

## *Consulting and the Life Processes ~ a developmental pathway*

*As a thing the Way is shadowy, indistinct. Indistinct and shadowy, yet within it is an image; shadowy and indistinct, yet within it is a substance. Dim and dark, yet within it is an essence. This essence is quite genuine and within it is something that can be tested.*

~ Lao Tzu

*It has sacramental character ... It is real substance. But in order to understand this, the concept of substance has to become ethical and moral. This substance does not simply exist, it has to be generated, and it can be brought into being. Properly understood and worked with, it gives rise to the 'social organism', the 'social structure'.*

~ Joseph Beuys

Whenever we consider *processes*, we approach a life-world, of which — and within which — we need to become increasingly conscious. My question is: how might we, as practitioners, undertake the challenges of developmental relationships, through a vitalised consciousness? And I want to state, in developing here an understanding of life processes, that I believe this approach is socially hygienic — that is, the Way is enabled rather than enforced.

There are seven life processes (as distinct from *psychological* or *animating* processes): *breathing*, *warming*, *nourishing*, *secreting*, *maintaining*, *growing*, and *generating*. While these processes are to be comprehended as being simultaneously inter-weaving, we necessarily have to consider them in a linear narrative. Yet we shall find this also has significance — for the life-world is characterised by such polarities as simultaneity and sequence. In this formative movement, an integrated process-pathway becomes discernable. We can look at this metaphorically...

The processes of *breathing* and *warming* are the preconditions for all further activity. Through breathing, a relationship is established between what is inner and outer — a space is opened up within space. Initially no more than a pulsating differentiation, this space is permeated by warmth, thus forming a kind of content, and establishing a basis for presence (think what it feels like to be in an airy, warm environment). Then the *nourishing* process draws inward all that is necessary to give shape and definition to this active space.

*Secreting* is central. A process of sifting and sorting takes place — retaining what is essential, rejecting the inessential — through which form is given substance.

The existence of any entity must be regulated through a process of constant *maintaining*. Yet this would only keep things as they are, were it not for the process of *growing* that underlies all development and transformation. Organisms develop, from their juvenile forms through into maturity. Finally, reproductive capacities appear at every level in the living organism, a process of *generating* its own kind.

The presence of these seven life processes within an organism suggests a pathway for our processes in developmental relationships. Change is often exhausting, perhaps because in its character and in the way it emerges as a disruptive, revolutionary event rather than a quiet evolutionary one, it seems *unnatural*. In the event, if we can co-operate with the life processes we might find a way of working that is a genuine social ecology.

## 1. *Breathing / Sensing*

First, as practitioners working into any situation we can say that there needs to be a *sensing of the field*. We have to observe, repeatedly and carefully looking and asking ourselves what we are seeing; Rudolf Steiner comments that 'we should not try to make out, through intellectual speculation, what the things mean, but rather allow the things themselves to tell us'. We can call this *breathing* — living sensitively into a whole range of impressions, which often are of a contradictory nature. These polarities in fact form the field, in which we orientate ourselves through what John Keats called 'Negative Capability: that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' It is too soon for assumptions — indeed, it is never the time for assumptions — so, breathing, we sense into things. Goethe refers to this breathing process in one of his aphorisms:

*You always have to look on the inner and outer sphere as being parallel or, rather, as interwoven. There is constant systole and diastole, a breathing in and a breathing out of the living organism...*

This breathing also is a living into another polarity, that two-way continuum between what carries through from the past and what streams towards us from the future. Is there sufficient *lightness of touch* to allow some breathing space *and* breathing time for others? Another word for this lightness of touch is *tact*. In sensing all the polarities and contradictions, we become aware of the whole situation — of questions and challenges becoming perceptible in the field. As these are articulated, our tactfulness may help doubts to be allayed, through ensuring that there is enough spaciousness for people to come to terms with the issues.

## 2. *Warming / Relating*

Simultaneously we need to be aware of another life-field. We do not merely stand outside a situation and look at it, we have to enter in, to engage, and this penetration is accomplished through the expansive intent of warmth. In *warming* to the situation, to people, we establish *empathy*. Otherwise we might be too heated in our enthusiasm, so that the other person wants 'to chill out'. Or too cold — and then the other person might feel frozen out of the situation. Cynicism — a kind of hatred — *is* freezing. Alienation is common in dysfunctional situations. Warmth suffuses, permeates, welcomes — our patient dialogues can melt the ice, establishing a genuine relationship. So we can say that warming is relating.

Warmth *gives itself*, so it involves surrender — absorbing the viewpoint of others without any prejudice. So we offer our contribution, just putting it there and letting it stand, allowing the other person time to form a relationship with it. We do not force the matter. Breathing opens a space, which warming fills. And because this breathing continues, the warmth-mood does not become too humid. When breathing and warming are in the right proportion, the effect is like mild, fresh springtime air.

