

Changemaking Leadership

How do I inspire myself, members of my team, and others in the ecosystem to step into their power and contribute to systems change?

Over forty years of work with leading social entrepreneurs has shaped Ashoka's perspective about approaches to leadership, organization, and collaboration that positively advance systems change and ignite the changemaking capacity in everyone. Through our experience learning and working with Ashoka Fellows, scholars, and practitioners from a variety of fields, we have distilled, analysed, compiled, and synthesized patterns, lessons, frameworks, and resources about new ways of leading. What we are calling "Changemaking Leadership" is leadership that aims to galvanize others to step into their power and contribute to change for the greater good.

Recognizing that changemaking leadership is a core ingredient for social entrepreneurs to maximize their impact and create systems change, we aim to share our approach to leadership with other supporters of the global social entrepreneurship movement and thereby spark discussions and deeper exchange on the subject. Below we highlight general perspectives that impact the way we understand and approach leadership development. After defining three different levels of leadership, we unpack the four core principles of changemaking leadership and discuss their relevancy to each level. For each principle, we also include tips and resources that may be helpful for social entrepreneurs and their supporters.

Guiding Perspectives on Leadership and Leadership Development

Leadership is no longer a 'one-size-fits all' model.

Leadership is an adaptive process that requires discernment and choice.

There is no single model of leadership that fits the entire field of social entrepreneurship. Rather than choosing one leadership model to focus on, supporters should help social entrepreneurs develop a range of useful roles, competencies, and skills by exposing them to a variety of different models. Leadership often requires the ability to shift between being a leader, an enabler, a supporter, and even a follower. It means knowing when to lead and when to facilitate, when to speak and when to let others speak, when to drive change and when to co-lead with others. These different roles require different capacities, mindsets and skills.

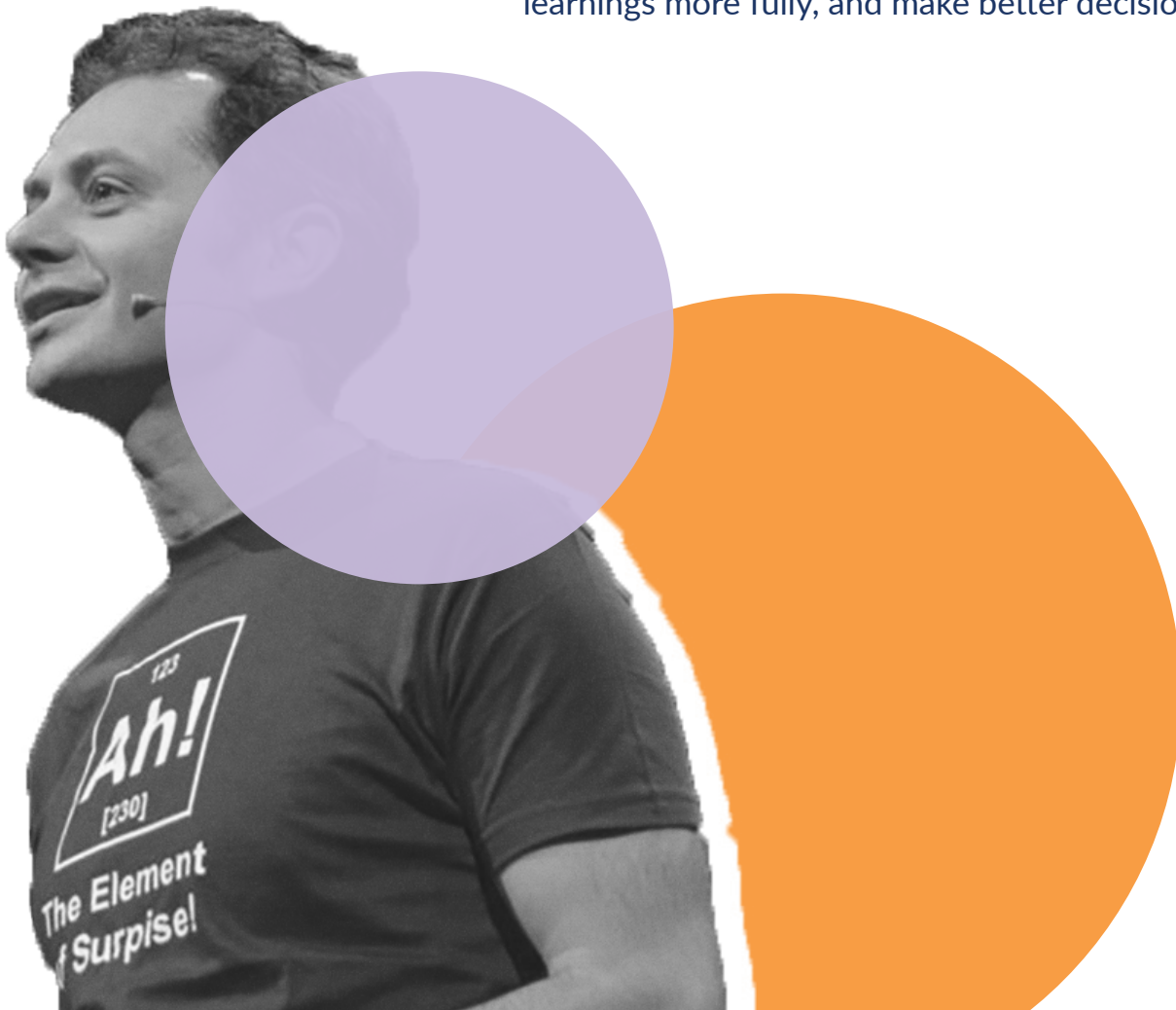
For this reason, it is crucial to build the capacity of leaders to listen and to be fully attentive to their present context so that they can determine what kind of leadership role or approach is most appropriate. In order to do so, leaders must be able to listen deeply, recognize what is happening around them, and exercise empathy.



