intelligent movement within the soma, psyche, and emotional body. Trauma material transitions from being invisible and disembodied into a living movement gradually absorbed into embodied presence, revealing itself to the larger container of embodied awareness that now holds it.

The practitioner’s role here is to maintain this expanded, safe container of embodied presence while also synchronizing it with the unique relational, developmental, emotional, and somatic qualities of the trauma material as it unfolds. This requires a refined precision from the practitioner as the previously invisible trauma becomes absorbed into presence. At this stage, trauma transforms from a past-based, time-looped movement into a presence-based, emergent process—a capacity I call *trauma synchronization*, encompassing the i-space, you-space, we-space, and all-space.

During synchronization, the numbness surrounding trauma begins to melt, allowing the initially overwhelming experience to surface within a contained, felt, and embodied presence. What was once too intense for the nervous system to handle can now be experienced and integrated. For example, a childhood experience of fear due to neglect might reveal itself as somatic shaking, emotional fear, and mental imagery. Here, the practitioner maintains a subtle, attuned presence,



allowing the trauma material to arise, take shape, express, and then dissolve, eventually joining the individual's integrated life experiences. This integration fosters wholeness, expanding the field of embodied presence and deepening wisdom.

Presencing leadership practitioners who incorporate trauma synchronization invite a more profound embodied wisdom into group dynamics, as these gaps in presence are filled with attuned awareness. If the trauma was collective, it integrates within the group as greater embodied wisdom and as an expanded, ethically informed social understanding. From this perspective, trauma presencing not only contributes to the development of presencing leadership but also offers critical insights for social justice—a topic to be explored further in future articles.

### V.3 Trauma Integration – The Third Capacity

The process of synchronization naturally leads into the final phase of trauma presencing: trauma integration. This phase can be easily overlooked, as the cathartic and dynamic qualities of the synchronization phase often leave presencing practitioners with a sense of completion once trauma has expressed itself and dissipated. However, it is essential for practitioners to create a subtle, supportive container that allows the nervous system—once home to the trauma—to explore and stabilize within its new, integrated state of being. In this phase, trauma is fully integrated, digested, and transmuted into wisdom that flows throughout all channels of experience, including the soma, emotional body, mind, and even what we might consider the soul. At this stage, the nervous system gradually adjusts to a renewed sense of self and reality, and this shift is relationally absorbed across the i-space, you-space, we-space, and all-space. In this way, integration contributes not only to the wholeness, presence, and embodiment of the individual but to the collective field of life as well.

Trauma integration blends seamlessly with the synchronization phase, releasing past time loops and allowing this transformative experience to be woven into the embodied flow of life experiences. This deepens the subtle embodiment of the practitioner, filling spaces that were previously occupied by unprocessed trauma with embodied presence. Supporting this integration often involves a “re-entry” period into daily life that is intentionally slower-paced, allowing for the internal-to-external transformation to take root and expand across all levels of experience, from the i-space to the all-space.

## VI. The Wisdom of Trauma: Implications for Embodied Presencing Leadership

Trauma presencing is grounded in a refined stance of respect and acceptance for trauma, absence, and numbness within our experience, emerging from a precise attunement to absence itself.

Rather than seeing absencing as something wrong or unwanted, this perspective shifts away from viewing absencing as a flaw, which is often a symptom of our disconnection from trauma. From the vantage point of the original overwhelming experience, absencing or numbing—holding trauma material in an invisible, time-looped form—functions intelligently as a protective mechanism, a solution rather than a problem. Trauma processing deepens our relationship to these qualities of absence and mutedness, culminating in gratitude for what Thomas Hübl calls “that which stays hidden” from our awareness (Hübl, 2020). This process fosters a compassionate embrace of the exiled parts of our experience.

As presencing leadership integrates trauma presencing, disembodiment begins to reveal itself beyond the assumption that greater embodiment is inherently superior. Instead, we cultivate a home for disembodiment within our embodiment practice, expanding our capacity to hold the entirety of human experience. In this way, more aspects of humanity are welcomed and held within humanity itself.

## VII. Conclusion

In working with individuals, organizations, and through my own inner journey, I have come to see that there is deep wisdom within our frozen, disembodied trauma. Trauma, often absenced and layered with symptoms of numbness and fragmentation, holds invaluable insight for those who seek to embody presencing leadership. Yet, true access to the wisdom of trauma requires a shift in perspective: it is not about breaking through or bypassing these frozen parts of ourselves, but about developing a reverent and attuned sensitivity to what remains hidden. Trauma’s function as an “intelligent solution” rather than a flaw suggests that disembodiment and numbness have served as vital protective mechanisms, shielding us from overwhelming experience.

For presencing leadership to evolve as a deeply embodied practice, it requires not simply a pursuit of greater embodiment but a profound recognition of our potential disembodiment—our unpresenced, numb places—woven subtly through our individual and collective experience. Trauma presencing offers a pathway to address these hidden aspects, cultivating an attuned relationship to the absences within us and allowing them to come into presence in their own time. As this process unfolds, it reorients presencing leadership toward a more comprehensive embrace of both presence and absence, expanding the capacity for resilience, wisdom, and ethical attunement in leadership.

By honoring the role trauma plays in our lives and by allowing it to re-integrate as part of our embodied awareness, presencing leadership gains a greater depth for navigating today’s complexities. Through this respectful attunement, the blessings and wisdom that trauma carries are

no longer frozen or hidden but are revealed as essential parts of our journey, offering gifts from our past that shape our presence today and lay the foundation for an embodied, compassionate future.

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# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EQUINE-ASSISTED LEARNING TO DEVELOP PRESENCING MASTERY

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**Abstract:** This article introduces Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) as an embodied and effective methodology for cultivating presencing mastery. The aim is to contribute to the growing repertoire of Emerging Presencing Approaches (EPAs) that among other developments, advance the shift from presencing as a way of knowing to presencing as a generative way of being (Gunnlaugson, 2024). The article further explores the critical roles of clean feedback, intersubjective dynamics, and co-iterative relational processes in facilitating the development of presencing mastery. By situating presencing mastery firmly within the body, EAL offers a pathway for leaders to increase their resilience and efficacy in navigating the complex, fragmented, and often disengaged social systems of contemporary organizational life. In this context, presencing mastery emerges not only as a theoretical construct but as a living, embodied practice critical for leadership development in an era marked by escalating complexity and relational fragmentation.

**Keywords:** Presencing Mastery, Equine-Assisted Learning, EAL, Somatic Intelligence, Emerging Presencing Approaches, Dynamic Presencing, Feedback, Integral Theory, Conversational Leadership

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### I. Integral Theories and Presencing Mastery

Integral and somatic perspectives on leadership development have steadily emerged over the past three decades. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, integral leadership models such as Torbert's Action Inquiry, Kegan and Lahey's Transformational Languages, Scharmer's Theory U, and Wilber's Integral Philosophy began to influence the field. While these models acknowledge the importance of incorporating the body into leadership development, many of these approaches remain fundamentally cognicentric, leading to what Bockler (2024) describes as the design of "intellectually

driven training regimes, prompting us to subjugate our multidimensional nature to extrinsic goals and performance measures—which most likely inhibit the autonomous maturation of our other intelligences and potentially catalyze individual and collective existential burnout."

By defaulting to linear and subjective learning methods—such as assessments, journaling, meditation, and self-reflection—leadership development approaches often emphasize the knowing and doing aspects of leadership while neglecting the embodied being of leadership itself. This omission represents a critical gap. As Winther (2013) asserts, "In order to evolve an authentic leadership, a person's basis for awareness of self, both in a somatic and a symbolic sense, must be experienced and expressed through the body."

Wilber (2000) describes an "integral vision" as one that "attempts to include matter, body, mind, and spirit as they appear in self, culture, and nature." At its essence, integral experience emphasizes interconnectedness—within oneself, with others, and with the broader environment. Ralph Kilmann (2001), a prominent figure in conflict management, argues that achieving such a holistic way of seeing, thinking, and behaving requires a "mental revolution" in self-aware consciousness. Yet, to be truly integral, this paradigm requires more than a shift in cognition—it demands what Pohl (2006) calls a somatic revolution.

Somatics, as Blake (2009) defines it, "refers to the art and science of living in the human body; to the inherent and inescapable unity of thinking, feeling, and acting in the world—the place where sensation [perception], emotion, and cognitive interpretation of events all meet and interact to form one's moment-to-moment experience of life." While some integral models reference embodied learning—whether through language (Kegan & Lahey, 2001) or movement-based practices (Strozzi-Heckler, 2003; Palmer, 2017; Hayashi, 2025)—they do not fully or explicitly leverage the body's innate intelligence to respond to, and develop a more comprehensive awareness of, what is actually occurring when one is presencing.

Thus, grasping the concept of presence—and cultivating presencing mastery—remains elusive when not integrated through the intelligence of the body. Put simply, one cannot learn to access presencing or sense the emerging future solely through intellectual study or theoretical exploration. As embodied beings, we must ask: How does one consciously learn to enter and sustain a state of presencing, and to sense the emerging future as it unfolds?

## II. The Forgotten Intelligence: Re-Membering the Body

In guiding individual leaders and groups through transformational learning processes, practitioners often overlook or take for granted a critical human capacity—our "sense-abilities", or the ability to utilize all five senses to supplement intuition. Yet, it is precisely this holistic somatic

awareness that forms the foundation of how we experience and perceive our environment. Ignoring the body's inherent wisdom is akin to operating a vehicle firing on only three of its four cylinders: it may move forward, but the ride is rough, inefficient, and unnecessarily taxing. In contrast, tuning up the full "engine" of our being—by integrating all faculties of awareness—enables a more efficient, aligned, and generative experience.

When we cultivate balance and integration among our intellectual (IQ), emotional (EQ), physical (PQ), and spiritual (SQ) intelligences, we become more congruent, fully aligned, and capable of inhabiting our source of being. From this congruence, we are better able to "show up" in every sense of the word—embodying transformative leadership and relational authenticity (Pohl, 2006). (See Figure 1.0).

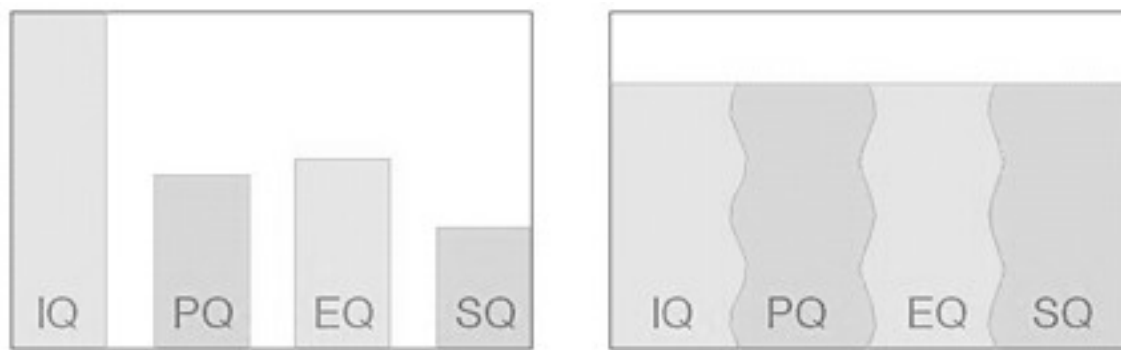


Figure 1.0 Imbalanced Non-integral experience

Balanced Integral experience

Throughout human evolution, the body's primal roles—securing safety, finding food and shelter, and ensuring species survival—have been progressively overshadowed by intellectual, emotional, and spiritual pursuits. In contemporary life, the body is often reduced to a mere vehicle transporting these pursuits, rather than honored as an integral source of intelligence and relational capacity. What possibilities might emerge if the full spectrum of the body's capacities were invited to "sit in the front seat" alongside intellect and emotion—playing an equal role in how we communicate, lead, educate, and create the future?

The integration of body, mind, emotion, and spirit is gaining traction within leadership development. Richard Strozzi-Heckler, founder of the Strozzi Institute, has pioneered somatic coaching and team-building programs that emphasize leadership as a somatic phenomenon. Drawing on his sixth-degree black belt in aikido, Strozzi-Heckler (2003) argues that the body is indistinguishable from the self, and that "it is essential to include the body if one wants to build the skills of exemplary leadership."



Similarly, aikido master Wendy Palmer's Leadership Embodiment program teaches participants to shift their physiological responses to environmental stressors through aikido-based and mindfulness practices. Her work is rooted in both Eastern wisdom traditions and neurobiological research on how hormones such as testosterone, cortisol, and oxytocin influence bodily responses in varying contexts. Through simple centering techniques and embodied relational practices, leaders develop stronger, more grounded leadership presence.

David Whyte, philosopher, poet, and leadership consultant, underscores the voice as an embodied vehicle of leadership. In *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America*, Whyte (1994) writes, "The voice literally emerges from the body as a representation of our inner world. It carries our experience from the past, our hopes and fears for the future, and the emotional resonance of the moment." He argues that inhabiting the body through the voice represents "one of the great soul challenges of adult life" (1994). A leader attuned to the embodied resonance of their voice—its strength, its location within the body, its congruence—cultivates greater influence, relational presence, and authenticity. Yet this capacity requires what Whyte sees as psychological curiosity, fortitude, and maturity, qualities essential to leadership effectiveness.

Otto Scharmer, founder of Theory U, asserts that developing our "deep innate capacities to sense and actualize the future" constitutes the single most critical leadership capacity for the 21st century (Scharmer, 2005). His concept of presencing is defined as "sensing and bringing into the present one's highest future potential—the future that depends upon us to bring it into being" (Scharmer, 2005). Theory U integrates emotional intelligence (EQ), intellectual intelligence (IQ), and spiritual intelligence (SQ) through reflective dialogues and group facilitation processes. To address the embodied dimension, Scharmer's Presencing Institute includes Arawana Hayashi's Social Presencing Theater, a movement-based practice that helps participants engage somatically with "current reality and emerging future possibilities" (Hayashi, 2023).

Olen Gunnlaugson, founder of Dynamic Presencing, offers a critical refinement of presencing practice. Gunnlaugson (2023) notes that for some practitioners, physical movement-based approaches may distract from attending to the "nuances of inner movement" that are essential to cultivating presencing as a way of being. He argues that "a more interior approach to embodiment is needed to help ground and stabilize our presencing awareness" (p. 119). Within this frame, Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL) becomes a powerful medium—where horses serve as relational partners who reflect and stabilize the practitioner's inner presencing movements in real time.

Hence, while numerous integral and somatic models gesture toward embodied leadership, Equine-Assisted Learning uniquely enables a living, relational, and somatically grounded encounter with presencing, offering a direct pathway into the forgotten intelligence of the body.

### III. The Intersubjective and Co-Iterative Creation of Knowing and Being

At the intersection of "you and me," there is much more occurring than the exchange of ideas or perspectives. Sabetti and Freligh (as cited in Winther, 2001) observe, "In every professional context, there is an important space. The space is never empty but is charged with atmosphere, energy, meaning, possibilities, and disturbances." This insight reflects what has become evident in my own work as a somatic intelligence coach—that co-iterative interventions, which foster the intersubjective nature of relationship, can facilitate access to presencing and the ongoing development of presencing mastery.

Iteration, as Bhattacharya (2019) describes, refers to experimenting by practicing a creative process repeatedly, while co-iteration involves engaging in this experimental process with others. Intersubjectivity, a key concept in social science, is defined as "the sharing of subjective states by two or more individuals" (Scheff, 2015) or, as noted in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2025), as "involving or occurring between separate conscious minds." This relational quality is foundational to the unfolding of presencing, yet it remains underexplored in many models of presencing practice.

Cathy Hawk, creator of the somatic coaching method Lights On Leadership, emphasizes that the potential for transformation resides in the space between two people, and that a relational intelligence emerges when this space is consciously attended to. Hawk argues that such relational intelligence, when witnessed and sensed, can lead both individuals and groups toward fundamental shifts in consciousness (Hawk, 2011). It is through systematic access to this relational presencing space—rather than solely relying on subjective reflection, mindfulness practices, or individual movement—that the development of presencing mastery may be most effectively facilitated.

Importantly, consciousness itself is derived from conscientia, meaning "knowing with." This etymology suggests that it is through our relational and intersubjective connections with others and our environment that we come to know ourselves. Philosopher Christian de Quincey (1998) emphasizes that without conscientia, communication would be impossible and evolution would become a chance event—highlighting the fundamental role of relationality in human becoming. In alignment with this view, Scharmer and Pomeroy (2024), in their discussion of fourth-person knowing, introduce the notion of a shared relational knowing that transcends individual subjectivity. They write:

Fourth-person knowing has a particular quality of being neither my knowing nor yours, neither solely outside nor inside me, but rather something beginning to articulate from a

different source that operates beyond these distinctions (Scharmer & Pomeroy, 2024). Applied artist and transpersonal psychologist Jessica Bockler (2024) supports a similar view in her definition of presencing as "a participatory practice, informed by the multi-dimensional contexts which shape what happens in the space between us." These insights collectively underscore that presencing is not solely an individual act, but an intersubjective process co-created in real time through relationship.

Indeed, we often know we have entered a presencing space because we sense in our bodies a shift—an opening, a liminality, a shared spaciousness—indicative of a co-iterative unfolding. However, while such moments may be fleeting or elusive, the deeper question remains: How can we consciously leverage these multi-dimensional relational contexts—not only from an intellectual perspective but also from a somatic one—to systematically cultivate and sustain presencing and foster presencing mastery?

#### IV. The Crucial Role of Feedback in Learning Presencing Mastery

Alongside the co-iterative and intersubjective nature of presencing, somatic feedback plays a crucial role in developing presencing mastery. Feedback, as organizational researchers Rothwell and Kazanas (1998) note, has been regarded as “the single most significant non-instructional solution to human performance problems” (p. 241). Their research highlights that both the clarity and timeliness of feedback are essential to addressing performance issues. From this perspective, feedback becomes a necessary element of learning and development, particularly for leaders navigating complex environments.

In his work *The Discipline of Conscious Conversation: Principles and Practices*, psychologist Louis Cox (2008) emphasizes the importance of paying attention "to the data presented to our senses from our own and others' bodies, our environment, and from nature." Cox argues that noticing and working with somatic information has the potential to influence behavior and improve the quality of our interventions. More than that, he suggests that engaging with this level of data “could be the difference between our survival and our demise as a team, as a larger human system, as well as a planet” (Cox, 2008).

From this standpoint, I contend that the development of presencing mastery depends not only on timely feedback but also on the quality of that feedback. Specifically, feedback needs to be clean and delivered in a psychologically safe way and environment. Clean feedback requires that the person offering it consciously separate observable data—what is actually seen, heard, or sensed—from judgments or assumptions. As Walker (n.d.) explains, clean feedback is based on “objective evidence, [observable data] that all parties concerned saw, heard, smelled, or felt” and is “devoid of

judgment, inference, and projection.”

Delivering clean feedback, however, is difficult for most people. Yet horses, by nature, offer nothing but clean, immediate feedback. They respond directly to how others show up, without interpretation or bias. In this way, horses model an essential skill for presencing mastery—the capacity to offer and respond to feedback that is grounded in the reality of the present moment.

Thus, becoming students of horses as somatic feedback experts allows us to practice receiving feedback in a way that is immediate, embodied, and relational. Through this process, we also engage the intersubjective nature of relationship—experiencing presencing not as a solitary act, but as a shared relational event.

## V. ‘Sense-Able’ Like a Horse: Presencing in Real Time

The field of Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) has been steadily growing over the past 30 years. EAS is a unifying term that refers to multiple services in which professionals incorporate horses and other equines to benefit people (Wood, Alm, Benjamin, Thomas, Anderson, Pohl, Kane 2021). This field is comprised of three distinct service areas: therapy, Equine-Assisted Learning (EAL), and horsemanship. Equine-Assisted Learning is distinct from therapy services that incorporate horses because of how the interaction with the horse is facilitated and debriefed. For example, a therapy session that incorporates horses involves a licensed therapy professional who teams up with an equine specialist to deliver a specific type of therapy, which may include psychotherapy, physical therapy, speech pathology, among others (Wood et al., 2021).

EAL encompasses three non-therapy areas of learning: equine-assisted learning in education, organizations, and personal development. It is a facilitated experiential learning modality in which people engage with horses through ground activities to learn leadership competencies, strategic thinking, team building, and emotional intelligence (Dyk, Cheung, Pohl, Noriega, Lindgreen 2012), through relational problem solving, feedback, and leveraging somatic intelligence and presence. In organizational contexts, EAL enlists a professional or coach with expertise in both working with horses and organizational settings, who utilizes a coaching model to facilitate learning. While similar to other experiential learning programs, EAL has the added element of working with horses, whose varied and unpredictable personalities, attitudes, moods, and natural behaviors create unique and stimulating experiences that leverage the human-horse relationship (Equine Experiential Education Association, 2021).

An EAL session uses ground activities with horses that challenge participants to utilize somatic intelligence competencies—along with their IQ, EQ, and PQ—to influence their equine partners in accomplishing clearly defined goals. This might involve walking with a horse on a lead

rope around cones and having the horse willingly walk next to them without stopping or veering off course. Another activity could include moving a horse that is off the lead rope into a box made from poles in the middle of an arena, without touching the horse or speaking to team members during the activity.

Equine-Assisted Learning effectively marries the notion of conscientia—"knowing with"—with the body's innate ability to decipher and leverage somatic feedback to sense the emerging future and explore effective actions. This form of experiential learning provides an embodied way to cultivate presence and fourth-person knowing—contrasted with models that are primarily based on cognitive shifts. In fact, EAL facilitators often observe that the more an individual works from their head, the less willing the horse is to engage with them. EAL offers a safe environment for participants to experiment, pressing pause on left-brain thinking and engaging in an exploration of "the relational and embodied dimensions of presencing [that] are critical to any path of mastery" (Carrillo, 2024), both inside and outside the arena.

To successfully collaborate with a horse, participants need to develop the ability to receive and process honest, in-the-moment, objective feedback from the horse, suspend linear thinking, co-regulate their emotional responses, become fully present to sensing the relationship between horse and human, and remain curious about where that co-iterative relationship may lead. This is what Torbert and associates (2004) refer to as developing super-vision—a trans-cognitive phenomenon that requires our body and brain to multitask (Torbert, 1972), and "to expand body awareness from an isolated, strictly internal state to the balanced awareness of the body in its immediate environment, now!" (Shambo, 2013).

Torbert and associates (2004) observed that "few of us go on to the profound field of adult learning wherein we seek to directly engage the fourth territory of experience—our attention itself, our super-vision." Simply put, most people are only aware of what they are focusing on or thinking about in a given moment, rather than holding a global awareness, or unified consciousness, similar to that of a horse.

Horsemanship coach Chris Irwin speaks directly to this capacity for developing super-vision and becoming present with horses. "When you are with a horse, consistency is how she measures integrity, so the horse must be your primary focus all the time [somatically reading the environment]. She needs your constant reassurance that everything is in control, and everything from your position [physical alignment] to your bearing [moving forward], breathing [emotional regulation], and even the subtlest gestures must reflect this... If we want horses to focus their attention on us, we must learn to focus ours on them. That's easy enough to do in spurts. The real trick is to learn to maintain it for as long as we need to" (Irwin, 2005). (See Figure 2.)

Torbert suggests that one reason super-vision is so rarely utilized is because very few people can sustain this quality of attention and presence for extended periods, as it requires individuals to leverage perceptual muscles that are rarely used in everyday life.

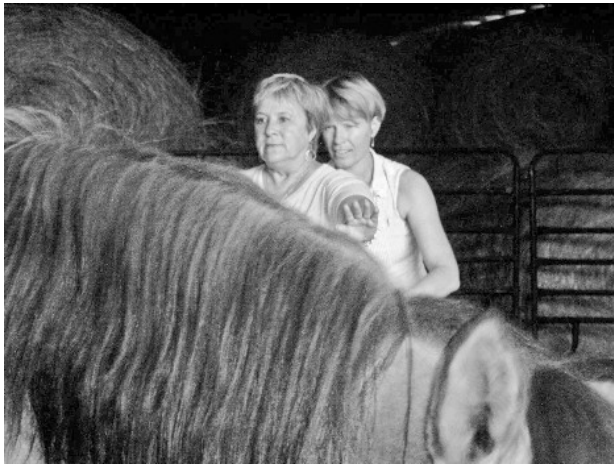


Figure 2.0 Developing and practicing Super-vision with a horse.

Equine-Assisted Learning, in the context of leadership development, provides a powerful learning environment where participants can explore their leadership effectiveness or address individual and organizational challenges through the lens of a non-verbal, somatic, prey-animal partner. The feedback horses offer is both timely and clean, as they respond authentically and honestly to how a person is showing up—without judgment, story, or projection.

Because horses are social herd animals and prey animals, their survival depends on members of their herd being authentic, using clear, transparent, non-verbal communication, and responding immediately to potential threats. It is no different for participants in an EAL session. Often, the feedback horses offer startles participants into a new somatic awareness, revealing habitual, egoic behaviors. EAL offers a direct somatic experience "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" (Gunnlaugson, 2024, p. 218).

Moreover, just as up to 93% of human communication is non-verbal (Mehrabian, 2009), horses highlight how much of our interaction occurs beyond words. Participants in EAL sessions are required to develop proficiency in body language, moving beyond habitual reliance on verbal communication to read and respond to real-time feedback from the horse. This is similar to what Bockler (2024) describes as "active receptivity"—"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." In this relational space, horses let us know—clearly and without judgment—when they are

willing to "dance" with us, offering a profound practice of presencing in real time.

## VI. The Buddha Nature of Horses

Anyone can access deeper sources of embodied presence through felt-sense exercises by connecting to the ground of their being (Bockler, 2024). As Schuyler (2013) explains:

In Buddhism, the ground refers to the foundation of being, our buddha nature, an aspect of ourselves that is already perfect and always present. It is the seed within all sentient beings that connects them with one another and with life, and makes enlightenment a possibility. When people are in touch with gravity and the ground of their being, it can be seen in the way they walk, the way they look in your eyes.

Horses naturally and instinctively seek this grounded quality of being in their herd members and are highly sensitized to how body movements and posture convey leadership and safety. If they do not sense this grounding when a human approaches or attempts to accomplish a task, the horse will often become uncomfortable and may move away or shut down and refuse to engage.

For instance, when a person is nervous and operating from their head—or is emotionally incongruent (nervous but pretending to be calm)—the horse instinctively avoids the non-coherent and incongruent energy, signaling a lack of relational connection. Yet, the moment that person successfully grounds themselves by breathing, centering through their feet, and connecting with themselves and the horse, is the same moment the horse stops fidgeting, lowers its head, softens its eyes and mouth, and relaxes. This immediate feedback from the horse is co-iterative and serves as confirmation to the human that they are influencing the horse's behavior through their own capacity to become centered and present.

If an individual is unable to ground themselves and embody congruence, the horse will naturally seek out other beings—human or horse—who can provide that sense of safety and grounding. This dynamic is not unlike organizational life, where people often leave leaders or organizations that fail to embody grounded presence, connection, and safety. Leaders who lack coherence, relational attunement, and embodied congruence create environments where others feel unsafe or disconnected—just as a horse does in the presence of an ungrounded human.

