

Presence - impressions of an inspiring seminar

Two of the four authors of a book on an ancient but newly discovered method of facing challenges, within companies, organizations and societies, gave a seminar on the so-called U-process.

Joe Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers came to Europe to initiate some 70 participants into this process¹. It is a method of using learning skills and transforming capacities so as to achieve amazing results.

The U-process has been used successfully in commercial undertakings, large organizations and in societies in transition (South Africa, Guatemala). It has been described by the authors of "Presence", among whom the abovementioned Jaworski and Flowers, as well as Peter Senge ("The Fifth Discipline", introducing the concept of learning organizations) and C. Otto Scharmer ("Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges"), as well as by Adam Kahane ("Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities"). It goes back to thinking by physicist David Bohm concerning the implicit order and to ideas on synchronicity by psychologist Carl Jung. Joe Jaworski's "Synchronicity - the inner path of leadership", written together with Betty Sue Flowers, sets out many of the ideas already.

The U-process makes use of capacities that are normally associated with major scientific discoveries and artistic achievements or with abnormal events. Discoveries and achievements come about when scientists or artists go into observing mode and 'link in' with possibilities and inspiration that are not accessible when they themselves are too much 'in the way'. Also, in crisis situations, a remarkable unified collective response is sometimes noticeable which taps forces that people who give assistance (such a relief workers) did not realize they were able to bring forth and which allows methods of unwitting communication (relief workers finding out they converge on the spot where someone needs rescuing or cooperating with seamless effort). In intense situations of an altogether different nature (sports events), sportsmen and women tell afterwards of having been capable to act 'in flow' and win.

Whilst for many problems a direct solution can be found through mental processes only and by using past experience, major challenges often cannot be successfully met by using common cognitive processes or by focusing on details or separate elements of a situation.

By way of example: many mechanical and some social problems can be solved by thinking out the best answers and applying these of the basis of past experience. This method of meeting challenges is reactive. With major challenges, the interrelationships between parts and wholes require us no longer to look at parts for the solution to a problem but at the complete picture ('the whole').

The U-process goes beyond reacting and even beyond restructuring, redesigning and reframing - which all involve taking a fresh look at our own conceptions and definitions of the situation and, hence, go deeper than mere superficial change - as it involves regenerating. It assumes that solutions are available if only the connection to them can be made. They offer themselves to the open mind. This requires deep listening² and observation of the present situation. It also involves personal change. Thus, this method of meeting challenges requires far more from the individual as it involves

¹ Seminar organised by "Nieuwe Dimensies"- see: <http://www.nieuwedimensies.nl/>, Nyenrode Business University, Breukelen (NL), 29 and 30 November 2007.

² Four methods of listening were discerned: '*downloading*' whereby the 'listener' merely registers what is being said in order to react from his or her own judgment and opinions, '*factual listening*', which already brings in acceptance of disconfirming data, '*empathic listening*', which accesses the listener's heart, allowing her or him to see through another's eyes, and '*generative listening*', which 'becomes the vehicle for manifesting something new'.

him or herself as a human being, making use of all our faculties³. It goes to the source of our action. It asks the fundamental questions: Who am I? What am I to do?

In spite of these rather ephemeral notions, the U-process has been successfully applied in making a Shell oil refinery go from heavy losses to big profits, in establishing a new Intel plant in record time seeing it recoup investments in a second record time, and in helping to make successful transitions to societies in deep trouble (*apartheid*, civil war). Also, the authors presenting the seminar have both been involved with Shell in its scenario planning exercises. These involve 'sensing' possible future developments that are then spelled out in different scenarios, helping Shell to prepare for the actual events when one or the other scenario unfolds. Finally, the U-process is helpful in forging deep bonds among teams and instils a single purpose in organisations.

Several aspects made the seminar stand out:

- The seminar was conducted in an interactive manner with full participation of those attending.
- It was given in the form of stories (and exercises) since the human mind apparently has a different method of registering stories (*descriptive*) than rules (*prescriptive*: "do this", "don't do that"), something which was vividly illustrated with participants telling each other their defining life moments as a hero story, a victim story or a story of someone who has learned from experience. This characteristic of the mind may explain why we are so fond of stories and myths (in the sense of collective stories or story settings that are often followed⁴).
- The seminar followed the U-process, going from the observation left leg of the U, through the deep 'sensing' of the bottom and up towards the action alongside the right hand side of the U.
- It was interspersed with beautiful pictures from nature which is considered our teacher and which therefore is an essential part of any U-process: participants retreat in wilderness to be 'empty' and receive nature's inspiration in meeting the challenges. The intriguing thing is that they are given a brief when setting out into nature to forget the challenges for which they have come together and to focus only on nature and fundamental life questions.
- The seminar offered a number of useful tools for better listening and evoking new realities, inter alia mentioning different brain waves that are connected with different problem solving methods (logical thinking, one-pointed focus, creativity and intuition).
- The seminar brought approaches to major problems that have been used by ancient cultures into the modern world, linking these approaches to science and to the globalised world.
- The seminar faculty wonderfully interacted with each other and the participants.
It was a joy to be present.

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³ It was posited that human beings make use of only 15% of their capacities at best, the remainder being left unused or having been 'unlearned' in the socialisation process from baby to adult.

⁴ Betty Sue Flowers and Joe Jaworski discerned four myths that made us: the *hero* myth (excellence as ideal), the *religious* myth (goodness as ideal), the *democratic scientific* myth (truth as ideal) and the currently predominant *economic* myth (growth as ideal). They see a new type of myth emerging: the *ecological* myth (wholeness as ideal).