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Pioneers in a Time of Radical Social Change

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Alejandro Salazar, in his book, *The Emergent Strategy*, quotes Arthur Schopenhauer.

All truth passes through three stages:

First, it is ridiculed.

Second, it is violently opposed.

Third, it is accepted as self-evident.

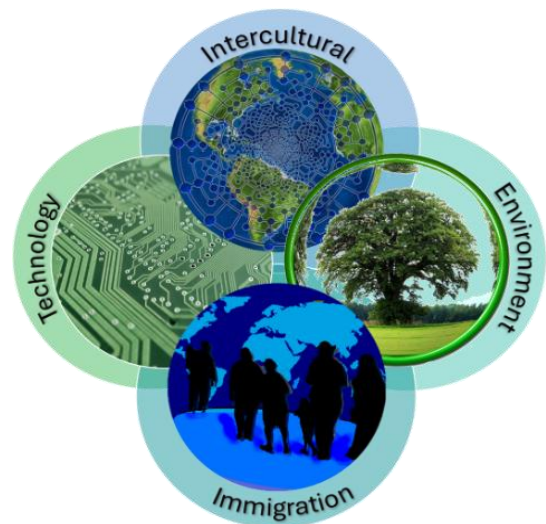
This is our societal struggle at this moment. We, as a collective body, are navigating this process with people at different stages of acceptance, opposition, and ridicule of the current reality. One of the essential questions we face is how to hold our society and institutions together in this time of rapid change which challenges long-held values, traditions, and social norms.

Currently, we are facing four intersecting realities that converge, creating tension, sometimes violence, a sense of loss, and deep-seated anger. These realities and their consequences are challenging the very fabric of society, as norms are disrupted by new and diverse populations arriving in countries due to climate-related issues that have led to increased migration and immigration. The climate is creating more violent storms and events resulting in the historical destruction of homes, entire towns, and people's way of life.

Technological advances are rapidly impacting every sector of our society, including job losses, the development of new communication methods, and the alteration of long-standing economic

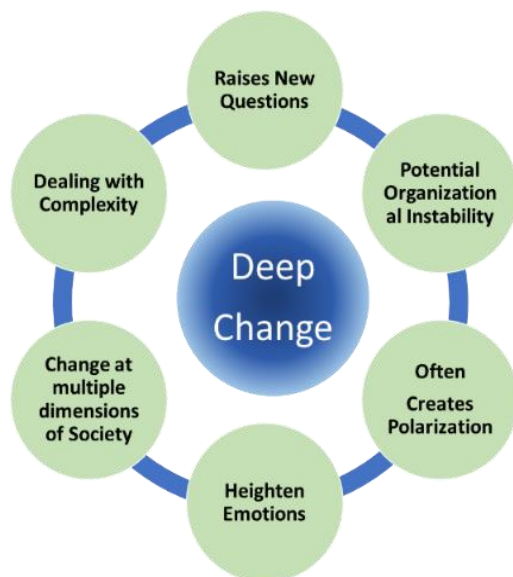
systems, ways of being in community, and the way we govern ourselves. Additionally, we are witnessing immigration and migration that are fostering diversity within our communities. We must view these four as interconnected rather than separate realities.

All of these elements are intertwined. Each of these critical aspects has profound implications for us individually, as a family, and on our communal lives. These changes are challenging every institution and society while raising new spiritual and cultural questions about the meaning of life, society, and community. Finally, they are challenging long-held societal norms and the concept of community, with unintended consequences that include losing traditional ways of thinking and challenging social norms and customs in our cities, nation, and the world.



This historical moment is urging us to recapture the pioneer spirit that drives innovation. People and organizations possessing a pioneer spirit explore new concepts, approaches, and radical changes.

The changes being explored and experienced in every sector are causing profound shifts in society. The graphic below depicts the impact these shifts are having on societal and global change. It is becoming apparent that when many dimensions are asked to change simultaneously, we are challenged on multiple levels, leading some parts of society to yearn for a return to the past.



The deep longing for the past is why one of the most profound questions we need to ask ourselves, collectively as a community, is how we can embrace the process of co-creation in an increasingly complex and interconnected world that creates stability rather than chaos?

