

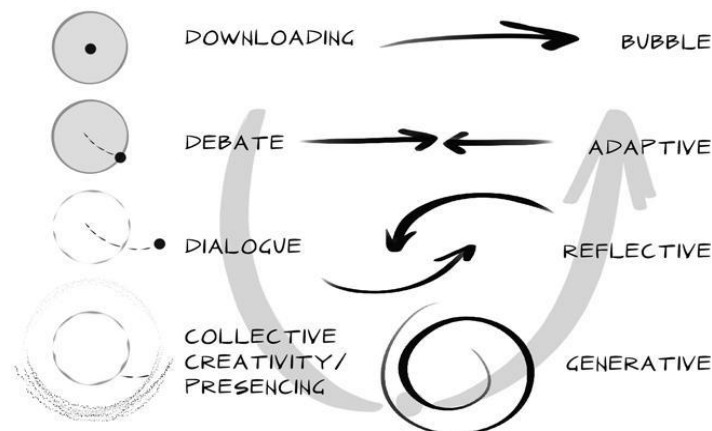


Building New World Capacities: Generative Dialogue Part 1

*“Wherever we put our attention as leader, educator, parent, etc. - that is where the energy of the team will go. The moment we see the quality of attention shifting from ‘ego’ to ‘eco’, from ‘me’ to ‘we’, that is when the deeper conditions of the field open up, when the **generative social field is being activated.**”*

Otto Scharmer, Theory U

In [The Essentials of Theory U](#), Otto Scharmer shares four different stages/qualities of conversation:



Four Fields of Conversation
The Essentials of Theory U - www.ottoscharmer.com

Field 1: Bubble - Downloading (Habitual)

“How are you?”

“I am fine.”

This field of conversation operates in a kind of “bubble” of conformity. It is habitual and requires that participants conform to the dominant pattern of exchanging polite phrases rather than saying what is really on their minds. It is learned in early childhood (in school - saying what the teacher wants to hear) and is then transferred into organizational life as adults, where we use the same skill to deal with bosses and colleagues. This type of conversing tends to result in dysfunctional behavior. It prevents teams from talking about what is really going on. They talk about what really matters to them somewhere else - in the parking lot, over lunch, or on their way home.

The bigger the gap between what is said (I am fine), and the actual situation (I am completely overwhelmed), the higher the likelihood of some kind of disruption or breakdown in the system down the road.

Field 2: Adaptive - Debate (Factual/"Ego-system")

"How are you?"

"I am terrible."

The defining feature of field 2 conversations is that participants speak their minds. They abandon habitual, rule-reproducing language for a tougher type of conversation where individuals dare to differ. Field 2 conversations imply opening up to viewpoints that challenge the dominant views and the structure that results from this kind of interaction is often a debate. The word "debate" literally means "to fight or beat down."

This can be useful because it gets all opinions on the table, but can also **restrict the conversation to thoughts and assumptions that are "already known."**

Field 3: Reflective - Dialogue (Empathic/Relational)

"How are you?"

"Not sure. But how are you, my friend?"

"Not sure either. I too arrived with an uneasy feeling."

"Oh, really? How interesting. Tell me about it. What's going on?"

Dialogue comes from the Greek *logos*, "word" or "meaning," and *dia*, "through," and can be translated as "meaning moving through."

To change habits of thoughts and assumptions, participants are encouraged to enter into a type of dialogue that allows them to realize that "I am not my point of view." As Bill Isaacs, author of *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking* says, "I can suspend my own point of view and look at somebody else's assumptions."

When this happens, participants widen their perspective in a way that includes themselves - they begin to shift from seeing the world as an exterior set of objects to seeing the world and themselves from the whole.

Field 4: Generative - Collective Creativity/Presencing* (Ecosystem)

"How are you?" example reaches its limit

This level of generative conversation gives birth to new ideas and identities, imagination, and inspired energies. Examples include high-performing sports teams, jazz ensembles, and other groups in which musicians listen to themselves while simultaneously listening to the *emerging* collective music.

With **generative dialogue**, there are distinct changes in people's experience:

- Time seems to slow down
- A feeling of space opening and or widening
- Sense of self becoming less defined while the boundary between self and "other" opens up to a collective presence from which the conversation seems to flow (also known as "the third space")
- Ideas emerge collectively (people no longer say, "That is my idea")
- The group engages in the art of thinking together where **one idea builds on the other**

*Presencing is the act of connecting to the source of inspiration and will. It allows for the individual or group to go to the place of silence and allow the inner knowing to emerge. ... This shift can be done individually or collectively (Scharmer, 2009). It also allows for **co-creating from an emergent future**.

How to Shift From One Field to Another

From Field 1 to Field 2: Bubble → Adaptive

Break into small groups where everyone can share their observations and views on a topic. This shifts the conversation to more of brainstorming than debating. This also helps with "face-saving" when confronting a boss or other authority figure.

From Field 2 to Field 3: Adaptive → Reflective

The shift from debate to dialogue involves a shift from trying to beat down the contrary view to inquiring about each other's views and listening to the other with empathy. This involves the ability to identify with or understand the perspective, experiences, or motivations of another individual. It can also involve comprehending or sensing another individual's emotional state.

From Field 3 to Field 4: Reflective → Generative

Shifting into a deeper field of collective presence often happens in a transitional moment of stillness. This provides a type of "gateway" - it is a space of "doing nothing", of neither over-intervening nor disengaging.

To learn more:

[Building New World Capacities: Generative Dialogue Part 2](#)

[Building New World Capacities: How to Create Generative Systems](#)

[Building New World Capacities: Generative Listening](#)

To receive implementation support:

bernadettewesley.com

Additional Resources:

[Presencing Institute](#)