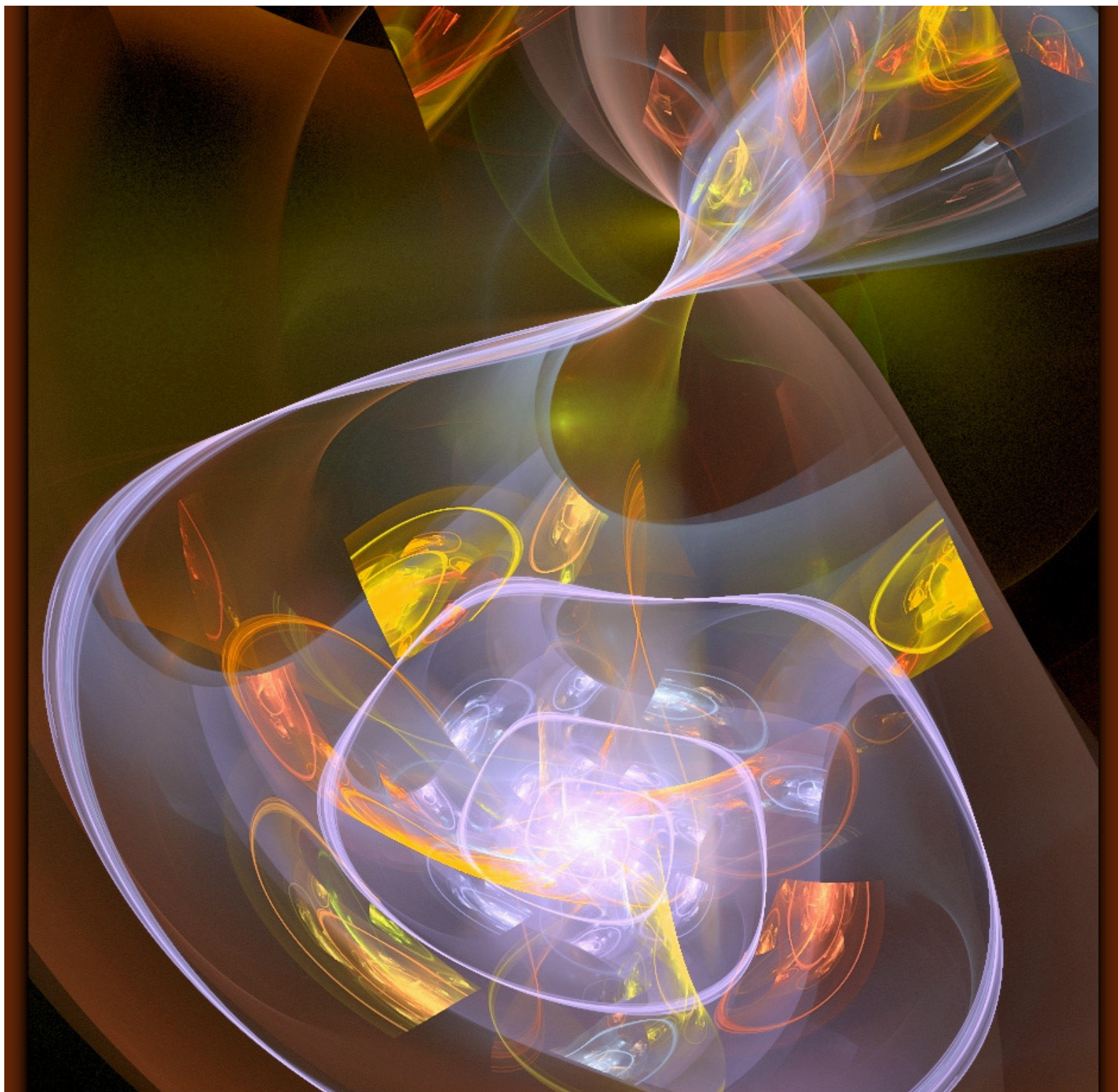


AN INTERPENETRATIVE APPLICATION OF THEORY U

BY GEOFF FITCH & ABIGAIL LYNAM



CHAPTER 5

An Interpenetrative Application of Theory U

Geoff Fitch & Abigail Lynam

Introduction

This chapter describes an interpenetrative approach to the application of Theory U in an integral transformative development program that Pacific Integral has offered for the past 14 years (Ramirez, Fitch, & O’Fallon, 2010, 2013; Fitch, 2016). The term interpenetration indicates two aspects of a phenomena (such as an individual and a collective or the left and right side of the “U”) that are both distinct and paradoxically co-exist and are inseparable. This approach emerged as we redesigned our program with the intent of finding a deeper integration of the tools and frameworks we made use of. Over time, we began to see Theory U as a fundamental archetype for transformation in all aspects of our work; an archetype that is both timeless and unfolding in time, and that interpenetrates with the other frameworks we use including integral theory (Wilber, 2006), constructive development theory (Cook-Greuter, 2002, O’Fallon 2011), integral polarity practice (Murray & O’Fallon, 2010) and others. The chapter describes the evolution and distinctions of this interpenetrative approach to Theory U application, as well as experiences, lessons learned, and essential practices.

Pacific Integral has been exploring, facilitating, and research-

ing transformative change in an integral, developmental context, through its Generating Transformative Change program, its own organization, and other communities of practice it has convened and participated in. We have convened, facilitated, and engaged with dozens of different integral developmental collectives, involving over 300 individuals, and over durations ranging from nine months to several years. The core of this exploration has been the Generating Transformative Change program (GTC), which enacts and facilitates a new way of being and action in the world grounded in later, more subtle states and stages of consciousness that we refer to as Causal Leadership (Ramirez, Fitch, O'Fallon, 2013). Part of Pacific Integral's learning and evolution has been to ground our work in research, through an ongoing longitudinal study of the developmental growth and experience of participants, before, during, and for years after they complete the programs.

