

Coming to Emotional Acceptance:
A Key to Transforming from MySpace to OurSpace

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"Finding a way to encourage others to both understand and believe in a new point of view may not be enough to propel them into action.... At some point, if emotions don't kick in, people don't act."

Patterson et al., *Influencer: The Power to Change Anything*

Abstract

Why do transformations fail? Of the myriad reasons discussed in the literature and most likely known to you from your own experiences, I want to focus on the role of emotional acceptance – the acceptance by an individual, at a visceral or even spiritual level, that the transformation's value proposition affords a better alternative for the individual than the current state. Lacking emotional acceptance, most people, even if they board a transformation train to a new destination, soon disembark.

In this discussion I will take the perspective that "coming to emotional acceptance" is a learning process. Using an action-learning model and observations about influencing people, effecting change, and adult learning, we will explore together some major dimensions of emotional acceptance and how to educe it in a transformation endeavor.

Why should you care whether a transformation succeeds or not? I believe that there are two reasons. The first is very broad and altruistic. It involves the survival of our planet, the quality of life of all people on earth, and the preservation of the natural world. Achieving an interdependent global economy, in which everyone has essentially equal opportunity and for which there are sufficient sustaining resources, will require each of us to participate in major transformations from "my space" to "our space." These transformations have several dimensions: social, technological, economic, environmental and political, and they will play out at different levels of "my" and "our:" individual, family, community, business, state, country, and networks among these.

The second reason that you should care is very immediate and personal. It involves gaining greater purpose for your life. If you are concerned about a cause, if your career is in flux, if your family position is changing, if your health is declining, or if you have a destructive addiction – to cite some examples, I assert that you won't succeed by "going it alone." You will need to transform from "my space," where you are today, to "our space," where there is help, support, teamwork, and community.

Introduction

Ready, set, go! If only a transformation were so apparently simple. One barrier evidently resides at the readiness stage, where ability and motivation must meld to promote and reinforce action. It's at this stage that emotional acceptance is won or lost and, accordingly, the fate of the transformation is determined. I want to illustrate this point with a true story.

In 1998 a large, multinational company formalized a major initiative, called Achieving Competitive Excellence (ACE for short), to improve the quality of its products and services and the productivity of their related processes. Originally ACE focused on quality (as opposed to delivery or cost) as the top priority. The same year saw the launch of the company's quality university and the beginning of the widespread training of employees, starting top-down with the CEO and senior leaders of the corporation. Each work group or cell across the company was given the objective of increasing its competitive excellence as defined on an Olympic-like scale of maturity: Qualifying, Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Three years later, after several thousand people had attended the quality university and many work groups had significantly increased their ACE maturity, the VP of Quality realized from survey results that the company's customers had felt little impact from ACE. He commissioned a relentless root cause analysis.

At the outset it was clear that the ACE transformation had failed to engage but a small fraction of the company's 200,000 plus employees. This disappointment was attributed to four factors:

- Perception that ACE was tactical, not strategic
- Perception that ACE was an expense, not an investment
- Lack of accountability for ACE
- Failure to educate senior leaders in how to lead the change to a process-focused culture.

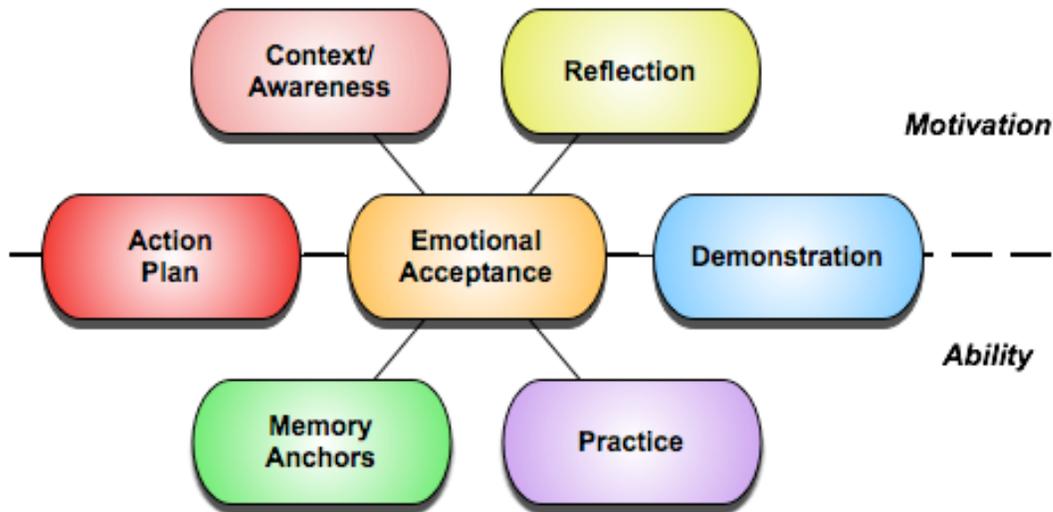
All of these factors are readiness issues: the first three speak to motivation; the last, to ability. A prevalent behavior was the delegation of ACE activities to lower-level people so that upper management could focus on what mattered: results. Another widely held assumption was that ACE was a program that would soon pass. The emotional buy-in to ACE was low in the ranks of middle management, who were being measured on delivery and cost, and this had started to erode the grassroots support that had been growing. Fortunately, the CEO and his VP's of Quality and Supply Management had the perseverance to turn the ACE transformation around. I will return to this story later.

My approach is to treat transformation readiness, with its central component of emotional acceptance, as a learning experience.

In the past decade or so, several authors have made seminal contributions in different guises to the topics of transformation readiness and emotional

acceptance. I will assemble and discuss some of their knowledge within the framework of an action-learning model.

Action-Learning Model



It is not coincidental that this model has emotional acceptance as its centerpiece. Often shown in a list, the components of the model do not usually interact in a linear fashion. For example, the emotional “Aha!” moment could come from attention to emotional acceptance, or it could be sparked by reflection, by demonstration, by practice, by a memory anchor, or by some combination of these. The notion of readiness is also shown in the figure, with the top elements of the action-learning model roughly involved with motivation and the bottom elements, with ability. It’s now time to inspect each element of the model in more detail.

Context - The learning experience (transformation readiness) begins with awareness of a situation and why it’s important to the learner. This is what Gladwell called “The Power of Context” in his book *The Tipping Point*. In the book my favorite story about the power of context describes the start-up of Sesame Street. Feedback from the first pilots indicated that the children could not identify with the all-adult cast. This finding led to the insertion of characters like Big Bird, with whom the children could relate. And, since Big Bird was also friends with the adults on the show, the children were now part of one, big, trustworthy family and their learning could proceed in a safe context.