Leadership involves a constant, subjective, and holistic learning process

Once social entrepreneurs know what is necessary for their leadership and learning, the role of supporters involves helping them to build deliberate, dedicated learning journeys– journeys that allow them to develop new practices, tools, and (peer-)support systems for managing and correcting their own development and evolution.

When designing learning journeys, it is important to make use of all forms of intelligence available to human beings - our head, heart, hands, and the connection with all that is larger than ourselves. These are all important methods of receiving information and are all part of the way individuals learn as whole humans. By using all our senses and all forms of intelligence, we can uncover new insights, discover different perspectives, understand and integrate learnings more fully, and make better decisions.



Leadership can be expressed at various levels: individual, team, and ecosystem

- **Individual:** Leaders are at the heart of change. While it is true that systems can shape people, people also shape systems. Intermediaries need to consider and unpack the ways in which our inner state influences our outer actions.
- **Teams:** Leadership is the result of collective practice. Transformative change happens in teams. Connecting your team with passion and purpose, enabling shared leadership, and building organizations with permeable borders are all ways to unleash the changemaker potential in teams and organizations. Over the past several years, we have observed that in a change-based world, teams do not belong exclusively to one organization. Throughout society, we are seeing the emergence of open and fluid teams comprised of individuals from different sectors and organizations who align around a shared vision.
- **Ecosystem:** Only through the collective power and engagement of everyone in the ecosystem can we create transformational social impact. Weaving together everyone in the ecosystem around a shared purpose and vision, building networks and organizational structures that catalyze collective action, and enabling social movements whose impact accelerates exponentially are all ways to drive eco-systemic change.



Core Principles of Support for Changemaking Leadership

Principle 1: Support leaders to see they are part of the system they want to change – and to strengthen awareness of their mental models and worldviews

Our conscious and unconscious beliefs, values, behaviours, biases, judgments, and assumptions are reflected in the systems we create. An individual's ability to develop a deep awareness about how they embody the values they want to see in the world, how they live and act in interconnected and interdependent environments, and how they can re-discover reality through the eyes of the other is essential for their capacity to galvanize others into their own power and ignite conscious, equitable and just systems change.

We recommend creating space for social entrepreneurs to develop awareness about their mindsets, perceptions, and world views, as these are what shape their values, beliefs, and behaviours in the context of leadership and collaboration. It is essential for leaders to become aware of their limiting and expansive beliefs, mindsets, and world views because these perceptions impact the way they behave in the world.

