15.671 U-Lab: Transforming Business, Society, and Self

H1 Fall Term 2017, Thursdays, 5:30–9:00 PM, E62-233
Credits: 6 Units of Pass/Fail credit

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Maximum size: 60 participants
Open to all MBA, SF, MIT, and non-MIT students
No special requirements or application necessary

Main resource website for the class:
www.presencing.org
www.ottoscharmer.com

Required books:
For each session we will use specific chapters from these two books:


Theory U will be the primary textbook and focuses on the introduction to the U process and the U theory, including examples, drawings, and tools. Leading focuses on applying the U Theory to transforming economics and capitalism, and will be the complementing textbook.
U.Lab Intro Videos

Intro video 1 (3 min)

Intro video 2 (5 min)

Course Description

This interactive and experiential class is about leading profound innovation for pioneering a more sustainable economy and society. It focuses on the intertwined relationship of the following three questions:

1. Transformation of Capitalism: How can capitalism and society evolve from its current forms to an emerging future form that creates well-being for all (society 4.0)?
2. Multi-stakeholder innovation: What leadership does it take to create profound innovation at the scale of the whole ecosystem of stakeholders and partners?
3. Presencing: How can people access their authentic self — their highest future possibility — and “act from” that heightened state of awareness in the now?

The class facilitates a journey of profound self knowing and change and is organized around three main threads:

1. Personal reflection practices: Each class will introduce a specific reflection practice that will help participants to generate the leadership knowledge that matters most: self-knowledge (Who am I? What is my journey and Work?)

2. Relational practices: Each class will also focus on distinct relational practices that hone the leadership capacities of deep listening, precise observation, and dialogue.

3. Societal practices: The third thread deals with the current transformation of capitalism (“society 4.0”), sustainability, and our role in multi-sector leadership for profound system-wide innovation and change.

In order to “explore the future by doing,” each student will develop a prototype initiative that connects the three threads — the personal, relational, and systemic dimensions.
**Course Objectives**

This course is designed to create three types of knowledge:

- **Conceptual knowledge:** key concepts are sustainability and awareness-based leadership (Theory U)
- **Practical knowledge:** new tools and practices that help people become better listeners, communicators, and leaders
- **Self-knowledge:** the most important dimension of all great leadership — Who am I? What am I here for? What am I going to do with the rest of my life?

**Key Ideas**

- The keys in sense-making are precise observation, deep listening, and tuning in to emerging patterns.
- All profound innovation and creativity involves some deeper understanding and knowledge of your Self.
- Leaders who change the world need to investigate the two root questions of creativity: Who is my Self? What is my Work?
- In a rapidly changing world, creating the future involves rapid prototyping rather than long-term planning.
- To make social responsibility in business work, leaders need to develop the skill of facilitating collaboration among key actors from all three sectors: business, government, and civil society.
- You cannot solve today’s leadership problems with the same level of consciousness that created them (paraphrasing Einstein).
- Leaders must know themselves and their context, and understand the forces that transform society and self.
Schedule

**Class 1: Sept. 8, 5:30–9:00 PM**
Subject: Intro to Theory U
Practice: Effective Listening

HuffPost column 1: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-dark-money-and-shifting-consciousness_us_58ddbae7e4b04ba4a5e25274

HuffPost column 2: Seven Acupuncture Points
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/58e006cce4b03c2b30f6a6fa

Assignment 1 (due following week): Reflection paper (question), Empathy walk

Video Clip
Thich Naht Hanh on Compassionate Listening:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyUxYflkhzo

**Class 2: Sept. 15, 5:30–9:00 PM**
Subject: The current transformation of global capitalism;
Practice: Sculpting; the art and practice of deep listening
Assignment 2 (due following week): Reflection paper (on class discussion, case clinic 1)

Pre-reading:

Films:
*Inside Job* (2010). Directed by Charles Ferguson, narrated by Matt Damon
Trailer: http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/inside-job/

Video clips:
Wealth Inequality in America:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPKKQnijnsM

Video
Case Clinic Intro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTrLUql-qE
Case Clinic Instructions: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwjKROGi6H4
Articles:

Class 3: Sept. 22, 5:30–9:00 PM
Subject: Sensing and Embodying the Future
Practice: Social Presencing Theatre and Case Clinic
Assignment 3 (due following week): Reflection paper (on class and Case Clinic 2)

Pre-reading:


GNH Animation:  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Zqdqa4YNvI

Class 4: Sept. 29, 5:30–9:00 PM
Subject: Connecting to Source
Practice: Stepping into the Field of the Future
Assignment 4 (due following week): Reflection paper (on visioning practice and case clinic 3);


