



Where Intention meets Action

*Nourishing
the Social Soil*

“Leadership and change do not start with a strategy, it begins with a process of becoming aware.”

– Otto Scharmer



As we lean into 2026, we've been thinking about how we can best invite positive intention and action into our daily lives, to be and make the changes we believe in.

Unfortunately, it's an all-too-common human experience to feel powerless in the face of the overwhelming realities we confront. Especially the big-ticket issues: economic and social inequities, environmental concerns, and political divides. Many of us wonder, 'What's the point of trying to change anything? I'm just one tiny cog in the inexorable machine of life. What difference can I possibly make? I have no agency.'

But there is a powerful antidote and counter view to this hopelessness, which can also be a valuable leadership tool for leaders in large systems that intertwine with other large systems. Thought leader, Otto Scharmer, calls this alternative thinking "overcoming the illusion of insignificance."

Scharmer's work resonates with us because we agree with him that change does not lie exclusively in the hands of people who hold power and influence; rather, *change is many people doing small things*.

This notion is supported by Scharmer's lifetime of research into the nature of systems and has led him to believe that change can be affected by anyone through one simple movement – **a step into awareness**. It's with awareness that individuals are able to translate their desires and intentions for change into action and achievement.

And this necessary mind awakening occurs in the 'social soil' of social systems.



Tilling the Social Soil

After a lifetime of studying systems, Scharmer has learned that:

- You cannot change systems unless you change consciousness
- You can't transform consciousness unless you make a system see and sense itself
- You can't do any of these things unless you sense, embody, and co-shape the emerging future (i.e., be the change you want to see)

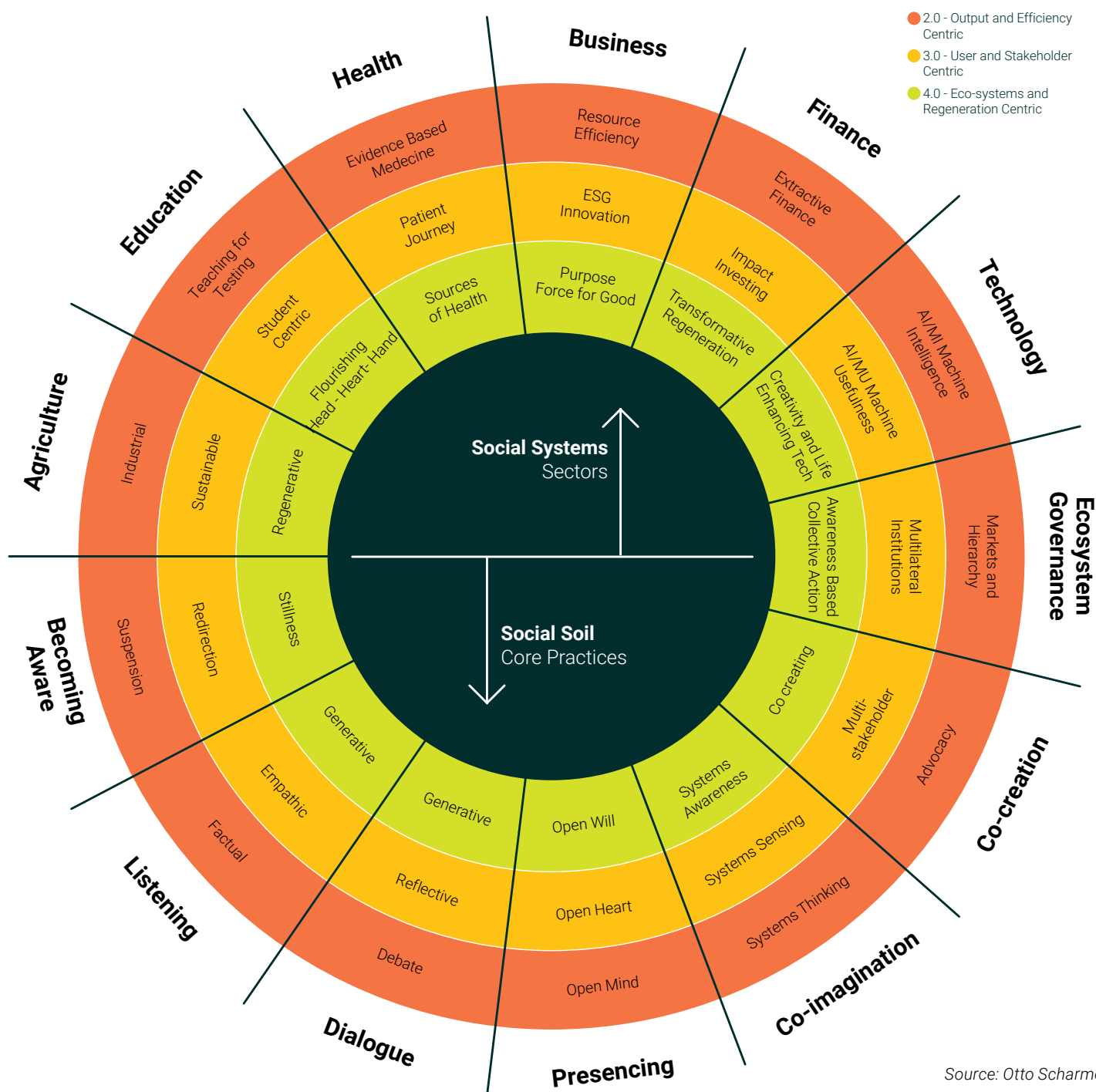
So *how* do we be and enact the change we want to see? Well, this brings us to what we also know about trees.