Context also summarizes Scharmer’s “Open Mind” prescription in *Theory U*, which explains how to descend the left branch of the U: download patterns of the past, suspend the voice of judgment, and see things with fresh eyes.

The equivalent of Context to the authors of *Influencer* involves understanding existing, “vital” behaviors and their root causes.

In Jensen's *Simplicity*, Context is the conflict ("burning platform") that we face and the current state of our progress toward resolution.

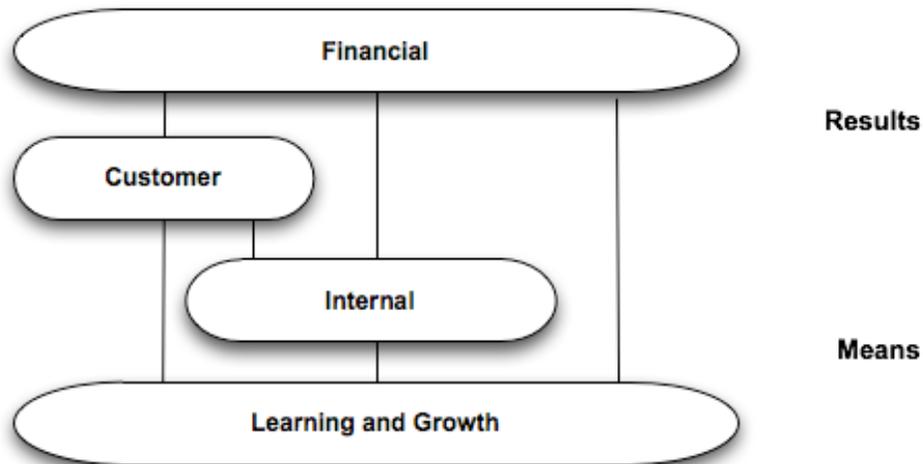
Kahane's *Solving Tough Problems* begins with Context: understand your own position and feelings on an issue, and then empathically listening to and understanding the positions of others. Note the parallel with Covey's prescription "seek first to understand, then to be understood" in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.

For Schein (*The Corporate Culture Survival Guide*), Context is the existing culture of an organization and an understanding of those elements of the culture that may need modification to meet a new situation.

Other devices for establishing Context include extrapolation, trend analysis and scenario planning. Extrapolation, as explained by Professor Ackoff, estimates where "you" will be in five years, if you don't change anything. Trend analysis and scenario planning (Schwartz, van der Heijden) don't predict the future but allow one to bound it. When scenario planning is able to eliminate other possibilities in favor of one, "There Is No Alternative" or TINA, the context for transformation becomes abundantly clear.

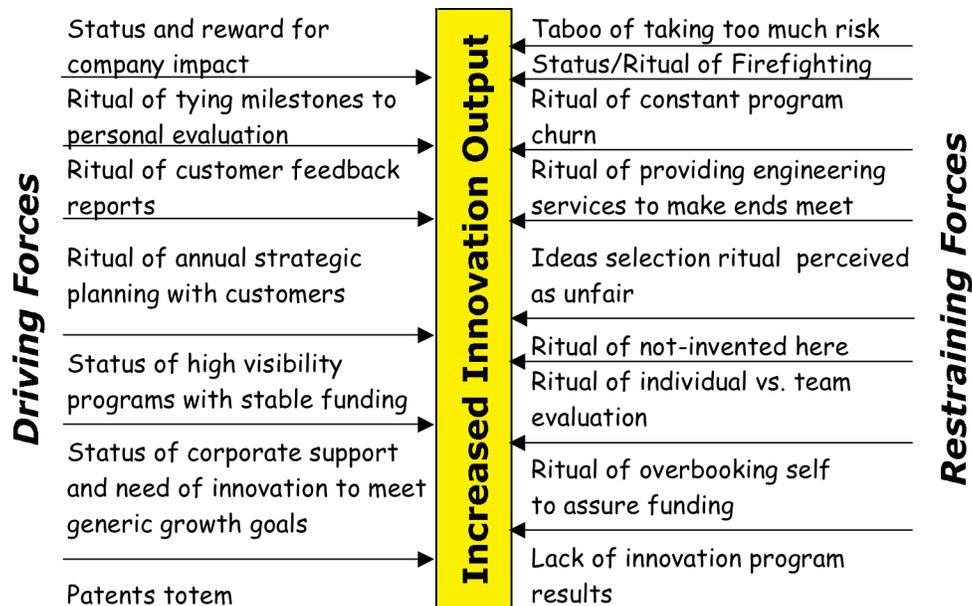
Return to our story about Achieving Competitive Excellence (ACE). We quickly realized from the root cause analysis and existing behaviors that there was no business case for ACE! We had been asking employees at all levels to undertake ACE on faith. We were trying to sell the abstract and counter-intuitive idea of "quality first" without credible evidence of a miracle, a near-death experience, or a huge reward. And, virtually all of the teaching examples were based on manufacturing, which was not viewed to be strategically important to the company compared with the likes of finance, business development, engineering, and R&D. In short, we had not established a common, compelling context and awareness for the transformation. For employees ACE seemed to be extra work that was detracting from their daily responsibilities. It's no wonder that people perceived ACE to be a tax and not an investment. When we finally did create the business case for ACE, it came as a surprise to many from two perspectives: it was huge, and the financial leverage resided in operations.

Also evident was our underestimating of the strength of the company's results-oriented culture in establishing the context for ACE. It took over two years, and the help of new evaluation criteria in the form of a balanced scorecard, for the importance of means (processes and people) to be understood. Unfortunately, only a few of us at that time had read *Profit beyond Measure* and *Better Thinking, Better Results* or were familiar with the Balanced Scorecard shown in the next figure.



With the evolution of the ACE maturity criteria, the company's management-by-results culture started to transform into one of management-by-means. Following is an excerpt of an interview given by the company's CEO: *"If I were giving a tip to a new chief executive, I'd say spend less time with the balance sheet and more time with the physical reality underneath... That's what makes the balance sheet, not the other way around. Work on the reality first — the results will follow."*

In another context story, I examined the culture of the R&D organization of one of my clients. This R&D group was charged with increasing its innovation output. The assessment results, which populated Margaret Mead's four cultural elements of rituals, status, totems and taboos, are shown in the following force-field chart:



Given this context, what would be the chances that the objective of “Increased Innovation Output” could be met without a major transformation?

