



The U Theory: Planning from the Emerging Future

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Overarching Intent:

**Workshop participants gain both a
conceptual and experiential understanding
of the U Theory they can apply during the
session and beyond**

Retreat Goals:



Workshop participants will understand:

- 1. The origins of the U Theory work**
- 2. What the U Theory is**
- 3. Why its important, particularly now**
- 4. Components of the U Theory**
- 5. How to apply it in focusing on your future**

Retreat Flow:



- I. Goals and flow of the session**
- II. Introductions via warm up listening practice**
- 4 levels of listening
- III. Origins of the work, Otto Scharmer, the MIT Center for Organizational Learning**
- IV. U Theory – What it is? why its important and why now more than ever**
- V. Components and Principles of the U Theory**
- VI. Application**
- VII. Debrief, check-out**



Levels of Listening

- I. **Downloading** – habits of judgement, reconfirming old opinions, judgements
- II. **Factual Listening** – precise listening, noticing what is different than we expected it to be **“Open Mind”**
- III. **Empathetic Listening** – connecting with another’s experience on an emotional level **“Open Heart”**
- IV. **Generative Listening** – connecting with the power of emerging future possibilities, sensing a shift in identity **“Open Will”**



The Learning Organization



Core Learning Competencies

Aspiration

- Personal Mastery
- Shared Vision

Reflective Conversation

- Mental Models
- Team Learning

Understanding Complexity

- Systems Thinking

Sources of Learning:



Experiential Learning Cycles(Action-Reflection)
– based on learning from the past, (Kolb,
Argris, Senge)

Learning from the future as it emerges –
“Presencing” – feeling a future possibility we
can connect with, then acting from that sense

Theory U is:



- 1. A Phenomenon – wake up to a deeper level of awareness that we use as a source**
- 2. A Framework and Language – for seeing and talking about our deeper levels of experience**
- 3. A Methodology – to help us to be more effective in operating from the deeper space**

Why now?



Given the state of the world and the 3 great divides of our times:

- **The Ecological Divide**
- **The Social Divide**
- **The Spiritual – Cultural Divide**
 - **how do we as leaders create and innovate in times when the ground on which we stand is pulled away and know the past doesn't seem to help with what we are facing?**
- **Need to move from “ego system” to “eco-system” awareness**

Theory U Principles:



- 1. Energy follows attention – shift from what we are trying to avoid to what we want to bring into reality**
- 2. Follow the three movements of the U – a) observe, observe, observe b) Retreat and reflect: allow the inner know to emerge c) act in an instant, by doing, by prototyping**
- 3. Go to the edges of the self – with an open mind, open heart, open will**
- 4. Pass through the eye of the needle – let go of everything, offload all non essential baggage**

Theory U Principles cont:



5. Transform the three enemies – the voice of judgement (VoJ), voice of cynicism (VoC), voice of fear (VoF)
6. Always start by attending to the crack – attend to the openings, challenges and disruptions where we “feel” the past ending and the future wanting to begin
7. Transform the field of conversation from debate to dialogue and collective creativity
8. Strengthen the sources of presencing in order to avoid the destructive dynamics of absencing

Part I Download Directions:



1. Think of a leadership/teaching/personal challenge you are currently facing or will be facing in the near term future. (Could be any context- personal, professional, family etc.)
2. Reflect on the assumptions/beliefs you are holding in your mind about that challenge itself and or about yourself that you think could effect the outcome of the challenge (could be positive, negative or neutral). List the on a piece of paper
3. Choose a partner and share your leadership challenge and the assumptions and beliefs you are holding regarding your challenge and yourself, the partners role is to listen carefully. Discuss which of your assumptions and beliefs will enabling and which may hinder you in successfully impacting your challenge. Then switch roles and have the other partner share their challenge and the assumptions and beliefs they are holding about their challenge and which may be enabling or hindering success

Part II Presencing Directions:



1. Reflect deeply on your intention regarding your challenge, what is the future you want to create? Following the meditative practice, write down the thoughts, images, insights, feelings or whatever came into your mind during the exercise
2. In order to create the future I want to create what do I need to let go of? What do I need to learn? Reflect on these questions and write down what comes to you.
3. Reconnect with your partner from the first exercise and share what came into your mind, including thoughts insights images, feelings. Your partner listens carefully and makes sure they understand what you are communicating, then share their reactions, thoughts regarding what they have heard. Switch roles.

Part III Letting Come Directions:



1. In order create your intention, create the future you want to create reflect on what help you may need, people resources, input etc.
2. Meet in groups of four, each person one at a time share their challenge, what they want to create and what help or support they need to accomplish their intentions
3. Large group debrief. What was your most important learning from this experience?