Collectively, we are facing new questions, often creating organizational and societal challenges as we navigate this complexity, which leads to polarization, heightened emotions, and systemic societal change.

The quotes below highlight the pioneering risks that two companies took during the COVID-19 pandemic through collaboration with numerous other institutions. They chose to risk their future for a larger societal benefit that was itself at high risk. It also led to partnerships among many organizations and the sharing of ideas and concepts across traditional industries, nations, and global organizations. The two quotes below, which address the risk of pursuing a vaccine with unknown results to safeguard the future, illustrate the challenge of living in a void without easy solutions.

Dr. Albert Bourla wrote in his book, *Moonshot Inside Pfizer's Nine-Month Race to Make the Impossible Possible*, "Clearly, this is not business as usual. If we miss our budget for a year, no one will remember it the year after. If we miss the opportunity to do something for the world now, we will all remember it forever."p.14 That quote speaks to the world we live in now, that we need to take risks we cannot see, so in time it will become what we take for granted:

BioNTech risked everything to create the COVID vaccine. In the book, *The Vaccine*, the authors stated, "By then, BioNTech would have begun a project that would

involve deploying hundreds of staff and spending millions of euros to develop a vaccine using an unproven platform against an as-yet unnamed threat.”p29

These two companies, along with many others, have become pioneers, architects, and risk-takers in addressing a critical social challenge. They have become artists who looked at society's canvas and created something unforeseen, giving both meaning and hope to a panicking society.

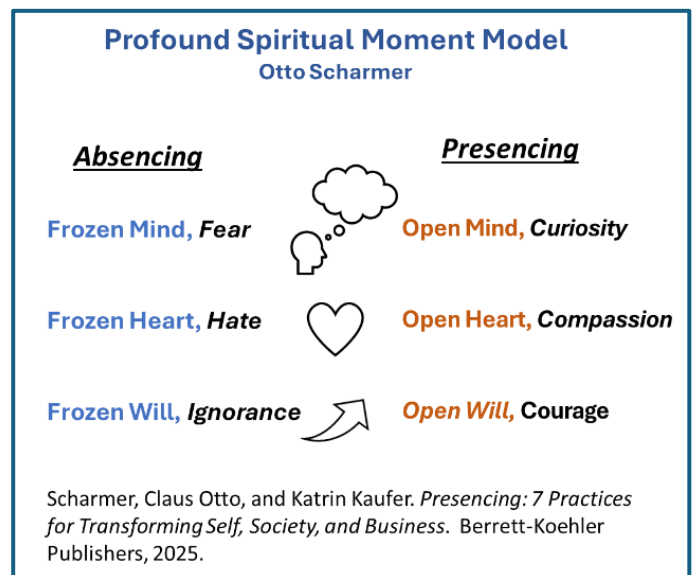


In moments of radical societal change, pioneers serve as both architects and navigators of transformation, shaping the contours of history while embracing the uncertain path. They challenge existing norms not out of defiance, but with a vision of fostering vision and innovation in times when traditional frameworks falter.

This pioneering spirit required not only courage but also an unwavering commitment to creation and adaptability—a hallmark trait that distinguishes trailblazers from those who settle for the

status quo. They became artists who found inspiration in the blank canvas and did not simply see white space; they reached deep into their spirit and saw solutions and opportunities.

Otto Scharmer, in his book *Presencing*, p 86. talks about the choice we have to either absent ourselves, deny, and run from the change, or choose to enter the space with an Open Heart, Open Mind, and Open Will. The graphic below depicts our choices.



This dance between two options, as Otto Scharmer aptly put it in his book, *Presencing*, calls us to choose being present in the moment or avoiding it, and to resist or engage. He states that we can choose to be absent or present.

When we live by being courageous, compassionate, and curious, we naturally become more vulnerable and open to trusting the unknown. This level of openness allows us not to be frozen in the

past, but rather to embrace the unfolding new with a curious mind, a compassionate presence in the face of change, and the courage to act.