Demonstration – The purpose of demonstration is to create a self-discovery that the idea or concept (transformation) being promoted is relevant and valid. Effective demonstrations are value-shaping events, which show that change is both possible and desirable, and they incorporate “stickiness,” as defined by the authors of *The Tipping Point* and *Made to Stick*.

It turns out that many people are uncomfortable participating directly in a demonstration or experiment, although they do respond favorably to a vicarious experience, such as a story, drama or simulation. The authors of *Influencer* provide several enlightening examples of the power of storytelling. One of my favorites is their story of a televised soap opera that tackled the social problem of wife beating in India. In the dramatization, the pain and suffering of the battered wife were sympathetically and emotionally treated. The next time the wife beater in the soap opera attacked his wife, the neighbors responded to her screams by gathering outside of the house and banging pots and pans in a display of disapproval. The rest of the story recounts how the dramatization gave viewers the courage to face up to wife beating in real life.

The central point of *Made to Stick* is that imbuing stories with stickiness will increase their appeal and impact. The authors have cleverly captured stickiness properties in their acronym SUCCEs (Simple Unexpected Concrete Credible Emotional Stories).

Of course, demonstrations can involve real-life experiences and experiments. The books *Influencer*, *The Tipping Point*, *Made to Stick*, and *Predictably Irrational*, to name a few, are chock full of such examples.

Another type of demonstration provides data and comparisons between the data for different functions, purposes or groups. Tufte’s pioneering methods in the visual presentation and interpretation of quantitative information guide the design of convincing demonstrations.

For a personal example involving the comparison of data, I was shocked last year when I computed the size of my carbon footprint and compared it with the footprint of the average world citizen, whom I imagined to be a newborn baby in China. This personal discovery, notwithstanding Al Gore’s Nobel-prize-winning *An Inconvenient Truth*, was a strong enough demonstration to begin my emotional acceptance of global warming. I’ll save the rest of this story for a later part of the Action Learning Model.

One more demonstration strategy, suggested in *Influencer*, consists of changing the environment, particularly in arranging people or objects closer together (“propinquity”). In my experience, co-locating team members,

sequencing work activities in cells, and then giving cells value stream identities are essential ingredients to the self-discovery of new behaviors and performance levels. Removing “monuments” that divert the flow of work is another such strategy.

Theory U identifies three particular types of environment:

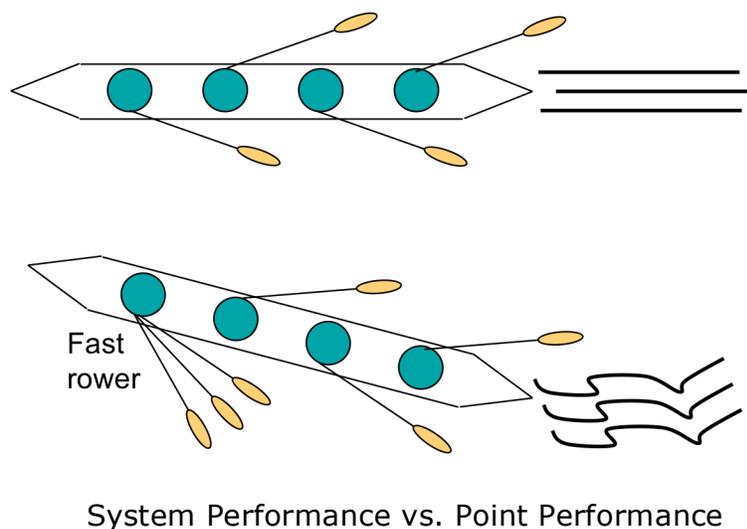
- co-sensing (places and practices of connecting and seeing)
- co-presencing (places and practices of stillness and presence)
- co-creating (places and practices of prototyping).

The facilitated environment of group therapy approximates these experiences, which, as portrayed in the book *Presence* by Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, and Flowers, can be emotional and even mystical.

In the ACE transformation, we videotaped and broadcast many stories of organizations that had successfully transformed themselves to Gold-level performance. That people in all walks of the company told the stories in their own words, and shared what ACE meant to them, brought credibility. You could sense the emotional acceptance of the speakers, and this added to the stickiness of the stories as effective demonstrations.

The foundational curriculum of the quality university was also recast as the interactive story of a business transformation, from start to finish, and we included examples relevant to all generic functions in the corporation. And, yes, we designed the new curriculum according to the present Action Learning Model.

Augmenting the ACE discovery experience, we changed the environment. We aligned all of the individual work groups and cells across the company into entities that promote direct accountability to customers. The next figure illustrates the principle underlying this change.



Finally, we constructed quarterly reports comparing each division's data for quality and delivery, supplier quality and delivery, and ACE progress. The quarterly data reports have since been replaced by a web-enabled dashboard that presents current states for both means and results.

Emotional Acceptance – A key enabler of transformation occurs when a person accepts, on an emotional level, the need for change and is motivated to undertake or try the associated concepts and activities.

Scharmer, in *Theory U*, calls this stage "Opening the Heart," because it involves suspending the "voice of cynicism" and sensing with the heart, that is, emotionally. The next stage in *Theory U* is "Opening the Will," which requires overcoming your "voice of fear" and letting go of your "old self." As I have done with the Action-Learning Model, Scharmer emphasizes that the activities associated with *Theory U* do not occur in linear sequence, but often happen simultaneously.

The emotion of fear, or anxiety, also plays heavily in Schein's work, which posits that transformation won't happen unless

Survival Anxiety > Learning Anxiety.

The left-hand side, survival anxiety, speaks to Jensen's "Burning Platform;" it's what Schein calls disconfirming information, or evidence that you are not as good or as safe as you thought. However, the authors of *Influencer* caution that carping too much on the need for change just stiffens resistance.

The right-hand side of Schein's inequality, learning anxiety, encompasses many fears:

- Not knowing what is expected of me
- Discomfort in giving up something that I know how to do well
- Concern for the adequacy of my ability to meet the new demands
- Fear of looking stupid in a threatening learning environment
- Working myself out of a job
- Fear of falling behind in my present duties while learning new things
- Bucking entrenched cultural norms, behaviors, and measurement systems that have been the foundations of our success
- Unknown sources of help, training, practice, and mentoring
- Not belonging – perceived lack of respect for my existing knowledge, skills and attitude
- Going it alone
- Naysayers, especially those in my chain of supervision or among my peers
- Size and complexity of the undertaking and concern about sufficiency of resources

Schein's wisdom is to unpack learning anxiety by establishing psychological safety. This topic will be treated separately in the subsequent section "Reducing Learning Anxiety."

