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# Activation methods for leadership in complex environments

Eskola, Anne, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Zoccoli, Marcella, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Korhonen, Ari, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

Hundal, Shabnamjit, JAMK University of Applied Sciences, Finland

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*Today's business environment is best described as VUCA. VUCA means volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment where business organizations not only encounter the aforesaid problems, but also find themselves bereft of planning, strategies, and tools to handle or solve them. ProCESS project will deliver a methodology to respond to changing needs in the reality of dealing with complexity in a VUCA environment. We describe the method developed in the project to encourage individual students to develop their identity as a leader and to understand leadership as a state of mind that anyone can enter via personal agency.*

## Introduction

The acronym VUCA underscores a stark reality that the rate of changes occurring in the modern-day business spectrum has been outpacing the capability of business organizations to absorb, adapt and reflect such changes. As a result, businesses, industries, and careers are being disrupted faster than ever before and it can be argued that no business organization, whether public or private, is immune to such flurry of changes.

Business leaders have been facing several challenges that are not only new, unique, and complex but they have also been grappling, first, to live in a new business ecosystem engulfed with acute information asymmetries, and second, to make rational decisions amidst unprecedented business challenges. Consequently, business leaders are facing enormous level of insecurity and stress. (Szameitat & Nestler, n.d.)

Traditional management research considers organizations employing sets of actions and mechanisms that are controllable and requiring hierarchical management (Morgan, 1996). Nonetheless, such kind of business management models can function well in the context of physical production (Uhl-Bien & McKelvey, 2007), but in today's VUCA environment they cannot work.

The complexity theory suggests that organizations tend to self-organize themselves to a state where they regulate themselves. Complex systems have emergent properties that cannot be reduced to the mere properties of their parts.

The behaviour of complex systems is unpredictable and uncontrollable, and it cannot be described in any complete manner. (Heylighen, 2009.) Systems begin as collections of individual actors who organize themselves and new structures and behaviours emerge as the actors both act and react to each other creating value. Solutions are emergent, they arise through the process and cannot be planned and predicted in advance. The emergent result is often more than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of individual actions. (Haffeld, 2012.)

Many authors (Morin, 2014; Boulton, Allen & Bowman, 2015) have raised the question of the management of complexity, agreeing that the apprehension of complex problems presupposes not remaining within a rational approach, but benefitting from other approaches such as art, religion, or philosophy. This assumes the mobilisation of various human capacities other than exclusively rational thought. However, few companies take these new approaches into account and solutions provided by are almost exclusively mere means of support in stress reduction and in helping an individual find balance, rather than real responses to dealing with complexity.

Scharmer (2007) points out that in the environment of massive disruptions, leaders are often unable to redirect the course of events in any significant and constructive way. Instead, via this institutional failure, they are collectively creating results that (almost) nobody wants: "The cause of our collective failure is that we are blind to the deeper dimension of leadership and transformational change. This "blind spot" exists not only in our collective leadership but also in our everyday social interactions."

Indeed, leadership has often been raised in the position of shorthand answer for extraordinary positive organizational performance in situations where ill-structured problems arise in complex environments, where causal structures are lacking and where unexplained variance occurs. Unfortunately, this is only an attempt to understand complex and ambiguous organizational events in terms of leadership. To investigate leadership more closely, a more social constructionist and follower-inclusive approach is needed instead of traditional leader-centric approach. (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).

Many authors (Antonacopoulou & Bento, 2018; O'Reilly, Leitch, Harrison & Lamprou, 2015; Ashford & DeRue, 2012) have raised the issue of leadership crisis connected with VUCA environment. Antonacopoulou and Bento (2018) say that "leadership practice is in danger of becoming void substance by not inviting and inspiring ways of responding to the VUCA conditions" and Antonacopoulou (2018) calls for addressing the VUCA conditions with a VUCA approach to learning.

Ashford and DeRue (2012) describe the origin of leadership talent crisis by positing that it is emerging despite organizations devoting considerable resources to leadership development because people in organizations wrongly assume that "leader" means someone who holds a supervisory position and title. Leadership means that someone is able to influence people and processes to accomplish a collective goal and this can happen by anyone despite the level of organization or supervisory role. Another origin of leadership talent crisis comes from the assumption that developing leadership belongs to the organization's responsibilities instead of individual's task.

