

# Environment for Transformative Change

Session Thirteen

Online 2020-21



 Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA

Courageous, resilient, and faithful leaders for the sake of the world

# Environment for Transformative Change

## Session Thirteen Participant Outcomes:

1. Devise a strategy to set the environment for a leadership meeting in your faith community or area of ministry.
2. Articulate ways to let go and let come for groups.
3. Examine the ways you are affected by pathologies and “absencing” in family, workplace, or faith community.

## Preparation for this Session:

- Read this section of the manual and bring it with you.
- Continue to read *Theory U* by Otto Scharmer.

## Found in this Session:

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## Intentionally Setting the Environment

As a good example of intentionally setting the environment, the Reverend Lou Blanchard writes: “I just completed a meeting with someone who is a master at setting the environment for a meeting. She welcomed everyone, invited them to ‘check in’ in relation to the meeting’s agenda, read a short Scripture passage touching lightly on its relevance to the agenda, and invited us all to pray. It made a big difference in setting the stage for the conversation and decisions to be made that followed. In a very short period of time, she was able to build trust, help people who did not know each other very well connect with each other and God, and be clear about the purpose and data gathering necessary to accomplish that purpose.”

In discernment work of God’s emerging future utilizing Theory U, vulnerability, family systems, adaptive leadership, and emotional intelligence, building a container for that work is very important. We can know all the theories and have all kinds of models, tools, and lenses to use, but if we don’t set an environment where we can be open in mind, heart, and will to God and one another, we will not get far. So, what are some ways we can intentionally set the environment for this work?

### Space Considerations

Consider where this meeting is taking place. If it is a face-to-face meeting, how should the room be arranged to optimize productive and healthy connection with one another and be appropriate with the agenda? Will tables help people feel comfortable, or will they be barriers? Would a circle or square arrangement help people see one another? Give thought to where the chair of the meeting should be. Are the chairs comfortable enough for people to sit for the length of the meeting?

Could the meeting take place in more than one space? For example, a priest starts vestry (council) meetings around the altar in the sanctuary for the check-in and prayer time. The group then moves to the conference room for the business portion with computers, papers, and the need for tables.

Think about the technological needs for the meeting. Will there be participants who will participate through a video platform? Will data and documents be shared electronically? Will everyone need to plug in computers? What are the boundaries around using phones, checking email, texting, etc. during meetings? Are there AV needs?

For Zoom meetings, do you have a setting that isn’t distracting from your purpose? Is the lighting good so people can see you? If you are using spiritual props—candles, icons, music, other images—have you practiced using them beforehand? Do you know your audience and their skill level in using Zoom? Do you have protocols around muting, using chat, sharing screens? How will you engage all participants—address someone who may dominate the conversation or one who prefers to use the chat feature instead of speaking? Do you need a technical assistant? Everyone will benefit from you taking time beforehand to work through multiple issues and presenting clear guidelines at the beginning of the meeting.

## Connecting and Building Trust

*“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul...” Acts 4:32*

Spending a bit of time checking in with one another at the beginning of a meeting helps everyone feel included and accepted. Using the BRAVING Inventory as a guide/check list is also helpful in being clear about the expectations and creating a safe container for people to be able to open their minds and hearts for the work of the meeting. As each group member is aware of their embodied perspective, core values, and current capacity to be present, deeper connection and discernment is possible. Commitment to pray for one another before a meeting and afterwards also deepens the connection.

## Connecting to God

*“Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” Matt. 18:20*

Gathering in silence to come into God’s presence as a group is powerful. It shapes the group and connects them with each other as well as God on a deeper level. Activities such as praying together and spending time intentionally listening to what God might be saying by reading Scripture, Lectio Divina, or meditation are all ways a group can become acutely aware of God’s presence in their midst. As a group continues to practice these skills, it grows in capacity to discern and create the next steps in God’s vision.