Video clips:
Steve Jobs, Stanford University Commencement Speech, 2005 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1R-jKKp3NA

Thomas Heatherwick, “Building the Seed Cathedral”, TED, May 2011 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXbhTHaMwTw; and Thomas Heatherwick and Stuart Wood discuss the work of Heatherwick Studio: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3EIRbxzo4Y

Class 5: Oct. 6, 5:30–9:00 PM
Subject: Prototyping ideas
Practice: Empathy walk@home
Assignment 5 (due following week): Empathy walk at home, Reflection paper (on case clinic 4; prototype);
Pre-reading:

Brene Brown: The Power of Vulnerability

**Class 6: Oct. 13, 5:30–9:00 PM**
Subject: Prototyping review
Practice: Cross-team coaching
Assignment 6 (due following week): Create prototype

Pre-reading:

**Class 7: Oct. 20, 5:30–9:00 PM**
Subject: Project presentation and crystallization of key learnings
Practice: Speaking with authentic leadership presence
Assignment 7 (due Oct 31): Final paper

**Course Evaluation**

This will be a pass/fail course. In order to pass, you must attend all class sessions. In addition, each student must
(a) participate in and facilitate results in a self-organized project,
(b) participate in weekly peer coaching sessions,
(c) write weekly reflection report (one page), and a final reflection paper on some key lessons that have emerged from the U-Lab journey.

Students who sit in on part of the class, or who miss days or parts of days, will not receive credit.

**Course Application and Enrollment**
The course is limited to 60 participants. If you confirm your participation and do not attend class, you will have prevented another student from participating. If you cannot fulfill this professional commitment, give immediate notice of cancellation.
**Student Experiences:**

"For me Otto’s class has been one of the most memorable and enjoyable classes at MIT. It’s hard to really categorize the material that Otto covers; perhaps one part inward reflection, one part self-discovery, and one part strategic planning for the future. At the heart of the material are the lessons from Theory U, which outline progressive stages of self-exploration and personal growth, enabling future leaders to delve into their deepest sources of inspiration and vision, connect to the authentic self, paint a vision for a best future possibility, then strive to realize it! The class is both humbling and inspiring, uplifting and reflective."
--Yusuf Bashir, Sloan Fellows Program, Class of 2011

“How do I live in the possibilities of the moment, engage in deeper conversations, build meaningful relationships and engaged communities and organizations? Otto’s thoughtful and creative approach in enabling you to realize your purpose and find your inner voice is fascinating. Ultimately to create effective organizations and dynamic teams, we need to first begin with ourselves. What does it mean to thrive and to progress in the context of an individual, family, organization, and community? The course makes you challenge yourself, reflect on your values and priorities, and hence be intentional in defining your strategy and paving the way forward.”
--Abide Sadaffe, Mid-Career Program, Harvard Kennedy School, Class of 2011

"Otto’s course has been the most formative one for me, because at first, I was actually skeptical, for example Otto’s idea on Business 3.0, I initially thought it was a nice idea, but highly improbable. Using the opportunity to develop a prototype for change, several of my Sloan Fellow colleagues brainstormed on how to fortify our community post graduation, and ultimately, to develop our class ethos and therefore, with Otto’s assistance, we created a mini-course, titled “Legacy & Leadership” to expose our entire Sloan Fellows community to Theory U. As a result, we have set up four sessions for our classmates who are already overloaded with classes, but for the single weekly two hour class, we have had some great turnout. Specifically, we developed guiding questions that were tailored to our community, to foster a dialogue that goes into developing a framework upon which we an build a sustainable supportive alumni network. Ultimately, this effort has been successful about using Theory U to capture the value of our network, and, most importantly, we feel it will create a sustainable alumni community well beyond graduation."
Program in Innovation and Global Leadership  
“My original goal in attending the class was to fulfill Sloan’s leadership requirement. In hindsight, I found one of the most important things that led me to business school in the first place: something closer to my truer self. The turning point for me was the in-class visioning exercise. I had heard and read a lot about the power of envisioning things in the future—people use it often in sports, for example—but I personally never thought about applying it to life in general. The comment that most successful leaders meditate in their own way lent credibility to the exercise, so I gave it a sincere try in the classroom. It made me feel great. I realized that if I could feel that great just by ‘meditating’ for a few moments in a classroom, establishing a routine to re-center myself on a more regular basis could be really powerful.

I think that my experiences in and outside of the lab that I take forward will make me a better person, a better husband, a better provider, and down the road, a better father. I think those are amongst the most important leadership roles in life.”

--Michael W. Holmes, MBA Class of 2005