Ashford and DeRue (2012) propose that if organizations are to prosper in VUCA conditions they need to enable people from all organizational levels to not only act as leaders but also to see themselves as leaders and be seen by others as leaders. Thus, leadership is a state of mind anyone can enter, which permits it to emerge at any levels of organization because the identity of leader is also socially constructed. They also suggest it is possible to take personal agency for developing the leadership skills proactively based on a person's own development and lived experiences. Leader identity is the first step, both a precursor and motivator of leadership development. To move individuals from passive recipients hoping to become developed to active learners of their own leadership development requires approaching experiences with a learning orientation instead of proving competence or avoiding failure.

ProCESS is an educational project bringing together four higher education institution partners with 192 student and five companies from Finland, France, Latvia and Romania. The higher education partners' goals are to ensure the employability of graduates and make the graduates more efficient in a complex working environment by helping them to become creative and innovative individuals who can take initiative, solve complex problems (or situations), and work collaboratively. This happens by developing an original and innovative method of dealing with complex, real-life problems offered by the four companies in the project. The research task of this study is to build a method to develop students' identity as a leader in complex business environment.

The method is tested by students when they solve the complex problems while being coached by academic and company coaches from four universities and four

companies respectively, and by a varying number of SESS (sensorial, emotional and spiritual skills) trainers, whose task is to evoke the sensorial, emotional and spiritual skills of students (future leaders). This methodology aims at responding to changing needs in the reality of dealing with complexity in a VUCA environment.

## Literature review

Complex problems of VUCA world are the opposite of simple problems that can be laborious but are always solvable. Complex problems involve many parties that have their own needs, values, and priorities. It is very hard to find a solution for complex problems because the problem changes every time it is tried to be solved, and there are no prior solutions that could be utilized when solving a new problem because problems are unique. It is also very hard to estimate the success of final solution. (Camillus, 2008.)

Organizations encounter complex problems usually in situations where they face continuous change or unforeseen challenges. This can happen anywhere: in strategic development, in product management, etc. (Camillus 2008, Christensen, 2009.) In complex environment, the parties lack common world view, common values or common ethics, and people are looking at the problem from different perspective and planning strategies (Geertz, 1973).

The reason lying behind the problems might be the fact that complex problems connected with the improvement of operations have traditionally been solved using thinking and techniques based on expertise and considered adequate at some point of time in the past (Raisio, 2010; Szameitat & Nestler, n.d.). This used to work for simple problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Camillus, 2008; Conklin, 2005) especially because leaders feel they are too busy to stop and reflect because of the hectic, competitive pace of global business (Szameitat & Nestler, n.d.). There is also a psychological aspect: human mind tends to perceive things that support prevailing conceptions, which, in turn, strengthens prior conceptions. When contradictory signals are omitted, organizations lean on procedures that have become outdated. (Cougar, 1996.)

### *Aesthetic leadership*

The mainstream paradigm emphasizes the logical, rational, explicit and linear nature of organizational practices such as management and leadership (Ropo, Parviainen & Koivunen, 2002). Hansen, Ropo and Sauer (2016) suggest that leadership approaches rooted in scientific realism take a rational and linear view that is too narrow to describe complex human experiences of leadership because an organization is not an intellectual abstraction only. If we want to look at things in an alternative way, aesthetics can offer a different viewpoint. Aesthetics means knowledge that is created from our

sensory experiences (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching) and that are lived in and through the human body. These experiences precede all other forms of knowledge and include a connection between thoughts and feelings.

An aesthetic approach recognizes that rational analysis and cognitive understandings of knowledge neglect important aspects of everyday organizational life. Even though reason and logic have often been contrasted with emotion and feeling they are both sources of knowledge and they generate meaning people act on. Thus, aesthetics refers to meanings people construct based on feelings about their experiences via senses (as opposed to meanings that could be deduced in the absence of experience, e.g., mathematics) the same way as art gives meaning through meanings other than the logical. In decision making situations, people use more than just rational judgement and in situations where rationality does not work, such as in complex environment, leadership becomes most crucial. (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2016.)