For example, consider the differing ways in which leaders perceive the world. Some feel they live in a world that is safe and abundant, and thus they see others as potential collaborators and partners. Others feel that they live in a world characterized by scarcity and danger, and thus they see other actors as competitors or threats. Others still (likely the majority of entrepreneurs) find themselves somewhere in between these extremes. This difference in perception significantly influences the extent to which any leader can collaborate, form partnerships, create networks, see the larger picture, envision big ideas, and so on.



Tips for Supporters:

- Deepening awareness requires a different approach compared to transferring knowledge. Here it is about supporting social entrepreneurs with consistent practices and experiences that allow them to develop stronger awareness. We recommend using frameworks and tools that act as lenses or mirrors for leaders to look at themselves honestly and authentically and providing leaders with a safe non-judgmental space to reflect with others. Exposing leaders to different perspectives, mindsets and experiences ultimately helps to challenge their prevailing mental models. We also recommend offering a sliding scale of leadership coaching references (including low-bono and pro-bono offerings) for social entrepreneurs who are interested in additional support.
- As with all the principles, it is important to model the change we wish to see. Intermediaries should model the ways of leading, being, and operating that they intend to develop, support, or enable in their participants.

Resources:

- The [sensing journeys](#) developed by the Presencing Institute and the changemaking journey developed by Ashoka in the context of the [Visionary Program](#) help participants draw their changemaker journey and reflect in peer-groups on the inflection points of their life.
- We often use this [iceberg model](#) to help leaders become aware of how they can influence the kind of change they are trying to achieve in the world. This exercise also helps to deepen leaders' self-awareness.
- Our coaching circles focus on creating diverse, non-judgmental groups that support inquiry and reflection, and on choosing open-ended questions that challenge leaders to self-reflect.
- We often use the 4 levels of listening developed by the Presencing Institute to explain the power of deep listening as a leadership skill and the influence it has on leadership and collaboration. This [8 minute video](#) from the Presencing Institute explains the 4 levels of listening as a core skill. It also has an [assessment tool](#) that helps users to practice listening. We highly recommend these stakeholder [interviews](#), also developed by Presencing Institute, which support leaders to practice their deep listening skills in a way that informs their strategy.
- 360 Feedback is a process that compiles feedback from direct reports, colleagues, and managers, as well as self-evaluation by the employee themselves.
- Selected leadership development programs that focus on seeing differently to think and do differently: <https://www.aberkyn.com/en/>; <https://www.mobiusleadership.com/>; Ashoka Europe's Fellowship Program at <https://fellowship-europe.ashoka.org/story/new-leadership>

“89% of Fellows report that Ashoka changed how they see themselves as a leader. Of these, 94% report that they are leading differently as a consequence”

The Unlonely Planet - Global Impact Study, 2018

Principle 2: Support leaders to be open and willing to be changed by others

Galvanizing collective changemaking requires being open to learning from, and integrating, their perspectives and contributions into a problem or solution. It requires relinquishing complete control and letting go of attachment to our ideas. In order to do this, leaders must be able to pay full attention to the present moment, suspend their judgment, trust the process, and remain open to receiving new information – whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Only then can they gain a deep understanding of what is happening and truly co-create a solution.

Invite social entrepreneurs to explore and reflect on where and how they can relinquish control over aspects of their idea, their solution, or their vision in a way that leaves space for others to meaningfully contribute. This can be part of a leadership learning journey or workshop, or it can be included in strategy discussions, particularly if leaders recognise that resistance or fear is preventing them from engaging stakeholders effectively.

This can be a difficult process, and it requires a capacity for openness and trust. It is important to support entrepreneurs to let go of cynicism, remain compassionate and empathetic to others' experiences, and let go of control and of fear so that they can embrace the complexity and discomfort of a shared journey.



Tips for Supporters:

- Include open questions like ‘what do you need to let go of?’ and ‘how might you let go constructively?’ that invite social entrepreneurs to explore and reflect on where and how they can let go of control.
- Share with social entrepreneurs how openness influences the power and potential of collaboration. Support them in becoming more aware of their judgements, their cynicism and fear, and the contexts in which they are open and closed to others.

