Chapter 8

Theory U Applied in Transformative Development

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors demonstrate how Theory U can be integrated into a long-term transformative learning context that involves both individual and collective processes of development and growth. They begin by examining the theoretical underpinnings of Theory U and how they relate to and inform other theories and practices. They then go on to share more specific practical knowledge of how this model informs Pacific Integral and its Generating Transformative Change (GTC) program in each of these three areas. Finally, the authors explore some of the research that has resulted from the use of Theory U.

INTRODUCTION

She delves deeply into her concrete world of facts and actions. It surprises her, for she thought she knew so much about her physical world but as she contemplates it she sees how much has been unconscious for her, and how much of her concrete situation and life has prevented her from realizing all of her potential. As she contemplates this, she breathes into the facts of her life and lets it go.

Next, the process brings her to gaze deeply into the recesses of her contracted and conditioned mind; her circular psychological habits, her projections, her habits of heart and mind, and the lies and stories she has told herself through the years. She feels and senses her life as the whole of her life. With a deep breath, this is also sent into the wind, letting it go.

Finally she is brought to rest, opening her to the causal space through which the Source can emerge and speak directly to her. She has let go, and now it is time to let come.

This is a brief sketch of a pilgrimage experience of a transformative process informed by Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) that we use at Pacific Integral.
with participants in our integral, developmental program, Generating Transformative Change (GTC). Theory U informs the GTC program as well as the emergent design and management approaches we use in our business practices at Pacific Integral. We engage individual participants and groups in presencing practices and facilitate novel collective ‘U’ processes.

In this chapter, we set out to demonstrate how Theory U can be integrated into a long-term transformative learning context that involves both individual and collective processes of development and growth. We begin first by examining the theoretical underpinnings of Theory U and how they relate to and inform other theories and practices that we use in our programs. We then go onto share more specific practical knowledge of how this model informs Pacific Integral and its Generating Transformative Change (GTC) program in each of these three areas. Finally, we explore some of the research that has resulted from the use of Theory U in our work.

THEORY U INTO PRACTICE

Although our work is informed by a variety of theories and practices, four organizing frameworks are central to how our work emerges: Theory U (Scharmer, 2007); theories of adult stages development (Cook-Greuter, 2002; O’Fallon, 2010a); states of consciousness (Brown, 2006; Wilber, 2006); and the Integral model (Wilber, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). We find that when each of these four frameworks are incorporated with each other, they can provide a powerful, practical experience for transformative change in individuals and groups. The later three models comprise a

Figure 1. Theory U (Scharmer, 2011a)