Aesthetic leadership is concerned with sensory knowledge and felt meaning associated with leadership phenomena. This way, it is very much connected with everyday life of organizations. Aesthetic meanings arise and emerge out of symbolic interaction and processes of social construction, and they involve subjective knowledge of feelings and emotions used to construct, represent, and interpret the felt meanings and sensory experiences of organizational life. People play a role in constructing reality and looking at organizations and leadership in an aesthetic way reveals the hidden and unrecognized ways of knowing in a holistic way. Inquiry into aesthetics necessarily requires direct experience. (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2016.)

Duke (1986) argues that leadership is about bringing meaning to relationships between individuals and organizations and aesthetic leadership focuses on the felt meaning, social influence processes and the emotions of leader–follower relationships. An aesthetic way of knowing through the senses brings both positive and negative feelings and emotions, but the focus is always on interaction.

## Theory U

Theory U responds to a world in crisis (Heller, 2019) and invites leaders to transform their thinking process from one based on isolated datasets, facts, and observations into a more holistic approach that is fundamentally intuitive (Szameitat & Nestler, n.d.). Theory U suggests that true leadership is about shifting from a personal, individual-centred, self-interest ego-systemic approach to a collective, group-centred, multi-stakeholder approach where society should get to “eco-system awareness”-driven forms of cooperation. This process is the journey of the U. (Scharmer, 2007; Trigger, Trends in Global Governance and Europe’s role, 2019.)

The model describes seven ways of attending to and

co-shaping the world and developing seven essential leadership capacities: 1) Downloading means repeating the same old patterns of thought so that “the world is frozen by our old mental habits and past experiences; nothing new enters our minds”. 2) Seeing or observing means that we suspend our habitual judgment, wake up with fresh eyes and to tolerate that nothing is happening. 3) Sensing means that our perceptions widen and deepen and “the boundary between observer and observed opens up.” 4) Presencing happens when we let go of the old patterns and assumptions and “the boundary between observer and observed collapses into a space for the future to emerge.” 5) Crystallizing is when “envisioning happens from the field of the future rather than from our ego. 6) Prototyping is exploring the future by doing and by improvising and by linking the intelligence of the head, heart, and hands. 7) Co-Evolving or performing means embodying the new through new practices, processes, and infrastructures. (Scharmer, 2007; Presencing Institute, 2022; McKinney, 2018.)

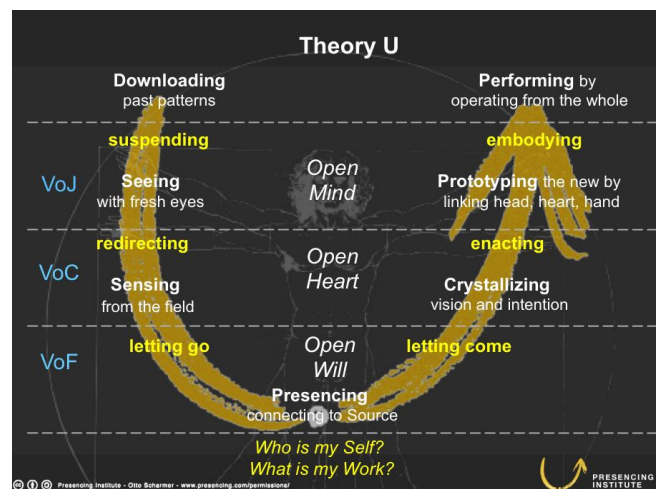


Figure 1. Theory U (Wikimedia Commons, n.d.)

The “U” is a graphic expression of the journey. The left-hand side of the picture describes the move downwards away from past prejudices and resistance of thought, emotion and will, closer to the outside world embodying the newly acquired capacities, finding common intent and sensing the best future possibilities. At the bottom of the U-shape there is the moment of presencing (i.e., sensing which means feeling the future possibility and presence which means the state of being in the present moment), which is the point between letting go all that is not essential and getting ready for the future to emerge through shared wisdom. This point describes the ability to overcome disruptions by “acting from the presence of what is wanting to emerge”. It is important to normalize not knowing the answers and emphasize the value of quiet reflection to allow ideas to emerge. On the way to the threshold of presencing, people must quiet down their Voices of

Judgment, Cynicism, and Fear. (Scharmer, 2007; Presencing Institute; Trigger, Trends in Global Governance and Europe's role, 2019.)