Perhaps, because horses have four feet to our two, they are twice as grounded as humans. Their Buddha nature arises from their deeply grounded, non-predatory, instinctual present-moment awareness.



## VII. Congruence and Being Real – Join Up With A Horse

Successful collaboration and presencing with horses relies on the reciprocal and intersubjective nature of relationship, from both an internal and transcendent place of connection. Horses provide participants direct, in-the-moment feedback about organizational system pressure, communication breakdowns, and inauthentic intentions, in the instant in these organizational challenges show up. On the flipside, when a person can consistently access and maintain their present-moment awareness, it produces congruence between thought, feeling, and action. When they develop the ability to communicate a clear vision and intention, practice patience, and build trust and connection, the horse responds by “joining up” (Roberts, 2002). Join up is the moment when the horse decides to put their trust in the leader and willingly follows them anywhere they go without a halter or rope attached. (See Figure 3.0) This is analogous to when someone is seen and experienced as an authentic leader—someone who has integrity, who strives to earn the trust of their stakeholders, and who focuses on creating meaningful relationships with their team by using their inner compass to guide their actions (Gavin, 2019).

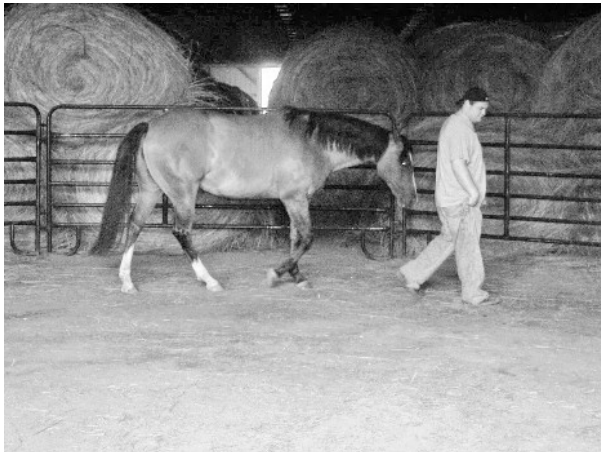


Figure 3.0 Join up with a horse.

Join up happens when trust between horse and human drops down to the underlying nature of reality, when the falling away of ego happens and the horse can sense that their human leader has become congruent, relationally accessible, and ‘real’ in the most natural sense. When skillfully facilitated, an equine-assisted learning program can attune us to “the fullness of what-is and our experience of reality as it is” (Gunnlaugson, 2024, p. 217). When a participant can somatically experience what it feels like in their body to lead a horse, they can then call upon this felt sense of knowing-with to somatically lead others toward the emerging future outside the horse arena.

When presencing becomes embodied, a participant may experience the flow state, as described by Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Flow “creates within us

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the psychological qualities associated with being carried: a feeling of effortlessness and safety, and the inner knowledge that life has the power to carry us, if we allow it” (Flatischler, 1992, as cited in Burns, 2013). Developing presencing mastery requires people to “collectively operate in the flow mode, where magic happens in the mystery of co-creation” (Burns, 2013).

Describing the phenomenon of presencing is difficult. Scharmer describes the texture of the presencing experience as being in a liminal, altered state, or a state of grace (2005). It is equally challenging to describe the somatic experience of join up with a horse. When an EAL participant describes that moment of oneness with the horse, they are often dumbfounded and speechless. When they find the words, they describe it as magic, in the flow, connected, spiritual, and effortless. However, using words like “magic” and “mystery” is misleading, because the “flow” or join up experience of EAL is neither magic nor mysterious. It is a very real and tangible experience that can be consistently actualized when a person or group consciously leverages their ability to somatically engage others in relational problem-solving—observing, listening, and sharing with mind, heart, and will wide open; and going to the place of individual and collective stillness, opening to the source of creativity and presence, and linking to the future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2005).

## VIII. The Conversational Nature of Leadership and our Predatory Action Logic

Everything we do with horses is conversational. Every move we make, every breath we take (to borrow a well-known lyric), they are watching us. If we stop to listen with our eyes and senses, we will notice that they are always inviting us into conversation—asking questions in the way they look at us, and responding to our non-verbal answers. Questions like: Are you OK? Are we safe? Where are we going, and why are we going there? What do you want me to do right now? If we cannot answer these fundamental questions in the moment, it becomes difficult to create movement and momentum toward a common goal, connect relationally, or sense the emerging future together.

The most fundamental, and most invisible, conversations in which humans engage are linked to our instinctual predatory action logic. Everything about us communicates our predatory nature, from having eyes on the front of our heads—predisposing us to being myopically focused on goal setting (catching our prey)—to how our body language asserts control and dominion over others. The consequence of our unconscious dependence on words as our primary tool of communication, combined with our tendency to see horses as livestock rather than sentient beings who can teach us, precludes us from engaging in meaningful, embodied conversations that would support the development of presencing awareness with those we work with and lead.

Perhaps presencing mastery is inextricably linked to the process of fostering new conversations, both internally and externally. David Whyte contends that leadership effectiveness is

fundamentally linked to the conversations we have with ourselves, within our organizations, and in society (Whyte, 2022). Whyte suggests that “the first step toward a new conversation is to stop the conversation we are having now, usually one that we have inherited, from the organization or from a previous epoch in our lives... [and] to hold that exchange in a different and more fundamental way: to drink from a different well,” finding “a different way to tread” (Whyte, 2022).

Equine-Assisted Learning challenges and disrupts, on an embodied level, what we believe we know to be true about the predatory conversations we are having, because to successfully establish a collaborative relationship with a horse requires learning a new language—the language of Equus—and entering a completely foreign *modus operandi*: the prey paradigm. This empathic and somatic language encourages individuals and groups to “open their minds,” to “suspend their voice of judgment,” to “see with fresh eyes” (Scharmer, 2005), and to make visible the fundamental predator/prey conversation.

Making this conversation ‘visible’ in a somatic way, allows us to become aware of how our unconscious, instinctual predatory nature shows up in our leadership style. (See Figure 4.0). It allows a leader to experience the difference between ‘power over’, which results in compliance (Figure 4.0), and ‘power with’, which engenders collaboration through the adoption of the embodied concept of leading from behind (Figure 5.0).



Figure 4.0 Unconscious predatory body language directed at the horse’s head by a leader when dealing with increasingly challenging tasks with a horse. Resulting in an agitated, frustrated reaction from the horse.



Figure 5.0 Conscious non-predatory body language directed at the horse’s hind quarters takes pressure off the head of the horse. Resulting in a willing forward movement from the horse.

As an EAL facilitator, I have witnessed these seemingly invisible and intangible conversations become very visible and tangible, due in large part to the horses asking us to become aware of our predatory body language and to let down our defenses, become vulnerable, and allow ourselves to be seen.

Equine-Assisted Learning is an embodied leadership experience that places people in a wordless, inter-species conversation, offering the opportunity to ‘tread’ unfamiliar trails that compel us to pause and confront our habitual, instinctual, and predatory ways of connecting, communicating, and collaborating with others. If the presencing process seeks to move people from ego- to eco-awareness (Scharmer, 2018), then what better way to do so than to place oneself in an egoless ecosystem—and learn to be one of the herd.

## IX. The Effectiveness of Equine-Assisted Learning to Develop Presencing Mastery

Most leaders come into an EAL experience with varying degrees of skepticism and cynicism. “How could a horse teach me anything about leadership?” is a familiar question heard by most organizational EAL coaches. Most people doubt that they will learn anything about themselves or gain insights or solutions to the challenges they face. However, by the end of a day working with horses, there are observable shifts and increased awareness about the distinctions between doing leadership and being a leader.

There are five reasons why working with horses encourages individuals to redirect and suspend their “voice of cynicism” (Scharmer, 2005) and move down the U towards presencing. First, the activities that participants engage in with horses hold metaphorical similarities to the challenges they are facing at work, either as a team or as an organization, which increases the transfer of learning to real-world contexts. Second, the non-conforming experiential nature of an EAL experience provides enough distance, space, and emotional safety for participants to observe how and when their default leadership behaviors show up—without the fear of confronting them face-to-face around a conference table in the urgency of an organizational challenge. Third, skillful debriefing of an activity with horses allows participants time to reflect on the assumptions, habits, beliefs, stories, and values that unconsciously shape behaviors and, in turn, produce results at work. Fourth, the honest feedback horses provide allows people to somatically, emotionally, and intellectually notice when their unconscious fear is operating, and to “let go” and come to ground, where they can sense the emerging future from a place of relational presencing. Fifth, once people know how to presense with horses, this embodied knowing can be “re-membered” when a similar situation arises in an organizational context.

Additionally, horses assist us in developing presencing mastery because, in part, they place us

in a state of reverie. “To be in reverie is to inhabit multiple layers of our consciousness all at once, to be fully aware of every bodily internal feeling while hazily hearing and seeing every ambient sound and sight [much like a horse’s natural state of attention]: to be present in this time now while inhabiting the timeless, employing the mind to re-interpret the future and even re-imagine the past” (Whyte, 2025). As Bockler points out, “The witnessing and nurturing presence of others can be enormously helpful here, as can be immersion in natural spaces radiating with vitality and abundance” (Bockler, 2021). Horses, when in a relaxed state, can offer people this nurturing presence, and 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” (Bockler, 2021).

The learning insights gained from EAL continue to deepen over time because being in proximity to horses creates both a hormonal (release of the ‘bonding’ hormone oxytocin) and neurological response that is rewarding to our brains and makes us want to seek and recreate the experience again (Shambo, 2013). “All mammals have this innate circuitry which is not about rewards but the excitement of searching them out” (Panksepp, as cited in Shambo, 2013). This type of learning creates a snowball effect, becoming increasingly rewarding as one develops, practices, and fine-tunes their somatic intelligence, perceptual, and presencing awareness.

## X. Conclusion

Equine-assisted learning is an Emerging Presencing Approach (EPA) that supports leaders and coaches to ground, deepen, mature, and embody their presencing perception within the overall presencing process, and to develop “our presencing as an embodied organ of perception” (Gunnlaugson, 2024, p. 217). The highly somatic, clean, in-the-moment feedback that is foundational to EAL creates non-conforming and intersubjective experiences where people can enter a new perceptual and somatic paradigm, guiding them through a kind of metamorphosis to the next stage of development—one that allows us to check the ego and “open the aperture of awareness, so that we may perceive more of the world at large” (Bockler, 2024). Equine-assisted learning allows people to practice the process of presencing in ways that foster presencing mastery. Leaders and coaching practitioners can gain deeper insights into their own naturalness and the ground of their being, where they can sense “the true from the false, the real from the unreal, the important from the unimportant” (Meher Baba, 2000).

For this emerging presencing approach to be fully adopted by leaders and presencing practitioners, further exploration and research into the roles of clean feedback, relational intersubjectivity, and the conversational nature of leadership in facilitating presencing and developing presencing mastery is needed. If we are committed to cultivating presencing mastery, perhaps the natural next step is to seek out an apprenticeship with a known master—the horse.

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# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## EMBODIED LEADERSHIP THROUGH PRESENCING

### *Unlocking Intelligence in the BodyMind*

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**Abstract:** This article explores the vital role of embodied awareness in presencing leadership, challenging the enduring cultural bias that privileges intellectualism over the body's innate intelligence in how we understand leadership and human potential. Drawing on theatre-making traditions and contemporary leadership practices, it introduces the concept of dual intelligence via the embodied and conceptual, examining how their integration enhances presence, adaptability, and leadership effectiveness. Central to this exploration are three channels of sensory awareness: exteroception, proprioception, and interoception. Through examples from both theatre and leadership, the article shows how cultivating embodied awareness can result in more authentic, responsive, and impactful leadership. Emphasis is placed on centering and other regular embodiment practices as tools for deepening somatic intelligence and sustaining presence. The article further considers imagination as a bridge between conceptual and embodied knowing, proposing that when imaginative capacity is grounded in sensory awareness, it can catalyze both personal and collective transformation. By confronting the prevailing bias towards intellect, this work advocates for a more integrated, sensory-based approach to leadership. Particularly, one that builds resilience and capacity for leading holistically in today's complex and evolving environments.

**Keywords:** Embodied leadership, presencing awareness, embodied sensing, embodied intelligence, embodied storytelling, relational leadership, somatic awareness, centering practice.

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## I. Introduction

Many theatre-making traditions create and express by working with the performer's somatic landscape. The genres of theatre that have inspired me in my creative journey align with this tradition.

I've spent countless hours over many years in theatre rehearsal spaces, including in Tokyo, Moscow, Bali, India, and across Europe, diving into the felt sense of my body. It has been a long, ongoing process of slowly shedding layers of expressive inhibition and learning to trust the wisdom beneath the surface. My path brought me especially to the rich, ensemble-based traditions of Asia and Russia, and these experiences were nothing short of life-changing.

Together with collaborators, following movement scripts or exercise directions, we allowed our bodies to explore through physicality and movement, learning to listen and respond to the information we perceived. In these contexts, we developed by playing with ideas and concepts in conjunction with sensory experiences. By paying attention to our internal and embodied landscapes, we laid a strong foundation for exploration, reflection, and creative discovery. We engaged in physical conversations with our bodies through gesture, sound, and sensation, while moving in new and unexpected ways to seek novel expressions.

I discovered that when we filter questions, conversations, ideas, data, and stories through embodied channels, our bodies reveal hidden insights, wisdom, and knowledge. This discovery eventually led me to wonder, many years later, if embodied awareness could unlock such creative potential in theatre, what might it offer to leadership practice and the experience of becoming present?

A performer's deep engagement with embodiment, in the collaborative dynamic of the theatre ensemble, offers valuable insights for presencing leadership. By harnessing the body's wisdom, leaders can cultivate authentic, adaptive, and impactful practices. This think-piece will explore these concepts more deeply, examining how embodied awareness can transform the leadership experience.

Presencing leadership invites a deeper orientation to the body as a source of wisdom, one that includes subtle intelligences arising through stillness, sensation, and relational immediacy. Theatre-making embodies many of these principles: sensing into the moment, suspending habitual responses, and responding from enlivened awareness. Just as performers remain attuned to themselves and others through the immediacy of the body, leaders can cultivate similar somatic skills for more adaptive and impactful leadership. This applies to both the self and social dimension

of leadership.

Working with an ensemble in a theatre-devising tradition can be highly stimulating of one's senses, curating deep focus, and often conjuring a profound sense of momentary connection. With this understanding of the creative process, I have been exploring the convergence of theatre, creativity, and social innovation in various contexts for the last 20 years.

As an embodied art form, theatre is inherently preoccupied with what the famous Polish Theatre director Grotowski called "*the closeness of the living organism*." To discover aesthetic nuances in expression, performers incorporate an awareness of their bodies in space, together with feelings and sensations, into their artistic choices. Intuition is also highly developed through sensory discernment, playing a crucial role in how performers improvise or respond to different audiences and each other. This heightened sensitivity can lead to organic and unique relationships that emerge in the moment, despite existing scripts or staging, allowing for dynamic interactions that are attuned to the present moment. Just as actors rely on their physical instrument and intuitive senses to guide their performance, outside of theatre contexts, leaders can cultivate similar abilities to respond with agility and authenticity in complex and ever-changing environments. This integration of intuition, body awareness, and collaboration can enhance both individual and group performance.

Consider the parallels in theatre-making dynamics with performances in social innovation. In theatre, the individual performer needs to develop a personal creative sensory competency before and in conjunction with the activation of the collective, shared body of the ensemble. Can this also be true for social innovation leadership, where the individual, personal dimensions of the sensory body are a part of the collective social 'body'? In working intentionally with immediate experience, we could discover aesthetic nuances and competencies concerning self and others and begin to think with our bodies, *and* with our minds. Embodiment is not about rejecting the marvels of our intellect. Instead, this cultivation extends our minds into the extra-neural landscapes of our bodies and beyond. This allows for intentionality and conscious awareness of undesirable habits and reactions, bringing greater choice in action, and ultimately sharper self-leadership.

Before proceeding, it feels important to initially clarify what we mean by 'embodiment' and 'presence.' Embodied leadership may be understood as a holistic approach that values the role of our physical and emotional experiences in shaping how we lead. Presence, in this context, invites us to engage with the moment, which is only possible through the felt sense of the body. In this way, we can connect with others with authenticity and refined attention. Taken together, these concepts highlight the integration of mind, body, and emotion in cultivating a leadership style that is both grounded and responsive. Throughout this exploration, and especially towards the end of the article,

theoretical insights will be grounded in practical applications, including specific centering practices and embodiment exercises that can be integrated into daily leadership practice.

## II. Thinking Outside the Brain

The premise of this article is that our bodies hold insights that, when cultivated and integrated, can enhance personal and social transformation. Through consistent practice, embodied awareness complements intellectual development, offering more responsive and meaningful outcomes. Being fully present with oneself shapes how we show up for others, which is the nature of embodied leadership.

This piece also identifies a blind spot, a persistent bias, regarding how intelligence is understood and cultivated. Two seemingly distinct yet interrelated forms of intelligence introduced are embodied awareness and conceptual awareness. Merging these two forms of knowing - conceptual and embodied - can deepen our sense of self and empower our embodied wisdom. The opportunity to practice sensory awareness in every moment is highlighted, enabling the effective application of embodiment skills when needed. One grounding practice that will be mentioned is called ‘centering,’ where it is important to note the pragmatic distinction between practice and application. Centering, as a grounding and rebalancing practice, is considered a gateway to a deeper somatic opening and a foundation for impactful habits in embodied presencing.

The role of imagination as a faculty of intellectual awareness is also briefly explored. The felt-sensory experience of an imagined future, through present-moment awareness, is a playground for powerful collaboration between our intellect and sensation. With increased embodiment skills, individuals become equipped to discover the creative spaces between embodied and intellectual exploration. These spaces are pockets of liminal thresholds that bridge the dimensions of our extended intelligence in space and time. The article poses the question of whether new ways of learning and innovating can be co-created. By nurturing conscious connections between intellectual and embodied experience, we can develop a more holistic understanding and practice of presencing leadership.

## III. Dissolving the Intellectual Bias

Since Descartes’ ‘I think therefore I am,’ Western culture has prized intellect over sensory awareness, reinforcing a split between mind and body. Despite efforts to include embodied awareness, cognitive habits often dominate, leading to shallow listening, over-talking, and reactivity. In response, science author Annie Murphy Paul asserts that “Our pronounced bias in favour of brain-bound thinking is long-standing and well entrenched - but a bias is all that it is, and one that can no longer be supported or sustained. The future lies in thinking outside the brain.” (Paul, 2021, *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* | June 2025 | Vol. 2, No. 1

pp. 14).

While our minds interpret the world, our bodies shape how we feel and respond. Even when we value the idea of embodied intelligence, ingrained thought patterns often override it. The intellect tends to dominate, narrowing the landscape of information available to our conscious minds. This is not a flaw, rather, it's how our nervous systems keep us safe and efficient. They detect patterns in our environment and streamline our responses by relegating familiar reactions to the unconscious. This saves energy, but it also means many of our interpretations and actions are simply habits on repeat. To shift this default mode, we need to attune to the body's extra-neural wisdom, the subtle cues and sensations that arise beneath conscious thought. When we bring awareness to these signals, we begin to rewire our nervous systems, creating new pathways for perception, choice, and action into the future.

Developing embodied awareness provides an essential counterbalance to a head-centric orientation. Recognizing where this bias persists in our experience helps us overcome its limitations. Embodied awareness cannot be conjured up by the mind alone, as intellectual understanding does not lead to embodied wisdom. However, our intellect, which is undeniably remarkable and essential, plays a crucial role in guiding us toward this embodied awareness. By intentionally integrating embodiment with the capabilities of our minds, we can open new channels for perceiving, reflecting, and acting that were previously unavailable. Embodied leadership incorporates physical awareness, helping leaders self-regulate, manage their state, communicate nonverbally, and build resilience. By becoming more mindfully aware of their internal landscape, leaders can manage their emotions more effectively, make better decisions, and communicate more authentically. This, in turn, fosters trust and clarity. Practices like mindfulness and conscious movement enable leaders to stay centered under pressure, respond to diversity, and adapt to complexity. In team settings, shared embodiment generates collective energy and alignment, making the group more engaged, cohesive, and resilient. This approach connects the mind, body, and environment, enhancing collaboration effectiveness. Integrating embodiment, therefore, becomes a powerful practice for advanced forms of personal and collective leadership. In other words, leaders should intentionally practice these foundational embodiment skills to consciously apply their benefits.

Sensory attention, as a practice in embodied intelligence, allows us to notice and shift unwanted habits. It's only when we become aware of the tendencies that unconsciously shape our thoughts and actions that we gain the power to change them. In theatre work, these conditioned habits often show up in the body in familiar movements or holding patterns. Maybe it's a clenched fist, a swaying arm, or a tight jaw that kicks in during a certain moment or to a particular character or scene partner. The first step is simply bringing awareness to these unconscious patterns. Then,

through breath, or even just softening the focus, we can begin to let the tension dissolve. A clenched fist becomes a loose hand. A tight jaw finds space to release. These adjustments might seem small, but they often open the door to a different, sometimes more honest, more impactful response in the moment. As Anthony de Mello once said, “What you are aware of, you are in control of; what you are not aware of is in control of you. You are always a slave to what you’re not aware of.” (1990, pp. 13)

Emotions, which arise from sensations, are our predispositions for action. Without slowing down to observe, listen, feel, and sense more deeply, our interactions with the world may remain stuck in old, unconscious, and reactive interpretations and behaviours. Deepening our personal embodiment practice nurtures new lenses of perception, which can benefit the collective ‘body’s ability to listen more deeply and intentionally change reactive patterns. In this way, our emotional responses to the world become less reactive. In theatre, we are constantly training our primary instrument of expression - our bodies - to be attuned to the reality of our immediate surroundings and the presence of others, enabling us to ‘act’ with intention and choice. Mindfulness of sensations and emotions cultivates an enhanced personal leadership presence, which naturally extends into broader social interactions, and therefore also the physical spaces we occupy.

#### IV. The Extended Mind

While our main focus here is on embodiment in presencing leadership, it's worth expanding our thinking to include the concept of The Extended Mind (Murphy Paul, 2021), which broadens the way we understand cognition. Murphy Paul’s earlier quote that “the future lies in thinking outside the brain” points to how aspects of our physicality, such as breath, movement, gesture, and emotional state, actively shape our cognitive abilities. This challenges the traditional view that cognition is solely confined to the brain and instead advocates for a more integrated approach into the future, where the mind extends into both the body and the environment. By adopting this view, we move away from relying solely on intellectual processes, opening up new pathways for deeper, more holistic engagement in leadership. In my own work, this shift has helped me navigate uncertainty with more flexibility and presence, qualities I see leaders increasingly needing in today’s ever-changing and complex world.

Social Presencing Theatre (SPT), developed by Arawana Hayashi with Otto Scharmer, brings the Extended Mind into practice. As part of Theory U, SPT activates the collective body through movement and awareness, bridging conceptual understanding and embodied experience to support adaptive, relational leadership. In SPT, the social field is activated by directing attention to the collective body, allowing participants to sense and shift underlying social dynamics through

physical movement and presence. It bridges the gap between intellectual understanding and embodied experience, demonstrating the effectiveness of embodied approaches. By integrating sensory, emotional, and rational awareness with movement, SPT helps develop leadership capacities that support adaptability and the ability to fluidly navigate between intellectual and felt experiences. In this sense, Social Presencing Theatre is a perfect example of The Extended Mind in action. As we explore further, we'll look at how embodiment functions as a vital expression of intelligence.

## V. Clarifying *Embodiment*

Embodiment encompasses a diverse range of practices, methods, and techniques that can serve personal and collective presencing. Embodied awareness involves developing a vocabulary for the layers of sensations we are perceiving, and the felt sense of who we are, which is arising moment by moment. Actively investigating our sensory experiences with the world around us and taking appropriate action from these insights is a form of embodied intelligence.

Our bodies perceive through aesthetic, sensorial, emotional, and experiential knowledge, often overlooked in favor of intellect. This intelligence, though rarely acknowledged, offers powerful insight when we learn to listen. Neuroscientist and embodiment coach Amanda Blake (2018, pp. 43) points out that we:

Tend to dismiss our sensations, urges, hunches, and gut feelings as unimportant or unreliable. We treat our bodies as vehicles to get to the next meeting, objects to polish for the next party, or machines that we hire an expert to fix. Rarely do we consider that our bodies might have wisdom worth listening for.

Accessing this wisdom can significantly influence our perception of, and response to the world around us. By honing an ability to feel more, we can cultivate state of the art system sensing abilities, as coined by Otto Scharmer. We can then apply these skills to the practice of social presencing leadership, but not from a place of intellect dominance, but through an expanding range of sensory tools. Another nugget of wisdom from Amanda Blake is that we do not see the world as it is, but rather as we are. Our embodied state fundamentally shapes our perception and understanding of the world, as our biology influences how we experience and interpret reality. As such, embodied intelligence works with a set of concrete embodiment skills that can be practiced, developed, and applied to enhance our social innovation efforts.

## VI. Towards Body Mind

Cognitive science emphasizes the concept of the "distributed brain," which recognizes the ongoing neural conversation between the brain and the body (Blake, 2018). These connections run from the tips of our fingers and toes up to the brain and back again, forming a dynamic network of communication. Physiologically, the brain and body are interdependent, and each relies on the other to function effectively. Yet these connections aren't fixed. They can be shaped. Through intentional practice, we can move beyond automatic patterns and cultivate what Amanda Blake calls "neural agility", the capacity to consciously intervene in our nervous system's default settings to create new, more adaptive responses. In this view, our intelligence isn't confined to the brain; it's distributed throughout our nervous and sensory-motor systems. Building on this, Lakoff & Johnson (1999, pp. 18) offer a powerful insight into how deeply our reasoning itself is grounded in our physical experience:

The mind arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experiences. This is not just the innocuous and obvious claim that we need a body to reason; rather, it is the striking claim that the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment... Thus, to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanism of neural binding.

The mind and body are so intertwined that Cartesian dualism can only be rejected. In life and work, bringing 'head and heart' together, both in practice and understanding, may be the next frontier for social presencing and innovation.

With regular practice and application, we become better able to build conscious bridges between the scaffolding of our minds and the subjective experience of our bodies. As we build these connections, so too do we lay the foundations for powerful social collaboration. This is a form of deep learning, as Otto Scharmer has called it, where we transform consciousness to change a system at scale. (2009)

In theatre, the rehearsal space is a laboratory for bridging intellect and sensation. Over time, performers develop neural agility and the ability to shift fluidly between analysis and action, thought and sensation, becoming a bridge into a more refined awareness of both mind and body.

In the rehearsal space, we always began with some form of embodiment practice. This involved different types of movement across the space, syncing with breath cues and visualization exercises, all aimed at grounding the mind-body connection right from the start. Only after activating these connections would we engage the mind with reflection and discussion. But we never stayed in the mental realm for too long. We would always come back to the body, exploring through movement and sensation.