Resources:

- Awareness practices are essential to support changemaking leaders in developing the capacity to be present and attentive to themselves and others. In addition to the resources in Principle 1, awareness practices such as mindfulness and meditation (including walking meditation or body scans) as well as exercises such as yoga and [embodiment](#) help social entrepreneurs to be present and aware of their mind, heart, and body.
- The [Theory U MOOC: Ulab](#) provides social entrepreneurs with tools that develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership. As well as the book [Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future](#)
- A [Loving-kindness meditation](#) that helps leaders to expand their circle of compassion and kindness.

Principle 3: Support leaders to ignite the changemaking potential of others

Galvanizing others to be changemakers is a fundamental component of any approach to systems change. Enabling changemaking at all levels upends the power dynamics of a system and ensures that everyone is an active contributor in defining and co-creating a better future. This accelerates the transition towards more just, inclusive, self-organized, and resilient systems – where no one is left behind. Leadership and changemaking ability are not limited by age, experience, authority, race, gender, ability, and any other characteristic.

Social entrepreneurs see the innate ability for changemaking in everyone and seek to ignite this potential. They do not see communities as beneficiaries that need to be empowered, as this assumes that they have power only if someone else gives it to them. Instead, social entrepreneurs see everyone as a powerful contributor and as the agent of their own lives.



At the individual level: Support social entrepreneurs to observe and reflect on their mental models around leadership and changemaking by questioning their basic assumptions and noticing their values, biases, and beliefs. Do they see the inherent potential and changemaking potential in everyone? If not, what is preventing them from doing so? This starts with becoming aware of the lenses through which leaders see the world.

Tips for Supporters:

- Support social entrepreneurs to challenge and question their mental models about changemaking – what they consider “right and wrong”. This work takes time and is often best done through a learning journey or with the help of a coach or mentor.
- Remember that change requires time. Working with our mental models could take longer than expected. Be patient and encourage your social entrepreneurs to be persistent and be patient as well.

At the team level: When it comes to collaboration models, there is no one size that fits all. Before deciding how to create and organize teams of changemakers, leaders should reflect on their goals, values, and context. These intentions should guide their decision-making and organizational design.

Another important approach to team design is to start from the inside out. Intermediaries can support social entrepreneurs and their teams to begin by looking at their culture, the individual values and competencies within their team or organization, and their communication practices, all of which are core enabling conditions for shared leadership.

Tips for Supporters:

- **Conflict Resolution and Non-Violent Communication/Feedback Training:** Support social entrepreneurs and their teams to develop a method of communicating that is compassionate and open to learning. Help social entrepreneurs develop a culture of changemaking in their teams and organizations.
- Engage social entrepreneurs’ leadership teams in your support programs. This is a great way of ensuring democratization of knowledge in the team and commitment from all parties to engage in a growth process together.

There's no doubt that the most important thing Ashoka did was to convince me that what I was doing was important, because I didn't think that way. I was just a little farmer on a very small scale and I mean if you'd said to me that I could do something to change agriculture in this country, I would have laughed at you because I didn't imagine for a moment that I could make any kind of impact at all. And I had to learn that. And it's great because now I know that every single person has got something that they can contribute to change lives."

Ashoka Fellow, South Africa

At the ecosystem level: Remind social entrepreneurs that bringing compassionate empathy to their work is not enough. It is a great intention; however, it is incomplete. To create solutions, leaders must work *with* people and communities. Social entrepreneurship is not about working *for* people and communities as beneficiaries. If community members are not genuinely involved as changemakers in creating solutions, leaders run the risk of imposing a particular point of view or placing a dominant narrative over the real needs of individuals and groups from all parts of the system.

Tips for Supporters:

- Support social entrepreneurs to explore how they can include strategies that engage other stakeholders as changemakers/active contributors. [This social entrepreneur](#) shares their experience of how they activate communities as changemakers. [This report captures a few more examples.](#)
- Encourage social entrepreneurs to ask themselves: Who else do we need to engage to contribute to, and co-create, social change? How can I engage young people as co-creators in social change? How can I engage those experiencing the problem to co-create social change?

