

# Mapping the Integral U

A Conversation between Ken Wilber, Otto Scharmer

## I. The U-Process of presencing

**Ken:** Let's begin with a summary of your view of the U-process of presencing. I'll make a couple of brief comments, if you don't mind, and then we can jump into it.

**Otto:** Sure.

**Ken:** You have certainly drawn from a number of individuals, but in particular Francisco Varela's work has been important to you. However, he lacks a real understanding of the developmental and intersubjective dimensions. In *Integral Psychology*, which is a book I wrote a few years ago, you can get a good feeling of these developmental aspects. In the back of the book I included one hundred charts that summarize the developmental models from a wide array of theorists and authors in this field.

**Otto:** Yes, I remember reading it.

**Ken:** In that book, I presented a criticism of Varela's work which stated that his neurophenomenology takes first-person and third-person realities into account, but not second-person realities. Nor does it take inter-subjective structures or developmental stages into account. These things, in my opinion, are a real gap in his approach.

**Otto:** Ah, that's good. I don't remember that.

**Ken:** With regard to the stages, I believe that this U process you describe can effectively happen at almost any stage.

**Otto:** Yes. It's an evolutionary grammar.

**Ken:** In a specific way, I'll try to give you my take on it and see if it makes sense to you, and then we'll go from there.

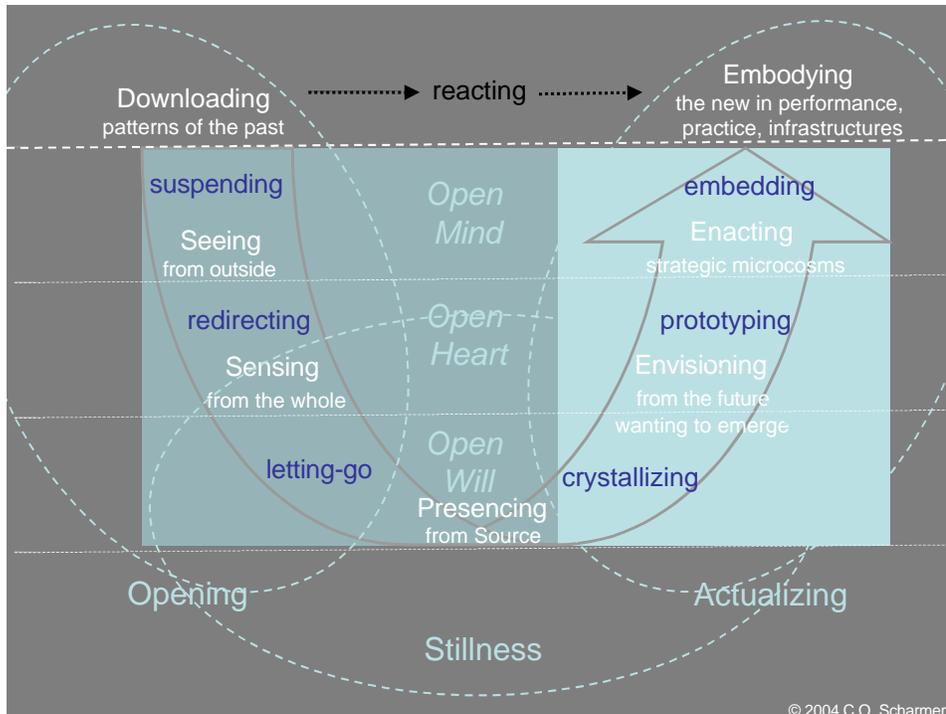


Figure 1: Theory U: Seven States and Capacities, Three Movements, One Process (from: Otto Scharmer: *Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future*, forthcoming; www.ottoscharmer.com)

**Otto:** Okay. You know how I use Varela here, right? He has synthesized phenomenology, contemplation, and introspection into three folds, or foldings. “Suspension” is Fold 1, “redirection” is Fold 2, and “letting go” is Fold 3.

**Ken:** Yes. And what he left out is something that's crucial in all of the contemplative schemes: the stages of development.

**Otto:** That's right. The relationship that I see between your work and mine is that you map the entire developmental and evolutionary territory from a 50,000-foot perspective—that is how I understand your work. You look at the whole damn thing. And what I'm trying here with the U is to go more into a mid-range change theory. I try to describe the same reality that you look at from a different perspective. In other words, I try to move onto the battlefield and describe the evolutionary process from the perspective of the entity that is coming into being throughout that journey. It's a description of evolution from the blind spot: the “I” of the evolving self.