In theatre, the intended relationship between mind and body is balanced, allowing practitioners to move easily between the two. This skill can be honed through training, and for performers, the ability to shift between these realms becomes second nature. Similarly, in presenting leadership, the capacity to toggle between intellectual processing and embodied awareness can be cultivated. It's crucial to note, though, that we're not advocating for the mind to be sidelined or rejected. Instead, we seek to expand our leadership capacity by incorporating both intellectual understanding and a deeper exploration of our embodied reality.

As we embrace the integration of intellectual and embodied awareness, we move toward the idea of dual intelligence, an approach that values both intellectual and embodied knowledge. This shift enables us to tap into a richer, more adaptive form of leadership that bridges the conceptual and sensory domains, potentially creating a more expansive and flexible leadership practice.

## VII. Dual Intelligence

Amanda Blake identifies conceptual and embodied awareness as distinct yet complementary dimensions of self-awareness. Conceptual awareness engages the mind, thinking about the self through language, logic, and symbolic and abstract thought. Embodied awareness, by contrast, is the 'self', experienced as a body, in the present moment, through sensation, emotion, and creative action. Bridging these two forms of intelligence through practical experimentation and collaboration, much like in theatre practice, expands our capacity for integrated personal and social presencing leadership. This expanded intelligence offers a broader lens, accessing more of what the world and our bodies reveal, thus widening the range of choices available to us. Crucially, it is through direct, embodied experience that this deeper wisdom emerges, ready to be shared, reflected on, and integrated toward meaningful outcomes.

Our embodied state, which has a resonant frequency experienced as a quality of presence, determines our resonance in the world and our ability to perceive and act upon it. Ginny Whitelaw (2020) emphasizes that resonance is a fact, but *how* we resonate is a choice that depends on our state of embodiment. She goes on to explain that our nervous systems are shaped by the experiences and interactions we've accumulated over time, and that we "see the world as we are". Our bodies essentially become the lens through which we interpret the world. So, when we intentionally make shifts or try to reshape this lens, it changes the way we perceive reality. This shift in perception plays a crucial role in leadership presence: our embodied presence and resonance act as a signal we send out into the world, influencing how we impact both ourselves and those around us. By actively engaging in this process, we can expand our intelligence and our ability to act from a more grounded, mindful place.

## VIII. Opening Channels of Sensory Awareness

Our physical and sensorimotor capacities are closely tied to our cognitive processes. The way we inhabit our bodies shapes how we perceive, interpret, and respond to the world. By developing embodiment skills, through focused sensory attention, we can disrupt habitual patterns of thought and behaviour, raising our awareness threshold and creating space for intentional action.

Three primary channels of sensory awareness support this work: *Exteroception* involves the five senses of touch, smell, taste, sight, and sound. These evolved for survival, yet when consciously honed, they offer a wealth of hidden information about the present moment. Attuning to what we see, hear, and sense externally increases our receptivity to what is.

*Proprioception* helps us locate and orient our bodies in space. It influences our sense of self, boundaries, and belonging. Through gesture, movement, and metaphor, proprioception supports the embodied expression of how we relate to ourselves, others, and our environment. Social Presencing Theatre exemplifies how this can be applied to leadership development.

*Interoception* is perhaps the least utilized of the sensory channels, and the type of sensing where small calibrations can lead to the most profound shifts. Sensations, feelings and emotions, though confined to the present moment, often arise in response to mental elements such as memories, thoughts, ideas, fears, expectations, and imaginings from the past, present, and future. Sensations generated throughout the body send signals to the brain, which are then merged with other streams of information into a single moment of our present condition, creating a sense of "how I feel" in the moment. So, while we typically think of the brain as guiding the body, the body also guides us through an array of sensory cues. Bringing awareness to the sensory landscape of our body and considering how this information can be useful in maintaining internal balance and more accurate interpretations of sensory information about the world is a form of embodied intelligence.

Although all three channels of sensation are in constant communication with each other, understanding and honing awareness within each channel can be a useful approach to utilizing these zones of embodied intelligence in social presencing work. Think about actors and performers in a theatre-making process. Training involves learning how to simultaneously tune into both internal (interoceptive) and external (exteroceptive) cues, all while being aware of how their bodies move and position themselves in space (proprioception). For example, an actor needs to be in touch with their internal sensations, like their breath or heartbeat (interoception), while also staying alert to the external environment, like the energy of the audience or the interactions with fellow actors (exteroception). At the same time, they must stay aware of their body's movements and alignment, adjusting to the space and other performers (proprioception). Theatre is a deeply embodied practice, and for the work to have a real impact, all three channels of awareness must come together. An

actor adjusting posture (proprioception), emotions (interoception), and audience response (exteroception) embodies all three channels in real time. Similarly, leaders can develop this integrated sensory awareness to become more attuned, responsive, and grounded in their leadership.

In social presencing leadership, a similar strategy can make a leader more present and responsive. Like actors tuning into the energy of a scene, leaders who stay aware of their inner signals and external cues can respond with more clarity, connection, and confidence. By developing this embodied awareness, leaders can make more thoughtful decisions, create real connections with their teams, and stay agile when facing challenges or opportunities. The practices of embodied intelligence in theatre-making offer valuable ideas and insights for leadership, helping leaders become more connected, mindful, and impactful in their work. As we become more in tune with our bodies, we also become better at understanding and making sense of the world around us.

## IX. Embodiment as Practice

Presencing, as a practice of embodiment, can be seen as a form of holistic intelligence, integrating intellect with the wisdom of the body. To fully sense the social field, as described by Otto Scharmer (2007), requires the patient and collaborative effort of deepening our capacity to feel beyond just presencing at specific stages, such as the bottom of the ‘U’. Building on this foundation, Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020) extends the notion of social sensing into presencing as a way of being. Instead, we can view every moment, regardless of where or how we work, as an opportunity for embodied presencing. This allows us to gradually bring previously unconscious or overlooked aspects of the mind-body connection into awareness, and explore how they may be useful in exploring innovation questions.

Establishing a consistent embodiment practice builds empathy, listening, and responsiveness, key traits in both personal and social leadership. This beautiful invitation to sensation from a journal entry by author Jeanette LeBlanc (2018, pp. 3) serves as a poignant reminder. I have included this here as the poetic aesthetic offers a compelling invitation to return to the felt sense of our bodies.

Be gentle. Pay attention. Offer purposeful healing. Seek Equilibrium. Unfreeze, slowly.  
Stretch yourself out into the world. Let your eyes calibrate to this new light and notice how it caresses the lines and curves and soft and hard of you. Allow your mouth to twist and stumble around new shapes. Be so very sensory. Notice everything. From every angle. The way your bones feel. The way you orient to space and time. Invite your whole being into this new way of living, into the totality and wholeness of it. Let it be strange and uncomfortable

and painful and stiff. Let it be magical and novel and unfamiliar and entirely wonderful. Follow the whispers where they lead.

## X. Presencing as a Form of Centring

Centering enhances emotional regulation, self-awareness, and resilience, qualities essential for grounded leadership and collaborative presencing. It allows leaders to shift their embodied state and connect more intentionally with emerging possibilities. Furthermore, centring can mitigate physiological and mental stress, which undermines our ability to be creative and perceive possibilities. Stress is anti-creative.

The numerous benefits of centring positively impact our leadership resonance and extend to the social domain, influencing the quality of our collective presencing. Centring is a crucial practice for leaders seeking self-mastery in what can be called creative self-leadership. By practicing centring, we become better equipped to access our highest potential, leading to more responsive creativity in sensing into the emerging future within the collective field.

Various centring practices can be combined for significant benefits when practiced regularly. However, it's important to distinguish between centring-in-practice and centring-in-action. Our bodies are wired to respond in certain ways under stress, so to change our body's response, we need to cultivate state regulation skills during non-stressful times, so we can apply them effectively in real work and high-stakes situations that trigger stress. Therefore, a regular practice of centring is needed to reap its benefits. However, even a few seconds of centring can influence your internal state to be more present, receptive, and alert.

This aligns closely with what I've experienced in theatre: that movement, breath, and physical intention don't just express feeling, they create feeling. By shifting posture, breath rhythm, or muscular tension, we access entirely new emotional and relational possibilities. Claire Dale, a leading researcher in the field of *Physical Intelligence*, the study of how bodily movement, posture, breath, and visualization influence our neurochemical state and performance, offers insights that give language to what actors have long known in practice - that the body can lead the mind. Practices like breathwork, movement, and visualization don't just help us feel grounded, they also shift our internal chemistry. As she writes, "We are able to shift and change the levels of key neurotransmitters and hormones in the body and brain through how we move, how we breathe, how we visualise situations and engage, how we create relationships..." (Dale & Wesson, 2020, pp. 11).

This scientific lens complements the experiential insights from theatre, affirming that embodiment practices not only influence our subjective state but can physiologically prepare us for presence, decision-making, and creative leadership. Similarly, leaders can apply these principles by

using intentional movement or breathwork before high-stakes interactions, such as meetings, presentations, or negotiations, to regulate internal state and enhance clarity, calm, and interpersonal resonance.

In the theatre rehearsal space, while we may not always use the term *centering*, or even *embodiment*, for that matter, we regularly practice bringing our awareness back to the present state of our bodies. Centering builds the capacity for discernment of attention, creates space for refined reflection, and often serves as preparation for action.

I'll never forget a moment sitting cross-legged on the rehearsal floor, focusing on my breath to ease my nerves before presenting a difficult role, playing someone on the edge of madness. As I sat there quietly, trying to gather myself, my teacher passed by and simply said, "I'm glad you came today." I believe that in witnessing me *gathering myself*, he too was affected, becoming just a little calmer and present, himself.

The joy of centring is that it's available in every moment, wherever you are or whatever you're doing. Centring in action takes the practice beyond stillness and into the flow of everyday experience. It is the art of remaining centred in the moving body while simultaneously orienting toward what we care about, what holds meaning, purpose, or value for us in the world. This quality of attention allows us to stay connected to our inner steadiness even as we move, speak, decide, and relate. Theatre offers a compelling example of centring in action, as the activation of bodies moving in conjunction with creative awareness is presence in motion: a felt coherence between body, intention, and action. In this way, centring becomes not only a practice of returning to ourselves, but a way of simultaneously staying connected to world around us, anchored and aligned, as we engage with the unfolding and relational moment.

Try some of the following suggestions to build your centring practice. Start with mindfulness as the foundation. Bring your attention to the present moment without judgment. Notice sensations in your body, your breath, and the environment around you. Focus your attention to be objective, simply notice feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations without needing to change them. Incorporate breathwork, such as deep belly breathing or alternate nostril breathing, to calm your nervous system. Use your senses to anchor yourself in the here and now, tuning into what you can see, hear, feel, and smell, and become more attuned to your body's inner signals.

Body scans are another helpful tool. Slowly bring awareness to different parts of your body, inviting release where you find tension or discomfort. Practice grounding techniques. You might stand barefoot on the earth, press your feet firmly into the floor, or visualize roots extending from your body deep into the ground. These practices help connect you to both your body and the earth beneath you. Engage in mindful movement. Theatre exercises, still-image work, gesture-based

exploration, dance, or yoga can all help you develop a deeper, embodied connection to yourself. Physical constellations, which are spatial arrangements that bring ideas or emotions into form, are also powerful tools to turn conversation into embodied experience. Another potent centring tool is reconnecting with what matters most to you. What do you care about deeply? What are you committed to? Some people find that asking a question, and using inquiry itself as a centring practice, opens valuable insight and presence. Try some of these centring questions:

Who am I, and how is that embodied here?

What has meaning to me, ultimately, and here? Why am I doing this?

What do I most value, ultimately, and here?

What do I serve, ultimately, and here?

For social centring, explore shifting the 'I' to 'We' when collaborating and remain curious about how this changes the essence of the inquiry. As the inquiry shifts from personal to the collective, can you notice how the personal body merges with the social body? Who are we and how is that embodied here? What has meaning to us? These kinds of questions invite a deeper exploration of the embodied nature of our relationships.

Cultivate self-compassion and be kind to yourself as you practice centring, remembering that it takes time and practice. Set aside regular time for practice, integrate it into your daily routine, and be patient with yourself as you progress at your own pace. Experiment with different approaches and find what works best for you. With consistent practice and attention, you can cultivate a deeper sense of centred presence and enhance your overall well-being and leadership resonance. Centring well, and remembering to stay under pressure, takes practice. Developing a regular centring habit will greatly benefit the social domain of work, where collaborators can co-sense and co-centre around issues being addressed, and appropriately incorporate these insights into their creative innovations. A centring practice will enable stronger metaphoric bridges between head and heart and between body and mind. With this foundational practice, we begin to become co-creators of our shared future.

## XI. Imaginative Sensing

As we cultivate our sensory awareness, it's important to embrace experimentation and play, harnessing the growing intelligence within us. While embodied awareness is limited to the present moment, imagination, which is part of conceptual awareness, lets us transcend space and time. Through the imaginative vehicle of our mind, we can recollect the past, reflect on the realities of the present, and envision possibilities for the emerging future. This almost magical capacity allows us to conjure up realities, outcomes, situations, and futures that do not yet exist. However, these projected

imaginings do not vanish into thin air. Rather, they have a sensory influence on our current state of embodiment, thanks to the role of mirror neurons at play. Our minds do not know the difference between our flights of imagination and what is real. In other words, the ability to discern sensations and related emotions that are stimulated through future casting, through our felt-sense in the present moment, allows us to physically and consciously sense the emerging "field of the future" in the here and now. This is a profound idea where the head and heart merge.

For example, when I imagine myself as an old man living a simple yet empowered life, surrounded by nature and a community of friends, my sensorial experience comes alive. I can hear the sound of the ocean's waves, see the vivid green hues of nature, and feel supported and enabled to do work aligned with my purpose. I feel a warm softening and an expanded sensation in my chest, my breath deepens, and my jaw relaxes. I smile.

Expanding on this idea, imagine a collective of people imagining together, merging sensory experience with the faculty of the mind. Strategically connecting the intelligence of body and mind to deepen understanding, collaboration, and a shared vision for the future is simply a matter of shifting attention. Imagining possible futures and bringing them into our consciously felt sensorial experience requires deeper sensing into our somatic field. If we can imagine it, we can sense it. Applied to the collective community, this becomes a powerful, practical technology.

## XII. Closing Reflections: Deepening our Shared Humanity

Embodied intelligence is vital not only as an individual pursuit but also as a foundation for holistic, integrated, and sustainable collaboration. Deepening our sensory awareness sharpens our thinking and unlocks extended cognitive capacities, enriching the quality of our social innovations. For leaders engaged in presencing, this means learning to perceive through the body's deeper intelligence. By softening ingrained cognitive biases, we create space for more grounded, attuned ways of knowing.

When the rational mind collaborates with the felt sense of our body, a bridge forms between conceptual understanding and lived experience. By aligning to this inner coherence, we heighten our sensitivity to emergence and deepen our relational presence. Orienting from the body's intelligence allows us to attune more fully to the present and connect more meaningfully with others. This embodied awareness enhances our responsiveness and supports a leadership that resonates with clarity and care.

Throughout this article, we've seen how integrating embodied and conceptual awareness provides a fuller, more dynamic foundation for leadership practice. The three channels of sensory intelligence - exteroception, proprioception, and interoception - offer practical gateways into this integration. Imagination, when intentionally paired with somatic awareness, becomes a powerful ally,

allowing us to sense future possibilities as tangible, felt realities that shape our experience of the present.

Presencing leadership is ultimately a shift in being. Like theatre-making, it opens new possibilities for creativity, connection, and transformation through the convergence of mind and body. In this way, presencing becomes a path to becoming more deeply human together, creating the conditions for collective transformation to take root, and, ultimately, for a theatre of connection to emerge.



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## EMBODIED PRESENCING LEADERSHIP: *Midwifing Transformation through the Integral Art Lab*

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**Abstract:** This article explores the practice of Embodied Presencing Leadership within the experiential framework of the Integral Art Lab, a creative and consciousness-based process developed in collaboration with the Presencing Institute. Designed for leaders navigating complexity, the Integral Art Lab uses the medium of visual art to activate sensory awareness, inspire creativity, and cultivate qualities of appreciation, dignity, and interconnectedness. Through carefully facilitated processes, both individual and collective dimensions of embodied leadership are awakened. Participants engage in practices that deepen perception, align inner and outer awareness, and support the emergence of new insights from subtle, often overlooked, dimensions of experience. As this work unfolds, a form of collective leadership begins to emerge that operates like a unified, living organism attuned to the deeper intelligence of life. The article proposes that Embodied Presencing Leadership, when practiced in alignment with Source and shared among a consciously attuned group, can support a more dignified and co-creative coexistence with all forms of life.

**Keywords:** Embodiment, presencing, leadership, source, letting be, creativity, consciousness

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### I. Introduction

This article arises from my lived commitment to Embodied Presencing Leadership and the experiential terrain I have cultivated through the Integral Art Lab (IAL). Rooted in two decades of

inquiry into consciousness, embodiment, and artistic process, my work unfolds at the intersection of personal transformation and collective emergence. The IAL was created in close dialogue with the Presencing Institute and functions as a u.lab 2x prototype aligned with the Theory U framework. It offers a generative space for leaders and practitioners to engage with aesthetic experience, subtle sensing, and embodied inquiry as pathways into creative leadership.

The structure of the Integral Art Lab supports deep access to inner and relational knowing. Participants engage in a rhythm of contemplative, embodied, and dialogical practices, often catalyzed by a shared encounter with a specific artwork. These aesthetic entry points open the perceptual field, allowing participants to sense into emerging possibilities, attune to resonances within and between bodies, and participate in an unfolding process that reveals insights not easily accessed through conceptual reflection alone. The artwork functions as both a mirror and a threshold, inviting contact with dimensions of human experience that are imaginal, intuitive, and often transpersonal.

Through these curated processes, subtle layers of reality begin to surface. Those currents that are often just beneath awareness yet carry transformative potential. Participants learn to presence themselves more fully in each moment, to listen through the body, and to attune to what is moving in the shared field. These dynamics give rise to a more integrated form of leadership, one that does not separate cognition from feeling or isolate the individual from the whole. Instead, leadership becomes an embodied expression of relational intelligence—responsive, grounded, and sourced in something deeper than personal will or strategy.

In writing this article, I draw from years of facilitation, participant reflection, and direct observation inside the Lab. My method of inquiry is intuitive and transdisciplinary, guided by a five-cycle hermeneutic spiral that allows emergent material to unfold through layered interpretation. This process moves from the initial formulation of a core question into ever-deepening phases of insight and synthesis. Each cycle invites a fuller expression of embodied knowing, making space for new forms of meaning and connection to arise through embodied presencing leadership.

## II. Embodied Presencing Leadership

*You will realise that it is not the language that matters—it is the frequency of the message and the messenger. (Rudd, 2013, p. XXXiX)*

My dedication to Embodied Presencing Leadership emerges from my lived experience as host and facilitator of the Integral Art Lab (IAL), a format developed from the Theory U process. In the IAL, we explore the translinear unfolding of creativity and consciousness, reflected through the aesthetic experiences of artworks. Works of art contain information that can inspire creative

processes and support the realization of one's potential. My motivation to research in this field is deeply aligned with the work of Swiss philosopher Jean Gebser (1905–1973), who posits that creativity arises from essential, active forces within Source, forces that spontaneously lead to mutation, new creation, and expressions of humanity.

As Embodied Presencing leaders, we remain deeply engaged at the core of these creative processes, both individually and collectively. We embody and presence the connection with Source as well as with participants and co-leaders, consciously witnessing and participating in transformative movements. What could be more compelling than exploring this creative Source of change and renewal through a focused inquiry?

In creativity, origin is present. Creativity is not bound to space and time, and its truest effect can be found in mutation, the course of which is not continuous in time but rather spontaneous, acausal, and discontinuous. Creativity is a visibly emerging impulse of origin which “is” in turn timeless, or more accurately, before or “above” time and timelessness. And creativity is something that “happens” to us, that fully effects or fulfills itself in us. (Gebser, 2020)

This creation, or mutation,<sup>1</sup> transforms the entire organism and relational system. It begins as a subtle movement that flows through the body, forging new connections, elevating energy levels, and leading to new expressions, attitudes, and modes of interaction.

According to Richard Rudd,<sup>2</sup> this creative impulse is based on a breakthrough<sup>3</sup> that causes the DNA to mutate to a higher frequency, which, as David Hawkins<sup>4</sup> (1927–2012) presents in his “Map of Consciousness”<sup>5</sup> (2020), potentially leading to a new level of consciousness and to an increasing perception of the interconnectedness and, with Jean Gebser, to an increasing co-creative unfolding among the universe, earth, and humanity.

In light of these insights, leadership is understood as the capacity for embodied presencing in alignment with Source and universal principles, functioning in service to the whole. This felt

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<sup>1</sup> A mutation is an unpredictable event that breaks the continuity in any linear sequence, at any level within the universe. <https://genekeys.com/the-glossary-of-empowerment/> retrieved 19.01.2023

<sup>2</sup> Rudd is a teacher, mystic, and award-winning poet. His inner journey began early in life as he experienced unusual energies coursing through his body, culminating in a profound spiritual experience at the age of 29. Emerging from what he describes as “a field of limitless light” that lasted for three days and nights, Richard was entrusted with a sacred teaching: the wisdom of the Gene Keys.

<sup>3</sup> Every breakthrough, according to Rudd, causes your DNA to shift to a higher frequency, resulting in new feelings and behaviors. The true magic unfolds as this inner transformation manifests in your outer life. Your attractor field changes, initiating a new sequence of external events as the cosmos begins to work with you rather than against you (Rudd, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> David Hawkins (1927–2012) was a mystic, psychiatrist, spiritual teacher, and author.

<sup>5</sup> *The Map of Consciousness* represents the first documented calibration of levels of consciousness. This chart encompasses the full spectrum of human experience, providing a pathway for aligning ourselves with the highest states of happiness and ultimate freedom. Simply encountering the map can be transformative, as certain insights can significantly elevate our consciousness by merely hearing about them (Hawkins, 2020).

interconnectedness enhances empowerment and responsiveness. We observe this phenomenon in the Integral Art Lab as participants and co-leaders attune, intentionally aligning and engaging in dialogue from this unified sense of being. Embodied Presencing Leadership emerges as individuals interact authentically and coherently from both vertical and horizontal alignment, recognizing that each expression has a tangible impact on the whole—each thought, sensation, and action matters. It is essential to honor every voice, enabling a shared, transpersonal cocreation, where each individual feels both personally engaged and part of the collective. This heightened, coherent interaction within the group as a unified organism requires qualities accessible at a frequency that enables love.

To lead in service of the whole requires alignment with everyone in the group and an acute awareness from which creative processes can be observed, demanding continuous alertness, dedication, and flexibility. I recently witnessed this embodied leadership in action through conductor Christian Thielemann, whose presence exemplified Embodied Presencing Leadership in September 2023. Thielemann was wholly devoted to the greater whole of the symphony, embodying and presencing the music and rhythm, foreseeing the piece as a unified entity and bringing it to life through masterful musicians, each a master of their instrument, all in service to the symphony. Another striking moment was observing a solo violist express gratitude to his viola, as though the instrument itself had played through him. This gesture symbolized a symbiotic relationship, a harmonious interplay of give and take that was instantly understood, reflecting the essence of collaborative artistry and leadership.

Merry (2013) referred to Marshall Lefferts work in describing a trans-linear unfolding of creative forces, emerging from the tension between the present moment and a future possibility. Movements that resemble the form of a torus, flowing from the outside to the inside and back, and from the inside to the outside, manifest through diverse languages and forms of expression, continually folding in and out to give rise to new insights, expressions, and structures of consciousness. Through this imagery, human creativity is seen as emerging from an embodied engagement with this evolutionary movement.

One could say that consciousness evolves through this toroidal flow, unfolding holographically within energy-matter and space-time, and individually through cycles of incarnation, transcendence, and integration of different levels of consciousness. Each stage of development includes and transcends the preceding structure and their manifestations. Rudd (2020) echoes this view that the universe, however chaotic or random it may seem, is inherently self-organizing, with consciousness permeating every level. Consequently, each individual embodies a unique personality with distinct talents and abilities, reflecting the universal principle of self-organizing syntropy.

In this way, the life force from Source acts as the agent for embodying one's potential in a

responsive and dynamically self-organizing way. As this potential unfolds through compassion and empathy in relationships, the more one becomes a co-creative participant in the universal creation process. This transformation, realized through the unfolding of deeper potential, affects all involved in the process of change. This sentiment is echoed by sacred dancer and teacher Banafsheh Sayyad (2023).

Embodiment means living the oneness and interconnectedness of all that is through the individual self and the body, recognizing and affirming that you are part of a living, connected universe. It is a dance of balancing and uniting body and soul, matter and energy, particle and wave, the inner and outer terrain. As above so below, as within so without.

With these reflections and new references to the ever-present connection with Source, it becomes evident that embodiment involves internalizing and inhabiting subtle information from the future, moment by moment, aligning closely with Olen Gunnlaugson's (2020) approach to presencing, where he describes allowing ourselves to be fully present to the deeper dimensions of our human nature, where who we are is understood more as an emerging phenomenon that is disclosed to us in each situation, moment to moment. In surrendering to this moment, especially in times of crisis, the convergence of past and future within the present becomes actualized, enabling us to embody this ongoing process of re-creation in the here and now.

In Theory U, (Scharmer, 2016), presencing is the blending of sensing and presence, involves connecting to the Source of the highest future possibility and bringing it into the present moment. Entering the state of presencing enables perception to arise from a future potential that requires our engagement to become reality. In this state, we step into our true being, our authentic self. Presencing for Scharmer is thus a movement that allows us to approach our self from the perspective of an emerging future.

In presencing, we perceive subtle information within, between, and beyond ourselves. Our collective awareness shifts from our individual bodies to a shared space of felt commonality, where limitations dissolve and new possibilities emerge. Through deep listening and by holding this collective of bodies together, we become receptive and responsible for a movement we can allow but cannot control. The creative impulse initiates something new, the specific form of which is yet unknown, as it begins to unfold, striving for a higher order. We experience these processes with felt awareness, grounded in a pulsating heart attuned to relatedness. We sense the frequency of our shared presence rising, and joy and love begin to flow as feelings that deeply nourish, connect, encourage, and strengthen us. Leadership arises from the individual's responsiveness to this, embodying the capacity to communicate with higher reality for a higher purpose. This aligns with the hermetic principle: "as above, so below; as within, so without; as the universe, so the soul..."

(Kybalion, Hermes Trismegistus).

Aligned with Source and in service to the whole, we can help others reconnect with this original sense of Oneness. As Richard Rudd describes, “True leadership does not impose itself on anyone. It is the gift of being able to help others find their own way forward in life, rather than taking away their individual power. It is characterized by love for the other and by deep listening” (Rudd, 2013, p. 48). This interconnection with Source reveals itself in the open space between the known and the unknown, the so-called “gap.” In this space of letting be, as Gunnlaugson (2020) describes, we provide a space to hold and prepare the ground for what is ready to unfold. From this gesture of receptive holding, a wider frame of leadership begins to emerge, one that makes room for the unformed, the chaotic, and the transformative to take shape. Peter Merry refers to this as Evolutionary Leadership: “the highest form of leadership—offering and holding the space for the movement to happen and facilitating the dynamic dance between order and chaos” (2013, p. 150).