What we see above ground in our flourishing forests – our majestic Karri's, hardy Banksia's, and prolific Wattles – is a direct function of what is happening below ground in the soil. Some scientists (it is still a debate), call this the “wood wide web” – a system of fungi that exchange nutrients and information, by wrapping around or penetrating tree roots, to create a shared underground network of electrical and chemical signals. Using this system, trees make all sorts of decisions about their health and welfare. It is an elegant and effective communication net of sharing and caring that, left undisturbed, allows the system to thrive and adapt.

Scharmer applies this same natural systems-thinking to human social systems. In order for human social systems such as organisations to be healthy, fruitful, for them to grow and evolve, and stay resilient i.e., change, they rely on what is happening deep in their system's 'social soil.'

In this analogy, the social soil might comprise behaviours such as how we listen, co-imagine, the conversations we have, how and what we cocreate, and how we approach and give space for what might come.

What determines the health of those behaviours, and therefore the system, is *the quality of awareness of our social relationships* i.e., how we think, converse and act.



Source: Otto Scharmer

<https://youtu.be/sliD-pkOJF8?si=k4AixJ77DrMxNx1o>



Intention to Action

Scharmer is convinced that by doing the work in the social soil, bringing a greater awareness to our relationships, we are preparing for action.

Without it, he says, we are floundering in a 4.0 world using 2.0 methods and tools because our social soil is not being well tilled. Human health within systems is directly connected to the quality of the social soil, meaning the way we 'are' with each other.

Organisations across the world are intentionally seeking transformation away from operating systems designed for efficiency only and toward those that are people-centric and regeneration-centric. But there is a disconnect between the challenges coming at us, and the institutional methods and tools available for us to use.

Turning these intentions into action - by improving the health of our social soil - can be accomplished by everyone, every day, through habitual practices such as:



Holding space to focus your attention on what is essential and what is not



Holding space for conversations that create a wider coherence



Suspending judgment and empathising, to sense the system through the eyes of others, particularly those on the periphery.



Caring for your organisation's emotional baseline through frequent and repeated 'state of mind' check-ins.



Addressing trust breaks and tensions immediately and never avoiding real-time repair.



Bridge the "knowing-doing gap" by creating small-scale, "strategic microcosms" to practice and potentially fail.

The first and most important movement, though, is understanding that **enacting meaningful change is an ability we all hold** if we give our attention to becoming aware of what feeds a healthy social system.

It's that simple and that powerful.

Welcome to a new year full of all the possibilities that *you* can realise.



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