## Cultivating Curiosity

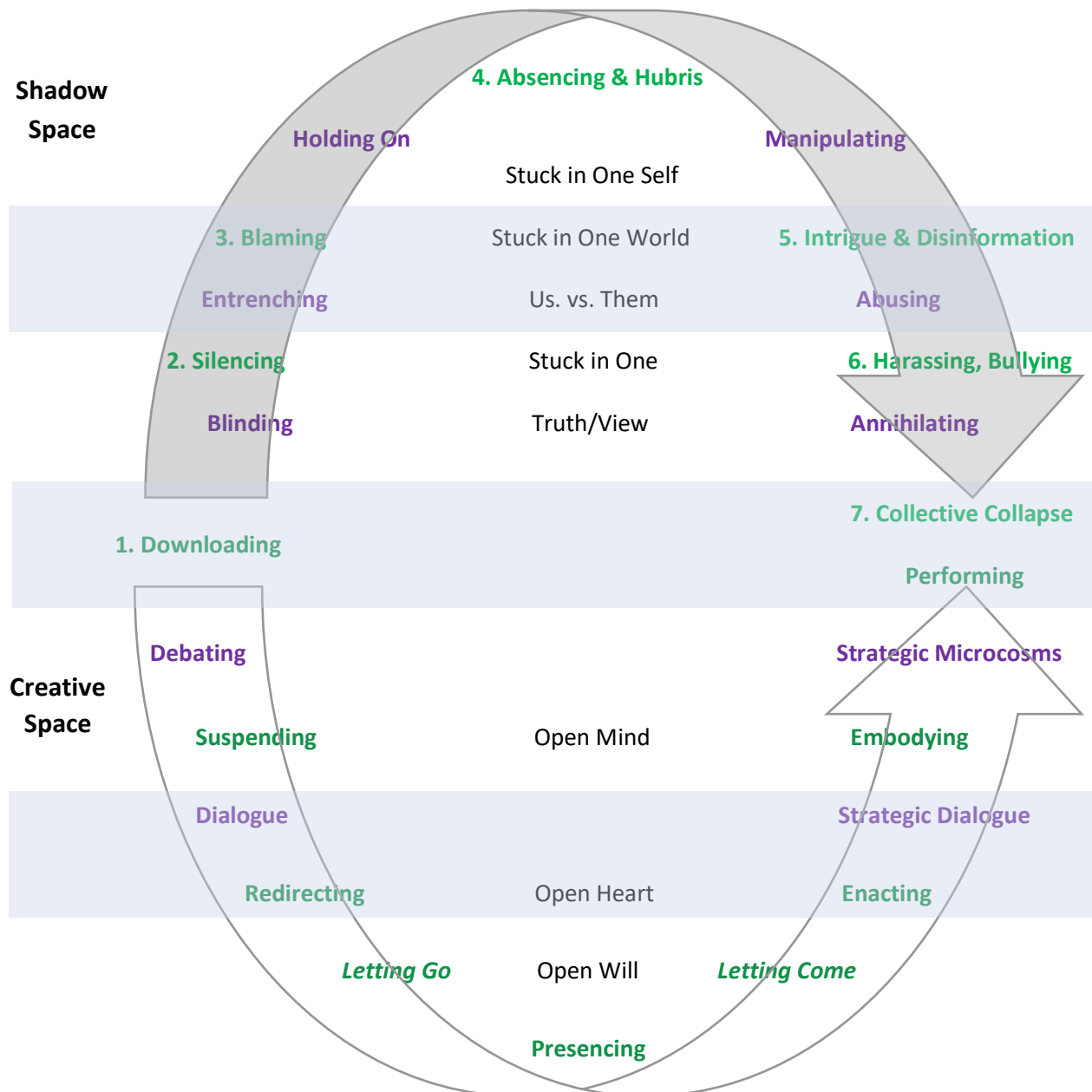
Discernment work assumes that all group members have pieces of the puzzle, data and perspectives, relationships and networks, values and beliefs which contribute to the work of the group. To promote dialogue to discover all these puzzle pieces, the group needs to be intentional about cultivating curiosity and opening *minds, hearts, and wills*. ***Opening the mind*** includes questions around what group members are seeing in observing the data from their stated embodiment perspective and discovering what other group members see from their perspectives. Sensing from an ***open heart*** might include utilizing rumble starters, listening, and empathy skills. Continually asking where God is in this and listening for God’s direction ***opens the will***.