The authors of *Influencer* raise the importance of peer pressure to motivation, and they describe the harnessing of peer pressure to goad people to go along with a transformation.

I want to spend a little more time with Theory U and the key notion of "Presencing," which is the term coined by Scharmer for "learning from the future as it emerges." We have so far seen how to descend the left side of the U from the top left, where patterns of the past reside, to the bottom, where Presencing occurs and there is profound connection with the purpose of "self." Scharmer draws the analogy here to "passing through the eye of a needle." These activities require deep introspection and confrontation with what has been sensed and seen, both individually and collectively. Theory U was developed for situations whose behavior is emergent and can't be predicted by past experience. The environment and its sustainability is one such example; the global economy appears to be another. Although the conflict between Israel and Palestine is nominally categorized as socially complex, with each side having different values, beliefs and cultures, it also has so many internal and external factions involved that the conflict exhibits emergent complexity. Dealing with emergent complexity requires intense sensitivity and the emotional acceptance of having to co-create new practices (and intentions) with others, that is, to foment a major transformation.

My personal story of encountering *Theory U* concerns my emotional acceptance of the need for immediate action to turn around global warming. Earlier I told of the quantitative comparison (demonstration) of my environmental footprint with that of the average world citizen. Prior to this I had been on the fence about Global Warming, until 3 years ago when I attended a lecture by Professor John Sterman of MIT's System Dynamic Modeling fame. His technical arguments raised my awareness that it's past time to act - awareness but not yet emotional commitment.

Then last summer came my footprint calculation. I started to conjure up all kinds of horrible scenarios for the world, for my present lifestyle and for the future of our grandchildren. Deep reflection and emotional acceptance soon followed. I have always been driven to apply my engineering talents to helping, not hurting, humanity. The discovery of the size of my footprint pierced me to the core. Sometime later a You Tube video clip provided an even more powerful (sticky) argument of why there was no alternative (TINA) but to act now, whether or not global warming is human made. I joined a local Green movement.

And the co-creating part of my story? I need to inspire my wife so that together we can create my space and make our home and practices a microcosm of what our community and the nation need to resemble.

Practice – To strengthen your ability, practice is required. It involves applying the new learning and concepts yourself and with others.

Influencer introduces the term “deliberate practice” to identify the following disciplined approach to practice:

- Devote full attention for brief intervals
- Receive immediate feedback against clear standards
- Break mastery into mini goals
- Prepare for setbacks (“moments of truth”) and build in resilience

The last discipline is perhaps the hardest. For example, if you are dieting, do you have a plan for how you will respond to the offer of an ice cream cone?

For the ACE quality university, we developed a team-based, run-a-business simulation as a capstone practice session. By diligently applying the tools and cultural norms of ACE, one team usually succeeds in delivering a larger quantity of perfect-quality work product to its customer than the other teams. An extensive database of quality issues taken from actual company case studies enhances the “stickiness” of the practice session as a realistic demonstration, as does an element of surprise in how the simulation is scored at the end. And the lessons drawn from the simulation are tied to real-life behavior: means drive results, quality is the lever for productivity and customer satisfaction, and leadership and teamwork are also critical success factors.

Memory Anchors – This element of the Action Learning Model creates understandable and memorable verbal and visual images that remind and reinforce the learning that has occurred.

The Heaths’ stickiness property of “concreteness” is a good guide to the design of a memory anchor. Making learning concrete means grounding abstractions to everyday terms (“simple truths”); putting people into the story; incorporating hooks into ideas; finding common ground for shared understanding; and talking about real people, not data.

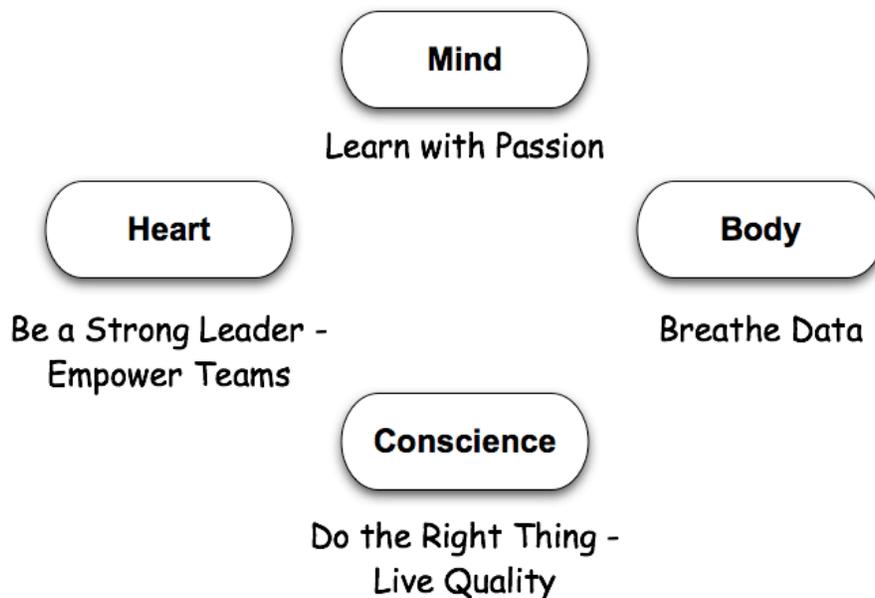
The last point was emotionally covered in *Influencer*, under the category of personal motivation, by the story of Dr. Berwick whose transformation was to eliminate 100,000 hospital deaths each year from errors and mistakes. His task was to engage hospital executives and physicians in making the hospital environment safer. Citing the large number of cases of hospital deaths wasn’t getting through to the physicians, because they all supposed that the problem lay elsewhere. It wasn’t until Dr. Berwick asked hospital executives and physicians to lead and report on the investigations of recent deaths, in which the names of children and adults were known and the tragedy was still

fresh, that the people in charge understood, often with tearful regret, and changed behaviors and procedures.

It's worth noting that *Made to Stick* and *The Tipping Point* rely on verbal images and stories. Adding visual images, such as cartoons and simple graphics, can often increase stickiness as has been pointed out by Roam in his book *The Back of the Napkin: Solving Problems and Selling Ideas with Pictures*. For example, the general reader would be quite lost in *Theory U*, were it not for the simple drawings that illustrate the stages along the "U" as well as other key points in the treatise.