## 3. *Nourishing / Digesting*

In our work, we have to *digest* every situation, chewing it over, turning it over in our minds. But in order to really grasp what is involved, to find what is *nourishing*, we have to let issues sink deeply down into our body's unconscious processes. We have to slow down, pause. We

might even need to sleep on it. If we were cows, we would need to regurgitate and chew over our cud — to ruminate... Digestion proceeds in stages; we have to break down an event or situation into its constituent parts, and work our way through them, to fully take them in.

We need to make sure that others have sufficient opportunity to get a grasp on the situation and on any proposed changes. Everyone's digestive processes are different — some are more carnivorous, aggressively tearing into it; others are ruminants. Still others are nibblers and light grazers. They digest at a different rate; if forced, indigestion results. That tight knot in the belly can be fear and dread. We must ensure not only that everyone has a meal-ticket to the same table, but also is allowed to work through the menu in his or her own way. Interest in each other's meal is important in building a relationship; while we cannot force others to eat what we like, we might try to understand their tastes.

#### ***4. Secreting / Essentialising***

These first processes are prerequisites for the central phase in a developmental relationship: *secreting* — the secret aspect of digesting. We have to secrete what serves development, and excrete the useless. We have to be intelligent (Latin *intelligere*: *inter* = amongst, between; *legere* = gather, pick out, read) — that is, we sift and sort. In dysfunctional relating, we lose this ability to sort things out. A kind of emotional diarrhoea, or else constipation, might be the result. Only now, all one's experiences are examined methodically, sifted, weighed, and then given a value in the context of the present circumstances. What is essential? What can be set aside as non-essential? Or simply not suitable at this particular moment? What needs to be forgotten? What remains in the sieve of consciousness? A whole range of possibilities and limitations begins to emerge.

Establishing what is actually in the field, and what does not belong there, may involve some real effort. Here, forces of sympathy and antipathy come fully into play, but they need to be objectified through repeated reflection: what is important, what is less important? Being hard on issues, while gentle with people, is important. Antipathy can easily become hostility, and sympathy can become submissiveness. Always be prepared for surprises — the miracle of secretion is the complete transformation of substances, so that nothing remains as it was. And through all this we need to be aware that the most vital secretion in this process is the Self. Am I more *present* — from Latin *praesens* = 'being before (one, the other)' — to my Self? Does the other's Self become more present? For although this may not have been articulated at any point as a purpose or aim, it is in reality the greatest fulfilment.

#### ***5. Maintaining / Practising***

What begins to take shape has to be borne forward. *Maintaining* is a conscious task. We need to bear the essential substance — the *quinta essentia* — towards a future becoming. Some determination is helpful. What has been acknowledged between us? What has been decided? Who is responsible for now carrying it further? Is there sufficient institutional and personal steadfastness? Holding the event in memory, and yet keeping the outcomes in movement, bearing them towards the necessities of letting things change — *letting-go* and *letting-come* — are each important elements in this. We need to keep things in mind, ticking off each step as we proceed yet retaining that essence. And we also need to consider what faculties need to be

developed, what skills are to be learned. What training opportunities are to be put in place, what coaching or mentoring is to be provided?

## 6. *Growing / Developing*

*Growing* is a conscientious extension of this bearing-in-mind towards an ever greater facility. This is a maturing stage. We will be looking for growth, for development, for change... The details of what now is needed must be worked out as we proceed. Where are the reflections, the review points where progress is to be evaluated? What might have to change in the face of practical experience in the course of life? Who decides on what changes?

We will encounter resistance especially during these stages. We 'hit the wall'. We need to find our way beyond this wall of doubt, of antagonism, of fear, recognising that this testing really serves to consolidate and temper what otherwise might be simply a rampant growth. Constraining habits exist at every level — they have been established as a hardened function of maintaining, as necessary developmental resistances. In response, the requirements are attentiveness, poise and presence; and saying 'yes' to whatever comes — not a resignation to it, but assent to its challenges. To allow the project's edges to be honed... There is a point however at which they must give way...

## 7. *Generating / Creating*

Ultimately, the realisation or fulfilment — of the task, of the mission, of ourselves — implies a truly creative stage where something new is generated, freshly born from all that has gone before. *Generating* results from all the work we do — conceiving a previously unimagined future, that blossoms into a new world of possibilities, and finally into fruition. The decisive moment is not a direct function of life processes — that is always a gracious event. But such moments are well prepared-for through increasing awareness of these processes, which are *already taking place in us* — in reflecting about it, we are simply considering how we might cooperate more fully with the functional basis of our own lives.

