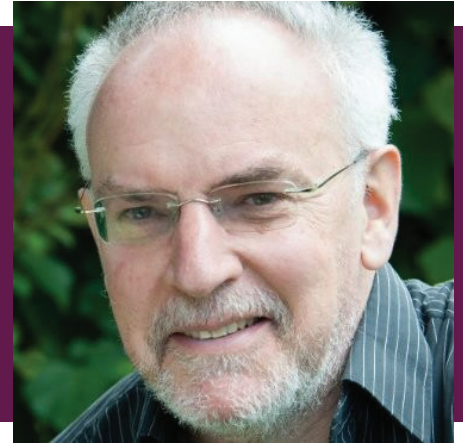


Leading From the Future

A White Paper from Mobius Transformational Faculty Member, Robin Alfred

At the 2022 Next Practice Institute Annual Gathering, Robin joins the faculty to lead a week-long track.



To say that these are challenging, interesting, unprecedented times is more than a cliché. We are living through unparalleled degrees of uncertainty. Although, in the words of Thomas Friedman, writer for the *New York Times*, it is not so much that the coronavirus is a black swan (an unusual event compelling attention) or even a white elephant (something we may find hard to address directly) but more one of a herd of stampeding black elephants that we have ignored for too long: the climate emergency, increasing inequality of wealth around the globe, ocean acidification, loss of biodiversity, rogue states, international terrorism, the plight of refugees, civil wars, the rise of nationalism and more.

In light of all these phenomena, which render us incapable of planning with any degree of certainty, we are being required to live and lead from a place of sensing, intuiting and responding (see Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations*), rather than predicting, planning and controlling. It is as if we are in a deep mist. Occasionally we can see a dim light beckoning us forward. Do we see clearly enough to know what our next step is? If we can take just the one step, the next will then become clear.

There are many ways to language what we are being called to do: move from the masculine planning paradigm to the more emergent feminine; transition

from the solar, hero-centered age to the lunar, collective age; move from the Piscean to the Aquarian age (see Laurence Hillman); journey through Otto Scharmer's Theory U, shift from planning to emergence, and many more. What they have in common is the need to

sensitize ourselves, both individually and collectively, and to create the spaciousness for real innovation, real freshness and real creativity to emerge. Contemporary mystic, Thomas Huebl, talks about creating the conditions where we can 'listen to the whispers of the future.' The future is not so much a point towards which we walk but more like a voice that is quietly and constantly calling us if we can but create the inner stillness and spaciousness with which to listen, and then summon up the courage to act on what we hear.

So, what are the conditions and practices that can support the creation of such a sensitivity?

Conditions for spaciousness

I want to invite you to remember the best idea that you ever had. What was happening within and around you as that idea landed in you? Perhaps it was a time when a new project, a new insight, a new home called to you. Perhaps it was when you decided to marry and had a deep sense of inner knowing that this is your partner.

START CLOSE IN,
DON'T TAKE THE SECOND
STEP
OR THE THIRD,
START WITH THE FIRST
THING
CLOSE IN,
THE STEP
YOU DON'T WANT TO TAKE.

From 'Start Close In'
by Mobius Associate Fellow
David Whyte

When I ask this question in workshops, the answers usually involve some kind of inner spaciousness. Maybe you are taking a shower, maybe you are walking in the woods, maybe you are meditating, gardening, doodling, journaling – something outside the usual busyness appears to help create the conditions, the inner spaciousness, in which the new can arrive.

This inner spaciousness has two dimensions to it. One is simply doing something or being somewhere unfamiliar which creates new contours in our inner landscape in which new **insights** can nestle. The other is a spaciousness which allows **digestion** of our previous experience. If we are full, busy, running from one thing to another, there is no space to digest and thus to create the emptiness into which the new can arrive. It is as if we are literally so full we cannot receive any more! If our glass is full of water we cannot simultaneously fill it with champagne. We need to empty something out first.

The role of urgency and pressure

If we need spaciousness to both digest our daily experience and to create the emptiness into which the new can arise, does this always have to mean slowing down, or can time pressure and a sense of urgency also fuel processes of innovation? What is the balance between allowing things to emerge and engaging our will to act? Two diagrams support the next step in our inquiry (see page 65).