The right-hand side describes the move upwards where answers are found in co-operation with others. Co-creation is a tool to overcome crises, whether economic, social, cultural, ecological, spiritual or personal, and it is a process of identifying, prototyping and refining new forms of commitment and action or social reality creation. (Presencing Institute; Trigger, Trends in Global Governance and Europe's role, 2019; Scharmer, 2009.) Once a group goes through this process, individual members and the group begin to operate with a heightened level of energy and sense of future possibility and to function as an intentional vehicle for an emerging future (Presencing institute, n.d.).

The foundational capacity of the U is listening to others, oneself and what emerges from the collective in an open space in which others can contribute to the whole and suspend the voice of judgment. The preparation for the experience at the bottom of the U requires the tuning of three inner instruments: the open mind, open heart, and open will. This requires active sensing together as a group. When an open heart allows to see a situation, the open will enables to sense what is wanting to emerge. Moving down the left side of the U requires the group to open up and deal with the resistance of thought, emotion, and will. Moving up the right side requires the integration of thinking, feeling and will in the context of practical applications and learning by doing. (Presencing institute, n.d.).

Due to its novelty and developing stage, there have not been much critical investigation of Theory U's grounding. However, Heller (2019) posits that the theory is falling short of adequately capturing real world complexity, nor does it match academic standards because of its inconsistencies. Despite these deficiencies, Scharmer deserves the merit of being the first researcher on organizational leadership who has embraced non-conventional schools of thought (such as emotional intelligence, transdisciplinarity and wide intellectual range), and gone far beyond the predominant personality, relationship or behavioral based approaches which govern the mainstream literature on leadership theories. Therefore, Theory U has potential to be transformed into a useful approach to new ways of leadership. (Heller, 2019.)

## Data and method

Because aesthetic leadership is about sensory knowledge and felt meanings, this has influence on the methods that can be used if the richness of the phenomenon is to be captured. Qualitative research has made a positive impact in understanding about how leaders manage meaning (Bryman, 2004) and observation is often the

recommended method for aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic inquiry attempts to capture the felt meaning of various events and interactions. This inquiry requires an aesthetic sensitivity in making observations. In exploring aesthetic aspects, researchers would ask about emotions rather than logics that surround organizational decisions. Aesthetic leadership research calls for insight into the experience through ethnographic interviews regarding generative experiences, or direct participation in the aesthetic experiences and the emergent sensemaking that flows from them. (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer, 2016.) We have chosen the latter for this educational research project.

Learning in organisations by individuals and communities can take place in many ways and this calls for fostering simultaneously individual and collective learning, that mobilizes collective energy to be more fully engaged (Antonacopoulou, 2018). Activating aesthetic leadership in individuals will require activation of the sensory faculties, the aesthetic judgment, and the cognitive capacities of both the researcher and the participants (Hansen, Ropo & Sauer 2016). Work life is an emotional experience and there is a complex relationship between emotions and learning. Extreme emotions, positive or negative, interfere learning and thus individuals who can regulate their emotions are generally more effective at learning from experience. This needs a high level of self-awareness and is vital in leadership skills development. (Ashford and DeRue, 2012.)

Classroom may be considered as a practical lab of complexity because a classroom is a complex system composed of interconnected parts that as a whole exhibit one or more properties not obvious from the properties of the individual parts. A complex system's main feature is emergence, the arising of novel structures, patterns, and properties during the process of self-organization. Exercising leadership can be defined as helping a group to face its real problems to find efficient and sustainable solutions in a spirit of progress for society by 1) facing a complex problem with no clear given solution, handled by a complex system (the classroom), 2) reaching a solution progressively emerging from interaction, 3) sticking to the purpose and not avoiding it, 4) exploring the problem as a team trying to use the different skills of each participant letting practical solutions emerge, 5) learning about each member's own way to bring value to a group, 6) learning how a human system functions, and 6) experiencing self-reflection aimed at action. (Dagot, Delle-Vedove, Roullet, Pasquet, Gillet & Pareau, 2009.)