Drawing from these contributions, creativity emerges as a spontaneous breakthrough or mutation that arises in moments of tension or crisis. Such moments carry within them the seeds of transformation that embodied presencing leaders are attuned to hold. The receptivity of both individual and collective vessels is essential to the conception, cocreation, and birth of the new. Facing the unknown calls us to recognize and embrace the opportunity within it, to listen for its potential, and to take the next step in relationship with what is becoming. As instruments fulfilling a higher purpose, we are called to continuously renew the known and cocreate new orders. This movement toward creative renewal expresses the original meaning of leadership.

The Indo-European root of the word “leadership,” \*leith, means “to go forth,” “to cross a threshold,” or “to die.” That root meaning, which suggests that the experience of letting go and then going forth into another world that begins to take shape only once we overcome the fear of stepping into the unknown, is at the very heart and essence of leadership. (Scharmer, 2016, p. 407)

As host and facilitator of the Integral Art Lab, I have observed that the radiance of my own and others embodied potential. This, along with the frequency conveyed through voice, tone, and language attracts individuals who intuitively resonate with and seek this type of experiential learning, reflecting Rudd’s point “it is the frequency of the message and the messenger that matters” (Rudd, 2013, p. XXXiX). Operating under the assumption that each individual is a fractal within a larger fractal lineage, this naturally draws together those inclined to contribute to and complete the components of a self-organizing collective organism. An effective way to understand this process is by exploring resonance as an attractor that communicates itself through an open invitation to participate, share experiences, and generate new insights within the circle of those present.



In practice, this process has revealed an optimal group size of 8-12 participants, with groups of eight particularly significant, resonating with the concept of “Holding Together” in the *I Ching*. At this scale, each participant can see, hear, and perceive all others, creating an environment where every shared impulse becomes meaningful, capable of influencing both individual and collective frequencies and behaviors. Through this insight, Embodied Presencing re-centers leadership, coupled with intentional reflection on fundamental questions such as: “What can I contribute?”, “What is my higher purpose?”, and “Why am I here?” When each individual embodies leadership through presencing in service to the whole, a collective form of Embodied Presencing Leadership begins to emerge, valuing the distinctiveness and importance of each individual, recognizing that every contribution is essential to the wellbeing of the whole. Former feelings of unworthiness, separateness, or the need to compete for relevance are transformed into experiences of appreciation, dignity, and interconnectedness. In this dynamic, creative unfoldment within the group functions harmoniously with the natural order and the broader universe.

### III. Research Topic: Midwifing Transformation

From my continually evolving experiences within a community of individuals who are themselves in constant transformation, the meaning of “Embodied Presencing Leadership” also shifts. Originally understood as leading oneself in alignment with Source, this practice gradually informs the collective, evolving into a form of collective Embodied Presencing Leadership. This creative process is characterized by an increasing sense of authentic power, emerging from a felt interconnectedness, and by the capacity to respond both individually and collectively in service to the whole. This expansion stems from intensifying energy and an elevated frequency level within the presencing community.

The most vulnerable moment within this process arises when letting go of the known and the past, and surrendering to the unknown in the present. In this delicate moment, perception widens, allowing us to receive and conceive subtle new information. This is the presencing moment of letting come, where we become aware, explore, and connect, bridging the conscious with the subconscious and unconscious realms, the known with the unknown. New insights may initiate the actualization of previously unconscious conditioning, including prenatal imprinting. Transformation begins as we allow the unconscious to be seen, heard, and acknowledged, opening space for new information through deep listening, relating, and interconnecting. At an even deeper level, we may begin to intuitively sense the coherence of our oneness remembered as a felt sense of truth and unconditional love.

Physicist David Bohm suggests that the perception of truth, which may be a flash of insight,

actually changes the system to make it more coherent. And at the same time produces the words, which communicate a new foundation for thought. We directly perceive truth through feeling, intuitively sensing our essential connection when we encounter words that resonate with our being, as if these words echo within us, allowing us to recognize ourselves as originating from Source. Neurobiologist Gerald Hüther posits that we long for this coherent feeling of oneness from birth, which he names *Würde* (DIGNITY) as a felt state of interconnectedness. In this mode, individual Embodied Presencing Leadership merges with the collective, evolving into a holistic, breathing, and moving organism. This laboratory experience of Embodied Presencing Leadership, which integrates our alignment with Source and a deep sense of interconnectedness, can be applied to daily life across varied contexts and environments. By participating in this creative process, we learn to consciously witness the emergence of Embodied Presencing Leadership.

In the mode of Embodied Presencing Leadership, shared experiences in encounters are witnessed, reflected, and mirrored physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually by other participants/co-leaders, generating new information and creative impulses that connect to broader knowledge and insights. In the spirit of dialogue, which holds different perspectives in abeyance (Bohm & Nichol, 2014), participants can move toward engaging in transparent communication (Hübl & Avritt, 2020) to illuminate various levels of understanding, which heightens awareness and fosters the generation of new insights. A small group of individuals can form an observable time-space container, a prototype community that raises and transforms frequencies and their qualities, fostering new connections, structures, and creations that emerge from collective intelligence and consciousness.

My experiences with the Theory U process, supports the collective unfolding of creativity and consciousness, led me to the research of C. Maxwell Cade, David Hawkins, as well as the teachings of Richard Rudd. This unfolding process of creativity and consciousness is inherently linked to the development of Embodied Presencing Leadership. Key qualities in this process emerge as abilities such as abiding in silence, deep listening, pausing, contemplating in the space of not-knowing, and witnessing processes without intervention as a way of contributing to embodied presencing. By absorbing subtle information and allowing its movement through our bodies on various levels, we begin to notice and integrate higher frequencies more consciously within our multidimensional body system.

Embodiment relates to what many traditions know as enlightenment or realisation. It involves the complete embodiment of the higher three bodies onto their corresponding lower planes. The process of embodiment begins from the moment you are born into a

human body, and it follows the trajectory of your evolution. The more evolved you are, the more embodied you become. (Rudd, 2013, p. 523)

Opening up to new, inspiring information requires courage, a quality that David Hawkins considers essential for progress. On Hawkins' logarithmic scale of energetic power, which ranges from 1 (basic existence) to 1,000 (the pinnacle of enlightenment), courage calibrates at 200. This level marks a crucial threshold, transitioning from self-centered, survival-oriented emotions to selfless, creative feelings. Positioned at this critical point of truth and integrity, courage empowers individuals to confront challenges and embody new ways of being and acting (Hawkins, 2020, p. 374).

In a presencing leadership context, embodiment calls for both vertical and horizontal alignment. This inner coherence rests upon the capacity for love. On David Hawkins' scale of consciousness, love calibrates at 500 and serves as a gateway to deeper relational attunement and spiritual openness. Through this opening, awareness expands into collective consciousness, universal principles, and the living movement of creation. As leadership evolves beyond the constraints of mental control and the lower frequencies of consciousness, it matures into a felt experience of interconnectedness. From this space, the leader participates in universal intelligence and becomes a conduit for creation as it unfolds. Aligning with love and truth supports an upward movement along Hawkins' scale and anchors leadership in presence and conscious intention (Hawkins, 2020, pp. 37–38).

In a similar way, Jeshua's teachings in the Gospel of the Beloved Companion associate courage and strength with the heart's fourth chakra. These qualities support the soul's ascent by helping one move through the illusions of fear and the constraints of the flesh. In this passage, the clarity and truth of the soul become accessible, revealing one's deeper identity as a child of the living spirit. From this view, presencing becomes an invitation to embody one's essential potential—soul, light, or essence—while simultaneously sensing oneself as part of a greater whole. This is the lived experience of being a fractal within a living cosmic matrix. It is an invitation to surrender into the evolutionary movement of life, to enter the creative process from within, and to align with a larger unfolding through embodied presence.

#### IV. Data Collection from the Integral Art Lab

The Integral Art Lab (IAL) is a collaborative prototype developed with the Presencing Institute team, designed to support teams, organizations, and networks in shifting their stakeholder systems and fostering new collaborative initiatives. These initiatives aim to enhance sustainability and equity within social systems worldwide. The IAL combines a range of interactive methods grounded in fundamental theories and practices, allowing access to multiple forms of knowing including physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and mindful. Art is integrated as a reflective medium, *International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching* | June 2025 | Vol. 2, No. 1

offering participants/co-leaders a mirror for awareness to apply newfound insights. Each IAL session centers on a specific research question, inviting participants to engage in a multidimensional aesthetic experience that explores the spiritual and epistemic potential of the whole body in a dynamic process.

In an exemplary IAL session, we focused on the theme *Würde* (DIGNITY) through the work of artist Martina Höss. The underlying thesis of this inquiry suggests that when individuals feel a sense of worthiness, they experience an original interconnection with Source. The intention of this IAL is to facilitate a learning experience that enables participants to embody their true nature, to be fully present, and to lead both individually and collectively in service to the whole. This process is intended to foster trust in our interconnectedness with all that exists, aligning with universal principles and dignity.

The primary source of data for this research is experiential, evaluated through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Data collection methods include inviting participants to freely express their experiences and measuring changes in their field of consciousness using the Random Event Generator (REG) Psyleron instrument. The REG is a device utilized in the scientific study of consciousness-related phenomena and is an outgrowth of the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory<sup>6</sup>, which investigated the influence of consciousness on the physical world. This mixed-method approach allows for a deeper understanding of the ways in which embodied presence and collective leadership emerge and evolve in alignment with Source and dignity.

## V. Criteria: Format, Methods, Participants, and Data of Embodiment

Criteria were established across four key areas: format, methods, participant engagement, and data of embodiment. The format provides a structured yet dynamic framework, organized into five segments—Meditation, Contemplation/Empathic Dialogue, Embodiment/Transparent Communication, Resonance Exploration/Journaling, and Generative Dialogue/Sharing—each segment facilitating distinct stages of experience over a 120-minute session. This structured approach supports a precise space where transformation and integration can occur.

The methods draw upon the theories and practices of Otto Scharmer's *Theory U* (2017), Arawana Hayashi's *Social Presencing Theater* (2021), David Bohm's work on *Empathic and Generative Dialogue* (2014), and Thomas Hübl's approaches to *Meditation, Contemplation, and Transparent Communication* (2020). These practices are designed to support access to intrasubjective,

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<sup>6</sup>Psyleron Research: Available: <http://www.psyleron.com/research.html> retrieved 26.02.2023  
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intersubjective, and transpersonal domains, encouraging participants to engage fully through embodied responses.

Participants engage in the various segments by responding through diverse modes of embodied expression, grounded in sensations, feelings, images, movement, and verbal articulation. This embodiment-centered approach fosters responses that are anchored in bodily awareness and primarily expressed verbally, enriching the depth of each interaction. The data we sought to generate were articulated through what Hayashi (2021) describes as “feeling-knowing”—an embodied, holistic awareness that arises through the entire body.

We noticed that when mindfulness grounded us in an embodied presence, we could easily connect with the knowledge held in the body. (...) We identified “trust in the body” and “not knowing” as enabling conditions, and we noted that gleaning meaning from embodied experience and translating that into verbal language demanded accurate and subtle perception. (Hayashi, 2021, p. 211)

We invite deep listening, especially to those moments that open up as “gaps” between shares “when time stops, when space and the heart open to the fullness of the moment (Hayashi, 2021, p. 129).” Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) described the emergence of the new information we intend to receive:

You can only listen when the mind is quiet, when the mind doesn’t react immediately, when there is an interval between your reaction and what is being said. Then, in that interval there is a quietness, there is a silence in which alone there is a comprehension which is not intellectual understanding. If there is a gap between what is said and your own reaction to what is said, in that interval, whether you prolong it indefinitely, for a long period or for a few seconds—in that interval, if you observe, there comes clarity. It is the interval that is the new brain. (Krishnamurti, J. in: Hayashi, 2021, pp. 137–138)

The data from the embodied experience include participants’ first-person accounts of sensations, feelings, shifts in awareness and intuitive insights. These are often expressed through phrases such as “I feel...”, “I sense...”, or “I become aware of...”. Complementing this, the field measurement data capture the energetic frequencies present in the shared space, mapping their patterns, shifts, and transitions over time. Together, these data streams offer a multidimensional view of embodied presencing.

## VI. Collected Data: Voicing From Embodied Presencing Leadership

Insights emerged through the embodied presence of Würde (DIGNITY), sensed and expressed through the whole-body system. Participants voiced phrases such as: “Being human,” “Union after breakthrough,” “I am here,” and “In accordance.” These expressions reflect moments of deep connection and alignment within the presencing process. Additional responses came from aesthetic engagement with the selected artwork. Participants described their experiences in phrases such as: “Upward movement, gentle joy, emerging smile, lightness, I being”; “Intangible, changeable light-faceted primordial beings, light beings”; “Ancient knowledge of harmony”; “Connectedness, wholeness”; “Dynamic movement, ascension, lightness, interwoven being”; and “A ray from beyond, upright, tree of life, connected with the earth and the universe.” These descriptions reflect an expanded awareness and a heightened sense of coherence with self, others, and the wider field.

Field data collected through two Psyleron Random Event Generator (REG) devices indicated measurable phases of coherence and peak moments of resonance. These occurred especially during the embodiment practice and again during the final phase, when participants shared and integrated their inspirations, insights, and impulses. Together, the inner expressions and external measurements offer a layered picture of the embodied presencing process in action.

The analysis shows that various receptive centers in the body were activated, responding and expressing through distinct “languages” such as movement, feelings, sensations, words, and images. Ordering these expressions reveals an interplay among body areas and their unique forms of communication, where even verbal expression carries a multidimensional synthesis of information. Expressions from embodiment demonstrate that “language and nature emerge together” (Barfield, 2011, p. 140) and embody “the ancient unity of sound and meaning,” where “roots as words” and “words with potential” (Barfield, 2011, p. 141) converge.

The data from the Psyleron illustrates a synchronous flow of information, particularly during practices such as the Embodiment/Transparent Communication and Generative Dialogue/Sharing. Core elements of the process, visible in the graphical field measurement, include embodiment, multidimensional relatedness and layered communication. Together, these elements enable transformation to be consciously witnessed and experienced through Embodied Presencing Leadership. As the process unfolds, activated areas of the body begin to interconnect and communicate dynamically, integrating information from various dimensions into embodied expression.

Embodiment brings an end to all words and explanations. Even though you may still use words, you have now entered into the language of light itself.(...) As you recognise yourself

to be a part of a higher evolution, your life's work and your inner purpose finally come into alignment. (Rudd, 2013, p. XXXViii)

This understanding resonates with the etymological roots of leadership, which suggest an attunement to the flow of information and movement arising from a felt sense of interconnectedness with all that exists. Informed by a feminine perspective and grounded in the witnessing of embodied transformational processes, the notion of Midwifing Transformation emerges as a fitting metaphor. It captures the essential role of supporting the unfolding and becoming of an embodied presencing leader. Within this framework, creativity reveals itself as a generative movement that gives rise to new insights, expressions, and forms of manifestation. Higher consciousness is evidenced not only in expanded awareness but also in the emergence of more evolved attitudes and behaviors. Embodied Presencing Leadership thus manifests both individually and collectively through a lived experience of togetherness. In this space, presencing is embodied both for oneself and on behalf of others, enabling responsive communication and self-organizing dynamics to arise organically.

## VII. Closing Remarks

The Integral Art Lab offers a generative space for the unfolding of creativity and consciousness across individual and collective dimensions. Through its carefully attuned processes, it cultivates and supports the emergence of Embodied Presencing Leadership. By nurturing the inner capacity to pause, dwell in stillness, and listen into the unknown, participants open themselves to subtle forms of awareness often eclipsed by the pace of everyday life. These finer languages, communicated through sensation, movement, and resonance, have the power to reconnect participants with their essential nature and restore a sense of belonging within a living, interconnected cosmos.

Such engagement gives rise to insights, connections, and structural realignments that hold transformational potential. When participants attune vertically with Source and horizontally with one another, a natural rhythm of co-creation begins to emerge. Embodied Presencing Leadership reveals itself as the capacity to respond with presence, relate with authenticity, and move in alignment with the whole. Within this relational field, each participant becomes a vital conduit in a larger creative process.

The artwork, and the field that coheres around it, serve as catalysts for frequency shifts. Lower-threshold patterns begin to dissolve as the movement of attention, the quality of listening, and the shared holding of space invite higher frequencies to enter. As these emergent insights rise into awareness, they do so within a shared body of presence, becoming living transmissions shaped

through receptivity and presencing. Embodied Presencing Leadership arises from within, nourished by the integrity of the moment and the depth of collective intention. The Integral Art Lab has offered a fertile field for exploring this emergency. In this unfolding, the conditions arise for new ways of being, relating, and leading to take root.



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UTE WEBER-WOISETSCHLGER, PH.D. CANDIDATE holds degrees in Philosophy, Art History, and Communication, and is currently a PhD candidate in Transpersonal Research at Ubiquity University. Her educational journey has deepened her understanding of integral theory and practice, Theory U, and various mystical traditions. Recognizing the essential need for synergy among these different realms, she founded the Integral Art Lab Hub in collaboration with the Presencing Institute.

Ute's work focuses on creating Integral Art Labs, practice groups, and retreats that empower individuals to explore creativity and deepen their consciousness. Participants learn to understand themselves as creative co-creators, reconnecting with their inner wisdom and the interconnected nature of all beings, which can lead to profound insights and transformative experiences.

Each Integral Art Lab fosters a supportive environment for personal expression and discovery while enabling participants to navigate complex challenges. This process enhances their capacity for Embodied Presencing Leadership, where mindful presence and collaborative creation thrive. Ute's commitment to fostering creativity transcends her local community; she aims to cultivate a global network of individuals dedicated to personal and collective evolution. The Integral Art Lab WRDE (DIGNITY) is one of the many platforms she has developed to inspire, uplift, and empower individuals on their creative journeys toward a more connected and conscious world.

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## ADVANCES IN THE METHODOLOGY OF PRESENCING: *Letting Be as a New Presencing Gesture, Interface and Transformative Path*

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**Abstract:** This article introduces *letting be* as a transformative third gesture of presencing within Dynamic Presencing (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025), introducing a new ontological region within the presencing process—beyond the familiar Theory U-based sequence of *letting go* and *letting come*. As a foundational gesture, letting be grounds the presencing process by offering a space for indwelling through the Five Level-Depths of Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2025). Integrated into the DP method, this gesture initiates an apprenticeship that shifts presencing from a way of knowing into an emerging presencing-based way of being. This article explores the pivotal and multifaceted contributions of letting be in stabilizing presence, cultivating relational and ontological depth, and fostering the presencing practitioner's capacity to embody presencing across both individual and collective contexts of practice. Through these and other contributions, letting be reorients the presencing process beyond the Theory U (TU) (Scharmer, 2007-2018) framework, opening new ontological territory within presencing with particular relevance for applied domains such as leadership and coaching, while supporting the ongoing development of presencing practice.

**Key words:** presencing approaches, dynamic presencing, presencing, presencing awareness, embodiment, ontological, epistemological

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### I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the field of presencing has been principally shaped by the Theory U framework, which has informed much of the contemporary discourse around presencing,

particularly in organizational and social systems contexts (Scharmer, 2007, 2018). Centered on the core gestures of *letting go* and *letting come*, Theory U (TU) introduced a method for connecting with source and learning from the emerging future within collective contexts. These gestures, adapted from Francisco Varela's phenomenological method of *epoché* (Depraz, 2003), aimed to suspend conditioned perception and identity, opening a receptive space for insight to arise. In this spirit, letting go facilitates a release from conditioned self-structures, while letting come opens space for emergent insight to take form.

With its emphasis on accessing a transcendent mode of presencing in the social field, the Theory U-based approach has left several critical dimensions of the practice underexplored and underdeveloped (Gunnlaugson, 2023, 2024a, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021; Gunnlaugson et. al, 2013). While letting go and letting come are regarded as central gestures, Theory U offers limited guidance for navigating the liminal terrain between them. In privileging an epistemological framing and application of presencing as a way of knowing, Theory U overlooks a more ontologically grounded orientation, one that approaches presencing as a lived, dimensional way of being. As a result, the more subtle interior processes and the depth-dimensions of presence that stabilize and deepen the practitioner's connection to source remain underdeveloped within the Theory U approach. These gaps point to a need for new methodological developments, what I refer to as Emerging Presencing Approaches (Gunnlaugson, 2023), that extend, deepen, and offer alternative perspectives on the presencing process.

Going forward, there is a need for ongoing development of presencing approaches that more fully engage the inner dimensions of the presencing process across diverse communities of practice. These include approaches that deepen embodied awareness, cultivate refined ontological and phenomenological discernment, and support the stabilization of consciousness at more subtle levels of presence. Such developments move beyond predominantly future-oriented framings of presencing by reorienting practice toward the immediacy, depth, and generativity of presence itself. As the field continues to evolve, these and other approaches open new horizons for cultivating presencing as a living, maturing path.

In response to this need, this article introduces *letting be* as a deeply transformative gesture. Developed within Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025), *letting be* serves as a stabilizing gesture and ontological method that anchors presence within the depth dimensions of our presencing nature in the immediacy of the moment. Drawing inspiration from early conceptions of psychological holding, letting be cultivates the inner conditions through which the ontological

grounds of presencing can be re-accessed and reclaimed as a generative, embodied, and dynamically emerging way of being. Through sustained engagement with this gesture, letting be introduces a new dynamic that bridges the gestures of letting go and letting come, offering direct access to the ontological depths of presence out of which a new presencing path and method has emerged (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b). These depths offer a generative renewal of our presencing nature; sustained contact with them, in turn, stabilizing the presencing process itself. From this interior ground, new inner horizons of inner experience and inscape (i.e. the subtle landscape of our presencing nature) become available for exploration. As a living practice, letting be opens access to the liminal dimensions of presencing that have remained largely unrecognized and underexplored, offering a way of dwelling and resting one's faculties within the unarticulated interior territory where emergence begins to take shape.

This practice is particularly significant in coaching and leadership contexts, where the capacity to hold paradox, navigate relational depth, and creatively engage complexity is essential for fostering meaningful transformation. Letting be cultivates a stabilizing center and inner environment that enables presencing practitioners to remain grounded amidst uncertainty and ambiguity, while sustaining intimate contact with presence. In leadership, this stabilizing ground fosters attuned decision-making, relational authenticity, and the capacity to guide others through complex challenges. In coaching, letting be facilitates a shift into presencing as an ontological mode of being, where practitioners connect with and express their presencing nature in real time.

## II. Introducing letting be, a new *presencing gesture, interface* and *path*

Within Dynamic Presencing, letting be activates a subtly embodied space in which presence stabilizes and deepens, aligning practitioners with the source of what is emerging. It addresses a critical gap in existing presencing practice by establishing the interior conditions for anchoring in the depths of presence, allowing practitioners to serve as source conduits for generative emergence. As a scaffolding interface (Figure 1.0 below) to the liminal depths of presence, letting be re-calibrates the presencing process toward ontological depth. It invites practitioners to settle into and acclimate to presence in ways that cultivates patience, receptivity and other key conditions necessary for fully embodying their presencing faculties through the embodied, phenomenological, and ontological (EPO) dimensions of their presencing experience. Through this deliberate practice, letting be enables practitioners to root their presencing in the deeper ontological layers of being, establishing a new grounding center from which presencing can unfold as a transformative way of being.

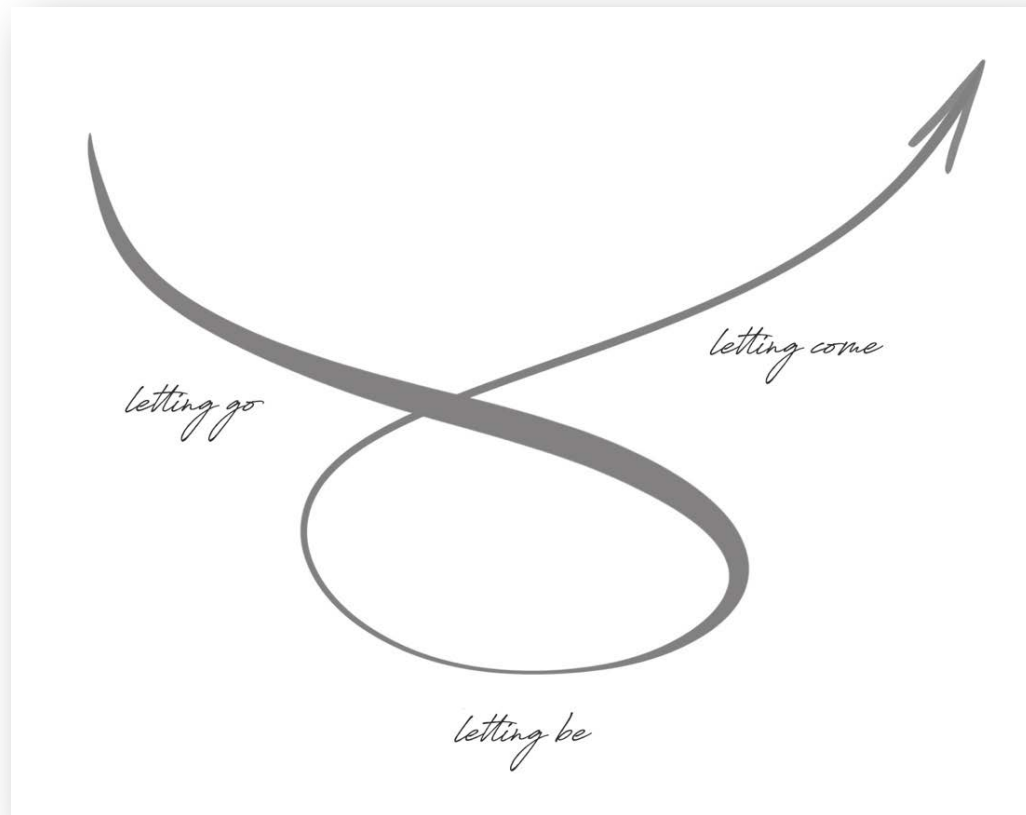


Figure 1.0: Letting be: A new presencing gesture, interface, and path

For coaches and leaders, letting be enhances their capacity to slow down, hold presence, and engage more deeply with the subtle nuances of their presencing experience, as well as that of those they serve. It opens a new embodied pathway into emergent possibilities, shaped by the level-depth of one's presence (Gunnlaugson, 2023, 2024a). In this way, Dynamic Presencing bridges a significant ontological gap in the TU-based approach to presencing, offering a more grounded and dimensionally attuned method for navigating transformation.

To deepen this exploration, in Dynamic Presencing draws on letting be as a movement of enfoldment (Bohm, 2006) into presence and indwelling (Jaworski, 2012) across the Five Level-Depths of Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2024a). Letting be functions as both a method and path for immersing presencing practitioners in a stable embodied engagement with the depth dimensions of presence and their presencing nature. In doing so, it establishes the phenomenological conditions for practitioners to individually or collectively uncover, apprentice with, and begin to embody their

deeper presencing nature. Far from a gesture of passive stillness, letting be becomes a dynamic process of grounding awareness, one that fosters a direct contact with the ontological ground of our presencing nature via the Five Level-Depths of Presence. By creating a space of ontological coherence and receptivity, letting be functions as both an intermediary interface and a pathway for engaging with the underlying dynamics of presencing as an expression of one's being.