## **II. The application of the U-Process**

**Ken:** I agree. It's a better way to do it than Varela did, and I'll tell you why.

**The model that I'm working with is briefly summarized by “Quadrants, levels, lines, states and types.” There are several things that happen at most of the levels, and here, a level means a structure, stage, developmental level, or developmental structure, and we**

**sometimes use the term "waves of development."** Those all roughly mean the same thing. And keep in mind that the quadrants occur at all stages.

There are also developmental lines, of which there are at least one or two dozen that have been identified. These are capacities that human beings have, or "multiple intelligences," as Howard Gardner calls them in his work.

**Examples of these developmental lines are things like cognitive intelligence, moral intelligence, aesthetic, interpersonal, mathematical, musical, and kinesthetic.** Research tends to show that all of those developmental lines go through stages. Howard Gardner calls the lines "streams," and the levels "waves." So the developmental lines or streams go through stages or waves of development.

In addition to these elements, there are states and types. So we have quadrants, states, and types occurring at almost any stage.

An example of types is yin and yang, or masculine and feminine. If we look at the caduceus model, there are seven levels with a masculine and feminine energy in each of them, or two types in each of the seven stages.

Then there are states of consciousness, which is what I think you are partly working with. Let me explain why I think that, and why this is important.

**I agree that this U process can happen in most of the stages—I think this is phenomenologically valid. I don't believe that it happens in a six-month-old, but I think this process can happen in most of the intermediate stages of development.**

**Therefore, the U process has a much wider applicability than you might suspect, because a lot of the people you're applying this to self-select.** People who come to work with you are going to be orange or green or yellow, for the most part.

Now, we can talk a bit more about the states of consciousness. There are three or four natural states that are universal. The great traditions call them waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the Ever-Present which underlies all of them.

Technically, most of the traditions use five states, so let me point out what they are referring to. The states of consciousness called waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and the Ever-Present all have energies or bodies associated with them that are called the gross body, subtle body and causal body.

The waking state has a gross body; the dream state has a subtle body; and deep, formless sleep has a causal body. Then turiya, the fourth state of consciousness, is that which witnesses all three states. This is the ever-present transcendental state, which we sometimes call the Witness, simply because it can witness all the changes of state.

So that's turiya, which technically is the fourth state of consciousness. Then the fifth state is turyatita, which is the non-dual state. This is when the witness is one with everything that it's witnessing. But for now, I'll just use the three main states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, or gross, subtle and causal, to get the point across. What's important about those states is that they are phenomenologically very different, and different capacities can come into play in each of them.

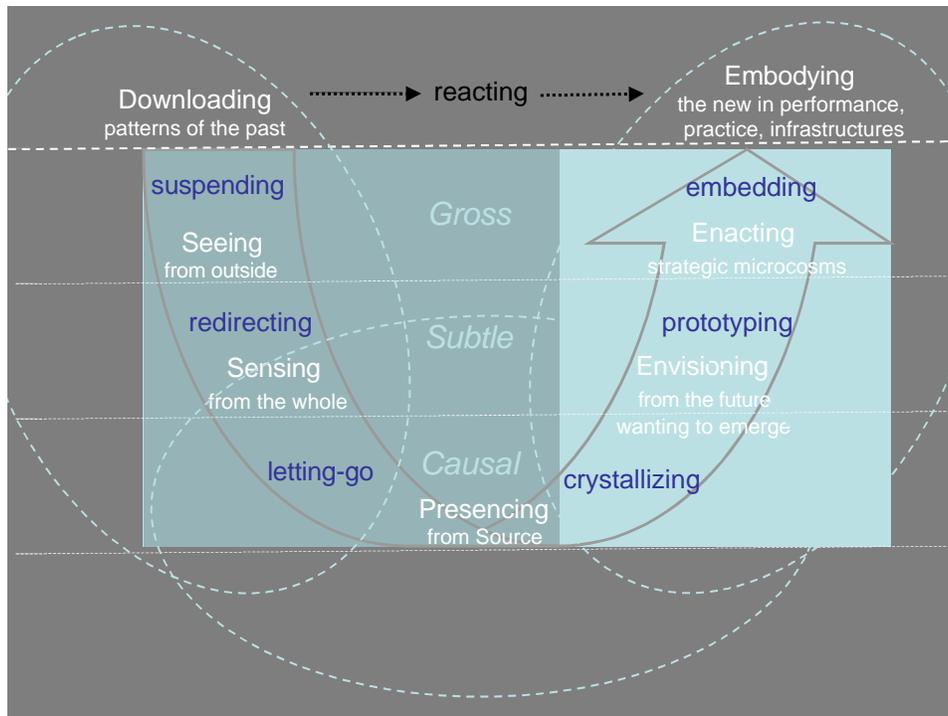


Figure 2: Ken's Uncovering of the Ontological Dimension of the U: Gross, Subtle, Causal

