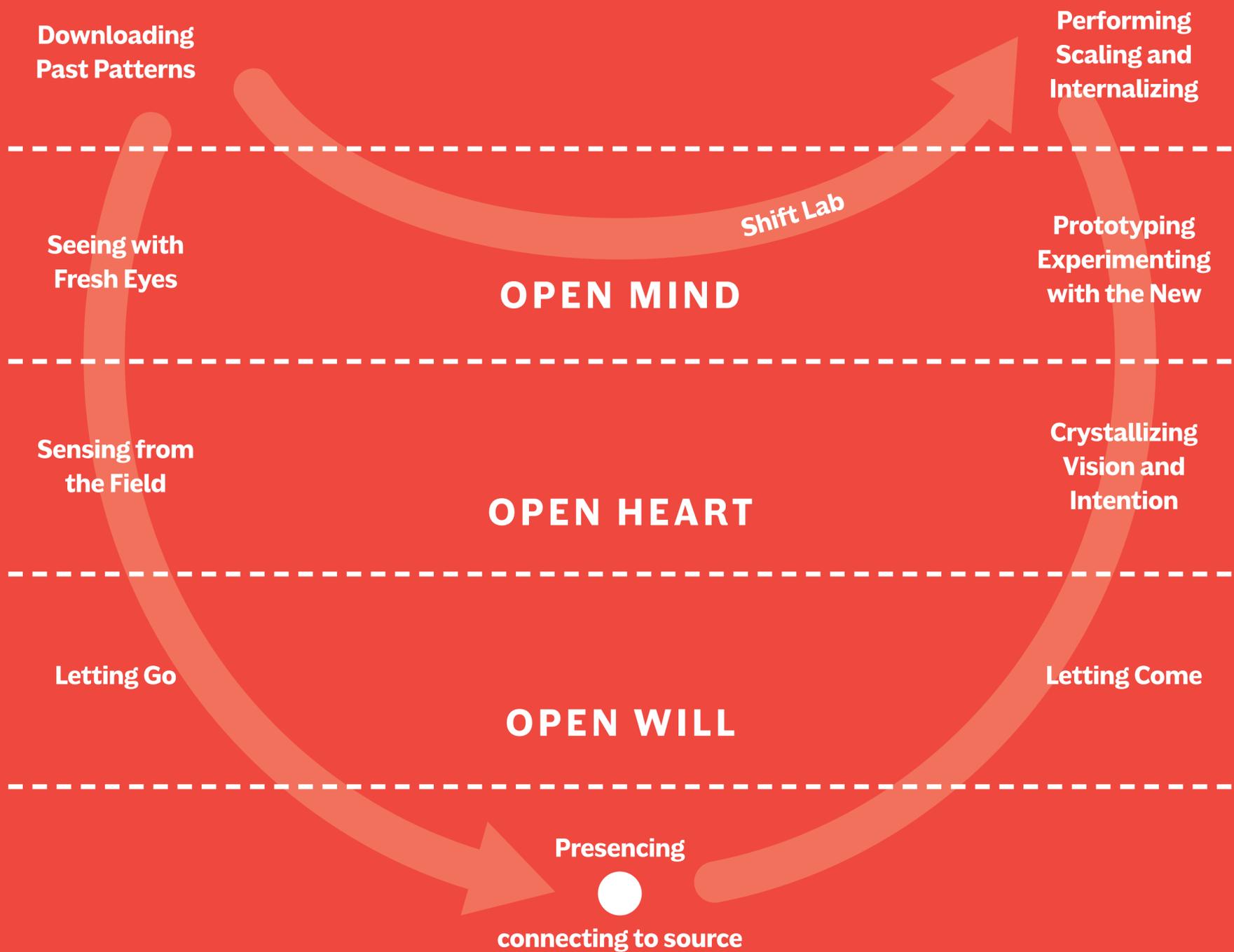


THEORY U



One way to understand this challenge of “going deeper” to tackle tough social challenges is the Theory U framework. The framework describes the journey of social innovators as working through multiple phases of discovery, beginning with “downloading” their own mental models of a complex situation and then gaining increasing insight through conversations, experiences and research with others. This (ideally) results in an openness to the emergence of new ideas about how to address the challenge. They are expressed and tested through prototyping possible new approaches and then – if appropriate – scaling and institutionalizing successful experiments.

When asked to describe their new insights from Shift Lab I.0, several Core Lab and Stewardship team members described their “U” journey as a shallow one. Almost everyone could point to some new insights into the causes of and possible solutions to racism and poverty. But they also felt unable to test their own assumptions and ideas fully, to empathize deeply with the racism that amplifies poverty, and eventually to see the challenge in profoundly new ways.

adapted from Otto Scharmer

4 Types of Conversations

Generative Dialogue

- presencing, flow
- time: slowing down
- space: boundaries collapse
- listening from one's Future Self
- rule-generating

Reflexive Dialogue

- inquiry
- I can change my view
- empathic listening (from within the other self)
- other = you
- rule-reflecting

Talking Nice

- downloading
- polite, cautious
- listening = projecting
- rule-reenacting

Talking Tough

- debate, clash
- I am my point of view
- listening = reloading
- other = target
- rule-revealing

Otto Scharmer developed the Four Types of Conversation framework to describe four levels of conversation.

They range from relatively superficial conversations (Talking Nice) to deeper conversations in which people try to understand one another's perspective and make themselves open to developing new perspectives (Reflexive and Generative Dialogue).

While all four types of conversation are important when tackling such complex issues as racism and poverty, meaningful change and innovative responses typically emerge from deeper conversations.