## Beware of the Shadow Side of the U (Absencing)

Living in this world, we know that even as creative forces are at work, destructive forces are also present. It is wise, therefore, to be aware of these forces as we attempt to create spaces for creative conversation and emergence. As can be seen in the diagram below, moving through the **“Creative Space”** of the U takes us from the stance of *downloading* (#1 on the left)—the way we’ve always done it—to ***open minds*** with data which helps to objectively observe the situation, often sparking creative *“debate”*. The movement continues to ***open hearts***, redirecting attention to purpose/mission and

*dialogue* with diverse perspectives, and finally to the bottom of the U with ***open wills***, to the generative flow of God’s grace (**Presencing**). Moving upward on the generative side of the U, the conversations continue in *strategic dialogue* to enact the emerging change, to developing *strategic microcosms* that embody the change, and finally “re-freeze” the change in internal, social/cultural, and organizational structures (**Performing**). In our lived experience, however, this path is often wrought with diversions into destructive and pathological behaviors which throw us off course and abort the discernment and creative process, as shown in the “**Shadow Space.**” Knowing what these behaviors are enables us to name them and move in intentional ways back to the “**Creative Space.**”

In *Theory U*, Otto Scharmer has diagramed these two paths as follows:



***“...be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Matt. 10:16b***

Utilizing the above diagram, Scharmer outlines seven debilitating behaviors that abort the creative process in what he calls the cycle of conversational absencing:

1. **Downloading**—Talking nicely, not rocking the boat, reenacting patterns of the past, conforming to the status quo.
2. **Silencing Other Views** (Blinding)—Discourage contradiction, deny data, and dismiss other views. This often happens when people want to avoid conflict or with authoritative decision making.
3. **Blaming Others** (Entrenching)—Prevents the group from seeing complexities and seeing themselves as part of the system. It is easier to project the problem elsewhere than it is to courageously take responsibility for our part of the problem. It may also entrench the group in their own viewpoint (herding with like-minded people or triangulating) rather than seeing other viewpoints and the whole.
4. **Absencing & Hubris** (Holding on)—Disconnecting with your authentic Self, God, and the relationship with true purpose/work/mission. Members check out, withdraw, distance themselves, or armor up with vulnerability shields, leaving an inner void which can be filled with ego, hubris, and self-pity to defend their choice.
5. **Intrigue & Disinformation** (Manipulating, Abusing)—Deepens the disconnect by manipulating information and viewpoints, questioning behaviors, assigning false motivation, and suggesting conspiracy theories which tend to polarize the group in favor of the preferred worldview, ideology, or politics.
6. **Harassing & Bullying** (Annihilating)—Adds more poison, usually including threats, to the interactions and relationships to abort any creative thinking or alternative views.
7. **Collective Collapse**—Disembody future potential other than what has been predetermined by those with power over the group.

In summary, Scharmer states that creative conversations are disabled when cut off from three lifelines of emergence:

- **Silencing** cuts the group off from observable realities outside of themselves, shutting down the *open mind*.
- **Blaming** cuts the group off from seeing itself from another perspective beyond themselves, shutting down the *open heart*.
- **Absencing** cuts the group off from the Source/ God, who they truly are, and their purpose/mission, shutting down the *open will*.

The antidote to these behaviors is to notice them early, name them, and return to the creative conversations of debate, dialogue, and presencing. Once a group starts down the path of silencing and blaming, it can quickly escalate to absencing, intrigue, bullying, and collapse of any creative thinking; as we have seen in our political arena. Having the courage to offer feedback, name your perspective, and invite other perspectives backed up by the data can help deal with the silencing. Countering blame might call for data around forces at work inside and outside the system, intervention theory, Ladder of Inference, and Polarity Management.