**What I think you're doing is effectively moving people through states of consciousness at whatever stage they're at. This also happens in meditation, and that's why Varela got the hang of it when he first proposed his theories.** He was really describing gross, subtle and causal states of consciousness, which is the meditative structure. But that still leaves out stages.

Typically the gross/waking state is a cognition of "it." It's a state where the thinking process tends to be fixed on "its," or anything that can be described in "it" language. Thus, when someone is seeing everything from the outside, that person is using cognition that is distancing. This is a classic waking, or gross object oriented process, even though there are indeed conceptualizations that occur.

### III. Thinking, Feeling and Source

**Otto:** Yes, in my model this would correlate to "seeing," where you project your mental models onto the wall. So where would you place "thinking," "feeling," and "Source" in your model?

**Ken:** In your U process, “thinking,” “feeling” and “Source” would translate into gross, subtle and causal. “Thinking,” as we are using it here, refers to cognition of an object. We don't mean, for example, contemplative thinking like Heidegger would use the term. So this is very close to what the gross dimension is, and it's the gross interpretation you come in with.

Then, the “feeling” in your model would be the whole subtle dimension. For example, in a dream state you have feelings. There can be thoughts, but they're very fluid and have a very deep intensity. The dream state is a classic example of that, but so are states of creativity. The relationship between creativity and dreaming is well established, including the fact that in the Upper Right quadrant there's theta-brain activity going on during most creative and dream states.

**Otto:** So that's what shows up in the upper right quadrant.

**Ken:** Yes. States of creativity and dream states have a lot of theta-brain activity.

Then, in your model, “presencing” will access your Self, or **Source**, which are simply variations on the causal Self—the pure, vast, open Self. You have to contact this vast expanse in order to have intentionality. The only time we have free will is when it comes out of this vast background.

If our will comes out of yesterday's habit, it's in the gross realm. And so what you're doing is getting people to fluidly access these states, at whatever stage they're at.

What you're saying here is that we come out of states and crystallize and institutionalize them. This is basically taking these subtler causal forms and materializing them in the near future. So you're essentially calling forth the future and embodying it by working with these creative states. Does that make sense?

**Otto:** 100%.

**Ken:** Fantastic. So what I'm saying is that this process can occur at whatever stage a person is at. Do you see what I mean?

**Otto:** Not quite.

**Ken:** Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4, Stage 5, Stage 6, Stage 7. A person can go through this U process at whatever stage they're at.

**Otto:** Right.

**Ken:** Does that make sense?

**Otto:** I can picture that for, say, 4, 5, 6, and 7. I have just tried to get my arms around an example, but does that really work on 1, 2 and 3?

**Ken:** Well, no, I stand corrected. As I said earlier, I don't believe this process will work with those earlier stages. At exactly what point it kicks in is hard to say. We'll leave that out for now. Can a five-year-old do it? Can an eight-year-old do it? Can a 10-year-old, a 20-year-old? What point it kicks in is an entirely different discussion, but for most adults, we can see it happening in Stage 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. Does the concept of the U process happening at different stages make sense to you now?

**Otto:** Yes, absolutely.

#### **IV. U process you get a view of the microtexture.**

**Ken:** I think that's what's so important about this. Bob Richards and I were talking about this, and we want to carry this conversation forward with you because I think this is a missing piece of the integral puzzle. That missing piece is exactly what you mentioned earlier, where with stages and quadrants, you get a view from 50,000 feet, but with the **U process you get a view of the microtexture**. This is a real first-person phenomenology of what happens when you go through this great process. It most likely doesn't exhaust everything, but I think it's a fantastic model and technique. It's especially important because I think you're tapping into these great states. There might be other things happening, but you and I have already agreed that this pretty much captures the important points. **That's very exciting, because it means that you can teach somebody who, in terms of spiral dynamics, is blue or orange or green how to be the most effective change agents that they can be at their stage.**

**Otto:** That's right.

**Ken:** I'll give you the last piece, which I think will fit with your model as well. Based on meditation and developmental research, we've come up with what seems to be a rule of thumb about vertical transformation: **The more you're plunged into states of consciousness that you can't interpret at your present stage, the more quickly those states help you transform to higher stages.** That's why meditation helps you move permanently into higher stages. I think the repeated application of something like this U process would cause definite transformation. Also, I think you would see some transformation in the work that you do, and that transformation would be consonant with my model—it would fit. Does that make sense?