I have always found Stephen Covey to be a master of the memory anchor and concreteness. His books, training material, and lessons, including those for the "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," "Principle Centered Leadership," and the "The 8th Habit," make ample use of the SUCCEs elements of stickiness, including memorable diagrams and memory anchors (e.g., the whole-body model that represents your "voice," and the four drivers of human motivation: to Live, to Love, to Learn, to Leave a Legacy).

The following example of a memory anchor used in ACE trades on Covey's whole-body model, which has four "hooks" in it - mind, body, heart and conscience. I think you will agree that the whole-body model and its four components are easy to remember. On these hooks, as shown in the next picture, I have attached four important commandments for ACE: Learn with Passion (mind); Breathe Data (body); Be a Strong Leader by Empowering Teams with High Morale (heart); and Do the Right Thing - Live Quality (conscience).



In the ACE transformation, we increased the concreteness of ACE by recasting it as a common operating system, something that everyone – regardless of position or function in the company – would be expected to use everyday. This definition got attention, because it put to rest the widespread belief that ACE was a program that would be transitory. And we described the operating system in simple terms: it's our culture; it's a set of tools for increasing the satisfaction of our customers, investors, and employees; and it's our competency to live the culture and use the tools. The ACE toolbox itself was partitioned into three "drawers" to help people understand the purpose of the 12 tools and remember them. The tool drawer for problem solving was labeled with the simple four-letter acronym DIVE to help users recall the steps of problem solving.

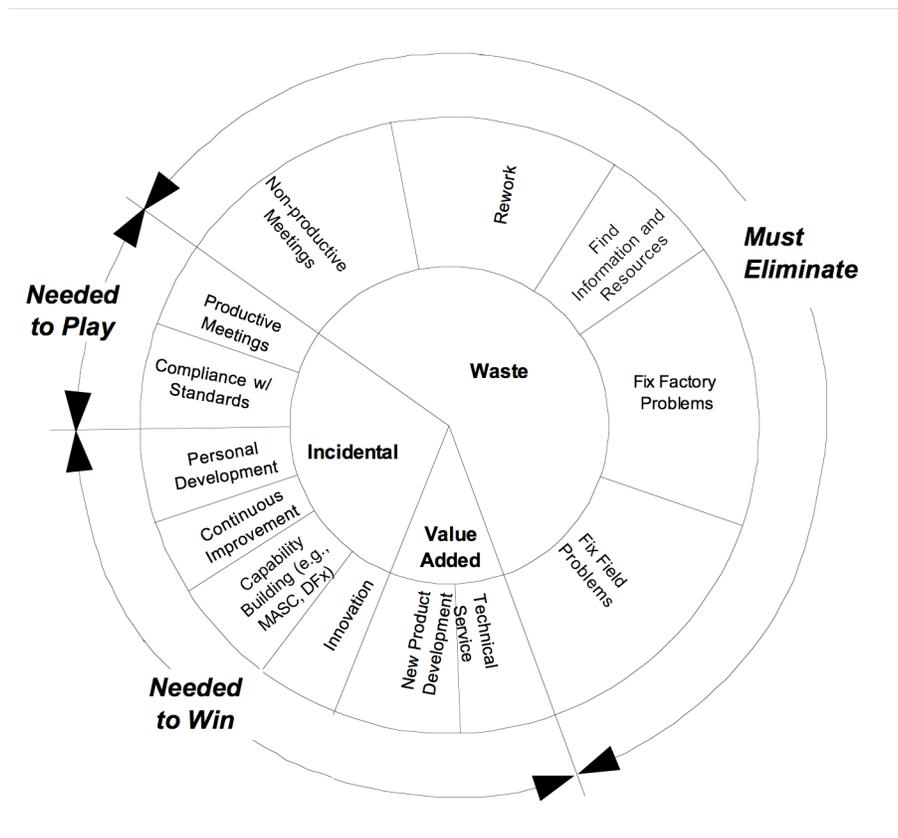
Reflection – The role of reflection is to take time to rationalize new ideas and information with existing beliefs and experiences. How does the transformation fit with my knowledge, experience, beliefs, and values? What new knowledge, skills and attitudes will I need for success? What changes in my behavior must I effect? What system and cultural changes will be needed to enable my transformation? Who has done this before? What distinguishes the "best-of-the-best" from the "worst-of-the-worst?" How am I doing?

The act of presencing, as described in *Theory U*, is deep reflection about one's self, one's work and one's purpose relative to the future.

For other approaches to reflection, see Drucker, "Managing Oneself," *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1999, and Block, *The Answer to How Is Yes*, Berrett Koehler 2002.

In the ACE transformation, after the first few sites reached Gold maturity, we reflected on what distinguished these sites from the rest of the company. It soon hit us, like a cold washcloth in the face, that "It's the People . . . Stupid! All of the Gold sites paid special attention to their people. Gold site employees were highly respected and empowered to pursue process, product, service, and personal opportunities for improvement; innovations abounded. The people's pride in satisfying their customers radiated everywhere: you could see it in their "shiny" eyes. Their workspaces were safe, clean, ergonomic, and organized to be productive. Their employee satisfaction survey scores were the highest in the company, and employee turnover was very low compared with neighboring businesses. Teamwork between management and associates was the norm. We also observed that employees were unselfishly volunteering in activities to better their communities. What we saw was a living demonstration of the ACE philosophy that "good hearts and good minds produce quality products and services." This realization – "it's the people" – caused us to add a people part to the ACE maturity criteria; it is the ACE version of "Learning and Growth" in the Balanced Scorecard. Today, at Silver maturity, the ACE culture of an organization is inculcated and palpable.

The next example, which grew out of a lean consulting engagement with an engineering organization, illustrates the use of reflection to create emotional acceptance. This group had been well trained in continuous improvement techniques but had obviously grown lax in applying them; they wanted a refresher. After lecturing the group for about 30 minutes, I noticed that they were distracted and not paying attention; in fact, there were no shiny eyes and some individuals were asleep, slumped over their desks. I switched gears and led a “what bugs you” session that filled a large whiteboard with complaints. The most prevalent issues had affinity with the people being seriously overworked – long evenings and weekends, too. This finding led to a homework assignment and the following pie chart (to scale) of how they spent their time during an average week.