Resources:

- Reframing Journeys from Ashoka India: These are regular spaces (4 days each) for Fellows to step back and reframe the way they see themselves and their role in the ecosystem. Body movement and mindfulness practices are used to help entrepreneurs reframe the way they look at their challenges, explore their next move, and engage with the ecosystem. Ashoka India has also supported sessions led by Fellows, including “Living Well, Dying Well” by Dr. Suresh Kumar and “Balancing Personal & Professional Life” by Fellow Anu Wahklu.
- [Book](#) from Ashoka Fellow Jordan Kassalow on changemaker journeys.
- [Book](#) from Aaron Hurst on the Purpose Economy.
- Reinventing Organizations by Fredric Laloux have developed [various resources](#) that support organizations looking to integrate forms of shared leadership.
- Book New Work needs Inner Work. By Joana Breidenbach, Bettina Rollow.
- [Make your Team Feel Powerful](#). HBR.
- Keep [a few references](#) for organizational/team coaches that facilitate and challenge a real team to optimize the ways they work together and create impactful and meaningful results.
- [THNK School of Creative Leadership](#) designs and facilitates transformational in-person learning experiences to train and support global leaders.



Principle 4: Support leaders to unlock collective power in a diverse & inclusive way

The nature and strength of our relationships with those around us determines our ability to create effective and equitable change. No individual or organization can hold the entire change process; only the collective power and engagement of everyone in an ecosystem enables transformative social impact.

Social entrepreneurs establish accountability and legitimacy by actively engaging with a variety of actors in their fields—citizens, government bodies, non-profits, companies and more. Lasting, equitable change involves diverse collaborations that apply to all parts (and people) in the system. This kind of change cannot be imposed; it is unlocked when everyone in the ecosystem recognizes and steps into their power as a changemaker.

Recognizing the importance of strong relationships in the system often requires that teams and collaboratives organize in new ways. At Ashoka, we think of such relationships in the form of ‘team of teams’ – smart networks working together across organizational boundaries, driven and guided by a shared purpose. While each situation requires a different type of collaboration, common patterns often emerge. There is the need to grow appetite for emergent processes and longer-term approaches to collaboration.

At the individual level: Supporters can help social entrepreneurs to be as intentional as possible about the kind of multi-stakeholder collaboration models they co-create. Intermediaries can support social entrepreneurs to discern when and what kind of collaboration and engagement best serve their goals, context and needs.

At individual, team, and ecosystem level: Co-creation of this kind requires learning from and with others and integrating their perspectives and contributions. Crucially, relationships at all levels become stronger with greater diversity. To embrace and foster the strengths of diversity, equity, and inclusion – and to leverage those strengths for collaboration and co-creation – leaders and their teams must develop several essential skills and capacities mentioned in Principles 1 and 2. These include being able to listen deeply (listening to learn), engage openly, handle discomfort and uncertainty, and address unconscious biases, judgments, and assumptions. It is also essential to support leaders, teams, and collaboratives to develop cultural competency (learning about and with other cultures) and intercultural empathy.

In building more diverse and inclusive teams, leaders are often asked not only to acknowledge personal and collective hurt and trauma but also to find ways to heal. Leaders must be aware of the narratives and “how tos” used in their teams and ecosystems so they can notice when a dominant narrative is not useful for diversity and inclusion and when other narratives (from other cultures and ways of operating) are more appropriate. For example, Western culture has certain norms of professionalism and performance that do not apply to other geographies and cultures. Leaders must avoid imposing their own standards on communities that hold a different worldview (e.g., applying western understanding of systems thinking in a Native American community that already views the world as whole and interconnected and has their own ways of operating).



Tips for Supporters:

- We recommend that intermediaries commit to continually building their own cultural competence, deepening their awareness of cultural differences, and creating diverse and inclusive teams, collaboratives and learning communities. At Ashoka, we are intentionally committed to this process. In this long path of learning, our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts have become institutional.
- Rather than promoting one collaboration model, support social entrepreneurs to become aware of the structural (outer) and cultural (inner) conditions that influence effective multi-stakeholder collaboration. Equip social entrepreneurs and their teams with mindsets and capacities that support collaboration and enable collective impact.