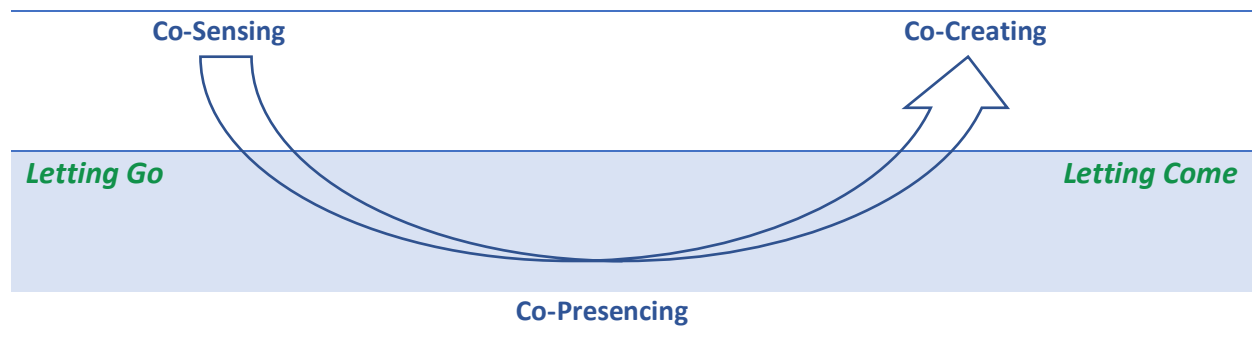
## Letting Go and Letting Come

### Process of Letting Go and Letting Come

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

**Romans 12:2**

The process of letting go and letting come is the heart of discernment. It is preceded by a sense of God calling a group to a new ministry, place, or way of being. After setting the environment for deep listening, Otto Scharmer describes the process as following the pattern of the U with “**Co-Sensing**” on the left side of the U, “**Co-Presencing**” at the bottom of the U, and “**Co-Creating**” on the right side of the U. This is a path of transformation and co-creating with God in Christ as God’s Reign emerges in our midst.



The *Excellence in Leadership* team experienced this process in the co-creation of Session 11. The session was to be about how we engage our current cultural context as leaders and faith communities. With the pandemic, the context had shifted tremendously, and what was originally written needed to be significantly overhauled. Three members of the team gathered and began the **co-sensing** and **letting go** process by first getting clear about the purpose of the session (framing our work and clarifying the intent). We then discussed current issues in our world and church and talked about ways to engage the material grounded in the principles of *Excellence in Leadership*. Following that discussion, one member drafted a possible outline. After sitting with the outline in prayer for several days, the three met again and discerned changes. A draft manual was written, and people were invited to write essays as the group followed the creative spark. Together, the whole EIL team experienced a run through of the session, offering wise suggestions. The team then worked on the updated manual and lesson plan in a couple of sessions, **co-creating** Session 11 for the participants.



## Co-Sensing and Letting Go

*“The most important conditions...for deep conversation to occur are an open mind (genuine inquiry and intent), an open heart (appreciation and empathy), and an open will (attention to the emerging future and authentic Self).” Theory U by Otto Scharmer*

Otto Scharmer uses the term co-sensing to capture the movement down the left side of the U where group members open their minds to seeing the data of their situation and system with fresh eyes as *well as their relationships with their* constituents and their purpose for being. Group members are suspending judgment and re-directing their attention to their mission and purpose. This calls for commitment to truth (**open mind**), to love (**open heart**), and to courage (**open will**). Letting go is defined as getting our “false self” or ego self out of the way individually and collectively as a faith community. Some helpful steps to clarify the intent of the discernment in this co-sensing process are outlined in *Discerning God’s Will Together* by Morris and Olsen (p. 66):

1. **Framing**—Identify the focus for the discernment work of the group. Clarifying the intent: developing a discernment question or defining an adaptive challenge.
2. **Grounding**—Define a grounding principle for the work which is informed by values, beliefs, and the purpose of the faith community (such as: proclaim & embody God’s love, make disciples of Jesus, serve Christ, “do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God”).
3. **Shedding**—Getting the ego out of the way. Letting go of biases, pre-conceived notions, false assumptions, and predetermined conclusions. It also means owning your embodied perspective to be able to be present in a more differentiated stance.
4. **Rooting**—Connecting the work to Christian tradition and Scripture: Exodus story (slavery and plague to wilderness journey to promised land), Pascal mystery (death, tomb, and resurrection), being salt and light, connected as vine and branches, etc.

## A Process for Co-Sensing and Letting Go

A process for co-sensing and letting go is in creating collective sensing mechanisms that allow the system to see itself and its purpose as clearly as possible by suspending judgment and re-directing the attention to the community’s purpose and mission. Some helpful steps:

1. Set the environment: build trust, clarify intent, cultivate curiosity, pray.
2. Use models, lenses, or tools to employ an adaptive process: observe, interpret, act; see with fresh eyes.
3. Explore questions that matter while suspending and redirecting listening from what we know, perhaps using rumble starters.
4. Connect diverse embodied perspectives/social locations from inside and outside the community.
5. Listen deeply for further insights and questions and listen to God in prayer and scripture. Perhaps utilize the “turn and learn” process to share insights.
6. Harvest/collect discoveries.



## Co-Presencing

Co-Presencing includes a time for group members to retreat and reflect to allow the Holy Spirit to work and let the future next step emerge. Listen to the prompts of the Spirit (classic signs of the Spirit's presence include a sense of peace or joy, tears of gratitude or amazement, life-giving energy, loving warmth, or goose bumps). Encouraging people to journal, taking some retreat time, and meditating are also helpful spiritual practices to allow the emergence to occur.