One year later, after returning to help them again, I didn’t recognize the organization. The people were energized and vibrant, and most of the problems for which they had been blamed had disappeared. What happened? They had reflected on all of the waste in their work and asked one key question, “Which of our processes are causing us the most waste and pain?” Applying continuous improvement methods that they knew well, they then set about improving those processes. By the way, I sporadically sample the time distributions of new clients and seldom find a group whose wasted productivity is less than 50%.

Action Plan - The final purpose of the Action Learning Model is to put the newly found readiness – motivation and ability - into a deployable plan. Lacking a well-thought-through action plan, many learning, training, and transformation endeavors just fade away.

Rubinstein and Firstenberg, authors of *The Minding Organization: Bring the Future to the Present and Turn Creative Ideas into Business Solutions*, assert that an action plan should be laid out by backward planning and should have SMART goals appropriate to the future state (or “goal state” in their terms). Since this state is not in the present, where goals are verifiable, these authors redefine the SMART acronym for future-state goal properties as follows:

- Sense of Purpose
- Meaningful
- Aligned and Achievable
- Realistic
- Timely.

Compare these properties with those for the present state:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Accurate
- Relevant and Reasonable
- Trackable.

Thinking backward (KNIHT Backward), in a way that brings the future to the present, is a big part of successful planning. The authors of *The Minding Organization* identify the following benefits of backward planning: force problems to the surface in the present; reduce the perceived constraint of resources that fetters the forward planning process; and get what you want or no deal, similar to options thinking. McGrath and MacMillan describe a more algorithmic approach to backward planning, called Discovery-driven Planning, in their book *The Entrepreneurial Mindset*. This methodology surfaces problems in the present and provides for option points to advance or exit, if the future state is not coming true as assumed. I have used discovery-driven planning to plan R&D projects and found it to be extremely powerful.

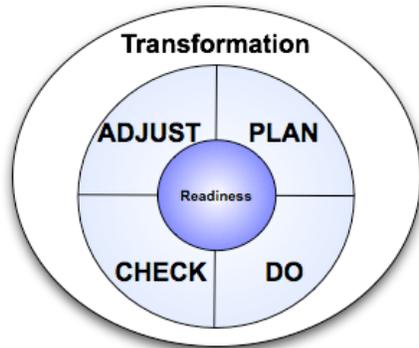
Another element of the action plan must be “deliberate practice,” as described in *Influencer*. Kahane’s advice in *Solving Tough Problems* is “just do it, and see what happens;” this advice also underlies the prototyping approach recommended in *Theory U*.

In *Simplicity*, Jensen urges an organization to pay attention to the following dimensions in designing “smarter” work; they also seem appropriate to action planning for a transformation:

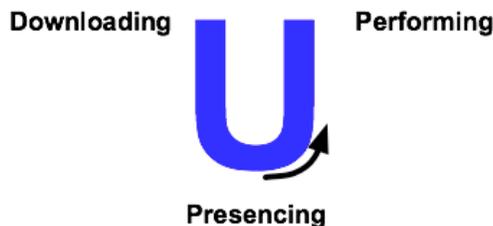
- Simpler to know: work backward from what people need
- Feels simpler: build in trust
- Simpler to use: content supports decision making
- Simpler to do: break the work into projects
- Simpler to succeed: design for ease of navigation

Visual controls found in 5S ease navigation through the work sequence.

Finally, an essential ingredient of any action plan needs to be feedback, adjustment, and accountability. Shewhart's original Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, updated by Dennis in his book *Getting the Right Things Done* and displayed in the next figure, still works well for the feedback and adjustment process. Dennis shows how to deploy top-level plans to all corners of an organization with the aid of Toyota's A3 charts, periodic checks of progress, and gemba "go see" activities. Adding root cause analysis to the "Check" activity permits so-called double-loop learning, which confronts undesirable behaviors driven by policies and deeply-held beliefs.



In *Theory U*, as depicted in the following figure, the action plan constitutes the activities needed to climb up the right side of the U, from the trough of Presencing to the pinnacle of Performing. These activities are crystallizing vision and intention, prototyping to create strategic microcosms, and, finally, achieving results through practices and infrastructures. The twist to Theory U, however, is that there is no long-term master plan. Instead, there is a series of incremental plans, prototypes and learning loops, the outcomes of which determine the next direction and incremental plan. The Plan-Do-Check-Adjust cycle is still highly appropriate for this kind of "emergent planning;" in fact, PDCA is essential.



No action plan is complete without a companion control plan. The control plan consists of three elements:

- Measurement protocol – what key parameters will be measured and monitored, by what means, by whom, and how frequently
- Control standard – what constitutes acceptable performance vs. abnormal performance
- Adjustment protocol – what will be done, by whom, in response to an abnormal or out-of-bounds condition.

The subject of accountability and reward and punishment is sensitively treated in *Influencer*, Chapter 8, “Design Rewards and Demand Accountability.” Another source of sage advice about reward and punishment is found in Kouzes and Posner’s book *Encouraging the Heart*; see particularly Chapter 7, “Personalize Recognition.”

Ariely, in *Predictably Irrational*, introduces the concept of social norms and market norms. Social norms – related to the greater good, pride, helping someone in need – foster inner accountability for performance. Market norms – related to monetary exchange – create contractual expectations of accountability for performance. The author’s experiments show convincingly that social norms drive much stronger accountability for performance than market norms.

Once appealed to, social norms become a demonstration of trust. Ariely’s evidence shows, however, that the two types of norms, social and market, cannot usually coexist. He found that when a monetary contract is inserted, social norms evaporate and take a long time to recover. For example, how would you feel, if your neighborhood bank, where you do your business and have friendly relationships with the tellers and managers, suddenly dunned your account by a \$50 fee for an overdrawn check?

An interesting and effective application of accountability was developed by Jack Welch at GE in the early 1990’s, after he had struggled for almost 10 years to change the corporate culture. The four-box matrix in the following figure speaks for itself, once you understand that Welch connected “supports

	Makes Numbers	Doesn't Make Numbers
Supports Culture	Star	Second Chance
Doesn't Support Culture	Separation or Second Chance	Separation

the new culture” with foresight in managing the long-term of the business. His wisdom was, “managing the short term of your business and managing the long-term of your business amount to the same thing.”