Facilitators need to create a solid and firm environment, because emergence takes place only if students feel comfortable and reassured. The paradox is that flexibility within the class requires a clear authority displayed by the teaching body, especially in terms of clear rules within the classroom, clarity of the general outline of the class and pedagogic objectives, and team spirit and

partnership demonstrated by the teaching body. (Dagot, Delle-Vedove, Roullet, Pasquet, Gillet & Pareau, 2009.)

In ProCESS project, Theory U method was adapted for a series of future search-oriented workshops where students were engaged in coaching circles with a facilitated learning and innovation process around the complex problem solving. Theory U is both a change framework and a set of methodologies. The U process is a tool for enabling leaders to learn not only from past experience but from the emerging future. It allows to operate pursuing emerging possibilities rather than reflecting on and reacting to past experiences (Scharmer, 2009). Theory U attempts to offer a practical method of learning that reveals the organization's blind spots by directing the attention to the interior condition and internal forces that underlie social change.

Theory U has been criticized because of its limitations such as being vague and not sufficiently grounded in practice, which makes it difficult to implement in unstructured contexts, but easy to implement for well-structured organizations. (Trigger, Trends in Global Governance and Europe's role, 2019.) Despite the criticism,

the ProCESS project aims at grounding the theory in practice with a set of six facilitated workshops developed during the study that will be described next.

## Testing the workshops in practice

In ProCESS project, when developing the method, we guided the working groups in two directions: knowledge and wisdom (experience) through different approaches and techniques of the arts (e.g., artistic, creative, and contemplative disciplines). With the aim of facilitating the students' approach to the work and the profound meaning behind it, the journey was inspired by Theory U and followed the metaphor of the three different topical-typical moments: the exposition, the development, and the recapitulation (Table 1). This flow framed the rhythm of the learning-development process and created a coherent narrative of workshops with the aim of the flourishing in the individual (private) and the collective (public) dimensions.

Table 1 The six workshops of “Complexity Sonaatti” at JAMK University of Applied Sciences

Exposition	Development				Recapitulation
1 <sup>st</sup> workshop	2 <sup>nd</sup> workshop	3 <sup>rd</sup> workshop	4 <sup>th</sup> workshop	5 <sup>th</sup> workshop	6 <sup>th</sup> workshop
Prelude and practice: Introduction to the journey and the SES Skills	Music: Associative practices, music therapeutic approach, Awareness, sensing, self-reflection	Theater: Case studies acting lab, dramaturgical and interactive perspectives  To see with fresh eyes and sensing from the field	Contemplative practices: Ancient Science of Yoga  Connecting to the source	Music: Empathy techniques, Embodying and presencing	Visual narrative gallery: Performing new strategies
Exploring the creative tools	Associative and projective method	Elements of Method Acting, Commedia dell' Arte, and Social Presencing Theater, letting go to let come	Upa-Yoga and Meditation practices, letting come, wisdom (experience) and clarity of profound realization	Associative and projective method, prototyping the new, co-evolving new practices	Application of sensorial skills, group acting with an enhanced level

Dedication, Commitment, Respect and Responsibility were required as an attitude to the workshops journey. The following instructions were given to be mastered:

1) We request you to prepare yourself to join the workshop in a conducive way and that you participate with appropriate circumstances and behaviour (not eating, appropriate dress, etc.).

2) During the workshops, laptop and mobile should be switch off or in silent mode but you can take notes during the briefing and debriefing.

3) During the workshops, there will be short break moments.

4) During the workshop, no videos but pictures are

allowed.

5) The workshop duration is four hours and this consists of 15-45 minutes Welcoming and Preparation, 2 hours and 30 minutes or three hours Active Practice, 15-45 minutes Nurturing moment, Leave-taking, Feedback and General Information.

6) Dress code and Equipment: Comfortable and suitable according to the practices.