As a core gesture, letting be introduces several key contributions to the unfolding of Dynamic Presencing. First, it enables practitioners to engage in an embodied form of presenced knowing by accessing the deeper interior of each level of presence. Second, it creates a subtle inner environment and ontological container for cultivating the interior dimensions of our presencing nature, supporting the journey toward refined integration and mastery. Third, it initiates a descent into what Theory U refers to as the *presencing abyss* (Scharmer, 2007): a liminal and generative space where previously hidden dimensions of presence, presencing and a reclaimed presencing self await contact.

Overall, letting be uncovers a living ground of wisdom, a fecund space where new dimensions of presencing can be cultivated by reorienting our relationship with the unknown and engaging more intimately with the implicit and unspoken dimensions of reality. Within this immersive realm of presence, letting be helps stabilize our resting in and from the underlying source of our experience, enabling practitioners to apprentice directly with the depth dimensions of presence. Through this apprenticeship, letting be coheres our relationship to presence as an embodied attunement, revealing an inwardly-sourced way of experiencing and relating that grants access to subtle layers of reality often obscured in ordinary awareness. In this state, the practitioner begins to reconcile the dualities of being and doing by navigating the presencing field from within embodied presence itself. In this way, letting be supports our acclimation to the deeper textures of reality, where hidden and unknown potentials reside. As a subtle presencing interface, it reorients the locus of presencing within the depth dimensions of presence, opening a path into reclaiming our presencing self that awakens through a deeper reorientation of presencing knowing, seeing, feeling and relating.

This reorientation through letting be marks a significant shift in how presencing is lived and embodied. Rather than appearing as a passing or episodic state, presencing gradually becomes a more immersive and stabilized mode of being, one that practitioners can learn to inhabit over time. Through letting go into letting be, they begin to work within presence as a living realm of generativity, one that gradually reconstitutes their presencing sense of self. As letting be stabilizes

our presencing awareness, it also grounds our apprehension of *what-is*, offering a reliable anchor for perception amidst the complexities and paradoxes of life and work. This grounding becomes especially vital in moments of tension, anxiety, or dilemmas arise, enabling practitioners to remain open and attuned to the generative depths of presence shaping what unfolds. In this way, letting be cultivates a calm and coherent center from which coaches and leaders can navigate relational and systemic dynamics with greater depth, resilience and clarity.

As an embodied, phenomenological, and ontologically informed movement, letting be opens a direct pathway into the abyss of presencing itself. It enables subtle, inner contact with the practitioner's deeper presencing nature. Through ongoing engagement, a kind of phenomenological scaffolding begins to take shape, drawing the practitioner into the depth dimensions of presence and being. This initiates an integrative process that re-weaves presencing knowing, perceiving, feeling, and relating directly from the source of being. In this sense, letting be also functions as an incubator for the development of the presencing self.

In contrast to Theory U's framing of the presencing abyss as a transitional threshold enroute to the emerging future (Scharmer, 2007), letting be within Dynamic Presencing reorients the practitioner toward the abyss as an interior domain to be entered, inhabited, and apprenticed within. Theory U implicitly positions the primary work of presencing on the far side of the abyss, through accessing the emerging future. While this forward-oriented perspective emphasizes transformation via the future, it tends to bypass the fertile terrain of integration, grounding, and self-reclamation that resides within the abyss itself. By turning presencing inward toward this uncharted interior terrain, letting be invites practitioners to explore the presencing abyss as a fertile ground and source out of which a deeper, more sustained and ultimately transformed form of presencing emerges. In this inner descent, the unknown depths of our presencing nature become a rich terrain of insight and realization, offering a new way of inhabiting presence in its fullness, where the seeds of emergence take root and begin to unfold.

One of the most significant functions of letting be as phenomenological scaffolding is that it marks the interior site where presence first makes contact with emergence. This gesture opens a generative enclosure—a subtle, phenomenological space in which practitioners are enfolded within presence itself. Within this receptive enclosure, the pull from the depths of being invites a reorientation of what it means to be established in and from presence. In contrast to letting go, which emphasizes release from the known self, and letting come, which attunes to the emerging future, letting be grounds the practitioner in the often-overlooked depths of presence as a living



ground of being. It is here that presencing begins to stabilize through a quality of unconditional allowing, fostering a relational depth where one can dwell fully with oneself, with the client or group, without succumbing to the impulse to fix, manage, or alter experience. This foundational stance of receptivity opens a pathway into apprenticing with the unknown, developing our ontological capacity to remain with what-is and deepening our epistemological sensitivity to the deeper subtle stirrings and promptings of emergence. In this sense, letting be introduces a vital rebalancing within the presencing process, offering a new ontological pathway for inhabiting presencing as a dynamically emerging way of being.

With letting be, the presencing coming-to-know process can indwell more fully as presence itself. Letting be draws us deeper into the depth-dimensions of presence, inviting the fullness of our presencing experience to become the ground for more integrated forms of embodiment. When presencing is approached as predominately field-based, this risks overlooking the transformative power of the presencing practitioner. Letting be invites us instead to be guided from within our presencing nature and the underlying level-depth of presence in relation to the presencing field. As we release identification with our known and conditioned selves, we begin to relax into the subtle experience of our emerging unknown presencing self. Here, letting be cultivates a deeper receptivity, a way of holding and beholding our experience that is both a stance and a path into a more profound, somatically informed mode of presencing. It cuts through the urgency to act or intervene prematurely, enabling us to establish a sustained contact with the inner presencing body, presencing self, and presencing field—the three core inner dimensions that, together, function as a conduit for presencing within the Dynamic Presencing approach.

### III. The Roots of Letting be informing the Dynamic Presencing Method

The gesture of letting be is rooted in a broad constellation of wisdom traditions, each illuminating a distinct facet of this presencing gesture. As an expression of negative capability, letting echoes Keat's insight that one must remain "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after facts and reason" (Keats 1899, 23). Letting be invites a quality of being present and at ease amidst uncertainties, paradox, ambiguity, indeterminacy and the greater complexity of reality. In Heideggerian thought, letting be resonates with the notion of the *clearing*, a space in which the pre-personal ground of being is disclosed, offering glimpses into the ontological foundations of existence (Schatzki, 1989).

From the perspective of theoretical physics, letting be resonates with Bohm's (2005) concept

of the implicate order—a hidden, enfolded dimension of reality from which the manifest world unfolds. As a presencing gesture, letting be opens the practitioner to this deeper coherence, allowing the unmanifest to disclose itself without interference or grasping. In mystical traditions, letting be is a threshold gesture that opens contact with the unknown—a fertile ground from which revelation, insight and realization may arise. In Christian mysticism, it mirrors the contemplative stance of the cloud of unknowing (Progoff, 1989), a sacred threshold for awakening into spiritual realization and transcendence. In Taoism (Loy, 1985), letting be reflects the receptive dimension of *wu-wei* or effortless, non-coercive alignment with the natural order of the universe. In Zen Buddhism (Davis, 2013), letting be opens the ground of non-resistance that precedes insight, creating space for emptiness to disclose itself.

Within the integral philosophical tradition, letting be aligns with the contemplative stance explored in practices like Waking Down, where subtle forms of embodied presence and interiority serve as gateways to spiritual depth and realization (Glickman & Boyer, 2018). Neuroscientific perspectives describe letting be as a mode of bottom-up processing, where sensation-based awareness is allowed to surface without being prematurely filtered through top-down analytical cognition (Siegel, 2020). In the literature on group process and facilitation, letting be informs the creation of dialogic containers and what Winnicott (1958) described as a holding environment, a psychologically safe space where vulnerability and openness can be sustained. Such conditions enable insight and transformation to emerge organically, as later expanded in the work of Wilfred Bion (1961).

Building on these philosophical, scientific, and spiritual foundations, letting be emerges as a foundational presencing gesture that transcends disciplinary boundaries while offering a grounded, expansive way of engaging presence. These diverse perspectives underscore its role in letting be's capacity to support the presencing self in coming into deeper embodied contact with what is implicit, unspoken, and not-yet-formed in the unfolding of reality. As we now turn to its expression within the Dynamic Presencing (DP) Method, letting be begins anchors presencing through sustained receptivity and dimensional attunement to what-is.

In Dynamic Presencing, the movement from letting go into letting be supports the practitioner in accessing and integrating their deeper presencing nature in three distinct yet interconnected phases (Figure 2): *enfolding into presence* (letting go into letting be), *indwelling in presence* (letting be), and *unfolding presencing emergence* (letting come from letting be). Each phase marks a phenomenological shift—from immersive grounding in presence to the emergence of dynamic,

presented insight and realization. As the process unfolds, the phases build upon and deepen one another, giving rise to an increasingly integrative way of presencing. This evolving process becomes foundational to a new mode of relating: one that unfolds from the inside out through the practitioner's inner coherence with self, with the client, and within the presencing field itself.

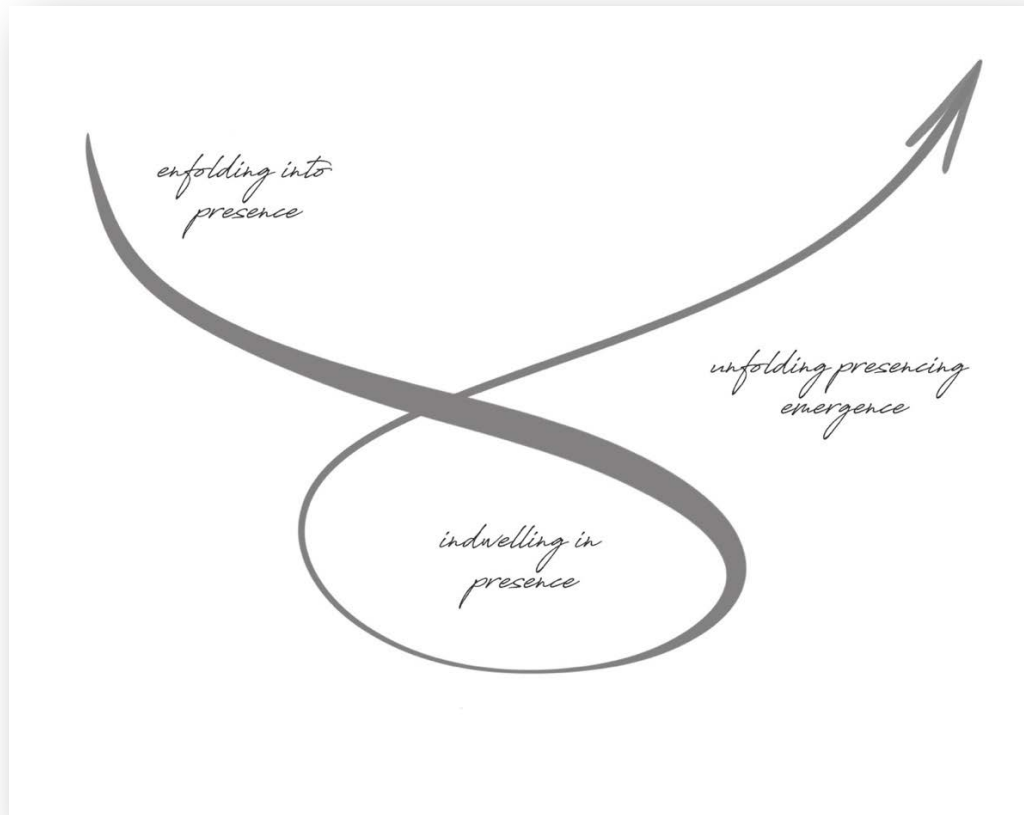


Figure 2: The three phases of integrating our presencing nature

#### IV. Enfolding into Presence: *Letting go into Letting be*

Having introduced the Dynamic Presencing process, we now turn to its first phase: enfolding into presence. This phase begins with a descent, a turning inward toward the concealed ontological terrain of presence itself. Rather than moving toward the emerging future, this opening movement suspends urgency and invites a depth attunement to the immediacy of presence. Within this inner quietening, a deeper receptivity begins to unfold through the inner presencing body in DPC (Gunnlaugson, 2025a, 2025b) where subtle sensing initiates access to the depth dimensions of

presence.

For the DP practitioner, this initial gesture elicits a renewed attunement to inner perception and deeper faculties of sensemaking. As the orientation turns inward, the vertical path into letting be begins to disclose itself, establishing anchoring within the subtle atmosphere of enfolded presence. Dynamic Presencing situates this first phase within the grounded depths of embodied interiority, where the hidden, the implicit, and the unmanifest begin to stir into lived accessibility. From this dimensional orientation, the DP practitioner comes into direct contact with their inner experience of being. Here, the apprenticeship with the presencing self begins, unfolding as an integrative descent into presence as a living, embodied dimension.

The following section traces the lived shift from letting go into letting be by attuning to the emergent textures of descent as they register within the inner presencing body. Rather than offering a conceptual account, it invites the practitioner into a direct, experiential encounter—one that unfolds through the subtle dimensionality of presence itself. Here, the descent becomes the teacher, and the practitioner begins to recognize letting be as a living gesture of receptivity and coherence that opens into deepening contact with being.

As enfoldment deepens, letting go becomes the gateway to the first movement of presencing. In this context, letting go involves gently dis-embedding from the conditioned structures of self and releasing into the deeper movements of one's presencing nature. The inner pace slows, making space to meet the fullness of internal experience. Surface patterns of identity, emotion, and thought begin to relax. The familiar self gives way to a more permeable and fluid experience of being, no longer bound by personality or personal history. Gradually, surface patterns of identity, emotion, and thought begin to relax, softening and thinning enough to reveal a more permeable and fluid experience of being. The familiar self no longer dominates in the foreground of one's awareness. Instead, the practitioner senses themselves from a more spacious inner background of being.

Letting go begins as surrender gradually gives way to attunement. The gesture of self-surrender opens a receptive state of being. As tension releases and any lingering rigidity softens, deeper immersion in presence becomes possible. From this quietening, a fuller sense of who we are begins to emerge, anchored in the depth of our presencing nature. This inner shift initiates a resynchronization with the subtle currents of embodied awareness. Letting go gradually gives way to letting be—where presence stabilizes, deepens, and becomes the ground from which the presencing path unfolds.

As surrender deepens into stillness, the stabilizing force of letting be naturally arises. It integrates and embodies the experience of presence from within. Without this stabilization, it becomes easier to fall into projection, imposing mental projection or downloaded patterns onto the presencing process, resulting in a diminished depth of contact with *reality-as-it-is*. This disconnection can lead to either shallow engagement or an over-reliance on the presencing field. In contrast, letting be invites practitioners to remain fully attuned to the present moment as it is, cultivating a presencing seeing that perceives from the living grounds of what-is. In this alignment, a deeper order of wisdom begins to surface through embodied attunement.

Letting be also serves as a counterbalance to the tendency to treat the emerging future as the primary telos of presencing. When presencing is oriented solely toward future outcomes, the depth-dimensions of presence and being often remain underexplored. In leadership and coaching contexts, this risks disconnecting from the underlying level-depths that give rise to genuine transformation with clients. In Dynamic Presencing, the gesture of letting be fosters a stabilizing ground from which the client's presencing emergence can unfold. This attuned embodiment also creates the interior conditions through which the practitioner can contact their underlying generative source. In this way, being source begins to come into the foreground—a subtle yet profound shift that transforms the practitioner's relationship with presence and stabilizes awareness at the level of inner being.

When letting go transitions into letting be, a receptive mode of indwelling begins to emerge. This shift prepares the practitioner to acclimate to the subtle territory of presence itself—a terrain where one begins to be with the deeper, implicate dimensions of reality. These dimensions are felt, intuited, and sensed—not yet seen, known, or understood. As the descent deepens, reconnecting with presence from the depths of being becomes the new orientation. Letting be gives rise to a felt-guided mode of sensemaking, one that enables contact with what remains hidden, unformed, or not yet embodied. Supported both ontologically and somatically at these depths, perception begins to stabilize within this liminal realm of our deeper presencing nature. In this receptive mode, letting be involves refraining from interference, resisting the impulse to interpret or conclude prematurely. Instead of interpreting, the practitioner begins to inhabit. This subtle gesture of inner anchoring allows one to dwell phenomenologically within the inner dimensions of the presencing self from the ground up.

This inner-guided movement of letting be builds upon a stabilized base of presence, opening practitioners to subtle, felt-sense conditions that reveal deeper ontological dimensions. When

accessed in an embodied and connected way, letting be supports the de-centering of ordinary identity and habitual self-reference. As the DP practitioner deepens in their capacity to embody the presencing self, this shift begins to shape the quality of their epistemological attunement to emerging insight. In this sense, letting be becomes an essential groundless ground, a dimensional support and inner stepping stone into both presenced realization and presenced being. It establishes the conditions for anchoring in the full dimensionality of presence, offering a stable platform from which the next phases of the presencing journey can unfold.

## V. Indwelling in presence: *Letting be*

Letting be establishes the conditions for indwelling in presence, where the DP practitioner moves beyond initial contact to inhabit the depths of presence as a lived experience. This second phase forms a vital inner foundation, rooting the practitioner in the full dimensionality of presence and the unfolding of their presencing self. In this space, letting be serves both as a stabilizing container and an initiatory process, guiding the practitioner into direct apprenticeship with their presencing nature. As the descent continues through the levels of presence—immediate, expansive, core, originating, and dynamic (Gunnlaugson, 2020a)—the practice of indwelling enables practitioners to reclaim, integrate, and embody each depth as a living dimension of their evolving presencing way of being.

Through this attunement, each level-depth introduces a dimension of presence, offering an active and embodied interface through which the practitioner recalibrates and resynchronizes with presencing as a dynamic, evolving way of experiencing. This shift from letting go to letting be marks a threshold into ontological depth, where the DP practitioner begins to inhabit their presencing nature more fully. With each new level-depth of presence, a new inner landscape becomes available, revealing emergent possibilities for insight, realization, and self-discovery.

During this phase, the locus of presencing moves inward, centering within the deeper terrains of presence itself. While the gestures of letting go and letting come in Theory U emphasize a crossing of the abyss toward the emerging future, letting be reorients this movement inward, drawing the practitioner into the generative depths of being. This inward shift leads downward into a new, living presencing world. Each level-depth opens into its own lifeworld and seat of presence, with unique inscapes (i.e. inner landscapes of experience) awaiting discovery. What begins to unfold is a reconnection with the living depths of one's presencing nature.

As the practitioner enfold into each level-depth of presence and into their own source of

being, letting be offers access to a dynamic, groundless ground from which the presencing self can be anchored, developed, and ultimately transformed. This process fosters a deepened sense of beingness and becoming established in presence. It reorients the practitioner to the inner dimensions of their presencing self as a living, embodied terrain. Within this orientation, letting be generates a kind of amniotic environment, an inner atmosphere from which the presencing self begins to emerge, grow, and unfold.

The second phase of indwelling in presence reveals a deepened shift in identity. As the DP practitioner apprentices directly with the depths of presence, the ordinary self with its personality and familiar attachments begins to loosen and is gradually recontextualized in presence. This loosening dissolves habitual imprints within the self-structure, creating conditions for direct contact with both the innate and emergent dimensions of one's presencing nature. Letting be offers both the means and the method by which the DP practitioner cultivates a renewed self-sense grounded in presence.

At these depths, DP practitioners encounter a regenerative process that opens into the still, luminous wisdom of unconditioned being. Dynamic and unfolding through the subtle interplay of immanence and transcendence, our presencing nature begins to disclose itself as both a source of inner stillness and a reservoir of wisdom. Indwelling from this depth initiates a shift from presencing as a way of knowing to presencing as a source-sustained way of being, grounding the practitioner in a deeper ontology of presence.

This hermeneutical space of letting be includes both *active* and *passive* modes of presencing awareness, each offering a distinct pathway into the depths of presence. Active modes involve relational engagement through discovery, reflection, and revelation. These practices foster the embodiment of presence through ongoing interaction with the presencing field. Active indwelling invites exploration of the layered nature of presence, allowing what has been hidden to surface and integrate into the presencing self.

In contrast, the passive modes of indwelling invite a deeper surrender into stillness and unknowing. Here, letting be guides the practitioner into a firsthand encounter with source. This is the realm of negative capability, where one learns to rest in and from the unknown, allowing presence to disclose itself without grasping or interference. Passive indwelling calls for profound trust—a willingness to abide in stillness even when fear or existential discomfort arises. Within this stillness, the practitioner begins to recognize their presencing nature in its most essential form. The depths of the abyss, once feared or avoided, gradually become a sanctuary where presence and

reality converge. In this space, letting be sustains an unconditional receptivity to what-is, enabling a profound alignment with the generative power of presence.

As DP practitioners learn to dwell in the passive depths of letting be, they begin to stabilize their presencing awareness at a profound level. This stabilization allows them to engage the presencing field as both a source of wisdom and as a foundation for transformation. The deeper the connection to presence, the more nuanced their capacity becomes to participate in the emergent dimensions of reality. From this stabilized state, presencing nature reveals itself as an ever-evolving embodiment of presence, attuned to subtle ontological conditions and able to perceive from the depths of stillness and wisdom. In this way, letting be provides the grounding and anchorage that supports the cultivation of mastery on the presencing path. It creates the interior conditions for profound self-discovery, disruption, and transformation to take root.

Through indwelling in presence, practitioners begin to inhabit a new relational stance, one that deepens their connection to the presencing self and reorients their way of being with the world. This second phase strengthens their capacity to navigate complexity, paradox, and ambiguity with increasing coherence and grace. As they learn to dwell within each of the Five Level-Depths of Presence, they begin to access a form of knowing from being that aligns perception and action with the generative flow of reality itself.

Indwelling in presence thus serves as a pivotal phase in the Dynamic Presencing path. It cultivates the depth and stability required for the next phase: unfolding presencing emergence. Whereas Theory U moves directly from letting go into letting come, Dynamic Presencing introduces letting be as a vital ontological descent and wisdom turn, reorienting the practitioner into the depths of presence as the necessary ground for encountering emergence. By fully inhabiting the Five Level-Depths of their presencing nature, DP practitioners become equipped to apprentice with a new way of presencing grounded in being as well as new possibilities for becoming.

## VI. Unfolding Presencing Emergence: *Letting be into Letting come*

The third phase, unfolding presencing emergence, marks the transition into a dynamic engagement with what is arising, guided by the gesture of letting come. This phase moves from being rooted in the presencing self to entering into co-creative participation with the emergent world. Within the DP Method, letting be opens the path into emergence and prepares the ground for this third presencing gesture. Having arrived and enfolded into the depths of one's presencing nature during the indwelling phase, the practitioner becomes available to meet emergence from the



inside out. As the arising moment is met through letting come, discernment becomes shaped by the abiding wisdom cultivated through letting be. This discernment is more centered, coherent, and at ease—characterized by stillness, receptivity, wakefulness, and the subtle ontological qualities of well-being and integrated wisdom.

During the early stages of letting come, letting be continues to offer a vital grounding. Awareness begins to unfold as presencing. Knowing arises through a deeper rooting in the wisdom of being. Presencing seeing begins to constellate from this same place of inner resting, unfolding in and from presence itself. Within the DP approach, emergence is engaged from a ground already established through letting be. Once presence has stabilized in the indwelling phase, awareness begins to open toward what is forming. This shift involves bringing depth into relation with the arising. The discernment required here draws directly from the subtle coherence, ease, and receptivity cultivated through letting be. These inner qualities offer a stable basis for contacting the movement of emergence. As presencing awareness unfolds, both knowing and seeing are ontologically sourced from letting be. Perception remains close to its origin, allowing early signs of becoming to be sensed and received. The gesture of letting come is supported and shaped by the underlying presence of letting be, which holds the emerging in a space of attentiveness. In this way, emergence begins to move in synchrony with a quality of inner stability that makes it intelligible.

This second movement of unfolding presencing emergence involves a subtle reorientation from interior resting toward relational engagement with the arising moment. In this shift, presencing moves to sensing into the generative horizon of becoming. As this threefold movement becomes integrated, the DP practitioner's presencing nature begins to function as a finely tuned instrument for contacting and participating with what is taking shape. Remaining grounded in letting be sustains the spaciousness required to meet the arising new in its own rhythm and time. This orientation invites a quality of sensemaking that remains attuned rather than directed. The subtle readiness cultivated earlier allows experience to be met without resistance, shaping a stance of openness and precision. From this inner clarity, presencing enters the field through the movement of emergence itself.

Being with what-is opens the way into more intimate contact with emergence. This quality of presence receives the arising world as it takes form, from within the practitioner and through the relational space of the presencing field. Experience is shaped by attuned awareness. Here, presencing joins and co-participates in the unfolding of emergence. Reality, when received through the depth of letting be, reveals itself as a living immediacy. From this place, a quiet equanimity arises that allows

resting with what-is while remaining fully alive to what is forming. With sustained practice, this mode of contact of flowing from letting be into letting come opens a new frontier of the future: one already embedded within the present, quietly waiting to be contacted and explored. As presencing becomes active at the threshold where emergence arises into form, both the presencing self and the world are renewed through this shared becoming.

From within these generative depths, participation begins to take shape as a co-creative movement guided from within. The heart of letting come lies in meeting the generative edge, where the unmanifest begins to take form through direct contact with presence. Within the DP approach, this edge is experienced as a liminal space, an ontological threshold where the depth of presence meets the formative intelligence of reality. What is taking shape can be sensed through the whole of one's being. The quality of embodiment—its coherence, spaciousness, and receptivity—shapes how emergence is met and engaged. In this way, the depths revealed through letting be begin to enter expression through letting come. This bridging movement allows presence to flow between inner stillness and outward responsiveness, giving rise to a living integration of being and becoming.

Engaging the generative edge of emergence begins with attuning to the subtle movements that rise from within presence. This attunement draws on the inner presencing body, allowing the practitioner to sense what is forming as well as what has not yet taken form. The quality of listening here is subtle and somatic in nature. As this orientation deepens, the depths of being begin to shift through our presencing awareness. What arises is first sensed from within before it becomes visible, spoken, or known. By resting in the fecund space of letting be while rising into letting come, a different mode of presencing participation becomes possible.

In Dynamic Presencing, letting come unfolds from the ontological source ground opened through letting be. The orientation remains immersed in and sourced from presence, staying attuned to what is forming now, in real time. Stability and coherence allow emergence to reveal itself. Expression and insight arise from the same ground. As the depths of presence enter into participatory relation with what is becoming, the boundary between our presencing self and the world begins to dissolve. What moves through conversation, action, or response now carries the imprint of being, giving way into becoming. Through this integration, letting come becomes a way of staying true to the depth from which generative emergence arises. Action, insight, and participation unfold as expressions of the living continuity between the source of our being and emerging form. From here, presencing emergence becomes a way of inhabiting the unfolding of the life process itself.

## VIII. Closing Remarks

This article has introduced letting be as a third presencing gesture, one that expands and deepens the movement of presencing into new ontological territory between letting go and letting come. Within the Dynamic Presencing approach, letting be marks a radical shift in orientation: a way of dwelling within the depth dimensions of presence as the region from which presencing becomes fully sourced and re-sourced. Rather than leaning toward the emerging future, presencing unfolds from the coherence of presence itself. This gesture stabilizes awareness, allowing emergence to arise through a different kind of alignment, one that integrates immediacy with becoming. In this way, letting be becomes the generative interface through which letting come takes form, offering a deeper, wisdom-infused way of engaging emergence from within presence itself.