Diagram 1 shows urgency in our outer context leading to a degree of inner focus. Time pressure, for example where we have to arrive at a new solution to an engineering problem within 12 hours, might well create a sense of focus that supports our creativity.

Diagram 2 suggests that an inner spaciousness that supports a sense of inner expansion can create the conditions in which we are more likely to be able to support and facilitate emergence.

It's important to also note that, for some people, the same time pressure might instead lead to a contraction in our nervous system, a tightness, which inhibits the flow of innovation — see **Diagram 3**.

The question then arises as to why some people might experience time pressure as helpful and focusing while others experience it as leading to a contraction in their nervous system which makes it less likely that they will innovate.

In 'Creativity Under the Gun' (HBR, 2002) Amabile, Hadley and Kramer suggest that there are four mindsets at play:

Creative thinking is *unlikely* when people feel as if they are on **Autopilot**, receiving little encouragement from management to be creative, engaging in less collaborative work overall, and feeling little time pressure. Equally, experiencing a highly fragmented workday with many activities and high time pressure, without a sense that the work they are doing is important, can create a **Treadmill** experience and, again, low levels of creativity.

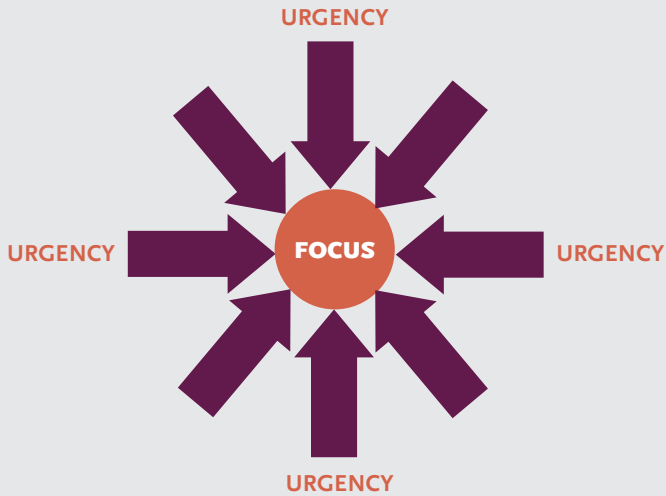
In contrast, creative thinking is *more likely* when people feel as if they are on an **Expedition**, and able to show creative thinking that is oriented towards generating or exploring ideas and identifying problems. On a highly time-pressured **Mission**, people focus on one activity for a significant part of the day and are left undisturbed or even protected from management.

This research is helpful but also limited. It locates the key determinants in the external environment and, in particular, whether people are allowed to focus on their work, and whether a sense of meaningful time pressure is being conveyed.

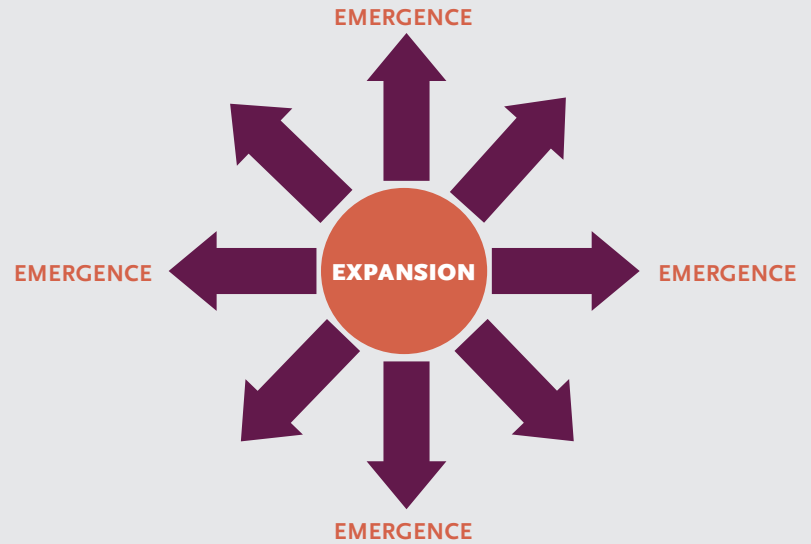
While external constraints clearly are impactful, I would like to suggest that how we respond to these constraints is also a product of our inner conditioning. Having one hour to complete a complex task, even with unsupportive management and in a chaotic workplace, does not, in and of itself, constitute pressure. The pressure is, in the end, our own creation. It will be composed of many inner experiences including our own histories, culture, previous experience of similar tasks and more. If, for example, we have grown up in a culture where time feels more relaxed and elastic, we may notice the requirement to complete the task within an hour and feel calm about whether or not we do that. If we have grown up in a culture where we are rewarded for achieving optimal productivity within a given time frame, we are likely to approach such a task with a different degree of inner spaciousness. If we have experienced abuse and trauma in our past we are likely to carry fear and contraction in our nervous systems which make it harder to relax and feel calm. These are just a few examples of how our inner state, and our inner conditioning, are likely to affect how creative we are under time pressure.