It might seem that this accountability matrix represents a market norm. But at the time the matrix was deployed, GE's leaders were more or less independently wealthy from a 10-year run up in the value of their company stock options. My hunch is that the matrix played more to the social norm of their pride - their desire to be recognized as stars in GE's constellation. Whatever the case, the device worked and Welch got his leaders to focus on the new culture that he wanted to build for the future of the company.

In the ACE transformation, accountability for ACE maturity progress was finally built into the incentive compensation plan for each executive, and there were forced departures of those in positions of authority, especially in operations, who were not driving ACE. Later, each division created a future state in which all of its sites were Gold and then planned backward to the intermediate milestones of Qualifying, Bronze, and Silver.

The other piece of the company's action plan was to focus ACE on operations and to set corporate-wide stretch goals for two operating metrics. This focus on operations from the perspective of the delivery of a product or service to a customer, had the effect of pulling all other corporate functions into ACE. We called the strengthened version of ACE "Second-generation ACE."

The kickoff of this plan, called Operations Transformation, was accomplished in a workshop of the company's top leaders and "hi pots" assembled in a former aircraft hanger. At this workshop the CEO elicited from each person three actions that the person would commit to in support of the transformation that year. The CEO also described his own actions to further the transformation; the most influential of these was his commitment to visit more of the company's operating sites around the world. Our Japanese cousins call this "gemba" (go to the site where the work is performed and see for yourself). Gemba is a powerful part of action learning, for it affords the opportunity to both learn and teach.

The final part of any action plan for a transformation, I believe, is the most important and, perhaps, most personal. It is the essence of Covey's 8th *Habit*: "Find your voice; inspire others to find their voices." It is also what Presencing and Co-presencing are about in *Theory U*. You can learn how to acquire the 8th habit in Covey's book and be inspired by the video vignettes captured on the DVD that accompanies the book. You can also read about social networking in *Influencer*, where the motivational activity involves harnessing peer pressure and the activity to increase ability, finding strength in numbers. My point is that each individual making a transformation from "my space" to "our space" is responsible for widening the network of believers in "our space" and for making "our space" a more comfortable place for others to belong.

In the transformation to second-generation ACE, a small band of five believers, consisting of the corporate VP's of Quality and Supply

Management, their directors of ACE and Supplier Quality and Development, and one high-potential individual contributor, found their voices and were able to convince others, including the CEO and division presidents, to adopt second-generation ACE. At the executive workshop where Operations Transformation was initiated, in fact, each of the presidents gave unsolicited, extemporaneous testimonials of examples where ACE had produced some astounding results in their businesses. To the middle managers attending this workshop, there seemed little doubt of their leadership's commitment to ACE.

This completes our tour through the Action Learning Model. Before closing, I want to tie up the loose end of reducing learning anxiety, which was left untied during the discussion of emotional acceptance.

Reducing Learning Anxiety

Earlier I drew on Schein's notion of reducing learning anxiety as a way to increase the emotional acceptance of a transformation, and I gave some examples of this anxiety. When learning anxiety is high, according to Schein, people will often deny the context, or dodge the transformation by keeping their heads down, or lobby to have the transformation start somewhere else. I like best Peter Block's description of learning anxiety advanced in his book *The Answer to How Is Yes*:

"There is a depth in the question 'How do I do this?' that is worth exploring. The question is a defense against action. It is a leap past the question of purpose, past the question of intentions, and past the drama of responsibility. The question 'How?' – more than any other – looks for the answer outside of us. It is an indirect expression of our doubts."

Throughout my tenure as director of Achieving Competitive Excellence, I was dogged by people who wanted a simple prescription, spoon-fed to them, for "how to do ACE." One group even asked, "Is there a 'lite' version of ACE that will give us the results that we want but without all of the work?" I came to realize that these were manifestations of learning anxiety and that no action would occur until we did something to reduce the anxiety.

Following are thoughts on how to mitigate these fears.

Insist on (Construct) a Clear Communication – Jensen in *Simplicity* offered the following components of a CLEAR communication:

- C - connects to what I do
- L - lists my specific responsibilities
- E - expectations: defines my accountability and evaluation
- A - ability: sources of help, training and reference material
- R - return: What's in it for me? For us?

The clear communication (from someone who has found his or her “voice”) should answer the most basic questions or issues that the learner is likely to have. With a nod to Jensen’s story-telling structure and his CLEAR acronym for communication, here are some considerations for such a communication.

What is the Story? What is the situation or conflict that we face? What progress have we made to date in resolving it? What does success look like this year? What is our destination or vision beyond this year?

What is expected of me? How will the transformation fit with or change my existing roles, responsibilities, and authority? How will I be evaluated and held accountable?

What sources of help are available to me? What training courses and practice sessions are offered? Are there tutors and mentors? What reference materials are recommended, and where can I find them?

What’s in this for me? For us? What will be my return (rewards, recognition, other benefits) for my effort spent on the transformation? (Schein points out that if the ‘story’ presents economic data, people can draw conclusions for themselves.) What is my safety net, in case something goes wrong?

I will cite two examples of safety nets. The first comes from the Wiremold transformation recounted in *Better Thinking, Better Results* by Emiliani et alii. Wiremold’s CEO Art Byrne wrote into the bargaining unit contract “No Union Associate employed on the effective date of this Agreement shall be subject to layoff, as a direct result of any continuous improvement project or other change in manufacturing method designed to improve quality or efficiency. Nothing herein shall restrict the rights of the Company to adjust its workforce in response to business conditions, provided such rights are not exercised in a manner which violates any other provisions of this Agreement.” The company then evolved a “lines of defense” protocol for handling employment during a business downturn:

- Insource work
- Reduce overtime
- Release part-time associates
- Reduce the workweek
- Offer a voluntary early retirement program.

The other safety net, in force at the company of our main case study, is called the “Employee Scholar Program,” which offers any employee the opportunity to return to school to undertake an accredited degree program in any line of study. The idea is to help people improve their careers and employability. At the end of the rainbow (the degree) there is also an award of \$10,000 in company stock. Because of this program, each employee is viewed to be responsible for his or her own career.

Insist on (Construct) Safe Practice Fields – Safe practice fields provide learners the time, resources, formal and informal training, coaching, practice and feedback they need. Here are some additional ingredients:

Non-threatening learning environment

- Patient instructors and coaches
- Discrete feedback
- Multi-media, self-paced learning materials
- Web-based reference materials for self study
- Enforced norms of learning behavior

Vicarious experiences: stories, simulations and games, first-hand testimonials from respected peers and persons in authority

Support network of (community of practice) of fellow learners and believers.