Integrated across the three orienting phases of the DP method—enfolding into presence, indwelling in presence, and unfolding presencing emergence—letting be serves as a generative throughline across the entire path of presencing. In the first phase, letting go into letting be creates the container for stabilizing awareness and accessing the depth dimensions of presence. This sets the stage for indwelling in presence, where practitioners reconnect with the implicate dimensions of reality and begin to activate their presencing nature. In the third phase, letting be becomes the gateway for letting come, fostering a generative engagement with the arising new in a manner deeply aligned with the DP practitioner's presencing nature.

This interplay of the three phases ensures that presencing unfolds with sufficient ontological depth. Letting be enables the practitioner to hold the creative tension between the known and the unknown, opening a receptivity for discovery, integration, and gradual transformation. Within the DP approach, letting be addresses a critical gap in the prevailing Theory U framework, which has yet to articulate the depths encountered at the bottom of the U in actionable ontological terms. By re-rooting presencing in the depths of presence, letting be transforms presencing into a generative way of being that reshapes how we perceive, engage, and participate with our experience at every level.

While Theory U has shaped much of the current understanding of presencing—especially through the social field and learning from the emerging future—Dynamic Presencing contributes to what I have termed Emerging Presencing Approaches (EPAs) (Gunnlaugson, 2023). It begins by grounding presencing in the generative depths of presence itself, offering a dimensional orientation toward presencing as a way of being. Letting be opens, and makes possible, sustained contact with the depth-dimension of the presencing practitioner in the presencing field. Through this critical ontological gesture, presence becomes dimensional: something that can be entered, indwelled, and

sourced from within. From this interior ground, emergence is joined through the coherence, stillness, and sustained inner contact with presence. Rather than prematurely tracing a path directly toward the emerging future, letting come in DP unfolds from within the wisdom depths of presence itself. This added dimensionality fundamentally reshapes how emergence is sensed and engaged, transforming presencing into an onto-epistemological practice of integration, participation, and becoming.

As a practical outgrowth of this paradigm, Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, 2025a, 2025b) has emerged as a transformational coaching approach that brings the ontological foundations of Dynamic Presencing into applied practice. DPC offers a living apprenticeship where coaches work with letting be to deepen presence and develop their presencing. In this context, letting be creates the inner conditions to transform presencing from a mode of knowing into a dimensional, dynamically unfolding way of being. It rebuilds the subtle interior ground through which presence reveals itself as intelligible, participatory, and alive.

By restoring a sustained way of contacting and resting in the generative depths of presence, Dynamic Presencing grounds presencing in the wisdom of letting be, activating a deeper coherence between being and becoming. Ultimately, letting be renews the transformative potential of presencing as a living path of integration, re-sourcing, and ontological participation. As the complexity of the world intensifies, this gesture becomes a necessary return to the depths from which presence moves and life unfolds. Here, presencing is inhabited as a generative rhythm of being—alive, attuned, and in flow with the becoming of the world.

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To date, Olen has authored or co-authored over 55 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and 15 edited, authored, or forthcoming books, including the recent three-volume series *Advances in Presencing*, which showcases interdisciplinary research and applications from the global presencing community. A passionate educator, he has received five major faculty awards for excellence in teaching in both Canada and the United States. At Université Laval and other institutions internationally, he mentors MBA and PhD candidates in pioneering research across the evolving frontiers of presencing leadership and coaching.

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## DYNAMIC PRESENCING COACHING:

### *Beyond Letting Go and Letting Come*

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**Abstract:** Emerging from the ontological gesture of Letting Be—first articulated in the development of Dynamic Presencing (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020–2025) and later integrated at the heart of Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a–2025)—this article introduces three holding gestures that deepen presencing from a mode of knowing into an embodied and participatory way of being. While *Letting Go*, *Letting Be*, and *Letting Come* establish foundational process movements for deepened presencing, the addition of *Holding Presence*, *Holding Depth*, and *Holding Emergence* introduces three ontological holding environments that stabilize and catalyze this transformation. These gestures unfold through a dimensional progression of three phases—*Enfolding into Presence*, *Indwelling in Presence*, and *Unfolding Presencing Emergence*—each corresponding to a distinct stage of presencing: *Presence*, *Deep Presencing*, and *Dynamic Presencing*. When integrated, the letting and holding gestures form a dynamic choreography between receptive openness and generative participation. Embodied within the DPC Process-Method, this integrated movement invites a deeply sourced and sovereign engagement with the relational, somatic, and emergent dimensions of presencing, enabling practitioners in leadership, coaching, and related fields to cultivate new forms and stages of presencing mastery.

**Key words:** emerging presencing approaches, dynamic presencing, presencing, presencing awareness, embodiment, ontological, epistemological

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## I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, Theory U (Scharmer 2007-2018) has become the main presencing approach for facilitating collective change and transformation across diverse fields.

Grounded in a process of sensing, presencing, and realizing, Theory U guides individuals, groups, and organizations through a U-shaped journey that enables access to deeper sources of awareness and emergent possibility. By suspending habitual patterns of perception and engaging deeper listening, individuals and groups descend into a threshold space of inner stillness and connection with Source. Within the social field, two core gestures—Letting Go and Letting Come—support the release of conditioned patterns while opening toward future possibilities. These gestures have come to define the presencing moment at the heart of the U-process.

While these two gestures offer a powerful gateway into the presencing field, they leave a vital dimension left unaddressed: the need for a gesture that integrates and anchors the presencing process from within. In response, Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021) brought forward a third transformative gesture—*Letting Be*. Letting Be introduces a stabilizing gesture of ontological depth, a subtle but essential resting place that coheres the presencing process between release and emergence. In Dynamic Presencing, Letting Be slows down the presencing process, opening an inner clearing where the depth immersion and integration of one's presence can take root as a precondition for presencing.

Emerging from these ontological foundations, Dynamic Presencing Coaching (DPC) (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025) offers a next-generation application of this work in coaching contexts. While Dynamic Presencing introduced Letting Be as the pivotal gesture that stabilizes presence between release and emergence, DPC extends this movement into a full process-method—one that integrates letting and holding gestures to cultivate embodied coherence, vertical depth, and generative responsiveness in real time. Within the DPC framework, Letting Be becomes the gateway for activating a deeper choreography of gestures that enables the presencing self to be stabilized, resourced, and sustained as a way of being. Through this integration, DPC supports the coach in inhabiting presencing as a living, dimensional process that moves through the inner presencing body, coheres within the presencing self, and attunes through the presencing field within the immediacy of the coaching encounter with the client.

Yet even with this addition, the overall presencing movement of the three letting gestures remains primarily *passive-receptive*. While they cultivate openness, attunement and emergence, what remains needed is a complementary gesture dynamic: an *active-receptive movement* capable of generating coherence in real time by vertically holding presence. Theory U provides an architecture for accessing presencing as a way of knowing, but it does not offer the inner structures required to



stabilize presencing as a sustained way of being. Within DPC, this active-receptive dimension is formalized through a set of holding gestures that the coach embodies to deepen and stabilize coherence throughout the presencing process. These holding environments allow the client to inhabit the letting gestures from within a resonant space of ontological support, where their presencing nature can gradually unfold in felt contact with the depth and coherence of the coaching field<sup>1</sup>.

The DPC process-method introduces a new structural capacity: the activation of the presencing self-sense as a unified vertical conduit capable of sustaining presence in the coaching field. Coherence here functions as an inner framework that organizes and aligns the vertical depth of presence—much like a building’s structure supports its form. This reflects how coherence underlies complex systems, from musculoskeletal networks to ecosystems and technological infrastructures. Without this vertical activation of presence, presencing often remains a temporary fleeting state. In DPC, cultivating presencing as a sustained and generative way of being involves activating the presencing self as a vertical conduit. This deeper energetic circuit gives rise to a coherence-generating self-sense—a felt alignment that enables both coach and client to engage transformational work from a generative orientation. Such integration is essential for supporting presence as a living process across coaching, leadership, and developmental contexts.

## II. The Emergence of Ontological Holding Environments in DPC

The addition of Letting Be deepens the journey of presencing by introducing a vertical depth-dimension, enabling a fuller integration of insight and a more grounded inhabitation of presence in the moment. Building from this ontological foundation, Dynamic Presencing Coaching introduces three complimentary holding gestures—*Holding Presence*, *Holding Depth*, and *Holding Emergence*. Applied in DPC, these gestures function as vertical activators, catalyzing coherence through the core axis of the presencing self and enabling presence to graduate its role into that of a living conduit for generativity.

In practice, these holding gestures support the coach in stabilizing presence as a dimensional environment in which the client can enter into deeper contact with their own presencing nature. In synergy with the letting gestures, they give rise to three key ontological holding environments that

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<sup>1</sup> Within DPC, the coaching field refers to the presencing field as it becomes relationally accessible and inhabitable in the coaching process.

support, deepen, ignite, and stabilize the presencing process from within. This dynamic integration makes it possible for presencing to unfold as a coherent, sustained, and generative way of being within the coaching field.

Each holding gesture corresponds to a distinct phase and vertical layer of the presencing process: Holding Presence supports the phase of *Enfolding into Presence* by stabilizing the inner presencing body, enabling presence to begin cohering from within. Holding Depth anchors the phase of *indwelling in presence* by activating the presencing self as a vertical conduit—this is the critical ignition point where vertical coherence comes online within the self-system. Holding Emergence supports the phase of *Unfolding into Emergence*, extending coherence into the presencing field, where presence begins to move generatively in relation. As a new way of engaging presencing, these three gestures create subtle enactive conditions that are needed for presencing to become a sustained, embodied, and participatory way of being for both coach and client.

Rather than giving authority to the social field as a transcendent source of intelligence, as emphasized in TU, DPC works with presencing from within a grounded, intrapersonal and relational space of immediacy. DPC integrates both *passive-receptive* (letting) and *active-receptive* (holding) orientations, offering a structural advancement in the underlying architecture of presencing. Through the interplay of these gestures, DPC establishes a synergistic framework that cultivates the coach's capacity to dwell within presence, stabilize emergent insight, and engage unfolding potential with the client. This marks a significant paradigmatic shift in how presencing is understood and practiced: from a process accessed through the collective field to a dimensional unfolding that emerges from the fully engaged presencing self in the presencing field.

Dynamic Presencing Coaching clarifies this shift through the three phases of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method: *Enfolding into Presence*, *Indwelling in Presence*, and *Unfolding into Emergence*. Each phase is supported by a corresponding interplay of the letting and holding gestures that stabilize presence across the inner presencing body, the presencing self, and the presencing field. This expanded framework of presencing (see Figure 3.0 below) invites a new way of engaging complexity by stabilizing emergent insight, while cultivating the coach and clients capacity to co-steward and co-create from presencing.

Whereas Theory U approaches the presencing field as a social field beyond the self, Dynamic Presencing Coaching reframes the presencing self as the central inner conduit through which the presencing field is accessed, engaged and co-shaped (Figure 1.0). In this orientation, presencing becomes a dimensional process that moves through the inner presencing body, coheres within the

presencing self, and attunes through the presencing field. This process unfolds as a living, self-generating circulation of presence—enacted by the coach and increasingly experienced by the client in the coaching field.

Within this structure, the holding gestures operate as vertical activators that support and stabilize presence across these three dimensions. While the letting gestures open the presencing process through passive-receptive movements, the holding gestures enable a complementary active-receptive dynamic. This deepens coherence and empowers the coach to co-steward generative emergence with the client in real time. Rather than aligning with a transcendent collective Source, the coach cultivates a participatory immediacy—grounded in embodied stillness, vertical coherence, and relational attunement. This integrated choreography of gestures transforms presencing from a momentary access point into a sustained, inhabitable way of being for both coach and client.

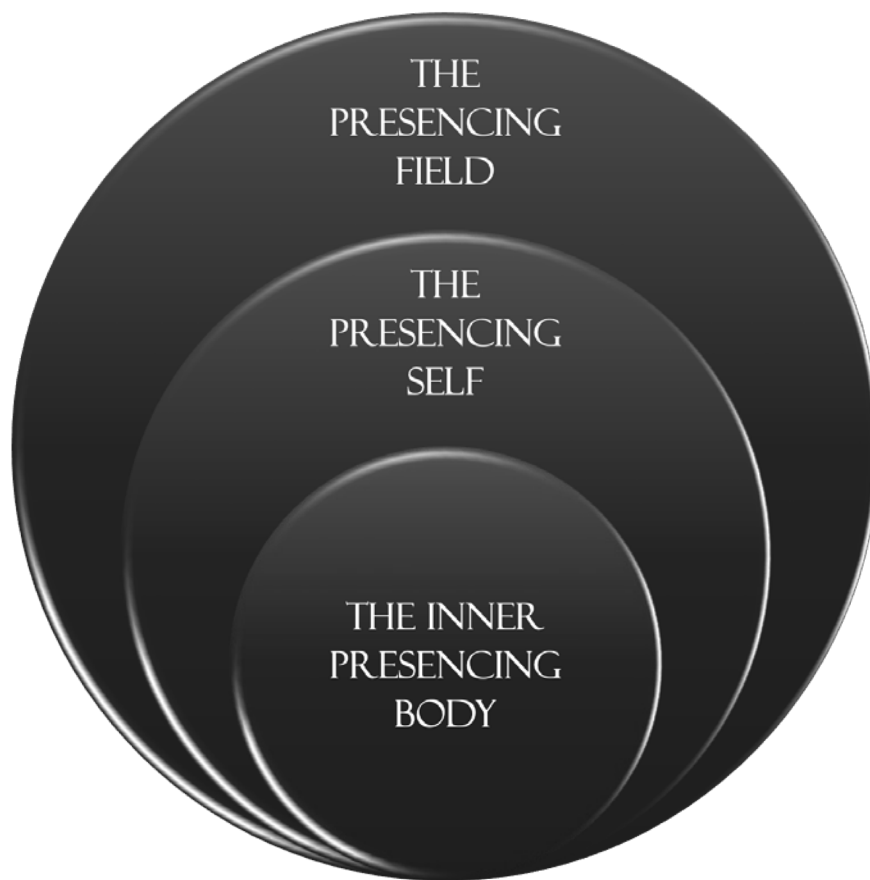


Figure 1.0: The Presencing Self-Sense as Embodied Conduit of Emergence

This shift carries wide-ranging implications for coaching. First, it enhances generativity by integrating the openness of the letting gestures with the stabilizing coherence of the holding gestures, transforming presencing from a predominantly passive orientation toward emergence into a dimensional process that is both intelligible and actionable. Second, it deepens embodiment by anchoring emergent insight within the inner presencing body, allowing the coach and client to inhabit presence with somatic coherence and vertical depth. Third, it strengthens relational attunement by cultivating shared gestures that support mutual responsiveness and coherence between coach and client within the presencing field. Finally, working with the holding gestures expands the practical reach of presencing by offering the structural capacity and grounded discernment needed to actively engage transformational dynamics in professional and developmental contexts such as coaching and leadership.

### III. The Inner Architecture of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Approach

Theory U has played a formative role in introducing presencing as a generative collective framework for leadership, organizational change, and systems transformation. As previously discussed, its letting gestures support a release from past constraints and attunement to emerging possibilities within the social field. These gestures among other qualities, cultivate openness, surrender, and spaciousness, offering a powerful means for engaging the presencing field collectively across diverse contexts.

However, Theory U's emphasis on a passive-receptive orientation, coupled with its framing of the presencing field as a transcendent social domain, introduces limitations in coaching contexts that require greater stability, embodied coherence, and participatory depth. While Letting Go and Letting Come create valuable space for receptivity and emergence, they offer little structural support or guidance for grounding and shaping what arises in the moment. Letting Go clears space and opens both coach and client to new possibilities, yet lacks a mechanism for anchoring that openness in a sustaining depth of presence. Similarly, Letting Come depends on the intelligence of the social field to guide emergence, but does not in itself support the coherence of presencing as a dimensional, embodied, and generative way of being.

Drawing on Francisco Varela's work with the phenomenological method of epoché (Depraz, 2003), Theory U integrates Letting Go and Letting Come as gestures that suspend habitual knowing and open a receptive state of connection with source. While Theory U has made significant contributions to the field, particularly by foregrounding the interior condition of the practitioner, it

leaves the deeper transformative potential of presencing underdeveloped—especially in coaching and leadership contexts where directional engagement is essential. To meet the needs of such environments, presencing must evolve beyond its predominant passive-receptive orientation to include active-receptive gestures that stabilize awareness, deepen coherence, and support the dimensional unfolding of the presencing process in real time for both coach and client.

Without these participatory capacities, the deeper potential of presencing remains unrealized. In coaching contexts, presencing requires more than momentary access to insight into the emerging future; it calls for generative ways of being capable of carrying the conditions for that insight into embodied, relational, and actionable expression. Just as mindfulness and meditation have evolved beyond passive awareness into more integrative and engaged practice, presencing is now moving toward a deeper synthesis of receptivity, dimensional coherence, and sustained participation. In this light, Theory U's continued emphasis on the transcendent intelligence of the social field leaves the embodied, ontological capacities of the presencing practitioner comparatively underdeveloped, a gap that Dynamic Presencing Coaching is committed to addressing.

### III.1 Cohering the Presencing Self through the Holding and Letting Gestures

In the DPC process, the presencing self emerges as a generative, ontologically sourced depth-dimension of one's presence and being that integrates the inner presencing body within the presencing field (Figure 1.0). This integration gives rise to a coherent presencing self-sense, capable of functioning as a fluid, generative conduit: the inner presencing body anchors stillness and presence, while the presencing field extends this grounding into relational contact and emergence. When engaged, they form the ontological foundation for presencing as a dimensional, transformative way of being.

Within this emergent space, the letting and holding gestures function as distinct yet synergistic expressions of the presencing self. The letting gestures activate receptive movements of release, stillness, and emergence. The holding gestures establish subtle enactive conditions and ontological holding environments across the inner presencing body, self, and field. For both coach and client, this dynamic relationship between gestures forms a dimensional choreography that allows presencing to be accessed, inhabited, stabilized, and increasingly sustained as an embodied way of orienting the coaching process.

Integrating the letting and holding gestures activates the presencing self as a generative conduit of coherence and emergence. The three letting gestures involve a flowing movement of

release, abiding and allowing: Letting Go initiates the process by loosening identification with the conditioned self; Letting Be invites a descent into presence and a deeper inhabiting of one's presencing nature; and Letting Come opens the way for sourced emergence to take form from within. The holding gestures accompany this progression by activating the subtle ontological conditions that stabilize and sustain the process: Holding Presence establishes conditions for a felt immersion within one's inner presencing body; Holding Depth supports vertical alignment with the Five-Level Depths of Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b) within the presencing self; and Holding Emergence attunes to the generative currents of the Five Field Stages of Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, 2025) within the presencing field.

These ontological holding environments engage the presencing self in being resourced, sovereign, and sensitively responsive to what is arising. For both coach and client, the letting and holding gestures enact a dimensional choreography of presencing in which presence is stabilized, emergence becomes participatory, and the presencing process unfolds as a sourced, living reality. This alignment generates the inner conditions for a new way of participating with presencing from the inside out. By recognizing the letting and holding gestures as core dimensional movements of the presencing self, practitioners deepen their embodied capacity to engage presencing as an increasingly sustained and generative way of being.

Through a range of practices, including *Taking One's Seat of Presence*, the DPC practitioner learns to engage presencing as a subtle and dimensional alignment across the inner presencing body, the presencing self, and the presencing field. This layered attunement activates each ontological environment active as a living center of presencing awareness, functioning in fluid continuity with the others. Within this inner ecology, the presencing body serves as the somatic ground through which presence is first contacted and stabilized. From this anchoring, the presencing self emerges as a coherent axis that orients within and across the Five-Level Depths of Presence. Extending beyond the self, the presencing field opens a relational atmosphere through which sourced emergence can begin to constellate and unfold. As this vertical alignment deepens, presence begins to circulate through the inner body of the presencing self, cohering the presencing field and attuning the practitioner to the unfolding dynamics of the moment. Together, these nested ontological holding environments form the dimensional infrastructure through which presencing can be sustained, enacted, and inhabited as a generative way of being.

Where Theory U sources emergence from the collective intelligence of the social field, Dynamic Presencing Coaching affirms the primacy of embodied presence, positioning the

presencing self as the generative ground for participating in the field. This shift enables the coach to engage relational and collective emergence through the alignment of their inner presencing body and presencing self within the presencing field. In coaching and leadership contexts, this orientation offers a more stable and embodied basis for sourcing transformation from within. As the coach's inner presencing body attunes to presence, it opens a subtle connection to the presencing field. From this alignment, a relational presencing begins to unfold—an interiorly sourced and field-sensitized way of being that emerges through their reciprocal coherence. This layered attunement establishes a dynamic continuity through which the coach can stabilize the unfolding process and actively engage the full generative potential of the presencing process in real time with the client.

When viewed dimensionally as a whole, the three ontological holding environments form a nested, fluid architecture, each functioning as a distinct dimension while remaining in coherent continuity with the others. The inner presencing body grounds somatic awareness and initiates the descent into presence. From this ground, the presencing self arises as a vertical axis of orientation and coherence. Extending into relational space, the presencing field opens as an emergent atmosphere where new configurations, insights, and shifts constellate. As this inner ecology matures, presence begins to circulate beyond the individual self, extending into the field as a responsive and sourced form of engagement. Through the DPC apprenticeship process, practitioners cultivate the capacity to explore presencing an embodied, dimensional way of being that sustains stillness, presence, and presencing in coaching and leadership contexts.

### III. 2. The Dimensional Choreography of the Letting and Holding Gestures

In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the letting and holding gestures create conditions to directly participate in the process of presencing. These gestures extend the presencing self's capacity to orient within emergence, working in resonance to sustain and guide the process for both coach and client. The following section elaborates on how each gesture functions in practice. The unfolding of this sequence reveals a pivotal insight: the letting gestures arise from the deeper nature of the presencing self, fostering receptivity, surrender, and alignment with the dynamics of the presencing field. Letting Go, Letting Be, and Letting Come work within the interior space and process of presence, initiating a descent into the depths of presence that allows awareness to deepen into contact with what is arising. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, these gestures open the inner space of stillness and presence, establishing optimal conditions from which the holding gestures can emerge. From this deepened contact, the holding gestures generate ontological environments that

stabilize and sustain the presencing process as it unfolds within the presencing field.

The letting and holding gestures support the emergence of a coherent and interdependent presencing self-sense and self-system, guiding the presencing process through a dynamic rhythm of release and containment, spaciousness and structure. As Letting Go softens the grip of the ordinary self, Holding Presence provides the somatic grounding through which a deeper contact with one's presencing nature can begin. In this descent, Letting Be invites a deeper indwelling within the lifeworlds of presence, while Holding Depth brings vertical coherence to this inner unfolding, sustaining orientation across the level-depths of the presencing self. As emergence begins to constellate, Letting Come opens the way for what wishes to come into form, and Holding Emergence attunes to the subtle dynamics that allow the new can arise, emerging through an embodied movement within the presencing field. These gestures unfold within a unified rhythm of becoming, enabling practitioners to participate in presencing with grounded responsiveness and dimensional clarity.

The letting and holding gestures reveal a dimensional simultaneity: each activates a distinct facet of the presencing process, yet they unfold emergently rather than in fixed sequence. Their choreography draws from stillness and emergence, interior depth and relational attunement, gradually integrating into the lived experience of the presencing self. For the coach, this simultaneity reveals itself as a generative coherence that takes shape through their embodied way of being. For the client, these rhythms open a deepening contact with their own inner ground, inviting a participatory presence that supports real-time transformation. Together, this shared presencing activates a dynamic field of emergence within the coaching encounter.

Crucially, both the letting and holding gestures participate in shaping the embodied coherence of the presencing self. Rather than arising from a fixed center, these gestures unfold relationally—co-activating presence through an inner rhythm of release and containment, openness and structure. As dimensional movements within the presencing self, they ensure that the presencing process remains grounded in stillness and sourced awareness, disentangled from the reflexes of the conditioned self. For the coach, they cultivate a stable inner coherence from which to orient and engage. For the client, they open and stabilize the ontological conditions through which emergence becomes lived, integrated, and gradually sustained.

### III.3 Clarifying the Inner Function of Holding

In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the holding gestures establish the inner conditions



through which presencing becomes coherent, inhabitable, and generative. Unlike physical containment or psychological management, holding in DPC is a felt dimensional responsiveness that supports each phase of presencing. Rather than directing the process, the holding gestures create inner environments that the practitioner orients from, allowing the presencing process to unfold in its own time and rhythm. It can be helpful to visualize the letting gestures as foreground enactments of presencing, with the holding gestures arising as background conditions that support, infuse, and sustain the presencing process. Together, they form a dimensional interplay that enables presencing to be lived, sourced, and embodied as a way of being—for both coach and client.

This moves well beyond Winnicott's (1960) original notion of a "holding environment" as a psychological container that supports early development through the caregiver's consistent, affectively attuned presence. While Winnicott's frame highlights the stabilizing role of relational containment in the formation of the self, it remains situated within an interpersonal and psychological paradigm where holding is something externally provided to another. In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, by contrast, holding becomes internal and ontological. Less in the sense of being private or enclosed, more as a subtle condition that arises within and between, something one becomes through sustained attunement to presence. This embodied posture entrains a depth of inner and relational presence through which new ontological capacities for coherence and sourcing begin to emerge.

The inner presencing body, the presencing self, and the presencing field, as illustrated in Figure 2.0, develop into a subtle structure through which the generative coherence of the presencing process unfolds. Within these inner environments, holding functions as a dimensional field-condition. As a subtle action, it fosters continuous, embodied participation. As coaches learn to inhabit and sustain these inner environments, they establish the ontological conditions that allow the letting gestures to become real-time movements of sourced emergence in their work with clients. In this way, holding becomes a participatory way of supporting and engaging the generative unfolding of presencing—a dimensional process through which presence circulates through the inner presencing body, coheres within the presencing self, and attunes through the presencing field as an embodied and sourced way of being.

Holding Presence corresponds to the first ontological environment: the inner presencing body. It arises as Letting Go releases the coach's embeddedness and identification within the conditioned self. Here, holding provides a subtle inner grounding that signals a shift into presence as a felt orientation. This gesture supports the somatic spaciousness through which awareness can rest,

reorient, and stabilize in stillness. Without Holding Presence, the gesture of Letting Go may dissolve the ordinary structural sense of self without offering a ground of presence from which the coach's presencing nature can become inhabitable.

Holding Depth stabilizes the vertical depth-dimension through which the presencing self coheres as a dimensional unfolding of being and presence. Aligned with the Five Level-Depths of Presence—*Being Real*, *Being Witness*, *Being Essence*, *Being Source*, and *Being Presence*—this gesture supports the coach's inner alignment across the ontological terrains of presence that constitute the presencing self. Holding Depth isn't simply accompanying the vertical descent; it sustains coherence as the coach attunes to and inhabits these forms of presence. This gesture becomes especially vital in the phase of Letting Be, when the presencing self begins to indwell within the level-depths of presence as living structures of presence. Without the support of Holding Depth, the coach may experience subtle forms of fragmentation, disassociation, or ungrounded spaciousness. With it, vertical continuity is cultivated, allowing the coach to stabilize their way of being from the inner ground and seat of presence.