Theory U is a central framework through which we engage our work. We are also deeply informed by integral theory (Wilber, 2001, 2006), leadership development and action inquiry (Törbert, 2004), ego development theory (Cook-Greuter, 2002; Loevinger, 1996; O'Fallon, 2011), dialogue (Bohm & Nichol, 1996; Isaacs, 1999), organizational learning theory (Argyris, 1999), subject-object theory (Kegan, 1998), insight dialogue (O'Fallon & Kramer, 2008) and several other bodies of work from Eastern and Western spiritual paths and traditions. A foundational orientation to our leadership and organizational work is a developmental understanding that spans the concrete, subtle, causal, and non-dual worlds in which our conceptions of individual and collective transformation evolves.

Through an interpenetrative approach, we endeavor to consciously hold multiple perspectives on our learning process. Further we aim to engage thoughtfully from those perspectives while acknowledging that all perspectives on the process are co-arising and co-creating the moment. This approach is distinct from an integrative method, which starts with models and distinctions and moves to reconcile them through editing, framing, and modification into a new, sensibly mapped model. An interpenetrative approach arises out of the view that a deeper wholeness exists - a process beyond our mapping - with which we are participating.

From this perspective, we hold the tensions and paradoxes that exist in and between our models and our perspectives on them. Sensemaking is contextual, provisional, and often paradoxical, and is coincident with witnessing and an openness that allows novelty to emerge.

The following is an example of an interpenetrative approach applied to the recognition that transformative change is an individual and collective phenomenon. An interpenetrative view understands that this separation is in a sense arbitrary, that both co-create each other and co-evolve together, and yet looking at each separately offers insights on different dimensions of change. Both of these perspectives are available at any time and can often point in different directions, yet in any social system there is a unified occurrence that is unfolding, with complexities and a wholeness beyond our ability to map it.

Another way to understand interpenetrative is to examine the four stages of a polarity which are: 1) no other, 2) either/or, 3) reciprocal or both/and, and 4) one within the other, paradoxical, or interpenetrative (O'Fallon, 2010b). Stages three and four can be seen as different degrees of integration, where both/and is an early form of integration from the perspective of separateness and interpenetrative is a deeper intermingling of opposites, seen from the intuition of unity. The fourth stage, which is interpenetrative recognizes that you simply can't have one without the other, that indeed one half of a polar pair actually enacts and depends on the other pole. For instance, in the individual and collective polarity, individuals are shaped by collectives and couldn't exist without them and collectives are made up of individuals. In GTC we engage in individual *and* collective development; separately, together, and interdependently. What this means in practice is that we engage in deep interpersonal work and support the conscious development of the collective to support an individual's healing and development, and vice versa. And in terms of the integration of different theories and models, each is held as distinct and unique, and efforts are made to preserve the integrity of the approach, as well as worked with interdependently. Developmentally, interpenetration begins with later subtle stages of consciousness (O'Fallon, 2010b) and further

evolves in the later transpersonal stages as the vantage point becomes awareness itself. At these later stages, one is able to take or witness a more holistic view of phenomenon, which includes an understanding of the limits of distinctions in language.

Our application of Theory U includes the use of the framework as a directional path towards transformation, with the parts of the U process held as distinct and sequential, and an approach that recognizes that the left, bottom, and right side of the U are always present and co-evolving, such as the territories of Open Mind, Open Heart and Open Will (Scharmer, 2007). In an interpenetrative approach, these frameworks are recognized as both distinct and precise in their own perspectives, while also intertwined and pointing to analogous realities. In our experience, this has revealed new power and depth in Theory U as it can inform and be informed by other perspectives and offers a novelty to how it can be applied. By engaging and integrating these multiple perspectives, the U practice is deepened and accelerated.

The chapter describes our intentions, theoretical orientations, experiences, and learning with our experiments in the application of Theory U in our transformative work, with a particular emphasis on the benefits, challenges, and questions arising out of this deeply paradoxical approach.

Background on Generating Transformative Change

In order to engage a long-term developmental process in the Generative Transformative Change (GTC) program, as well as in-the-moment practices, we integrate the use of Theory U as both a process as well as an ongoing, in-the-moment, dynamic way of being and doing (Fitch, Ramirez, O'Fallon, 2010). This occurs by practicing specific Theory U-based processes, as well as integrating the U process and its constituent elements into a non-linear, holistic framework for the development of capacities and enactment of practices for transformative change. For instance, by recognizing that all the points on the U are ever-present, we can enact them in a moment and simultaneously – open the heart, mind, and will, ground in source and enact the emerging future in an

instant.

The application of Theory U as both a process as well as a way of being and doing, integrates two core intentions of GTC. First, the participants individually and collectively learn to understand, engage, and embody transformative processes in themselves and in the systems in which they work. Second, the participants individually and collectively develop their inner capacities and potentials as leaders and as people.