DIAGRAM 1

Urgency leading to focus

**DIAGRAM 2**

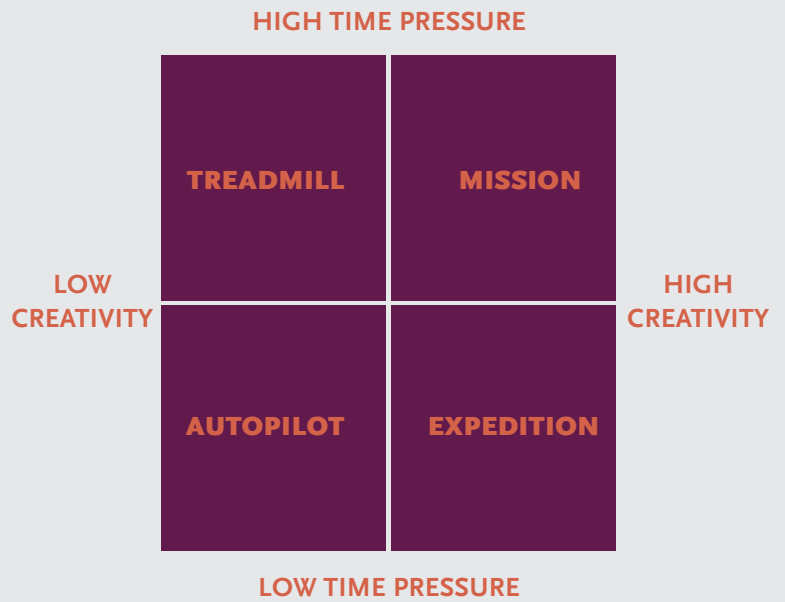
Inner spaciousness supporting expansion and emergence

**DIAGRAM 3**

Urgency with high pressure creating a lower chance of emergence

**DIAGRAM 4**

Four mindsets at play



(Amabile, Hadley and Kramer, 2002)

We might summarize this as: **Practicing inner spaciousness, whatever the external circumstance, will support our capacity to perform and to innovate.**

We might also note, that while inner expansion and inner spaciousness *can* create the right conditions for allowing new things to emerge, they can also lead to our energy becoming diffuse and ineffective unless harnessed to a clear *intention* and a sense of agency.

Intention is a catalyzing power

The clearer and stronger the intention, the more magnetic the field it creates. Intention is like a pebble dropped into a still pond. When we drop the pebble smoothly and from a great height it creates large ripples. Similarly, when we announce, to ourselves or to others, a clear intention, people and resources are more likely to be drawn to support the realization of that intention. **A clear intention catalyzes a field of resonance in which projects and plans can be realized.** A strong inner intention has a similar energetic quality to a commitment. WH Murray, leader of the Scottish Himalayan Expedition in 1951 wrote:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

It starts to become clear, then, that we need to create a “sweet spot” where there is sufficient inner spaciousness – to meet whatever time requirements, to allow us to listen to the whisper of the future and for innovation to arise.

Listening through imagination, intuition and inspiration

But what is this “whisper of the future” and how do we recognize it? It may be helpful to distinguish the natures of imagination, intuition and inspiration. The reason for this is to draw a distinction between where we are re-packaging ideas from the past and calling it ‘the future’,

and where we are really accessing something new and drawing in something fresh, which can, in Thomas Huebl’s phrase, “expand the gameboard of humanity.”

When we conjure up our **imagination** we are often using thought processes, concepts and ideas that are already known to us, but re-formulating them and reconfiguring them in a way that *feels* new. It is not actually drawing in new energy or insight, but it can feel as if the presenting idea or image is fresh and new.