These virtues form the foundation for creating a path forward. To be explorers of a new idea, concept, or service means allowing oneself and the organization to trust in the unknown and choose to risk failure, while being curious, compassionate with the process, and courageous enough to believe in what cannot be seen yet, knowing that it will be taken for granted in time.

Today's crisis is calling for courage and spiritual depth to embrace the unknown and imagine the new. For Christians, we only have to return to Holy Week and Easter to recognize that Jesus' journey was similar to ours. He suffered and died to allow something to emerge. There is the physical death we all will experience, and there's the transformative dying to self that happens at various points on the journey.

We are living in a sacred moment where we, as individuals and collectively, walk a profound spiritual path of dying and rising to something new. God is asking us to walk the same journey in these historical times that Jesus and his apostles faced in their lives.

- Garden of Gethsemane: Where Jesus, in Luke 22:42, said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still not my will but yours be done."

- In Matthew 28:5-6, the angel said to the woman, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus, the crucified one. He is not here, for he has been raised." Where have you taken him?

- Pentecost in Acts 3: And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak, in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. How can this be that we each hear in our own tongue?

Each of these scripture passages speaks to our historical time, when we are also called to seek God's will, not to be afraid, and to realize that the resurrection comes through embracing and believing we can collectively make a difference in this changing and evolving world.

In *Deliberate Calm*, authors Jacqueline Brassy, Aaron De Smet, and Michael Kruyt emphasize that to live in these times, we must embrace the Adaptive Zone. In the Adaptive Zone, to succeed, we must adapt by breaking free of our established patterns and habits, opening our minds, learn new things, and even finding new ways of learning and collaborating. "In the Adaptive Zone, there is a tremendous opportunity for creativity, growth, innovation, and true transformation, but there is a risk of failure and stagnation if we fail to learn and change" xii.

What is clear with the various changes globally, technologically, and through other inventions, is that our collective organizations are being implored to move into an adaptive process. Each organization must have a core value of recognizing the

signs of the times and not remain stuck in the status quo; instead, it should adopt an Adaptive Zone model.

“In the Adaptive Zone, there is a tremendous opportunity for creativity, growth, innovation, and true transformation, but there is a risk of failure and stagnation if we fail to learn and change.” xii This is the challenge of our times: do we stay in our comfort zone or choose transformation, which is the spiritual question of our time.

This leads to an individual or collective choice to remain frozen and cling to the security of the past, or to open our collective hearts and minds to explore, envision, and discover new possibilities. The graphic below, from Mark W. Johnson and Josh Suskiewicz, addresses the profound questions we face. The three elements they focus on are assumptions about the future, describing our future, and experimenting to achieve that future. All organizations and societies need to grapple with and embrace these questions, and over time, emerge into a community that fits this changing era.



In times of historical transformative change, the concept of change is no longer just a buzzword; instead, it leads to becoming explorers, adventurers, and pioneers of an age that will only be seen in time. We must become like artists with an empty canvas and go deep within to create what, in time, will be taken for granted.

To achieve this, we need to become artists who walk to a blank canvas. They have a sense of direction only when they put ink to a canvas; it then unfolds. It takes embodying the elements in this article to see the intersection of our current issues, opening our hearts to profound change through being curious, compassionate, and courageous enough to see what, in time, will be taken for granted. If we choose to hold on to the past that no longer supports a healthy society, the natural tendency is polarization, unhealthy individualism, and the 'us versus them' mentality. These realities often lead to destruction rather than embracing creative change.

Daniel Christian Wahl quotes Rainer Maria Wilke in his book *Regenerative Cultures*. P.19

Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and do try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. The point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then,

someday in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. P19

This quote speaks to the human and communal journey at this time in our lives. We are asking new questions, seeking new

solutions, and being transformed at all levels of our existence. As Deuteronomy 30:19 states, “Choose life, that you and your descendants may live.” The choices we make to leave the comfort zone and explore, envision, and discover set the path for us, as well as future generations.



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Author and consultant, Mark Clarke, is a Senior Consultant for CommunityWorks, Inc. He is available for consultation and welcomes a conversation to discuss your thoughts and questions about his writings.

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