Co-Presencing is also a time to be in touch with who we truly are in God—our True Self/Identity. Review your core values and authentic identity individually and corporately as a faith community. Get in touch, once again, with your God-given purpose, your Work/Vocation. Try to define the essence of your Work in a few words or phrases. Relate your core values and authentic identity to key insights and discoveries from the co-sensing process.

*“Do what you love,  
love what you do.”*  
Steve Jobs

## Co-Creating and Letting Come

The road to creativity often requires patience. God's timing and ways are not ours. Otto Scharmer describes the road to creativity as 1) nothing much is happening, 2) a period of boredom, and 3) noticing and responding to an inner impulse. Even though it seems as if nothing is happening, the Holy Spirit is at work creating something deep within us. Often, we will just feel a bit uneasy with no direction but recognize that something needs to be addressed. When the time is right, the unrest will become like birth pangs and we know it is time to move on the impulse. When the spark does come, Scharmer gives us four activities to help us respond to and crystalize the impulse:

1. **Clarify Impulse with the Intention of the Work**

Make sure that the impulse aligns with the essence of your Self and your Work/Vocation. Review the work you've done in the Letting Go steps—especially in the “framing,” “grounding,” and “rooting” part—to be sure you are on the right track.

2. **Give Yourself to the Impulse**

*Give, and it will be given to you.  
A good measure, pressed down, shaken  
together, running over, will be put into  
your lap; for the measure you give will be  
the measure you get back. Luke 6:38*

Next, give it all you've got to try to see possibilities of developing your impulse.

It's time to engage your imagination, dream, connect ideas and insights, and discover patterns and themes.



Otto Scharmer uses the formula:

$$E=Dm$$

Personal Energy = making a Difference in something that Matters

- Energy—Where is the impulse coming from? Why are you excited? How is your enthusiasm leading you?
- Difference making—How does this give meaning and purpose to fulfilling the mission or taking another step in fulfilling it?
- Matters—How is this making the world a better place, making life better, or bringing into reality part of God’s reign, values, or purpose?

Do it with abandon. Let go of what you give without certainty of getting anything in return. Give yourselves permission (permission slip) to play and create without concern for getting it right, being successful, or perfect.

### 3. Relax and Let it Come

Rest into what you’ve developed—to integrate head, heart, and hand. Don’t just think about it—feel it. It’s here that our analyzing minds often jump in too soon, blowing out the spark. Allow time for the impulse to grow and to sense when the time is ripe to take action. Sleep on it. Let it sit on the back burner of your mind and heart.

### 4. Follow the Spark

When you sense it’s time to act on the impulse, explore and playfully imagine possible options, paths, and possibilities, improving those options, and then weighing them to test and see what might be viable. Experiment with the option. Once a possible option has been identified, imagine it being a reality in the future and then work backwards on what steps you might take to make it a reality. Doing this collaboratively invites others into the creative process and ownership of the experiment and prototyping process. Intentionally invite people who will be affected by the plan (stakeholders) and have diverse viewpoints/embody perspectives. Remember to keep ***open minds, hearts, and wills*** through the process. What steps might you take to get there? What components are involved? Who are the stakeholders? How can you create critical mass? What forces are at work in the system that need to be managed?

After a plan is developed, it is time to try it out by prototyping on a doable scale and timeline (often a liturgical season or set timeframe). Once a plan has been developed, Scharmer offers the 6 R’s as a checklist to keep it aligned with the original purpose:

- **Relevant**—Is it relevant to the authentic Self/Identity and Work/Vocation of the faith community?
- **Revolutionary**—Is it new and fresh? Does it reflect the initial spark of the Spirit?
- **Rapid**—Can you do it soon? Do you have resources, people, knowledge to launch?
- **Rough**—Can it be done on a small scale (small group, pilot project)?

- **Right**—Does it capture the elements of the whole intention (core values, framing and grounding principles, divine leading)?
- **Relationally effective**—Does it leverage strengths, competencies, and possibilities with stakeholders and constituents?

Plan on hiccups and failures! It's all part of the learning. There will be valuable kernels of innovation for the 2.0 version of your plan. Give yourself permission to keep innovating, experimenting, and playing with the spark until it comes to fruition.

The co-creating continues in what Scharmer calls co-evolving as the initiative is launched and feedback is received. The initiative can be expanded upon, adapted, made part of the system, or scrapped as appropriate.

## References

Morris, Danny, and Olsen, Charles, *Discerning God's Will Together*, Upper Room Books, 1997.

Scharmer, Otto, *Theory U*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009.