Intuition, on the other hand, gives us access to information that is already in the field of consciousness, but not so apparent to us because we are more focused on our immediate senses – sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. When we access our intuition, we are not actually experiencing anything new, but more *refining our sensitivity* so that we can become aware of more subtle parts of our energy fields that have always been present, but that we are usually too fast or insensitive to notice.

In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, we see how Caesar ignores the warning of the soothsayer: “Beware the Ides of March” and goes ahead with his plan to enter the Senate and start a bid for power. Metaphorically we might equate the soothsayer with our intuition. How often do we have a nagging doubt, an intuitive hunch, that we ignore because we already have a plan of action that we are committed to?

Inspiration, in contrast, involves the practice of opening to the mystery of creation, some would call it God or the Divine, and to realms that are more closely connected to our soul – allowing something really new and fresh, something from beyond our usual habit of *thinking*, to arrive in us. For thousands of years the top of the head, or what is sometimes known as the crown chakra, is often described as the place where this inspiration arrives. The anointment of a new monarch; the blessing of a child when a priest or rabbi gently touches the fontanelle of the baby; the wearing of a crown where the points serve as lightning rods to attract this inspiration, are just a few of the many symbolic representations of this practice. One contemporary practice we can engage in is to meditate and allow our crown chakra, the highest point of our head, to open, inviting in new insights and inspiration. See **Diagram 5** overleaf for a simple graphic representation of this.

What these practices – accessing intuition, cultivating our imagination, and drawing in inspiration – have in common is that each is enhanced by the practice of presence.

Presence enhances listening to the future

Presence lies at the core of our life. It is the place of stillness, expansion, sensing, deep feeling. It is both empty and full at the same time. As Thomas Huebl says:

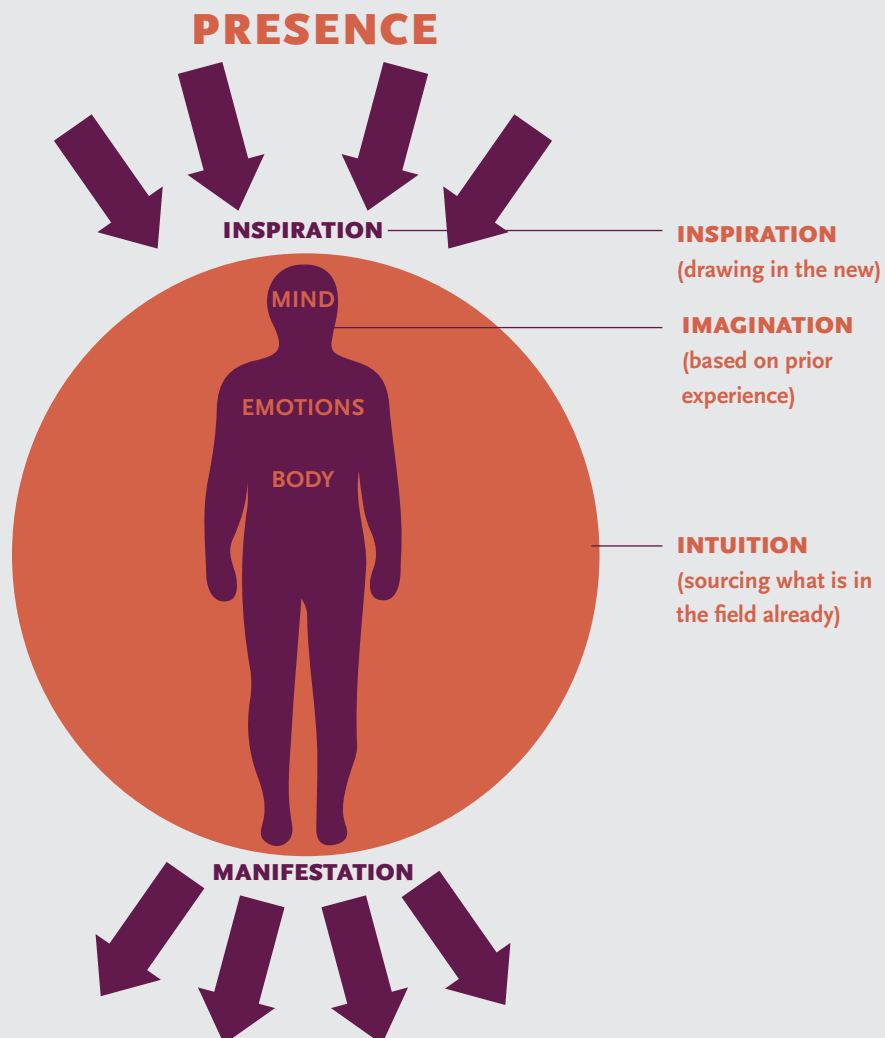
The empty space is not empty-empty. It's full-empty, which means it is super-intelligent. By listening to stillness, there are many, many inspirations, innovations, insights, understandings, a different learning, that arise. Not the

