

Reflections on my experience at Bettenburg with the Theory U process

- Anna Marie Bowers

In summarizing the two days at Schloss Bettenburg, I can describe the beautiful cool misty mornings, the view of the small German villages from the top of the hill, the feeling of staying in a 16th century castle, the noisy peacocks, and walking across the cobblestone courtyard to our meeting room.



I can describe the moments of deep personal connection with others who were there – the establishment of new working relationships and respect for each other as individuals with a passion for spreading Trager® throughout the world. We are all so much more than the roles we have within the organization. 25 individuals who are part of the Trager® organization from around the world shared their unique perspectives as part of the Theory U process; each story was an important piece of the total picture. The presence of the colleagues who were not with us was evident in every discussion. Our challenge as we return home will be to continue to model what we have experienced and learned.



The first day, we were asked: What wakes you up? Not what keeps you up at night, but what moves you from thought, values and beliefs to action? What holds you back? The voice of judgment keeps you from recognizing new data – the voice of cynicism keeps you from action – the voice of fear keeps you from trying something new. What are your hopes and fears for this meeting?

We discussed the levels of listening and the concepts of Theory U (C. Otto Scharmer). My notes were incomplete on this part, so when I returned home, I looked up additional information about levels of listening and this is what I found:

- (1) Downloading (Yeah, I know that already) – Reconfirming habitual judgments – everything that happens confirms what you already know,
- (2) Object-Focused or Factual (Ooooh look at that!) – Paying attention to facts and to new or disconfirming information – what differs from what you already know,
- (3) Empathic (Oh, yes, I know how you feel) – There is a shift from things, figures and facts into the story of a living being, a living system and a self, and

(4) Generative (I can't express what I experience in words. My whole being has slowed down. I feel more quiet and present and more my real self. I am connected to something larger than myself.) – Getting our self out of the way in order to open a space, a clearing, that allows for a different sense of the presence to manifest – at the end of the conversation you realize you are no longer the same person you were when you started the conversation. You have connected to the source of who you really are and to a sense of why you are here.

We watched the last minute of a short YouTube video of Placido Domingo and conductor Zubin Mehta – What did we notice about the conductor? The orchestra? The singer? There is a place where the note in the score is held for an indefinite time --- how do the singer and the conductor work together through this part of the performance? What does listening really mean?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jc_24Ya5Y4E . It's worth watching.



Using the materials provided, we built five versions of the current *Trager* organization including as many parts and relationships as possible – what does it currently look like and how does it work? We were instructed to build using our hands without planning ahead – working together to build on what each person is constructing. The materials: crayons, clay, stickers, wooden blocks, feathers, pipe-cleaners, long plastic strings, Legos, markers, colored paper, tissue paper.



When the time was up, we toured all 5 tables and each group explained their model. They are all different. We shared our insights about the *Trager* system (organization) – what have we learned from listening to each other? Are there any shared themes in these systems?

One shared theme was best expressed as “we feel stuck.” What does this feeling of being stuck feel like in our bodies? How would it feel in our bodies to be “unstuck?” How can we move physically from stuck to unstuck? How can we move with a partner and explore these feelings? How does it feel moving from “stuck” to “unstuck” when we are in a small group? What is needed to begin the movement? In our group, one person relaxed one arm, for just a moment, and a chain reaction of freer movement occurred.

After dinner, we returned to the meeting room to watch the 2004 Swedish movie “As It Is In Heaven,” directed by Kay Pollak. Our instructions: notice what happens in the community. In the morning we will be doing a journaling exercise about this topic of community as it relates to our own personal leadership within the *Trager* community, and what future is emerging. The movie is powerful, intense,

joyous, sad, frightening, violent, peaceful, and poignant. I know I was not the only one who cried the rest of the evening.



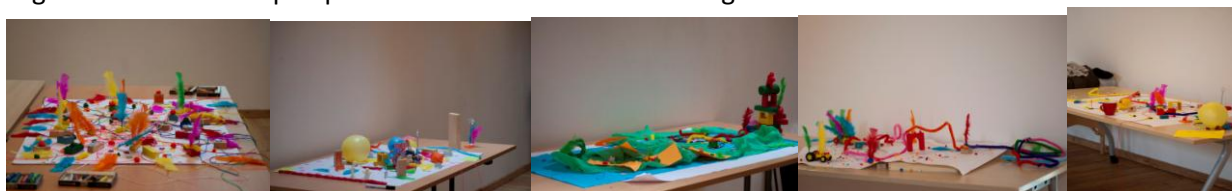
(these photos are from the movie)

The next morning there are 19 questions to journal. Balance and harmony – what would that feel like? What needs to be said? Can we listen to what needs to be said? Can we achieve harmony and balance? Where do we begin? What resources would we need? Who can we ask for help? The Swedish word for business translates into English as “nourishes life”. How can we nourish life? What would we need for that? What building blocks, activities, and functions would we need to nourish life with *Trager*? What qualities would be part of those building blocks? Writing our responses on large colorful post-it notes, one by one we shared our building blocks, placing them on the cleared, empty expanse of floor in the center of the circle.



Gradually patterns emerged, categories took shape, and we voted for the top five building blocks which gave us energy to begin the first steps towards a flourishing future for *Trager* in the world.

Respectfully dismantling the current *Trager* systems which we had constructed, and replacing the materials on the table; we used those same materials to build five versions of a future *Trager* organization from the perspective of each of the five building blocks.



We toured these five organizations (systems), and each group described their model. As we came back together in the larger group, it was clear some first steps or actions were needed in order to move forward. Someone suggested that this process is like when you decide to clean out the basement - first you have to move everything out of the basement, which means first you have a bigger mess. Next, you put back into the basement only those things you want there. Then, you will have to make decisions about the things that are left – to find a new place for them, give them away, or throw them in the trash.

Although we departed without delineating all of the details of the future, we bring back five building blocks, and a group of people who are working with each one (contact persons and descriptions of projects will be forthcoming). The groups that were formed to develop each building block will be sharing their initial steps, and may ask for help experimenting with new ideas, analyzing the results, and creating other prototypes. Prototyping is the first step in exploring the future by doing and experimenting, sometimes presenting a concept before it is even complete, and allowing feedback learning and adapting the idea as you go. “Fail often to succeed sooner” is the quote often used to describe prototyping.

The five building blocks are:

1. Find ways to bring Trager® into the modern world,
2. Develop a dynamic international website,
3. Have face to face meetings whenever possible,
4. Renew (refresh) the training track, and (I am in this group)
5. Get information about Trager® out into the world (Marketing).

I return with enthusiasm and inspiration as well as many questions as we move forward. What is the future that is trying to emerge for the *Trager* community? What will it look like and what will we all be doing? Can we take these familiar 5 concepts and try something new and unique? How will our work impact everyone else? What can we do to encourage the rest of our colleagues to support and nurture this fragile new process? How could it be if the working relationships were different for all of us? I don't have THE answers, AND, what I can do is practice every day – set aside a few minutes to hear my own voice – listen to the voices of colleagues as individuals and not as groups. I believe that it will take ALL of us, listening to each other, sharing, and paying attention to the changing needs of the world around us.

It reminds me of singing in a choir - it takes a little courage to find your own voice, and a lot of practice to balance your own voice with the voices of the others in a way that produces harmony. Conductor and choir move together through the music to achieve a harmony and balance that touches the audience in a way that resonates and invites them to participate in the experience.



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How could the *Trager* choir sound if you added your voice?