For the ACE quality university, we provided training of new instructors in how to create an effective, non-threatening learning environment for the students.

Solve My Problem – Many people have a hard time learning from generic examples that don't exactly fit their current situation. For example, in ACE we saw this behavior in the first quality university, where people in business functions had difficulty extrapolating the manufacturing examples of continuous improvement methods to their business processes. Here are some useful tactics.

On-the-job consulting: Individual time with teacher or mentor in a consulting role for the person's function or group

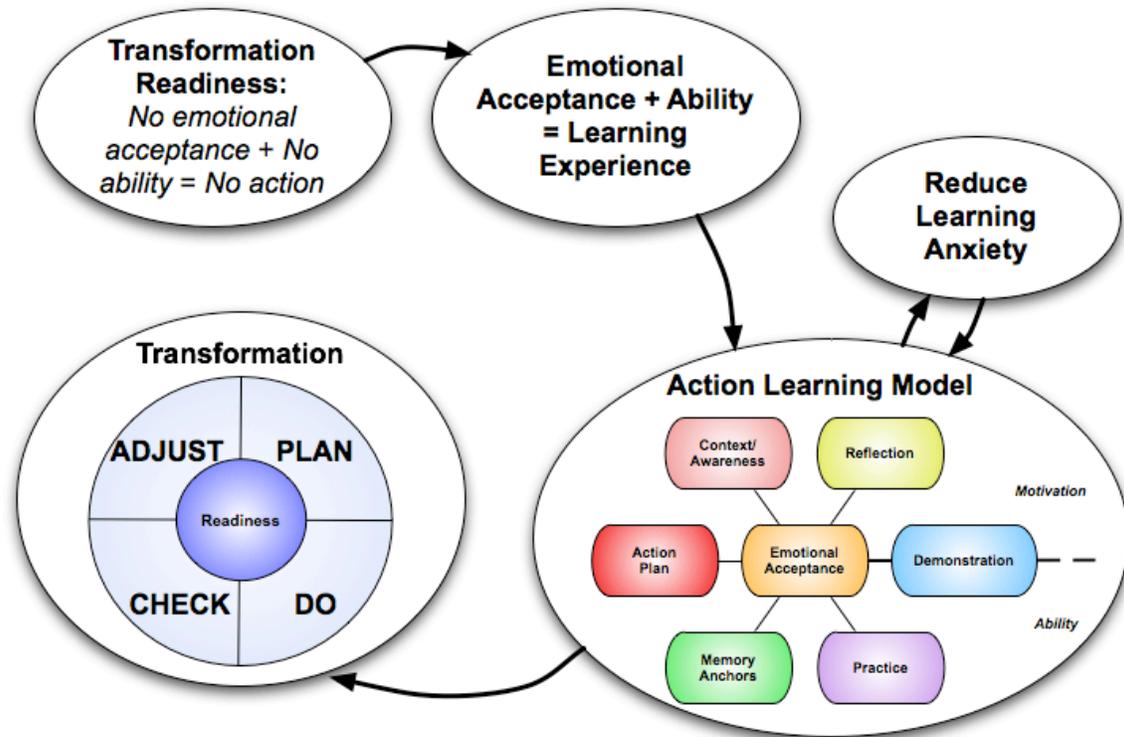
Help with specific weaknesses: videotaped behavior, shadowing and evaluation by an expert coach

Facilitated reflection time to help people connect the transformation learning to their situations and functions

Don't Waste My Time - Additionally, almost all people suffer the problem of having to learn new things while continuing to perform their "day" jobs. The learners don't want to waste any of their precious time. The prescription for reducing this stress is to break the learning experience into bite-sized pieces, sometimes self-paced, to accommodate busy schedules. There also must be a premium placed on the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning experience itself, and this can be determined through feedback. Thus, we come back full circle to the practices of the Action Learning Model.

Transformation Readiness Map

It's time to conclude our whirlwind excursion into how to inspire emotional acceptance of a transformation. Here's a map of where we have been.



I have looked at the transformation from "my space" to "our space" as a learning experience and have use an Action Learning Model to organize a set of practices, recommended in the literature and from personal experience, to improve the chances of the transformation's success. I have advanced that emotional acceptance of the transformation (learning) by those involved is the most important discriminator of success, and I have introduced ways, with special attention to those related to reducing learning anxiety, for gaining emotional acceptance. We have also seen that all of the elements of the Action Learning Model can contribute to and reinforce emotional acceptance.

In closing I want to leave you with the following thought that Peter Block expressed in his book *The Answer to How Is Yes* in the context of "Acting on What Matters:"

"In the face of all the messages that the culture sends our way, we can choose to become full citizens and become a cause rather than an effect. This means we must act as if our institutions are ours to create, our learning is ours to define, the leadership we seek is ours to become. It means releasing ourselves from the grip of our ambition and deciding to care for something large enough to give greater purpose to our work and to our experience."

This piece for me defines presencing and the quintessence of emotional acceptance of the transformation from "my space" to "our space."

I wish us all a good journey.

Acknowledgements

I will be forever grateful to Dr. Jack Byrd of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and Development at West Virginia University for introducing me to the Action Learning Model, which he called the Discovery Learning Model. We successfully applied this model in many consulting engagements to teach major corporations how to assimilate Integrated Product Development and to reduce their resistance to what was then a new way of working. Subsequently I added the Reflection element in view of its importance. The model has helped me many times since then in diverse applications.

I also want to acknowledge the instruction of Dr. Peter Senge of the Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) during the time when SoL and the International Association of Product Development were exploring a relationship. Peter also introduced me to the concept of Presence, which was under girded by Theory U. His profound wisdom continues to have a major influence on my life. For example, I am still struggling with his challenge: *imagine a world in which Toyota is mediocre.*

Finally, I express my deepest appreciation to Dori Digenti, who headed the former Corporate Collaborative Consortium for Learning (C3L) Network, for introducing me to communities of practice and, especially, to Professor Emeritus Edgar Schein. The morning that our consortium spent talking with Professor Schein at the Quaker Meeting House on Mount Auburn Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

References

The following references are where I started the present exploration, which is still a work in process. Undoubtedly, I have overlooked some significant contributions; for example, I discovered just before presenting my thoughts to the In2:InThinking Forum 2008 that I had unintentionally omitted John Kotter's wisdom. In the next revision I will most likely include the relevant

teachings from Deming and Gandhi as well. I trust that my dear audience will set me straight and offer other perspectives.

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