In addition, the GTC program brings together a diverse array of implicit and explicit intentions. We often describe GTC as a leadership development program, designed to support people growing and expanding into transformative leaders. Our organizational programs similarly aim to increase the capacities to effectively and transformatively engage with an organization's vision and mission. While these descriptions create a context of leadership, a more complex set of intentions is at play. Participants bring their own intentions for their own development: expectations, goals, plans, and visions for the future. The explicit intentions are complemented by implicit intentions arising out of the developmental, emergent process itself. In other words, if there is a future that wants to emerge, beyond our preconceptions of it, we can conceive of this future as an intention that in a sense, life wants for us, and it is to be discovered. From the outset, we invite participants to listen for this future that wants to emerge (Scharmer, 2007); their next stage of leadership and expression in the world. The intention of GTC is to be an incubator for this future, and to invite participants to imagine and sense into what that future might be. As designers and facilitators of GTC, it is our intent to discover the developmental unfolding in each participant (and each cohort), rather than to predict it or impose a particular form of development on groups or the individuals as transformative programs consciously or unconsciously might tend to do. We also encourage participants to continue to reveal their own implicit intentions for growth and transformation through their own responses and actions. This is a process of discovering and uncovering intentions, as well as consciously creating intentions for growth and development.

Ultimately, the provocation to leadership offers a learning op-

portunity with the intention to expand creativity, impact, and service in the world. Through all of our GTC work, we attend to the question, “What greater form of consciousness and action is emerging in the individual/collective and how can we participate in and support that emergence?” One can do so only through one’s particular “map of the world,” which includes our present sensemaking in models of adult development, state development, and organizational and social transformation. However, the limitations we place on our presencing of the ever-present Mystery or ground of being finds a home in the U model, which gives us a process for exploring and evoking that Mystery in its next form in practical ways.

We launched our initial GTC cohorts around the time of the first publications of Theory U (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005). After the first two cohorts, we began to comprehend the transformative process that the participants and cohorts engaged in, through the lens of Theory U and began to explicitly integrate and experiment with the theory in the program. We also engaged the Integral framework (Wilber, 2001, 2006) as well as other models, and had the intent to integrate and synthesize these perspectives into a unified approach. We were initially influenced by a conversation between Scharmer and Wilber (Scharmer & Wilber, 2003), in which they made a connection between the stages of the U-based processes and states of consciousness, and between the process of presencing and stimulating developmental growth through stages. Together they drew a connection between the three levels of the U – Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will, and the three states of consciousness and domains of reality – gross, subtle, and causal, and their relationship to fostering development. This helped us connect the process of change inherent in Theory U, with capacities and structures in the growth of consciousness and leadership. As we deliberately integrated these approaches and made similar connections, the conversation between Wilber and Scharmer encouraged our experimentation, research, and action, and in particular it stimulated a more interpenetrative view. While the domains of Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will represent movements of a process through time, the territories pointed to by Wilber are

states of consciousness that reveal ever-present aspects of reality or territories of depth. We recognized that presencing is something that occurs specifically in time and also, paradoxically, is always happening.

The Evolution of GTC

Our integration of Theory U involved several stages of evolution of the program. We began by learning about Theory U and then drew connections and points of integration with other theories and practices incorporated into GTC. We then designed and integrated a U-based process that cohorts engaged with during the second half of the program, starting with the third retreat. This process emerged as a pivotal point in the program and began to be referred to as the “heart of GTC.” This process involves a 4 and a half-day retreat working with a variety of practices to open the mind, heart, and will of the cohort. It includes consciously revealing collective facts and the cohorts’ interpretation of them, patterns of interaction, communication, and leadership, patterns of judgments and type-casting, and so forth, to help the cohort release each other and the collective from these potentially limiting habits. The process supports the cohort to let go of who they have been to discover who they might be together, individually, and as a collective – to source their cohort anew from a deeper ground of being. From this, the cohort engages in prototyping new ways of being and acting together.

We began to recognize Theory U as one of the central frameworks of the GTC experience. Simultaneously, we started to integrate Theory U in a deeper way into our own organizational and transformative practices. Each cohort, each retreat, the program itself, and our own organization were held as an emergent future and the capacities, tools, and processes of Theory U were brought to bear.

The GTC program has continued to evolve through an emergent process. Some elements have remained consistent: it utilizes an intimate cohort model that involves intensive retreats every three months, inter-session work online, and group and field

work. However, it has also varied in length from nine months to nearly two years and the curriculum has evolved substantially over the fourteen years it has been offered.

As GTC continued to evolve, we started to integrate the core theories and practices of GTC within Theory U in a more interpenetrative way. For example, the arc of the whole program was designed as a U process, as were each of the retreats. There is also an explicit U process as a component of each retreat. The first two retreats involve a U process to discover and design individual intentions and prototypes that are enacted during the intersession; then during the third retreat, the cohort engages in the collective U process mentioned previously. In addition, the tools we offer and the capacities we aim to cultivate are more explicitly oriented to develop the participants' and cohort's capacity to navigate the transformative territory of the U, as they progress through the program.

The principles that guided the design of GTC were that it be integral (encompassing as much of reality as possible), developmental (not merely asserting a single worldview, but situated in an ongoing, evolutionary trajectory), and motivated by universal compassion (serving to reduce suffering and increase fulfillment in the largest span and depth imaginable). These principals were integrated in a variety of ways; from concrete mapping and multi-disciplinary learning designs, to a deeper inquiry on their interpenetration, which then revealed new approaches that transcended and included the particulars of each practice.