The idea of introductory Workshop 1 (Exposition) was to introduce the journey and the trainers, to know the students, to make them know each other, to explain the attitude, rules and ethical codes to the workshop, and to engage them with some specific activities starting from the

awareness of their senses and the human intelligences. We agreed to work on two levels: the journey itself (the outcome of the 6 workshops for the cases solution, i.e., collective work) and the personal journey (developing students' attitude and talents through the execution-creations meant to produce and embody their skills as leaders, i.e., individual work).

### ***Workshop 1***

The first workshop presented the theoretical framework and the contents, practices, design, values and principles of all six workshops and it also contained direction for the off-stage, self-generated work such as practicing, reviewing material and self-reflective journaling. In addition, the first workshop included some active practices, embodiment exercises, musical momentum and relaxation followed by, at the end of the session, conclusive nurturing moment with leave-taking and time for feedback.

### ***Workshop 2***

The objective of Workshop 2 (the beginning of the Development moment) was to encounter each other in a deep way by sharing some music excerpts from the history of a person, which instantly raises up images and deep emotions which are shared with the others. We learned how convenient way it can be to get to know someone in a very short time. We also demonstrated how we can regulate the general atmosphere by using certain kind of music with the objective to shortly explore the overall effects of the music listening and study how it affects individually and in a group. Indeed, music listening practice can be relaxing, stimulating or mood regulating.

### ***Workshop 3***

In Workshop 3 (Development), through the EspressoSkillsLab©MZ21 design, a combination of elements and exercises selected among Method Acting, Commedia dell'Arte, and Social Presencing Theater, were used and the practices included: relaxation, concentration, voice production, movement, memory, space embodiment and Total Awareness©. These activities and dynamics offered the students the possibility to create a language useful to explore, through the lens of senses, the complexities and paradoxes of life, and apply it, in this context, to their dedicated case study. The objective of the workshop was to contribute to the creation a dedicated space of action, development of self and social awareness, connection and understanding of circumstances and paradoxes, reading behind the lines of the case, and imagining and creating solutions.

### ***Workshop 4***

The objectives of Workshop 4 (Development) were to activate the body's energy, sensorial capabilities and dispel

inertia through the UPA-Yoga exercises, to explore new possibilities with the help of meditation as a quality of life and not an act, to expand the meaning of being by becoming a meditative being, and to facilitate emerging meaning by applying meditation to our situation, which is the case study.

### ***Workshop 5***

The main objective of Workshop 5 (Development) was to conceive how we can modulate the mood and emotion of a person or a group with the music playing. The target was to demonstrate how the technique of empathy is a powerful tool for understanding and how it can sensitize the processes between people. Demonstrations by playing an instrument clarified this event and pointed out how we can use the technique of empathy in different levels: cursory level, middle level and deeper level, and that playing an instrument together does not require any special playing skills, just a sensitive mind and empathy skills with fast reactions.

### ***Workshop 6***

Workshop 6 (Recapitulation) aimed at sharing the knowledge and wisdom (experience) with the help of students' Visual Narrative Gallery of their artworks, artistic creations and creative discussion followed by nurturing moment, leave-taking, and time for final feedback. The workshop was ended by conclusions, thanking moment and celebration.

## **Findings**

The 16 participants invited and encouraged to develop their identity as a leader in complex environments experienced the first edition-six workshops of the "Complexity Sonaatti" at ProCESS project in presence during Fall 2021. At that time national and regional recommendations on the use of masks were still active and the memory of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic happened in the year 2020 and Spring 2021, when instead educational activities were online, still vivid. The commitment and dedication of the students during the U journey workshops were good even if consistency in the students' attendance showed the possibility for improvement maybe because of the sensitive situation.

Workshop 1, the prelude to the Theory U, was dedicated to the preparation of the students to the practice and to the leadership journey.

The participants worked in Workshop 2 with their emotions and attitudes by sharing musical experiences. They explored their aesthetic aspects and paid attention and learned from each other's experiences. The participants learned to understand the outside world more using their emotions rather than logics that conducted the

organizational decisions. This is important to comprehend because the work life is for its part an emotional experience and there is a complex relationship between emotions and learning. This workshop referred into self-reflection and experiencing each other's picture of the world. It guided the participants to understand the meaning of sensing and observing. They understood that regulation and understanding their emotions makes them more effective and they are more able to learn from experiences.