Holding Emergence corresponds to the presencing field itself—the relational and generative environment where presencing is engaged. Instead of being passively oriented toward the emerging future, this gesture engages an active-receptive attunement to the generative movements sensed within the presencing field. It supports Letting Come by stabilizing the conditions for discerning the generative currents within emergence. Holding Emergence does not guide the process toward a fixed outcome. Think of it more as attuning to the essence of what wants to come through. It safeguards the process by protecting the coherence of emergence, preventing premature closure, projection, or shaping by the conditioned self. Holding Emergence keeps the coach open to what is sourcing through, allowing the unfolding to retain coherence with its deeper origin.



Figure 2.0: The Vertical Holding Gestures and Their Ontological Holding Environments in DPC

These vertical holding gestures form a nested system of inner support, each corresponding to a distinct ontological holding environment within the presencing self. Together they generate a layered ecology through which presencing is grounded, verticalized, and extended into relational space. These environments do not simply accompany the letting gestures—they make their coherent unfolding possible by providing the dimensional structure and ontological context through which the gestures take shape. In this manner, the holding gestures gradually become the inner holding environment through the coach’s sustained practice and overall DPC Apprenticeship. Over time, holding matures into a capacity to support the letting gestures with greater precision, depth, and integrative coherence.

This subtle dimensional holding allows presence to gradually become a living medium through which the coach perceives, participates in, and responds to presencing in real time as it unfolds with the client. As both coach and client deepen into this inner ecology, Holding Presence,

Holding Depth, and Holding Emergence begin to shift from intentional gestures into embodied ontological postures—non-grasping, non-managing, yet fully engaged—forming the invisible, enactive scaffolding that sustains the presencing process. Over time, the holding gestures become dimensional ground conditions, enabling the letting gestures to be engaged with greater discernment, depth, and continuity. Without this stabilizing influence, the letting gestures risk leading to dissociation, over-expansion, or premature emergence. Insight or transformation may be momentarily accessed, but the deeper living dimensions of presence remain unintegrated or unembodied.

When the holding gestures are active, they establish ontological continuity throughout the presencing process. Letting Go is held by Holding Presence, which somatically grounds the transition in the presencing self. This support allows the coach to soften habitual identifications while remaining anchored in an inner spaciousness that reconnects them to their deeper presencing self. Letting Be unfolds through Holding Depth, stabilizing the descent into one's presencing nature across the level-depths of presence. Letting Come is supported by Holding Emergence, which attunes the presencing field to the subtle rhythms of generative becoming. Through this interplay, the letting gestures cease to function as passive acts of surrender and instead become integral to a dimensional participation—sourced, embodied, and actively attuned to the unfolding dynamics of emergence.

#### IV. The Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method: Three Stages & Phases of Presencing

Dynamic Presencing Coaching unfolds through a threefold progression in which each phase of practice corresponds directly to a distinct stage of presencing. The phase of Enfolding into Presence gives rise to the initial stage of Presence, where the practitioner begins to anchor in the inner presencing body and open the initial descent into stillness. The phase of Indwelling in Presence enacts the second stage of Deep Presencing, as the presencing self orients and stabilizes within the vertical axis of the five level-depths. Finally, the phase of Unfolding Presencing Emergence engages the third stage of Dynamic Presencing, as the presencing field becomes sensitized to sourced emergence and relational coherence begins to constellate through practice. This layered progression forms the living architecture of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method. Each phase–stage integration is animated by a choreography of letting and holding gestures that stabilize and guide the unfolding process for both coach and client.

As coaches move through each phase and stage with their client, they deepen their alignment with the inner presencing body, the presencing self, and the presencing field, allowing presencing to develop into a coherent way of being. This dynamic choreography is summarized in Figure 3.0 below, which maps the interrelation of phases, stages, gestures, presencing self-sense and vertical context that bring the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method to life.

PHASE OF PRESENCING	STAGE	LETTING GESTURE	HOLDING GESTURE	PRESENCING SELF-SENSE LAYER	VERTICAL CONTEXT
ENFOLDING INTO PRESENCE	PRESENCE	Letting Go	Holding Presence	Inner Presencing Body	Holding Presence in the inner presencing body
INDWELLING IN PRESENCE	DEEP PRESENCING	Letting Be	Holding Depth	Presencing Self	Holding Depth in the presencing self
UNFOLDING INTO EMERGENCE	DYNAMIC PRESENCING	Letting Come	Holding Emergence	Presencing Field	Holding Emergence in the presencing field

Figure 3.0: The Dimensional Progression of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method

#### IV.1 Stage One: Presence – *Enfolding into Presence*

Enfolding into Presence begins with the movement of Letting Go into Letting Be. This initial phase establishes the subtle ground and depth from which presencing unfolds. Ontologically, it corresponds to the first stage of the presencing process: Presence. This is the pre-presencing terrain where the coach begins to stabilize embodied awareness within the somatic regions of their inner presencing body. While not yet fully presencing in its generative expression, Presence functions as the necessary precondition from which deeper dimensions of one's presencing nature can unfold.

In Dynamic Presencing Coaching, the Five-Level Depths of Presence—*Immediate, Expansive, Core, Originating*, and *Dynamic*—are living dimensions of the presencing self that the coach gradually inhabits and attunes to through sustained apprenticeship. Within the session, the client is invited into this deepening terrain through the resonant presence of the coach, whose presencing nature subtly scaffolds the relational unfolding. This attunement involves an active, participatory embodiment of presence, where presencing perception and being start to align. Each lifeworld reveals a distinct microculture of presence, opening new pathways of contact with the unconditioned source within. As this descent deepens, the gesture of Holding Presence begins to emerge organically, stabilizing the inner presencing body as a somatic ground from which both coach and client cross the threshold into the Five-Level Depths of Presence.

As Letting Go transitions into Letting Be, awareness begins to deepen into the lived territory of embodying the presencing self. This phase marks a layered embodiment of presence, where the inner presencing body becomes more fully inhabited and subtle dimensions of contact begin to open. The coach settles into the inner presencing body, finding a stable alignment from which presence can begin to express itself with greater fluidity and depth. From this grounded stillness, the coach attunes to the unfolding lifeworlds of presence, creating the dimensional conditions for the client to gradually enter and resonate with these levels of depth.

What first arises is Immediate Presence, where presence comes into existential contact with what is—in the first lifeworld, Being Real. As presence deepens, it opens into Expansive Presence, where perception softens and widens, and space becomes an active dimension of Being Witness. From this spaciousness, a deeper current begins to move—Core Presence, where the soul's interior movement becomes more perceptible and felt in Being Essence. This experience gradually gives rise to Originating Presence, as the practitioner reconnects with the generative ground of becoming in Being Source. As these lifeworlds are contacted and embodied, Dynamic Presence emerges, integrating the full depth and span of presence into a fluid, responsive lifeworld: Being Presence.

Enfolding into Presence is the initial phase of descent into the inner territory of the presencing self. It begins with the gesture of Letting Go, which softens habitual identification with the conditioned self, releasing surface attachments and creating space for deeper contact. As Letting Be follows, awareness begins to settle into a new atmosphere, one shaped by the subtle depth of presence itself. The coach enters stillness, allowing contact with presence to be sourced from within their presencing nature. The client is invited into this process through the resonance of the coaching field. As Holding Presence is enacted, it stabilizes this early shift by anchoring presence in the somatic coherence of the inner presencing body. As Enfolding into Presence completes, presence becomes more fully embodied for both coach and client. This coherence prepares the ground for Indwelling in Presence, where awareness roots more fully into the generative depths of presence.

#### IV.2 Stage Two: Deep Presencing - *Indwelling in Presence*

Indwelling in Presence marks a deepening activation and stabilization of the vertical presencing conduit, through which the presencing self begins to take form and cohere as a living axis of being. Having entered into contact with presence through the gestures of Letting Go and Letting Be, this phase invites a further inhabiting—a stabilization of presence from within. What was previously touched now becomes lived. Presence shifts from something arising to something being

rooted in.

In the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method, this phase corresponds to the second stage of the presencing process: Deep Presencing. Here, the client continues to explore the core themes or questions that brought them to coaching. As the session deepens, the level-depths of presence that constitute the presencing self become increasingly active within the coaching field. The coach works with the gesture of Holding Depth to stabilize and sustain the vertical continuity of presence as it deepens. While Holding Presence anchors the inner presencing body, Holding Depth aligns the coach within their presencing self, supporting the unfolding descent of the client into resonant levels of presence. This gesture sustains the dimensional coherence necessary for the client's material to be engaged from within the Five-Level Depths as living dimensions of presence.

At this stage, the coach orients from their inner seat of presence, with Holding Depth sustaining their alignment within it. Rather than guiding or directing the process, the coach rests into the vertical depths of the presencing self, allowing presence itself to shape the relational and perceptual space. Holding Depth steadies the coach within this axis, ensuring continuity and attunement as presence deepens across the Five Level-Depths. From this stabilizing stillness, presence begins to constellate outward through the coherence of the coach's presencing self, opening a subtle environment in which the client may begin to sense and deepen into their own contact with presence.

Even without conscious recognition of the presencing self, the coherence sustained within the coach begins to shape the presencing field. This opens a subtle possibility for the client: an invitation into embodied contact with what is most real. As Holding Depth anchors the coach within the vertical depth of their being, presence becomes perceivable through their way of being. Subtle shifts may arise in the client as the atmosphere of coherence deepens. In this attuned state, the coach's presencing self becomes experientially palpable through the living resonance it holds.

This stage is Deep Presencing. It asks the coach to remain inwardly gathered in presence, entrusting the unfolding to the living intelligence already at work. At this point, the presencing self is no longer in relation to presence; it becomes the conduit through which presence listens, speaks, and shapes the moment. Stillness and vitality interweave, giving rise to insight and possibility that bear the signature of coherence and wholeness. Indwelling in Presence bridges the interior stillness of being with the nascent movement of becoming. As the coach holds this coherence, the client may begin to experience subtle shifts in their own orientation—small glimpses of stillness, inner clarity, or resonant insight that emerge through the supportive presencing field. The practitioner's way of

being thus becomes the silent architecture within which the client's deeper contact with presence can unfold. This prepares the ground for the next phase, Unfolding Presencing Emergence, where the presencing self begins to release from Holding Depth into the attuned receptivity of Letting Come.

#### IV.3 Stage Three: Dynamic Presencing - *Unfolding Presencing Emergence*

As presence deepens through Indwelling in Presence, a subtle inflection arises. What was stabilized through Letting Be begins to move from within, initiating the early gestures of Letting Come. This marks the threshold of Unfolding Presencing Emergence, where the presencing self begins to activate as a vertical conduit of sourced expression. In DPC, this phase corresponds to the third stage of the presencing process: Dynamic Presencing. Here, presence expresses itself as movement; it begins to manifest through the DPC coach's way of being, knowing, and sensing, and through the client's emergent awareness of what is seeking to unfold. The presencing field grows more dynamic as the coach attunes to presence itself, as well as to how presence begins to articulate itself. This is the emergence of a sourced responsiveness.

At this stage, the gesture of Holding Emergence comes forward as the subtle field-condition that allows Letting Come to unfold with coherence. While Letting Come initiates the movement of sourced becoming, Holding Emergence stabilizes generativity from within. The coach attunes to the field dynamics without directing them, ensuring that what arises is constellated in integrity with the depth that preceded it. This inner gesture sustains the openness of emergence without allowing it to become diffuse, fragmented, or prematurely acted upon. For the client, this coherence offers a responsive atmosphere in which their own emergent insight, action, or orientation can begin to take shape. Holding Emergence holds the becoming, allowing it to articulate itself without interference.

The transition is subtle but unmistakable: the arising new begins to enter the space. What once lived as vertical depth now entrains with the process of emergence. The DPC practitioner remains gathered in presence while attuning to the formative intelligence arising through the field—an intelligence congruent with the underlying source as one engages presencing. In this attunement, the coach maintains the coherence of the presencing field through Holding Emergence, while the client begins to sense the contours of what wishes to come forth within them. This shared field becomes the generative environment through which sourced emergence can unfold with depth and fidelity.



Here Letting Come becomes active. It is not effortful, yet it calls for conscious participation. Through refined discernment, practitioners listen with and through their inner presencing body to what is taking shape. Holding Emergence remains active, sensing the subtle integrity of becoming, stabilizing the field while resisting premature resolution. This phase requires the ability to remain in synchrony with emergence without prematurely succumbing to reactivity, projection or the need for control. Gradually, being and becoming intertwine as a creative movement emerges from within presence itself. Holding Emergence ensures that this arising is sourced and subtly congruent with the presencing process. Unfolding Presencing Emergence is the phase where new insights, forms, or directions arise out of stillness and are shaped by presence.

The three phases of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method reveal a living pathway through the depth dimensions of presencing. Each phase corresponds with a distinct stage of presencing—Presence, Deep Presencing, and Dynamic Presencing—and activates a unique interplay of letting and holding gestures that support the practitioner’s capacity to serve as a generative conduit within the presencing field. As these phases unfold, presencing becomes progressively more stabilized, embodied, and expressed through the inner presencing body, the presencing self, and the presencing field. The integration of these movements gradually coheres presencing as a participatory process of emergence and way of being. In this way, DPC reveals a dimensional architecture of transformation that is both ontological and process-guided in nature.

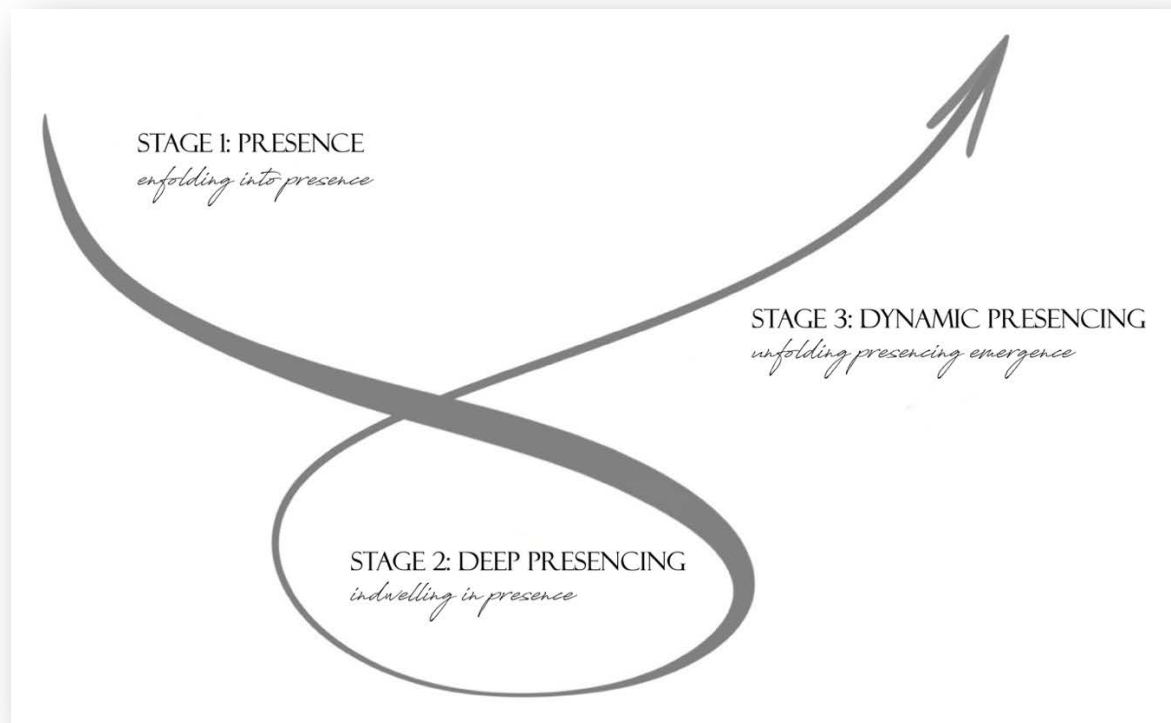


Figure 4.0: The Three Stages of the Dynamic Presencing Coaching Method

As the letting and holding gestures unfold, a dimensional progression of presencing begins to take form. The three holding gestures correspond to three ontological stages through which presence becomes increasingly stabilized, inhabited, and integrated. Holding Presence grounds the first stage, Presence, where the inner presencing body stabilizes awareness in somatic stillness. Holding Depth deepens the second stage, Deep Presencing, as the presencing self begins to inhabit and sustain vertical coherence across the level-depths of presence. Holding Emergence supports the third stage, Dynamic Presencing, as the presencing field activates and articulates sourced becoming in real time. These ontological stages are illustrated in Figure 4.0 above and reveal both where one is presencing from, and how presencing itself matures as a dimensional, transformative way of being. As coach and client, these three phases offer a clarified map of the phenomenological stages of presencing, shedding insight into our interior participation within the unfolding process of emergence itself.

## V. Conclusion: *Toward a New Horizon for Presencing*

The emergence of the holding gestures marks a pivotal evolution in the presencing process. Integrated with the letting gestures, they help support the ontological environments through which

presencing stabilizes as a coherent way of being. Crucially, the integration of the holding gestures offers an inner ecology of active receptivity that allows the letting gestures to unfold with greater dimensional integrity. When integrated, these gestures allow presencing to become a living medium that is generative, responsive, and sourced from the ontological depths of being directly. As this new direction of presencing practice takes shape, DPC offers a dimensional apprenticeship into the living intelligence of presencing itself for both coach and client.

While the letting gestures cultivate essential openness and attunement, their implicitly passive orientation can leave emergent possibilities diffuse or unanchored, particularly in coaching contexts that require active engagement and integrative outcomes. By weaving the letting and holding gestures into a unified process, Dynamic Presencing Coaching opens a new participatory terrain for presencing, one in which emergent insights are received, grounded, shaped, and gradually brought into meaningful expression by the coach and client within the coaching field.

This ongoing flowing movement between the letting and holding gestures transforms the very function of the Coach into an active co-steward of generativity—sourced from within yet attuned to the presencing field. Whereas Theory U emphasizes the intelligence of the social field as the primary locus of emergence, Dynamic Presencing Coaching re-centers this locus within the coach's presencing nature, through which the presencing field is shaped, attuned to, and engaged. Within this field, the client is richly supported in contacting their own presencing nature, allowing emergent insight to arise through a shared coherence of presence.

With the presencing self as the generative conduit, DPC coheres the inner dimensions of presencing into a unified, flowing wholeness. The inner presencing body anchors the coach's presencing self, allowing them to draw from this depth in relational contact with the client in the coaching field. As these inner environments cohere, the presencing process becomes more attuned, responsive, and capable of unfolding the subtle stirrings through which emergence takes form.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this expanded framework redefines how presencing is sustained and applied within real-world contexts. As a whole, Dynamic Presencing Coaching invites both coach and client into a more integrative way of engaging presencing as a way of being. Through this integration, coaches learn to inhabit presencing as a living process: one to be attuned to, sourced from, and responded from in each moment. In doing so, the DPC Method opens a new frontier of applied practice, illuminating how presencing becomes transformational when sourced and guided from the ontological depths of our presencing nature within the coaching field.

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To date, Olen has authored or co-authored over 55 peer-reviewed articles and chapters and 15 edited, authored, or forthcoming books, including the recent three-volume series *Advances in Presencing*, which showcases interdisciplinary research and applications from the global presencing community. A passionate educator, he has received five major faculty awards for excellence in teaching in both Canada and the United States. At Université Laval and other institutions internationally, he mentors MBA and PhD candidates in pioneering research across the evolving frontiers of presencing leadership and coaching.

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Olen's research, publications, and latest contributions can be found here:

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# IJPLC International Journal of Presencing Leadership & Coaching

## TRANSFORMING THE PRESENCING SELF:

### *A Threefold Developmental Movement*

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**Abstract:** This article introduces a new phenomenological movement that deepens and transforms the presencing self through developmental shifts in awareness and being. Central to this inquiry is the *mesa-turn*, an embodied ontological shift that extends Robert Kegan's subject-object theory of development. Whereas Kegan's *meta-shift* emphasizes transformation in one's self understanding through cognitive decentering and perspectival awareness, the *mesa-turn* invites practitioners into reclaiming deeper levels of ontological embodiment as a basis for presencing mastery. Drawing from Dynamic Presencing (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025), this inward reorientation cultivates direct, somatic contact with the presencing self. This deepening unfolds through the *Threefold Developmental Movement*: 1) the *meta-shift*, which uncovers the presencing self through a perspective-taking process; 2) the *mesa-turn*, which re-roots practitioners in the embodied depths of their presencing nature; and 3) *unitive resting*, which anchors them in a deeper integrative state of being presence. Together, these three movements reconfigure one's relationship with their presencing self by guiding a progression from dis-identification (meta-shift) to embodied re-identification (mesa-turn) to a re-configured, integrative identification within presence itself (unitive resting). This framework opens new developmental horizons for presencing leaders, coaches, and practitioners by shifting presencing beyond a way of knowing into a generative and sustained way of being.

**Key words:** presencing, ontological, epistemological, adult development, embodiment, meta, mesa

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## I. Introduction

*“The opposite of meta? The opposite of above, about or beyond is inside and within. The Greek word for this is mesa.” (Anderson, 2021)*

Robert Kegan’s (1998) subject-object theory has become a cornerstone in adult developmental psychology, mapping how individuals evolve through increasingly complex ways of meaning making and mind. Central to his model is the *meta-shift*: a movement of stepping outside one’s current perspective in order to witness it, reflect on it and grow beyond it. Kegan (1998, p. 34) describes this process as “transforming our epistemologies, liberating ourselves from that in which we were embedded, making what was subject into object so that we can “have it” rather than “be had by it.”” Through the integration of meta-awareness and perspective-taking, his orders of consciousness framework offers a useful developmental path that illuminates the expanding complexity of how individuals know and relate to their experience. For the purposes of this article, Kegan’s subject–object shift brings into relief a deeper inquiry: what aspects of our becoming are left unattended when development is framed primarily through a lens of epistemological transformation? In the work with Dynamic Presencing<sup>1</sup> (DP) (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025), this inquiry opens the possibility for a complementary axis of development, one grounded in presence itself and oriented through direct, embodied, ontological contact.

It also points toward an overlooked orientation—one that deepens the movement of perspective-taking by drawing practitioners into ontological contact with their ground of presence. In this way, Kegan’s meta-shift becomes the initiating gesture of a deeper journey that gives rise to what I call the *mesa-turn*: a reversal that redirects development from cognitive decentering toward somatic rooting in the inner terrain of presence, where one’s presencing self is no longer observed but directly inhabited. While the meta-shift clarifies the presencing self through decentering and dis-identification, the mesa-turn initiates a movement of *embodied re-subjectification*, engaging the felt, ontological depths of one’s presencing experience. This shift serves as a pivotal gesture within the *Threefold Developmental Movement*, which begins with the meta-shift, deepens through the mesa-turn, and culminates in unitive resting—an embodied integration of presencing knowing and being, sourced from the felt depths of one’s presencing nature.

This inward reorientation invites a re-examination of how existing accounts of presencing

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<sup>1</sup> This article introduces the theoretical foundations of the Dynamic Presencing Method. An applied expression of this approach is currently being developed as *Dynamic Presencing Coaching* (Gunnlaugson, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2025), a transformational coaching approach grounded in the ontological principles outlined here.

are framed and practiced within the broader field. Much of the current literature remains embedded within an epistemological orientation. Scharmer's Theory U (2007) based approach to presencing and subsequent extensions (Saldana, 2019; Peschl & Fundneider, 2014; Lewis, 2017) emphasize shifts in attention, perception, and awareness at the bottom of the U, where dis-identification from habitual structures opens space for new seeing, noting that "Theory U is an attention-based view that is grounded in Varela's later work, i.e., in an epistemological turn" (Scharmer, 2020).

These contributions have advanced valuable practices for cultivating awareness, yet again the ontological dimension of how presencing is contacted, embodied and sustained remains largely unaddressed. In contrast, the work of Dynamic Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2020-2025; Gunnlaugson & Brendel, 2019, 2020, 2021) evolves presencing as a way of knowing from the emerging future into a transformative approach to presencing as a way of being. Through apprenticing with the Five Level-Depths of Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2024, 2025) (Figure 1), practitioners enter and explore a series of lifeworlds that deepen both meta-based awareness and mesa-based embodiment, cultivating a more integrated and unitive presencing way of being.

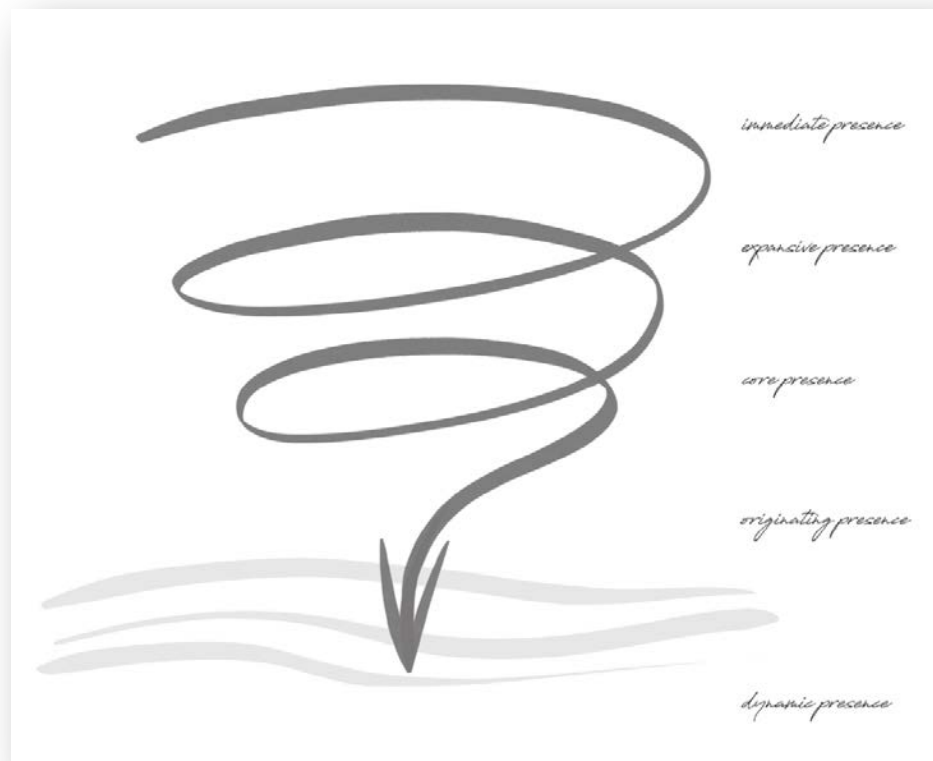


Figure 1.0: The Five Level-Depths of Presence in Dynamic Presencing

For the purposes of this article, the mesa-shift reversal of Kegan's subject-object theory



involves enfolded into the subtle, inner level-depths of presence and presencing awareness that constitute our presencing nature. The inward movement from holding one's perspective as object to re-inhabiting it as a felt subjectivity marks a long-overdue ontological reversal. It initiates an involutionary trajectory that complements the upward arc of evolution by grounding development in the descending movement of embodied presence (Wilber, 2000).