The key capacity development elements we integrate within the U process are 1) individual and collective stages of development, 2) various practices of state development, including meditation, awareness practices, and subtle energy work, 3) a relationship to polar opposites and paradox as a key dimension of cognitive development (Murray & O'Fallon, 2010; O'Fallon, 2010b), 4) moral development by stimulating and reflecting on a wider span and depth of care, 5) complexity of thinking by working with systems and their relationship to one another, 6) psychological and interpersonal practices to develop capacity to work with shadow, projection, and relationship dynamics and 7) action

learning prototypes to integrate, embody, and practice what participants have learned.

Questions Prompted by Theory U

The introduction of deep, transformative processes based on the Theory U framework prompted a number of questions for us. First, it provided a way to distinguish and talk about the territories of transformation, by seeing the domains of Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will (Scharmer, 2007) as territories of depth, i.e., different levels of subtlety at which change is occurring. These distinctions stimulated inquiry into other aspects of the program. We inquired into where we could go deeper by engaging the following questions: Where had change opened but not been sustained? How could we more fully activate the depth of presencing (openness to more coherent but un-conceived-of potentials)? How does personal and collective shadow relate to our ability to move through the transformative process? How does the transformative process reveal shadow? How do individuals and collectives transform together? Second, we began to see the practices and processes we engaged in, both in the program itself as well as in our own organizational and facilitation practices, through the lens of the Theory U's transformative framework. For example, the arc of the U became a core design principle for retreats; we came to attend to the voices of judgment, cynicism, and fear throughout the learning process; etc. These shifts in perspectives challenged us to redesign our conception of the program in light of Theory U.

As mentioned previously, we began to sense the potential for a deeper cohesion in GTC's design and sought to find a more powerful integration of the other frameworks and practices we employed. At a theoretical level, we drew connections between the frameworks and practices that we hadn't seen before. The more we proceeded with this integration, the more we recognized that the different frameworks we applied interpenetrated, and the more we began to see it as a whole. This process mirrored our own personal and collective development to a more

universal, holistic perspective taking that foregrounded the unitive whole that we were engaging with and backgrounded the process of negotiation and integration of difference.

Theory U as an Interpenetrating Archetype

We began to see Theory U as a fundamental archetype for transformation, present in all aspects of our work; it draws on the timeless dimension as well as unfolding in time and it interpenetrates with the other frameworks we use. Theory U's technology of social transformation can be seen to articulate not just a process, but to point towards domains of existence and change that are in constant relationship as an identity, a movement, and a simultaneity. These territories interpenetrate, which is to say they paradoxically exist distinctly and co-exist in the same time and space. They form each other and are in a continual dynamic relationship to each other. In our personal experience, they can be seen as aspects and dynamics of consciousness and form, which we are engaged in discovering, integrating, and enacting with ourselves and the world. This is important to our approach as we have found that holding awareness on this interpenetration allows for a deeper coherence and experience of wholeness to come to light, as well as more spontaneous and novel directions and solutions to emerge.

Thus, we refer to this approach as interpenetrative. This term is significant in the STAGES developmental model (O'Fallon, 2011), but points to a perspective in awareness that is found in many contexts. In the STAGES model, it indicates a pattern in development of how we hold polar opposites, where the tension is held in paradox and deep interrelationship and interdependence. In polarity theory, interpenetration can be thought of as one step beyond both/and thinking – an understanding of the deep interrelationship between and co-creative aspect of two opposing dimensions (Murray & O'Fallon, 2010; O'Fallon, 2010b). In Buddhist philosophy, 'interpenetration' points to the deep interconnectivity of all things and of all dharma. In Christianity, the notion of 'perichoresis' refers to the dynamic inflow-

ing and interdependence of the three elements of elements of the trinity. In developmental psychology, Kegan (1998) pointed to the fifth order consciousness capacity to see self in other and other in self. Interpenetration is sometimes symbolized in the Taijitu, or Yin/Yang symbol, by the small dot of the opposite color in each sides of the symbol, which remind us of the emptiness of duality, or ultimate non-duality of opposites.

In GTC, we hold the frameworks we use, such as Theory U, as perspectives on the present moment and on the dynamic unfolding at multiple levels. As such they reveal, enact, and enable something unique to the circumstances. The practice is to embody the perspectives as deeply as we can, to let them go, and let them come as needed, through the design, facilitation, and response to the moment. We endeavor to stay present to the enactment of our sensemaking and to take wise action based on the needs of the process unfolding through the moment. This has paradoxically led to both a deep integration of Theory U into our work, as well as a very light holding of it as a framework.

In the following sub-sections, we consider interpenetration along three different dimensions: within elements of Theory U itself; between Theory U and other models and frameworks; and between essential tensions or polarities that arises in the context of its application in transformative change. The vantage point of interpenetrative awareness will be explored through each of these categories, as a way to illustrate and evoke the perspective and its application.

Interpenetration of the Elements of the Theory U Model

Let us look more closely at some of the elements of the Theory U framework, which has served as a rich map of the transformative process for GTC and examine how we might see these from an interpenetrative point of view. First, we can differentiate territories of depth (of greater subtlety and complexity): Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will. In the context of Theory U, these territories represent movements through the social transformation process. But these are also roughly analogous to the

domains of depth of being, variously referred to as gross, subtle, and causal; or in colloquial terms, body, mind, and spirit. The term *gross*, also known as *concrete*, refers to the world of the senses, of ordinary perceivable matter, and of individuals and groups in their concrete appearances. The *subtle* is the world of mind, with its conceptions, emotions, constructions, and contextualization; the world of imagination and subtle contexts and systems. The 'causal' is the domain of awareness of awareness itself, of the unconditioned mind, full and empty, the witness and the manifest phenomena of all concrete, subtle and causal realities, as well as the very subtle content of mind that is present at this level. At this very subtle level, we touch into what is sometimes called the Source, the primordial ground of Being, which is paradoxically empty and also full of creative potential. It is at this point, the bottom of the U, where we are no longer downloading anything from the past and have the clearest potential to step into a new future (Ramirez, Fitch, & O'Fallon 2013; O'Fallon, 2011).