**Otto:** Yes. A hundred percent.

**Ken:** Great.

**Otto:** It also correlates nicely with what I've been experiencing myself and with what I've seen other people go through with the U.

**Ken:** If you're working with, for example, quadrants, levels, lines, states and types, then the U process is a state technology that can help people at different stages to envision and work with their own possibilities, given the stage that they're at. Then, the creative application of this can help them transform to a higher stage. This is why Bob Richards, Neil Burke, and I are so excited about this. It's a wonderful, useful technology.

Now, if you wanted to use an awkward framework, you could also take advantage of the integral model to situate this. You could look at how people who are at Bob Kegan's Order 3, Order 4, or Order 5 go through the U process. You're going to get different results, and see different things that they imagine. In other words, you can take people at moral Stage 3, 4, or 5, and they will all be able to do this process, but you're going to see different futures due to the fact that people have different orders of consciousness at each level. Using an integral framework would allow you to keep an eye out for that.

Furthermore, you could then start to track people over time. Kegan did this with moral Stage 3 people and found that over a course of six months, 28% of them transformed to Stage 4. So he did the same kind of research that some of the meditation people have done, which shows that meditation increases the development of these stages.

Whether or not that happens—and I think it does—this in itself, at whatever stage, is a fantastic technology to speed up the developmental process of people growing into the higher and wider reaches of their own potential. They would be envisioning it, and bringing it forth out of that chaotic froth of future which can then be embodied and institutionalized. **You're actually bringing forth the future.**

**Otto:** That tracks 100%.

**Ken:** Great.

**Otto:** We know meditation does something good for the individual and we know we need something on the collective level. But the question on the table is: What are the collective cultivation practices? What do they look like? How can we develop such a new body of cultivation practices?

And the other dimension in need of consideration is that for many people today, including me, the gateway to spiritual experience is through work. In other words, really tapping into the essence of your work

**Ken:** For men especially, but certainly for a lot of other folks as well.

**Otto:** Furthermore, we also need to consider the social context. I have seen major transformation and change occur when you help collective systems to develop a shared seeing and sensing of what is going on in their circumstance—seeing and sensing that allows the collective group to be aware of what is wanting to emerge.

**Ken:** Right across the whole system.

**Otto:** Yes. And this shared body of seeing and sensing opens up a new space that eventually leads to a subtle shift in the collective field. What's interesting here is that the collective field shift itself becomes a gateway for individual cultivation.

**Ken:** Yes. There is that mysterious "we" that has a life of its own.

**Otto:** And that "we" becomes a gateway.

**Ken:** Exactly. And if that being can resonate at a higher level than where some individuals in the group are at in a given moment, then that being lifts those people up.

**Otto:** Right.

**Ken:** Literally. And that's a transformative event in that case. This would deserve the term that's too widely tossed around, which is "conscious business."

**Otto:** What's that called?

**Ken:** Conscious business. Everybody is using that phrase these days.

**Otto:** So what's that?

**Ken:** Conscious business? Well, to date, it's the name of Fred Kofman's book, so I should not say something silly about it. Boomers do everything consciously. You have "conscious aging" and "conscious hiking" and "conscious eating." With these terms we imply that everybody else has done this unconsciously.

So there apparently used to be "unconscious hiking" and "unconscious aging".

But if you actually do this kind of thing, then it's raising consciousness in a work or business environment—a type of inter-subjective yoga. And that would really be conscious business. Does that make sense?

**Otto:** Absolutely.

**Ken:** You used to give that kind of immediate feedback with the people you've done the U process with, which is why you know you're onto something.

**Otto:** That's true.

**Ken:** It's very exciting.

**Otto:** It is. And the relationship you draw is so obvious, but I hadn't thought about it in those terms before. In my own uncovering process this is really a major step forward. Through this past 10 minutes, a whole universe which already existed just opened up, and I see the connecting lines. That's very exciting.

**Ken:** Great. Let's follow up. We can do it by phone.

**Otto:** Okay, that's great. Thank you so much Ken. I very much look forward to continuing this conversation.