While it builds on the contributions of the evolutionary-developmental meta-drive, grounded in epistemological expansion, the mesa-shift redirects this impulse inward. While Kegan's subject-object theory and Scharmer's epistemological view of presencing emphasize the reorganization of perspective, the mesa-shift introduces a return to presence through embodied inhabitation and a reversal from object to subject. It transitions from the cognitive act of perspective-taking to a felt, embodied awareness that no longer stands apart from experience, but roots awareness in the living immediacy of presence itself. Instead of continuing along a trajectory of transcendence, the mesa-turn opens a new developmental axis that deepens presence through ontological and somatic inhabitation rather than awareness-based transcendence and epistemological suspension. This orientation facilitates a downward re-organization of the presencing self, cultivating a richer interior complexity of embodiment that is ontologically re-constituted. Instead of folding out of embeddedness and going meta, the developmental gesture becomes one of turning inward and downward, inviting an embodied dimensional way of engaging experience. The mesa-turn is essential for advancing a mastery path that deepens the development and integration of the presencing self as the primary vehicle for presencing as a way of being.

Where epistemological forms are *trans-form-ed* through structurally reorganization along upward adult developmental trajectories, ontological forms are engaged through a different mode—direct, embodied and sensed contact. As each level-depth is uncovered and progressively embodied, one's presencing nature begins to awaken and take form. This descent into the ontological dimensions of the presencing self opens a distinct pathway into the creative, non-determinative depths of consciousness as they are actualized through embodied presence.

## II. The Threefold Developmental Movement of Presencing

The Threefold Developmental Movement works with three interrelated gestures: the meta-shift, the mesa-turn, and unitive resting. These gestures create a developmental sequence that transitions from reflective awareness, to embodied engagement, and finally into a unitive integration

of being presence. This progression provides a transformative pathway for reconstituting the presencing self as an embodied locus of knowing, being, and overall generative responsiveness.

The meta-shift introduces the first turn in the Threefold Developmental Movement, cultivating the capacity to step outside the embedded frameworks of the ordinary self. This gesture orients practitioners toward recognizing the presencing self as distinct from conditioned ways of seeing and being, creating space for a more expansive awareness of presence. By reframing the habitual structures of thought and perception as objects of awareness, begin to disembody from conditioned ways of seeing. This epistemological reorganization opens a first recognition of the presencing self as a subtle presence emerging within and beneath experience. Yet the reflective and cognitive nature of the meta-shift remains partial. It cannot bring the practitioner into the embodied depths of presencing itself. This creates the necessity for a second turn.

The mesa-turn deepens the work of the meta-shift by redirecting attention inward, engaging the presencing self through embodied awareness. This gesture marks a shift from reflective insight into a direct, ontological grounding in presence, where practitioners encounter their presencing self as a felt, lived reality. Within the Five Level-Depths of Presence model (Gunnlaugson 2024, 2025), the mesa-turn unfolds progressively, enabling practitioners to integrate the lifeworlds of *Being Real*, *Being Witness*, *Being Essence*, *Being Source*, and *Being Presence*. Through this process, the presencing self is gradually reconstituted through the integration of presence across each lifeworld depth. This inward turn not only deepens the practitioner's relationship with their presencing self but also prepares the ground for the culminating integration of unitive resting.

Unitive resting completes the Threefold Developmental Movement by dissolving the distinctions of subject and object and integrating presence into a unitive state of coherence. In this evolutionary dynamic (Merry, 2024), development is no longer oriented towards transcendent ascent (evolutionary) or descent (involutionary) but emerges as a self-stabilizing coherence that integrates prior movements into an integrated whole. Presence, in this final gesture, becomes a regenerative source of interior alignment. Unlike the epistemological reorganization of the meta-shift or the ontological grounding of the mesa-turn, unitive resting arises from the stabilized depths of one's embodied level-depth of presence. This final gesture enables a seamless integration of being and becoming. The Threefold Developmental Movement, with its progressive integration of reflective, embodied, and unitive dimensions of presence, offers practitioners a clear path for evolving the presencing self into a dynamic, generative force that shapes how practitioners engage with themselves, others, and the world.

### III. From *Meta* to *Mesa*: A Reversal of Perspective

In Dynamic Presencing, the path to presencing mastery unfolds through a downward movement, an involutionary descent into the embodied depths of one's presencing nature. This stands in contrast to the upward evolutionary ascent emphasized in Kegan's model and other adult developmental frameworks. Here, the descent involves apprenticing with each level-depth of presence through a process of re-embodiment and re-rooting into more primary dimensions of presence, being, and consciousness. In this downward, embodied mesa-turn, the task shifts from taking perspective on experience to re-integrating and re-living what was previously held as object in the presencing process. Attention moves from observing inner experience through reflective awareness to entering it more directly—sensing its textures, rhythms, and meanings from within the inner presencing body. This shift invites a more intimate encounter with presence, where what was once seen becomes felt as a lived dimension of who we are becoming.

By reversing and deepening the epistemological gesture introduced in approaches such as Theory U, this pathway reframes how we view, engage with, and integrate our presencing self. The mesa-shift opens a more embodied, ontological axis of development that deepens and complements the awareness-based foundations of presencing practice. These foundations include the ability to notice, name, and take perspective on inner experience by disidentifying from reactive patterns, recognizing conditioned ways of seeing, and shifting awareness toward emerging possibilities. The mesa-shift carries these perceptual capacities further. By redirecting attention inward toward the felt-sense of being itself, the practitioner begins to source their knowing from a more grounded contact with presence. The emphasis moves from observing experience to inhabiting it, from discerning meaning to embodying it as a living expression of one's presencing nature.

What shifts when Robert Kegan's evolutionary truism is reversed and deepened? In the context of presencing, what has been made object is now engaged anew as *subject*. This re-subjectification does not signal a return to earlier identifications or developmental forms. It invites a more intimate ontological participation, where an embodied inhabiting of presence takes place through renewed contact with aspects of experience that had been suspended by reflective awareness. What was once viewed through the lens of insight is now entered through the felt-sense, allowing the practitioner to meet experience from within, rather than observing it as a pattern or content to be observed.

Conversations with leaders and presencing practitioners suggest that when Kegan's subject-

object move is recontextualized as an initiating gesture within a larger developmental process, new meaningful horizons of practice emerge. Presencing begins to pivot from a process of epistemological disidentification, marked by suspending habitual attention and redirecting perception and awareness, toward a deeper re-inhabiting of one's presencing nature. While suspending, redirecting, and letting go create conditions for new presencing seeing, this approach often emphasizes how we perceive reality more than how we embody it. In contrast, the mesa-shift initiates a descent into presence itself, grounding awareness in the living immediacy of being. This is the stage of Deep Presencing (Gunnlaugson, 2025), where the emerging future is accessed through embodied contact with the deeper ontological ground of presence. Through this turn, the next stage of development becomes less about taking perspectives and more about reintegrating our presencing nature. This shift initiates a process of embodied wisdom, where development is supported by a deepening intimacy with one's presencing nature.

To clarify what takes place in this reversal, the intent is neither to return to earlier forms of self-identification, nor to reify our presencing nature. The emphasis instead is on suspending habitual identification patterns in order to create space for embodied contact with the deeper ground of our being. This contact becomes the basis for a more immediate presenced seeing and relational responsiveness. As a process-based phenomenon, the presencing self is not organized around the fixed identity structures of the conventional separate self, which orient from image and construct. Instead, it comes alive through a subtle movement of *re-subjectification*, *re-imbedding within*, and *re-embodiment* one's felt connection within presence. Where the emerging developmental self unfolds through epistemological stages that prioritize meta-awareness and differentiation, the emerging presencing self awakens through a more immersive and ontological embodiment that is lived and felt rather than observed or constructed.

Learning to let go of viewing our presencing nature as object, and instead stepping fully into it phenomenologically as subject, marks a key gesture of the mesa-path. While approaches like Theory U guide practitioners toward greater openness and stillness at the threshold of emergence, the mesa-turn extends the presencing movement inwardly and into depth, initiating a more direct inhabiting of presence through the inner presencing body. This reorients us toward a more immersive form of presencing. The object-subject reversal transforms how embodiment is experienced, allowing us to contact our presencing self by inhabiting it from within.

While developmental thinking typically prioritizes epistemology over ontology, and focuses on evolving developmental structures more than cultivating embodied wisdom, it nonetheless

prepares important conditions for this deeper turn. The act of making what was once subject into object refines our perception of reality as it is, strengthening discernment and insight. In this perceptual clarity, a second gesture becomes possible by re-inhabiting what was once made object, now encountered through the felt sense as a center of lived presence. This movement restores connection with the dynamic ground of presence and invites a renewed intimacy with the depths of our presencing nature.

At a deeper level of our humanity, there is an intrinsic pull into this presencing movement, an inner gravity that draws us towards the felt coherence of what perennial wisdom traditions describe as the true, the good and the beautiful. Yet, this natural movement is often resisted. Cultural norms, institutional habits and identity-based conditioning tend to pull us outward, reinforcing patterns that keep us disconnected from the unconditioned ground of presence. In the work of Dynamic Presencing, a gradual process of re-synchronization and re-embodiment unfolds through a gesture of enfoldment. This involves turning inward to reestablish contact with the inner wisdom dimensions that, though obscured by cultural conditioning, remain accessible within us. Through the mesa-turn, practitioners begin to access these subtle strata—inner terrains of being that hold both ancestral resonance and emergent potential. As each layer is re-contacted and integrated, the DP Practitioner reclaims a fuller range of responsiveness. Over time, this enables a more stable, coherent, and generative embodiment of presencing capacity.

## V. Making the *Mesa-Shift* inside our Presencing Nature

The constructive developmental paradigm (Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 1979; Cook-Greuter, 2004) broadly privileges the meta-perspectival move of stepping back from the self in order to transcend embedded limitations. While each author approaches this differently, they share a common interest in the developmental gains that come from cultivating reflexive awareness and perspectival differentiation. At its core, this shift involves loosening identification with the self as subject and learning to witness the self as object—those inner structures we were once embedded in and unable to see. By developing this stance, practitioners gain a more objective perspective that helps free them from the interpretive colorings of habitual experience and creates space for deeper transformation. It is a powerful and liberating move, well supported by research and the lived experiences of practitioners engaged in active developmental work. Foundational practices such as meditation strengthen and refine this capacity to observe, reflect upon, and become aware of the self-sense we are outgrowing, while also attuning to the pull of the emerging self we are growing

into.

This meaning-making process, grounded in the shift from subject to object, enables us to consciously engage with and transcend outdated mental structures, patterned responses, and self-identification that inhibit growth. By engaging these developmental drivers, we cultivate discernment in how we disembody from patterned self-structures and begin sensing the early contours of our emerging presencing self. As development unfolds, the balance between subject and object gradually shifts. Constructive developmental thought emphasizes this reorganization, learning to behold the self-system as object, rather than remaining imbedded within it. This capacity for sustained witnessed seeing becomes a kind of medicine for the soul. It releases perception from the bindings of unconscious identification and opens new space for deeper knowing and more fluid ways of becoming.

At the same time, this meta-movement tends to cast a subtle shadow over a complementary developmental gesture: the mesa-turn, which invites consciously re-inhabit and re-embody experience at deeper felt levels. The impulse to transcend experience by making it object can unintentionally obscure the wisdom of re-subjectification as an inward turn to presence through embodied inhabitation. While Kegan's epistemological re-orientation is undoubtedly transformative, the broader trajectory of developmental theory has often overlooked this deeper, inward apprenticeship with being.

Taken together, the epistemological and ontological movements inform a larger unfolding path toward presencing mastery. Kegan's epistemological move empowers heightened levels of presenced seeing, while the ontological object-subject move deepens consciousness into subtler levels of embodied presenced being. When integrated, these complementary drives enhance one another, creating a synergy that strengthens both. This integration opens new possibilities for advancing presencing mastery by uniting these dimensions of seeing and being into a coherent and transformative whole.

Without the complementary mesa-shift, which functions as an interior, embodied practice and the ontological orientation of the object-subject move, presencing practices risks becoming ungrounded. In particular, they may bypass the subtle, somatic dimensions of presence that are accessed through the inner presencing body. When this occurs, the center of gravity in presencing can drift upward, becoming predominantly cognitively led or awareness-based. Left unchecked, this tendency creates barriers to accessing presence as a direct, lived experience rather than a state observed or managed from a distance. In *Dynamic Presencing* (Gunnlaugson 2024, 2025),

reclaiming the Five Level-Depths of Presence is central to cultivating a grounded and stable presencing embodiment. By contrast, when the presencing field is treated as the primary source, as often seen in Theory U-based presencing, challenges can arise. Without sufficient integration of the practitioner's inner presencing body and being, this orientation may subtly externalize source—casting it as something beyond or outside oneself, often projected into the presencing field. Such a bypass reflects a deeper projective tendency shaped by the epistemological conditioning of Kegan's subject–object developmental logic.

To counterbalance this tendency and deepen presencing practices toward embodied mastery, it becomes essential to cultivate an interior orientation that prioritizes residing within the practitioner's presencing nature. This involves engaging directly with the inner work of establishing one's presencing self-sense in presence. When this integration matures, the practitioner's inner presencing body becomes a trusted sensing medium, an embodied channel through which our presencing nature can connect synergistically with the presencing field. This underscores the significance of the DPC enfoldment process, which grounds presence as the presencing perception. Through inner, embodied seeing, practitioners apprentice with each of the Five Level-Depths of Presence (Gunnlaugson, 2024), preparing themselves to serve as deeper instruments and conduits for presencing.

At this stage, Dynamic Presencing emphasizes reconnecting with the source of presence through stillness in the inner presencing body, re-establishing the ontological rooting of presencing awareness. The mesa-turn integrates presencing awareness in the inner presencing body, being, and physiology, enabling a reversal of the subject-object dynamic. This re-integration brings practitioners back into their presencing nature at a more profound level. Not a return to embeddedness; more a re-embedding of awareness ontologically through the inner presencing body. This reversal grounds our presencing nature in a more direct, embodied experience of presencing.

The mesa-turn initiates a process of reclaiming the Five Level Depths of Presence that constitute the full dimensionality of our presencing nature. This turn restores felt-embodied contact with the deeper regions of presence, creating the energetic and ontological conditions for a full activation of one's presencing self. As each level-depth is re-inhabited and integrated into embodied awareness, DP Practitioners begin to cultivate the energetic capacity and embodied wisdom needed to deepen, sustain, and ultimately transform their presencing practice. Through this descent, the Five Level-Depths—*immediate presence*, *expansive presence*, *core presence*, *originating presence*, and *dynamic presence*—are progressively re-embodied. As these dimensions become stabilized within the practitioner, a

more continuous and resilient access to our presencing nature emerges within one's way of being.

Reclaiming each level-depth of presence is both an integrative and participatory process. As the DP Practitioner's presence is unearthed and embodied, their presencing nature enters into fuller participation with the immediacy of the arising world. Each mesa-turn invites a more immersive way of engaging our presencing nature, fostering deeper connections with oneself, with others, and life itself. By accessing and embodying the core conditions of presence, practitioners begin to support the emergence of embodied presencing relating. Each level-depth of presence can be understood as distinct yet interrelated dimensions of our presencing nature. *Immediate Presence* refers to the existential experience of being here. *Expansive Presence* opens into a broader witnessing awareness. *Core Presence* offers deepened connection with our soul nature. *Originating Presence* connects us to the underlying generative source. Finally, *Dynamic Presence* integrates and flows through all prior grounds, embodying a responsive fluidity that moves in real time with the unfolding of life. Together, these level-depths encompass an embodied reconnect with the living depths of our presencing nature.

## V. Dissolving from the *Mesa-Shift* into *Unitive Resting*

Within the Threefold Developmental Movement, the mesa-shift gradually dissolves the subject-object polarity, culminating in a deeper integration and activation of one's presencing nature. At this stage, presence itself becomes the locus of experience, moving beyond conceptual understanding and dualistic frameworks. This final gesture invites a shift into unitive holding and beholding, where practitioners come into direct contact with being presence and the ground of presence itself. This ontological re-routing serves to anchor the meta-view, which otherwise risks remaining abstracted rather than embodied. While it is possible to cultivate a subtly embodied meta-view, the nature of the meta-gesture tends to privilege witnessing over being and felt-sense making. In the shift from witnessing to felt embodiment, practitioners begin a descent into reclaiming their presencing nature by re-connecting with the underlying level-depths of presence.

Within the Five Level-Depths, this process unfolds as practitioners engage progressively with each level-depth of presence, transitioning from immediate to expansive, core, and originating presence, before arriving into dynamic presence. This journey prepares the conditions for the final stage: dissolving into unitive holding through unitive resting. At this point, the dissolution of the object-subject polarity allows practitioners to rest deeply from source, where presence is no longer witnessed or acted upon but is received. The transition to unitive resting (Figure 2.0 below) from the mesa-shift carries practitioners beyond the dualistic interplay of subject and object into an integrated



experience of being presence. This resting draws from an active, regenerative stillness that holds the potential for profound insight, renewal, and alignment with the deeper ground of presence as a unitive experience and way of being in the world.

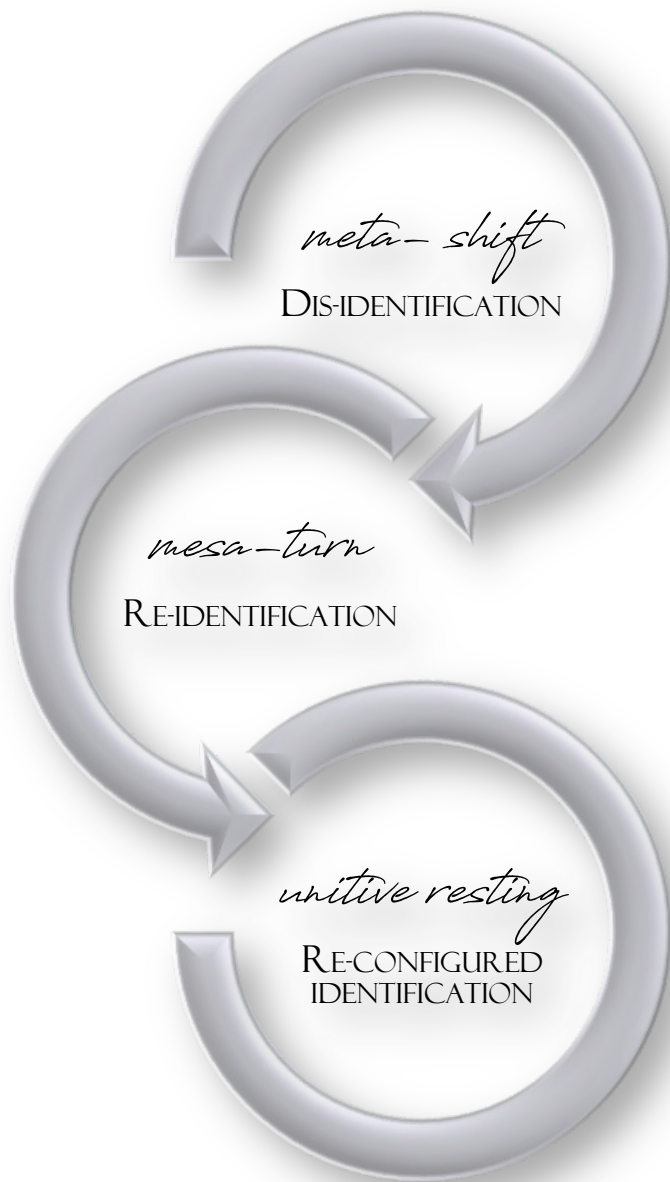


Figure 2.0: The Threefold Developmental Movement of Presencing

Unitive resting can be understood as an expression of the volitional drive, a dynamic that contrasts with the evolutionary ascent and involitional descent movements of the earlier gestures in the Threefold Developmental Movement. Evolutionary movement, as expressed in the meta-

shift, follows an upward trajectory that expands cognitive and perceptual capacities to transcend the limitations of the ordinary self. Involutionary movement, central to the mesa-turn, follows a downward and inward descent into the embodied depths of the presencing self, reconnecting practitioners to the immanent ground of presence. By contrast, volitional dynamics tend to be integrative. They embody a holistic, regenerative coherence that rests in the unitive field of presence. Drawing on Merry's (2024) articulation, the volitional drive expresses a return to the self as a dynamic source, where being and action, stillness and generativity, flow together as one. Unitive resting reflects this volitional coherence by dissolving all remaining polarities and allowing the practitioner to embody presence as a lived and ever-renewing state. Through this final movement, presencing mastery transcends both the cognitive expansions of the meta-shift and the embodied depth of the mesa-turn, anchoring practitioners in a self-sustaining ground of dynamic presence.

The meta-shift, as a catalyst for development, prepares practitioners for the object-subject reversal into the next level down. It is important to emphasize this distinction, as development is often conceptualized as moving to the next level up through a spiral or meta-level trajectory. By contrast, the Threefold Developmental Movement initiates a path that first dis-embeds from the ordinary, separate self, and then pivots downward into the presencing self-sense. These two encompassing gestures guide the practitioner into the third: a deeper unitive holding and unitive resting. This final gesture provides the necessary conditions for integrating our presencing nature directly from being.

Through the ontological grounding of presencing awareness in the source depths of presence, it becomes possible to re-yoke knowing to being, allowing presenced knowing to emerge as an expression of presenced being. This arises from an inner-connected state of unitive holding and unitive resting. By returning to this ground, the presencing practitioner creates the conditions in the third stage for a deeper integration of their presencing nature in real time, laying the foundation for advancing to later stages of presencing mastery. This deepening movement can be understood through the Three Rotations of Consciousness. In the first rotation, what was previously subject becomes object, initiating a contemplative inside-out turn. In the second rotation, what was previously object becomes subject, enabling an outside-in embodiment turn. In the third rotation, consciousness drops into unitive resting within our presencing nature, establishing embodied contact with source.

While this final gesture of unitive resting may appear to echo classical non-dual descriptions of realization, it is important to clarify that Dynamic Presencing is not a return to timeless awareness

or the negation of form. Where non-dual traditions often prioritize dis-identification and the dissolution of the personal self into pure awareness, the mesa-turn reorients practitioners into a deeper intimacy with their presencing nature, unfolded through the Five Level-Depths of Presence and grounded in the inner presencing body. Unitive Resting becomes a generative ground from which new ways of presenced knowing, being, and relating come alive in the world.

This integrated, unitive state of being presence gives rise to a new quality of experiential coherence—one that is neither static nor transcendent, but alive, embodied, and vibratory in nature. In this third phase of unitive resting, where presence is no longer divided into subject and object but explored as a unified field, there arises the possibility of what Gavin and Todres (2011) describe as grounded vibrancy. Emerging from a felt sense of non-separateness, this state allows practitioners to hold both movements simultaneously: subject giving way to object, and object returning into subject. Within this unitive holding, a deeper foundation of integration becomes accessible, an embodied coherence that anchors and renews presencing practice. Gavin and Todres characterize grounded vibrancy as containing both a sense of renewal and emergent possibility, as well as the deep continuity that comes from feeling at one with oneself and the world.

Within the presencing journey, the becoming aspect of consciousness first appears through the initial subject–object pivot, which can be likened to an out-breath, an expansive movement that brings us into contact with our presencing self. The second rotation, from object back into subject, mirrors an in-breath, drawing us inward toward the underlying ground of presence that supports and sustains this presencing self. The third movement, unitive holding, arises as an integration of both prior gestures. It invites the simultaneous inhabiting of both the out-breath and in-breath, an embodied awareness that holds the fullness of becoming and being together through the inner presencing body.

Les Todres and Kathleen Galvin (2011), drawing from Heidegger's later works, describe this simultaneity as *dwelling-mobility*—a mode of being that rests with things as they are while, on a subtle inner level, moves with things as they become what they can. This quality of embodied simultaneity offers a dynamic way of engaging with and from the presencing self. It animates the third rotation of unitive holding as a lived expression of a larger unfolding wholeness. Through this integrative movement, the source ground from which our presencing nature arises begins to reveal itself. The first two rotations—the out-breath and the in-breath—prepare the way for both unitive resting and the generative flow of expression from our presencing nature. Unitive holding, grounded in this source, becomes a synthesis of stillness and movement, a coherent unfolding of presence and

presencing in real time.

The multidimensionality of this process unfolds dynamically, yet it remains anchored in the resting that arises within and from unitive holding. This holding provides the spaciousness necessary for fluid movement across each rotation. As practitioners deepen into this subtle, embodied unfolding of their presencing nature, they develop the capacity to work with subject–object reversals while simultaneously resting within the ground of unitive holding. This living dynamism emerging from the stillness and fullness of being enables a way of being that is both alive and evolving, while also foundational and at rest.

## VI. Closing Remarks

This article has recontextualized Robert Kegan’s subject-object theory within the ontological territory of presencing, proposing a multidimensional developmental pathway toward presencing mastery. While Kegan’s meta-shift catalyzes the essential movement of perspective-taking, it is the mesa-shift that initiates a deeper descent, drawing practitioners inward and downward into the depths of their presencing nature. This embodied, ontological turn marks a pivotal reversal of conventional developmental logic, redirecting growth from cognitive complexity to somatic inhabitation. Culminating in unitive resting, the Threefold Developmental Movement offers a comprehensive framework for transforming the presencing self.

Kegan’s meta-shift remains an essential entry point into awareness-based development through perspective-taking. Yet without deeper embodiment, this awareness can remain subtly disembodied or abstract. The mesa-shift addresses this by re-embedding awareness into the ontological depths of the inner presencing body, enabling presencing practitioners to reclaim presence as lived being. By reclaiming the Five Level-Depths of Presence, practitioners can awaken the dimensional fullness of their presencing nature.

The final phase, unitive resting, softens the everyday duality of subject and object through a deepening integration of being presence. This phase marks a new accolade where presence emerges as both the foundation and the flow of one’s presencing awareness. Presence is no longer approached as a state to achieve or a level-depth to access. Instead, it is connected with as an extension of who we are. From this deepened re-orientation, DP practitioners begin to draw their presencing knowing directly from the aliveness of their presencing being. This unitive source grounding opens new pathways for presencing, enabling practitioners to engage with the subtleties of their inner being and the broader dimensions of reality in a unified, relational way.

Taken together, these developmental gestures trace a fuller expression of presencing that begins in perceptual clarity, deepens through embodied inhabitation, and integrates into a generative coherence that can be lived and practiced in real time. In doing so, this article has introduced the Threefold Developmental Movement as a transformative developmental framework for cultivating presencing as a way of being. By rooting presencing awareness in the subtle dynamism of the inner presencing body, it maps a practitioner's apprenticeship into a dimensional mode of knowing and generativity sourced directly from their presencing nature. Ultimately, this article articulates a path for presencing as a transformational way of becoming where our presencing nature emerges as a living expression of one's deepest wisdom, attuned to the unfolding coherence of life within and around us.

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