From the perspective of the bottom of the U or Source, we can recognize that the territories in Theory U are not just stages of a movement, but ever-present aspects of reality. The U process guides us to practice moving through these domains. At the same time, there are many frameworks that have distinguished these domains and articulated practices for working with them. Psychological models and contemplative traditions lay out bodies of work for realizing facility with them. Adult stages of development unfold ability to see and work with the content at these levels (O'Fallon, 2011). Thus, we can see these territories as transited by a process, such as Theory U poses (a path to follow), but also see them as potential capacities to develop, as we grow and develop, as well as potentially ever-present aspects of experience. The bottom of the U is ever-present, as is every other point along the trajectory of the U.

As referred in the previous paragraph, we can also take an ever-present perspective on the stages of the U process, which appear to proceed from 'left to right.' Each of these stages represent a kind of archetype of the transformative journey; a capacity, a pattern in being, and an aspect of the self. These archetypal

patterns are appropriately enacted at each stage of the U process when successful. But they are also ever-present potentials and when seen in this light we can acknowledge they interpenetrate with the entire U process itself (as all tensions or polarities ultimately co-create and unify).

For example, in the act of crystallization (as one moves up the right side of the U), we are letting come a future that wants to emerge, standing in it, and giving voice to it. This future crystallizes or comes in to very subtle form in our consciousness and by giving voice to it becomes an attractor for that future, however inchoate. At this point, the felt sense of this future is often very strong and clear, while as of yet unformed. To give voice to this is an act of daring and courage – the act of faith in the voice of a prophet. If we begin to imagine the capacities, stance, and identity of this perspective on Theory U as a kind of universal archetypal structure, we see that it can be (and ultimately must be) present in some form throughout the process. From the beginning, wholehearted participation in the U process is a kind of apriori faith in an emergent future. It is a kind of declaration of that future, without content. Deepening our capacity for prophetic faith (as with all the other archetypal patterns of the stages of the U), strengthens our engagement with the U process, especially when it apparently ‘fails’ us.

Similarly, as we move into enacting through experimentation and prototyping, we initially engage with the future as something unknown, complex, and emerging. At this point in the process, it is too soon to know with any precision where we are heading but, nevertheless, we are captured by a sense and vision of the future, so we experiment to engage with that emergent future. Experimenting is described in exploratory, playful terms - such as ‘explore divergent alternatives’ or ‘fail early and often’ (Scharmer, 2007). Effective engagement in this stage requires a kind of serious play. We must stay connected to the heart (and source) of our vision, while at the same time not hold it too tightly or become attached to images of what it might eventually look like. We can see that this is not only a requirement of this stage, but a kind of archetypal pattern, a quality, capacity, and

aspect of the self. If we imagine who would be needed to bring about the early stages of a nascent vision, we can begin to imagine the qualities and capacities of this self – social connection, creativity, novelty, wholistic sensing, trust. If we approach the whole U process (and perhaps all of experience) with this quality of serious play, with lighthearted enthusiasm, the experience can be infused with wonder and joy, and our willingness and engagement deepened.

These examples show how the elements of Theory U can be seen to interpenetrate with each other and not merely be held in a static model and process. There are numerous other ways to see essential patterns in the elements and structure of Theory U itself. For example, by identifying the polar tensions inherent in the model itself, such as Open and Closed, Reflection and Action, and so on, each are held in awareness, as a play in time, as a paradox, a dynamic tensegrity, and an expression of a whole that is infinitely greater than our ability to distinguish it.

Interpenetration of Theory U and other Frameworks

The deeper more universal patterns in the elements of Theory U are also suggested in other frameworks, while at the same time enacting distinctions and actions that are foreign to Theory U. As such, you can explore the interpenetration of these frameworks with Theory U.

As previously mentioned, Wilber and Scharmer noted the coherence between the territories of depth in the Integral framework (gross, subtle, causal) and those in Theory U (Open Mind, Open Heart, Open Will). In integral theory, these territories are both states of consciousness (interior) and domains of reality (exterior). A developmental perspective is a fundamental component of integral theory and O'Fallon's STAGES developmental model (developed in part through experience with the GTC program at Pacific Integral and influenced by the patterns inherent in Wilber's Integral model), integrates an understanding of states and stages as well as the territories of depth pointed to by integral

theory and Theory U. In Theory U, we transit territories as we presence and enact a new future, i.e. as we move down the U, we enter awareness of more complex and subtle realities until potentially letting go into the ground of awareness itself. In integral theory, they can be seen as ever-present realities and states of consciousness (which we can say we are touching into and provoking through the U process). In the STAGES model, they are also developmental structures, which emerge over time in individuals. We can then say that Source is an ever-present dimension of reality, which we let go into and presence with, *and* that this is a kind of state experience that is more or less available to us as a conscious enactment, depending on our level of experience with it. This is what makes Theory U possible and deepened through facilitation that supports a process of letting go and letting come to and from Source.

While the connection points one can draw to other frameworks is probably endless, the key for us was to recognize and see our work through the deeper structure of Theory U. Some frameworks are not as comprehensive as Theory U but still integrate a deeper structure. An example of this might be Torbert's Action Inquiry, which incorporates a model of single-, double- and triple loop learning that is similar to the territories of depth in Theory U (Torbert, 2004). The analogy between triple loop learning and Theory U's presencing was drawn in a 2005 paper by Starr & Torbert.