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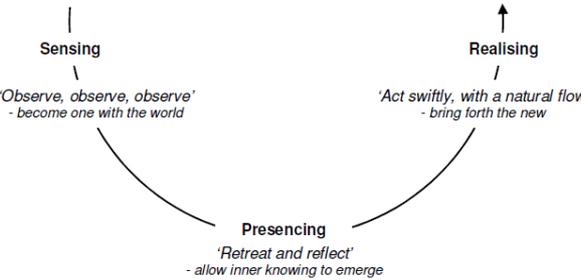
In summary, we can identify the essential qualities of the processes that have been presented here as a transformational field-path:

<i>Breathing:</i>	sensing into the contradictory elements	( <i>open mind in the face of doubt</i> )
<i>Warming:</i>	permeating the whole experiential space	( <i>open heart in the face of cynicism</i> )
<i>Nourishing:</i>	taking it all in to become 'response-able'	( <i>open intent in the face of fear</i> )
<i>Secreting:</i>	sorting the essential from the inessential	
<i>Maintaining:</i>	supporting a developmental environment	
<i>Growing:</i>	cultivating the transformational process	
<i>Generating:</i>	creating the new as spontaneous outcome	

We need to remain aware that the life processes are simultaneously active, continuously breathing, warming, nourishing, secreting, maintaining, growing, generating... All the others

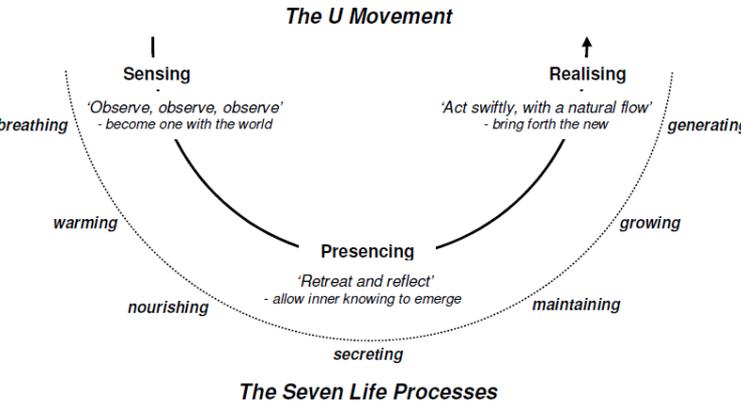
are present in each; for they sustain and support one another — this is the nature of life, after all — and they are to be seen imaginatively as continuous, interweaving processes as well as sequential ones. So, too, our consciousness moves like little boats, vessels of the light, upon these streams of life, layering and weaving our experience. As developmental practitioners I believe we can learn to work more consciously with such processes, perceiving them as realities in the world and in ourselves, and giving them real organisational substance.

Seen in these terms, the sequence can be placed in relationship to the U Path I have described in greater detail in my lecture *'Presencing' and the Life Processes*. This pathway, first articulated by Glasl and Lemson, and recently developed and elaborated by Otto Scharmer as his *Theory U*, involves an intentional descent to a stillpoint of awareness, and a subsequent emergence. These stages are summarised by Scharmer at the end of a 1999 interview with the economist and Taoist Brian Arthur, who refers to a 'second type of learning' that proceeds in three steps. Scharmer and his associates, in delineating this threefold U Movement, use the terms *Sensing*, *Presencing*, and *Realising* to encapsulate Arthur's evocative core characterisations:



When we consider the first three life processes, we recognise how they relate us to the world, to 'becoming one with the world' — sensing into the contradictory elements; permeating the whole experiential space; and taking it all in to become 'response-able'. The four subsequent stages are about transformation. At the bottom of the U Path, in sorting the essential from the inessential, the process of secreting 'allows the inner knowing to emerge'. Then we have the challenging task of embodying this essence, 'to bring forth the new' — through supporting the developmental environment; cultivating the transformational process; and so creating the new as a spontaneous outcome.

We can therefore relate these processes to the three successive stages of the U Movement as follows, recognising how they support consciousness in the developmental relationship:



Organisational change *can be* exhausting. But a path of consciousness that is based on organic processes, resonating with the basic bio-rhythms in the body, must be experienced at some level as harmonious. Hard, maybe, but justified, and — considered socially — just.

It must seem obvious here that I am talking about organisation development as a living path. Organisations can be approached structurally; but because organisations also *are* organisms, they need to be understood through exercising another kind of intelligence. A river can be investigated through studies of water composition and quantities, the nature of the terrain through which it flows, and thus the structure of the river-bed; but at some point we have to appreciate the qualities of *flow* itself, to live artistically into this, and to sense how water has its ways...

This art of consultancy requires both analytical thinking and imaginative thinking. The great Persian poet Rumi has something to say about these two kinds of intelligence:

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,  
as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts  
from books and from what the teacher says,  
collecting information from the traditional sciences  
as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world.  
You get ranked ahead or behind others  
in regard to your competence in retaining  
information. You stroll with this intelligence  
in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more  
marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet,  
one already completed and preserved inside you.  
A spring overflowing its spring-box. A freshness  
in the centre of the chest. This other intelligence  
does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,  
and it doesn't move from outside to inside  
through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead  
from within you, moving out.

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