As regards Workshop 3, Method Acting relaxation exercises, the use of some of the extravagant masks of the *Commedia dell'Arte* (i.e., Arlecchino, Colombina, Pantalone and Dottore), along with the final dancing moments opened new creative dimensions to students. They experienced the letting go approach of Theory U, the release of old habits and meaningless thinking processes, and prepared the ground for individual and collective acknowledgment of the unknown potential of their existing hidden talent useful for co-creative interpretations of the case study of reference. This renewed creative dimension nurtured their desire for more knowledge, epistemic curiosity, and motivated them to learn new ideas, how to eliminate information gaps, and resolve intellectual problems with the use of sensations, perceptions, and emotions. Between workshop 3 and workshop 4, a pause of a couple of weeks' time was given to students to connect with themselves, reflect and prepare to experience the second half of the U journey.

An introduction to the Ancient Science of Yoga was offered to the students during Workshop 4. The aim was to facilitate their attitude to the perception of clarity of the professional purpose connected to their individual source according to Theory U design. They practiced some of the practices selected by the SESS Trainer/Yoga Veera Teacher in charge among those of Isha Foundation. Isha Upa-Yoga practices (directional arm movements and neck practices) were demonstrated by an Isha Hatha Yoga teacher via videos with background instructions; they were combined with one Chit Shakti (Power to Create) video-guided meditation by Sadhguru. The final part of the session was dedicated to sharing moments of self-reflection where the participants drove the individual experience toward collective connectedness and supported their teamwork for case resolutions.

In Workshop 5 the participants learned to use their empathy skills and capacities. This practice was conducted by using music as a tool in dialogue. The foundational capacity of the Theory U is listening to others. By using their empathy skills, the participants learned to find the answers by listening and working with each other in co-operation. Empathy technique practice assisted to sense more deeply the processes between the observer and the observed. It is a way to tune the mental instrument to confront the complex working life problems in different levels. There is an active operational part in the practice

followed by the self-reflection momentum. New prototypes of ideas are then tested again with a reflectional part. The empathy technique practice requires a solid and firm environment where the participants feel comfortable and safe to work with.

In Workshop 6, the "Grand Finale" of the journey, the performance moment of Theory U, the students performed and externalized inner images, emotional processes, and thoughts through the artistic creations they prepared for the day as part of their work-practice of envisioning, crystallizing and embodying the whole experience of processing complexity in business environments through the arts and becoming aware of its salience in their leadership identity development.

## Conclusions

Theory U is based on insights from the latest scientific development such as complexity theory. Scharmer (2017) has combined well-known and unconventional ideas in Theory U, which is about change and about being able to learn from the future as it emerges. Usually when facing changes, people tend to use previous experience to project the future. However, the future needs new solutions and a new approach. That is, we learn from the past in situations where "learning by sensing and actualizing emerging future possibilities" would be more effective.

Scharmer (2007) posits that we need a new way of seeing, learning, and doing and that the primary job of leadership is to help people discover the power of seeing and seeing together: "These times call for a new consciousness and a new collective leadership capacity to meet these challenges in a more conscious, intentional, and strategic way." Theory U is a way of making a system (or an individual) sense and see itself. For Scharmer, the quality of results achieved by any system is a function of the quality of awareness that people in these systems operate from.

Theory U is not a structure where all existing work must fit in, but it opens possibilities to explore how to help working groups to achieve their targets and find common ground for their working even if it is not always possible to find a perfect solution or total agreement on a complex problem. Theory U offers a methodology to help align hearts, minds, and actions toward common goals, and to help build enthusiasm and momentum for the future.

ProCESS project has delivered a methodology based on the utilization of Theory U to respond to the needs of organizations facing complex problems in a VUCA world. As a result, we managed to encourage students to develop their identity as a leader and to help them enter to the state of mind that permits them to exhibit leadership at any level of organization, bearing in mind that the identity of leader is not a position or title but a socially constructed phenomenon.

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