Other frameworks include these territories of depth or process with different contexts, emphasis, or interpretation. Snowden's Cynefin framework of complex systems provides a useful view of systems at different levels of complexity that relate to the levels of the U. At the level of 'Downloading', Snowden's notion of 'Known' or simple systems applies, in which we are free to operate with known solutions, i.e., to download. At the level of Open Mind, 'Knowable' systems, where analysis (suspending) is important, but cause and effect are still clear. At the level of Open Heart, 'Complex' systems are at play, where cause and effect become less accessible. At the complex systems level we are part of the system and experimentation or probing is the appropriate action.

In Theory U this leaves the domain of Open Will, letting go, presencing and in Cynefin, the Chaotic system. Snowden interprets this from the more conventional perspective of something requiring crisis management, a state in which there is high turbulence and unpredictability. In Theory U, the goal is to achieve a kind of unpredictability, a sense of liberation from the predictability of past patterns. We might do well here to evoke the Greek's original meaning of the term *Kaos*, "the primordial state that precedes Creation. Chaos is an emptiness, but a fertile emptiness, a nothingness that contains the mysterious seeds of all that is, a vast and formless potential capable of bringing forth all form into expression" (Golabuk, 2012).

Seeing the elements of Theory U as archetypal patterns naturally draws us into more universal and traditional frameworks that elucidate these patterns. We see the elements of the U in the Hero's Journey, in the rhythms of change identified in the I Ching, in the patterns of the seasons, of the day, and of the breath. We see it in our language and culture. The territory of Open Heart is suggested through commonplace wisdom expressions such as "be the change you want to see in the world" and "you are the world." The human experience of letting go and letting come is suggested in statements like, "it is always darkest before the dawn" and "change comes in the 11th hour." Even the words, "f**k it," have something to say about the U process. The goal again is not to integrate these distinctions piecemeal or merely frame them in a larger metacontext, but to hold them simultaneously and lightly, while foregrounding awareness of the whole of the process. This allows for them to inform the work, to hold contradictions and tensions gracefully, and intend the action most conducive to openness and insight.

Interpenetration of Tensions Inherent in the Transformative Process

Theory U can also be viewed through the inherent tensions that are at play in the model and in the transformative process itself. Some of these are explicit in the model itself, such as the tension of reflection (the left-hand side of the U) and action (the

right-hand side of the U). Other tensions such as individual/collective, interior/exterior, idealism/realism are implicit in the model. Some exist at multiple levels of depth such as individual/collective, which is explored in greater depth below (Fitch, 2016). In GTC, we work with polar tensions at the concrete and subtle levels as well as very subtle tensions revealed at the causal level, such as transcendence/immanence, awareness/form, and part/whole. As we engage in the process of transformative change viewed through the U, these polarities are at play, both inherently in our growth and our relationship to each other and the moment, as well as specifically in how the framework provokes the polarities.

For example, Theory U implicitly challenges us to exercise our relationship with the tension between realism and idealism. The invitation of the right-hand side - to engage with and lead from the future that wants to emerge - is a powerful call to idealism, while carefully inviting us to enact it through prototyping and emergent practice. We are also invited to let go of the excesses of realism such as judgment, cynicism, or fear. At the same time, the left-hand side is a profound call to realism, to withhold our temptation to jump across to the other side of the U, until we have had the courage to fully encounter what is at its depth. To suspend our judgements and sense into an issue or challenge, is to face reality deeply. We can hold this tension as a kind of rhythm or both/and context throughout the U, but we can also see the deeper interpenetrative nature of this tension. Human experience includes transformation and movement towards a more enlightened future. This is real. We can only fully embrace a more idealistic future, the future that wants to emerge, if we actually conceptualize it as real. Likewise, our most enlightened visions of the future inherently include greater openness, acceptance, and embrace, i.e., greater willingness to be with reality as it is.

In GTC, one of the most significant tensions we have explored and integrated is that of the individual and collective. No other tension is more deeply connected with our experience of being human and the dynamics of transformative change. We started our work in GTC with a focus on individual development but quickly came to see how collective development was deeply con-

nected to individual development (Fitch, 2016). Collectives both liberate and constrain their members, and vice-versa. Our learning community work then grew to include transformative change at a group level, recognizing that it needs to be enacted consciously by all of the participants. Further, we came to see the tension between the individual and the collective to be fertile ground for growth. Engaging the tensions between the individual and the collective calls us to confront our own limiting patterns formed in group life and affords an opportunity to step into a more open, paradoxical relationship to both. Smith and Berg's work on the *Paradoxes of Group Life* identifies a rich and complex set of distinctions for this work (1997). Taken from a deeper perspective we can come to see that there is one transformative movement occurring and that individual and collective levels are perspectives that highlight unique dimensions of it.

As a practice of Theory U, these individual and collective perspectives are always at play. There is an individual and collective through line in all experience. Each individual who participates in a collective U process is driven by unique intentions and patterns. They have their own unique transformative unfolding that is a potential that may or may not have anything to do with the collective future. Likewise, groups have identities, potentials, and a call for involvement in the future they are working toward. All engagement with the transformative experience is ultimately a kind of symphony of collective and individual movements, jostling and provoking each other in their own way and their own timing. To integrate individual and collective transformation and growth in GTC, we include practices and processes for both. An interpenetrative perspective on this tension calls us to hold this whole symphony of movement, including our own individual and collective parts, as both witness and responsible actors. As we move through the U and presence the self and work that wants to emerge, we engage in growth through the dialectic inherent in these tensions, building causal capacity to hold both sides from a still point, and working with the transformative change that occurs in the dynamics of these tensions.