learning through feeding more form, the learning through emptying. And they are both important. It's important that we learn about form and it's important that we learn through emptiness. Why? Because it keeps the mind open, it keeps the mind creative. It says, 'This is how we look at life right now and this is all we learned about life, and we're open to it being a relative perspective, that there's more to it.'

Diagram 5 attempts to show this. Once we receive real inspiration, the call of the future, we want to allow it to land fully in our physical body so we become aware of how it feels physically within us. We want to allow it to land in our emotional body so we

DIAGRAM 5 Manifesting Inspiration

Derived from the teachings of Mobius Master Transformational Faculty Member, Thomas Huebl



understand and feel how it touches us or moves us or maybe even frightens us. We want to allow it to land in our mind so we understand and can witness our thoughts in relationship to it. In these ways, inspiration becomes a fully embodied insight which can then, when woven with a horizontal network of relationships and alliances, manifest a new impulse in the world. When this happens, we will experience a sense of satisfaction. A sense of our purpose being manifested in life and in form. We will have a sense that we are making the contribution we are here to make. It doesn't matter what size the contribution is. What matters is that it is *your* contribution. Your unique offering. Your gift to the world.

I close with this touching and humbling reminder, from the poet Martha Postlewaite, who writes:

*Do not try to save
the whole world
or do anything grandiose.
Instead, create
a clearing
in the dense forest
of your life
and wait there
patiently,
until the song
that is your life
falls into your own cut hands and you
recognize and greet it.
Only then will you know how to give yourself
to this world
so worth of rescue.*

My proposition is that we need to create inner spaciousness, even in times of intensity and time pressure, in order to both digest our daily experiences and to open to the future. The future is not simply tomorrow – where we often merely recycle the past – but something fresh, new and creative. Differentiating between intuition, imagination and inspiration, and aware of the catalyzing power of intention, we can support the development of each of these capacities in us. Then we will be able to listen to the whisper of the future, which is always calling us, and act in accordance with the highest evolutionary movement of which we are aware. ■

“The future downloads itself through us.”

– THOMAS HUEBL

ROBIN ALFRED worked as a trainer, educator and social work manager for 15 years in London, before moving to Scotland in 1995 where he founded the Findhorn Consultancy Service and then later, Open Circle Consulting. He has extensive experience of leading and developing groups and individuals across all sectors – corporate, public, and third sector.

For more than 25 years, Robin has facilitated groups of all sizes, from 6 – 600, in all sectors. He was a registered facilitator for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and was part of the design and facilitation team for the 2013 UN Global Compact in New York. Robin is trained in a wide variety of approaches to personal and organizational development including: Appreciative Inquiry, the Frameworks for Change Coaching Process, Process Work, Spiral Dynamics and Tools for Corporate Transformation. His facilitation work draws on these processes as well as Open Space, World Café and other innovative processes to maximize the group's collective intelligence.

Robin's clients include BP, the National Health Service, ABN-AMRO Bank, RBS, Tasweeq Qatar, BAE Systems, UN, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, CDP, Weleda and the UK Cabinet Office. Robin also spent 15 years as an Associate with Olivier Mythodrama, working with Shakespearean stories and Jungian archetypal psychology to develop high level leadership in many of the world's major corporations.

Robin is a Senior Student of contemporary mystic, Thomas Huebl. He offers coaching and trainings in Trauma-informed Leadership and the Art of Facilitating Transformational Fields. He also serves as a Mobius Transformational Faculty Member and joins us in October 2022 to guide a week-long, highly experiential track on Leading from the Future.