Thus, Theory U reveals itself not just as a process of social change, but one seemingly informed by a deeper architecture,

which when seen shows the ‘U’ as pointing to a kind of mandala of being and becoming. It points to and provokes the underlying polarities through which we rest in our experience and move towards greater expression and allows us to situate them as a greater whole, which rests dynamically in its tensions, while being empty and unlimited in possibility. In other words, it is both a path for development and transformation, for becoming, and it is a reminder of the ever-present ground of being, the bottom of the U, our fundamental nature of being, as are all points on the U. Letting go of the illusion of the fixed self, we see that who we are and what is next is continually arising from the fertile, groundless ground. In a moment that we *are not* in touch with that realization, the U process, is an enactment of it and an awareness practice that supports our experience of it. In a moment where we *are* in touch with that realization, we can see the U process as a kind of ritual that animates what is already happening in its own time and way, and that can help us remain faithful to and in integrity with it.

Practical Applications

In this section we review the practical applications of Theory U in the GTC curriculum after shifting towards a more interpenetrative approach.

While previously the U Process had a couple of specific applications points in the program, we first began to look for additional opportunities to apply Theory U and added new U processes to the curriculum. Next, we began to design an architecture for the application of Theory U in the program with both an individual and collective track. We saw that the individuals and collective(s) were going through different U processes simultaneously. For example, a team might be engaging in prototyping while one of its members is letting go of her will in relationship to her evolving role in groups. As we saw both happening, and at different rates, we began to more consciously design for and to support these multiple and varied individual and collective U process. Third, Theory U entered our lexicon more deeply and we began to see

each part of the program as a kind of U. Each retreat was designed in consideration of the U process; as was each segment of the retreat. Fourth, as we deepened our openness to the transformative process, we came to see that we are limited by our own projections on it. With this in mind, faculty come to the retreats expecting the unexpected. In this sense, there is a transformation that wants to occur that is independent of our design for it, for the whole, and the individuals. So, one could say that there are indigenous U processes that are at play in the historical occasion. In addition to our designs for the process, we are open to discovering what they are and what really wants to happen. We are part of the whole that is being transformed. Fifth, we began to apply Theory U internally at Pacific Integral, to frame our own work around it, for example by distinguishing what parts of our work are at which stage of the U and by deliberately apply a U process internally when needed. In the context of GTC, we see ourselves as we design, produce and facilitate as presencing ourselves and our work, constantly, and in our own transformative discovery. And finally, the awareness of capacity development in the context of the U had us seeing the different parts of the program as relating to phases of the U and offering learning opportunities to support our ability to navigate those territories.

To illustrate some of these changes, we'll look at part of the design of GTC. As was reviewed previously, in the first two retreats participants are exposed to a variety of experiences that build capacity, connection, and history with each other at a collective level. But in this part of the program the U process is largely focused on the individual. Each session participants are guided on an individual U journey and presence, out of the context of the transformative learning they have been immersed in, the future that is emerging in them personally. This U process includes a review of the learning participants have experienced during the retreat, an examination of the contexts of their own life and work, a holistic sensing that emerges out of individual shadow work, letting go meditations, nature walks, journaling, and dialog with other group members. Meditations include guided visualization, emptiness meditation, breathwork, and movement that facilitate the letting go process. Participants are introduced to the

practice of prototyping and set up and engage in this work in the inter-sessions.

In retreats three and four, collective U processes are introduced and integrated with the individual U processes. The cohorts go through powerful journeys to discover and enact what is emerging at a collective level, working with collective shadow, paradoxes of group life and collective presencing, while also paying attention to their own individual emergent process. This represents a significant turn towards collective evolution and transformation but builds on the knowledge of the U process and the individual capacities they have been building. In the third retreat, the U Process provides a deep integration of their collective experience to date with a focus on presencing the potential practice and contribution of the collective itself. The movement of the left-hand side of the U is a progressive and challenging self-examination of the cohorts' experience of itself and of each member. It includes an examination of the reality and results of the cohort to date, as well as a collective shadow process that helps unearth the patterns of meaning making, assumptions, and projections that have been present in the group. This practice builds the capacity and norms of collective self-awareness, as well as prepares the cohort to presence the group's future being and work together.

In the current form of GTC there are many aspects of the U processes that are in a stage of institutionalization. They are well understood and designed. There are also aspects of it that are quite emergent – more in a stage of experimentation. In recent years, for example, we have brought in more exploration of cultural contexts and identity. This is new and we 'fail early and often' with it and enjoy this process with the understanding that it is a place of complex emergence and new learning.

At the same time, in recent cohorts we had a shift in the diversity of participants from a cultural and identity perspective. This has sparked challenging and unexpected turns in the evolution of the two most recent cohorts. While we have offered GTC for 14 years, with over 25 cohorts held on three continents, there is a degree to which we see the process as a kind of unknown unfolding.

In holding the process as it unfolds both predictably and unpredictably, we endeavor to return to our own presencing and ask at the deepest level, what is happening? How are we a source of it? What are we blind to? What is self and our work?

Benefits, Challenges, and Questions from an Interpenetrative Approach

On the whole, the interpenetrative approach to applying Theory U has had some significant benefits for our work. As we made our transition to this approach, we were driven by the intention to deepen the power and impact of the program. We shortened the length of the program but also intensified the process. We see this interpenetrative approach as instrumental in this change. It allowed us to keep the practices of transformation more present and alive in every stage of the program and to work with the transformative potential in each moment. Additionally, the focus on development of individual and collective capacities in support of the presencing process, served as a positive feedback loop on the use of Theory U. As the participants progress through the program, they become more able as individuals and as a cohort to engage and work with transformation. And as we at Pacific Integral conceive of everything we are doing as a kind of transformative process, with greater access to the distinctions and capacities to enact that perspective, a kind of transformative energy and intent was released that deepened the power and impact of the work.

We also observed a deeper coherence emerge that opened up our own exploration of trans-conceptual collective intelligence (the emergence of coherent movement in the collective not dependent on our conception of it). As we hold a meta-integrative perspective, we could sense and experience a movement towards deeper integration and intelligence, that transcends the ways we make narrative sense of the process. GTC cohorts are developmentally diverse and we consciously avoid reducing the space to a normative interpretive framework, allowing for a deeper integration in the tension between sensemaking and the paradox of

meaning. Likewise, holding a meta-integrative perspective creates potential for integration between polar opposites such as that of the individual and collective, action and reflection, engagement and detachment. In short, we aim to hold space for individual and collective movement through multiple simultaneous ‘U’ processes, where participants make different meaning about the experience but share an open reflective awareness/presence and a meta-cognitive curiosity that allows for a sensing of the greater whole within which the process is held. There is something deeply graceful and magical about what can unfold in this space of openness.

At the same time, there are challenges to this approach as well. One challenge is unleashing so much complexity and nuance so that occasionally a needed simplicity gets missed or we get sidetracked in a dead end. We have come to recognize subtle attachments and confusions that have contributed to this. For example, the U process challenges us at every step of the way to see and evolve patterns of consciousness that are artifacts of the conventional mindset. An example of this is the tendency to view prototyping through the frame of project management. It takes time to understand the frame of reference with which to see a complex system and the kind of probing and experimenting that is at the foundation of prototyping. Likewise, much of the U process can be driven by intent and will – except of course the process of letting go, which can be encouraged, but is not fundamentally an act of will but of willingness and grace. Therefore, if we hold the U too tightly or too loosely, we can lose the dynamic relationship with the creative evolutionary unfolding and the process can become inert. Finally, there are times to not take the interpenetrative perspective – for example to foreground the individual over the collective exclusively or vice versa, rather than holding a deeper integration, which may not always be what is called for in the moment.

With this perspective on the U, each ‘stage’ of the U takes on a kind of archetypal form to it. This learning has been to discover the real nature of these dimensions of ourselves, to learn about our relationship to them – our aversions and attachments – and to re-own and integrate them in ourselves in a way that they can

be expressed with agility and effectiveness. For example, let's consider sensing, presencing, and crystalizing. The sensing self, the observer, committed to truth and with an Open Mind, can emerge tainted with our personal history of the emerging rational consciousness and its conflict with the collective order. We may be afraid to express the truth, to admit it, for fear of hurting each other. Or maybe we are attached to our sensing self, retreating to the observer position for safety. At its essence, the sensing self is the Witness, the knowing nature of awareness and our journey to reintegrate this into the self may have us face traumas related to freedom and detachment that are qualities of this self.

The presencing self is our self at the bottom of the U, which is at home with the Source, the ground of Being, having let go of our very will and open to receiving. At the heart of embodying this self is discovering and letting go of where we don't trust and of finding a deeper trust in Life. Befriending the bottom of the U is a profound journey and once open to it, we may become subtly attached to a conception of what it is to be 'let go' and surrendered, which might lead one to be 'stuck in the bottom of the U' or have them view any challenge as a prompt to return to the U, rather than to address it as an adaptive challenge or simply feedback (failing early and often) in the crystallizing process. The true integration of the connection with Source is to discover how it is just as present in every stage of the U, in every manifestation of the self as it is in presencing.

The crystallizing self is the voice of the higher self, of the future that wants to emerge; it is a place of deep faith and leadership. To integrate this self, we may have to challenge our traumas and aversions to giving voice, to standing out, and to idealism. Likewise, we may be attached to idealism and faith and avoid the deeper integration of idealism and realism needed to practically enact the future. Reintegrating this self is to see the faith innate in the entire process and to be willing to give voice to it at any time; to be a representative of the heart's truth.

The interpenetrative approach has required in some sense that we each internalize the process at a deeper level to have greater agility with it, as we cannot rely as much on a pre-scripted

form to the U.

Conclusion

To presence all of this subtly and complexly for the purpose of illustrating our approach to applying Theory U is to obscure something: the simplicity and humor with which we ultimately hold the process. The deeper stand to take in all of this is to let go or at least hold very lightly our theories and practices and to stand in presence with each other and with all that is happening, and to Love, to support, and to nudge a greater clarity, reverence, and communion into light. The foundation of the interpenetrative view is the still, luminous, and blissful being, holding the apparent opposites we can allow to come together.

In practice, transiting and working in the territories defined by Theory U can be challenging and require an intentional holding of the process. At the same time, this is a holistic transformative process, which means we are part of that process and can't know exactly where it is going. This challenges us to paradoxically hold a loving container for the process, to be open to deep integration, and to be a mutually vulnerable participant in the process. As an interpenetrative archetype of transformation, Theory U offers a developmental practice, a transformative process, and a way of being.

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