Resources:

- [Radical collaboration](#) is a helpful resource that outlines essential skills for leaders and teams that enhance their ability to be in relationships and to support the radical collaboration we need to solve complex problems we face.
- [Ashoka Europe's online course on leading powerful multi-stakeholder collaboration](#).
- CoCreative has developed [various multi-disciplinary tools](#) to support social entrepreneurs to [design change systems for collaboration innovation](#). We use the [5 Levels of Engagement](#) to support leaders in exploring the diverse ways they can collaborate and engage others in systems change work.
- We also use CoCreative's [4 Agendas in Collaborative Innovation](#) to support Leaders to more intentionally create the underlying conditions that facilitate collaboration. Another useful tool is [the 6 patterns of collaboration](#) which describes collaboration trends that can be leveraged towards more effective co-creation.
- There are [various resources](#) and [tools](#) to support the development of networks.
- John Kania and Mark Kramer of FSG – a mission-driven consulting firm – describe the emerging field of “collective impact” in their influential [article](#) in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. The concept further evolved in resonance with social movements research (e.g., see the article [Collective Impact 3.0](#)).
- In many multi-stakeholder collaborations, it can be useful to have a backbone organization. To bring awareness to this structure and explain when it best supports collaboration goals, Stanford Social Innovation Review has created a list of [proven practices for Backbone Organizations](#).
- [The Philosophical Aspects of Cultural Difference](#) by Dr. Edwin Nichols is a matrix to help develop insight into cultural ways of knowing, being, and doing work in teams and collaboratives. It can be used to build teams and collaboratives based on cultural strengths.
- Tema Okun has prepared a [diagnostic and reflection tool](#) that supports leaders, teams, and collaboratives to explore the dominant value systems that drive their collaboration practices.
- A powerful tool that proves how more diverse groups are more effective and impactful in the long term is the book: [The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies](#) by Scott Page. This can be a valuable resource for leaders looking to leverage diversity.

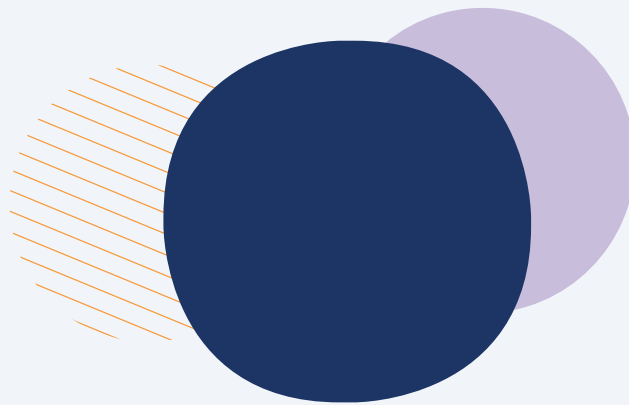
Example 1: Inside Ashoka

The Ashoka Europe Fellowship is a leadership and strategy development program designed for leading social entrepreneurs. It seeks to collect learnings from the Ashoka universe and integrate them into a core co-learning space for leading social entrepreneurs and their teams in a way that supports them to accelerate their impact. It is designed with practitioners for practitioners. The program has 6 co-learning modules that social entrepreneurs can access as they define their learning development priorities.

This includes a co-learning module on new leadership, which aims to support systemic leaders to reflect, question, innovate, and deepen the ways of leading, organizing, and being that are required to transform systems and mindsets.

- Through the new leadership co-learning module, the Ashoka Europe Fellowship collaborates with various social entrepreneurs and practitioners to define different online and offline learning experiences to support changemaking leaders.
- The modules are purposely designed as co-learning experiences to ensure that facilitators and participants co-create the learning experience. This also enriches the learnings and content of the modules, which are continually evolving.
- The Fellowship partners with various Ashoka Fellows as well as field leaders and practitioners in leadership development. Examples include Presencing Institute, CoCreative and the Wellbeing Project.
- Over the last 3 years the program has tested a range of learning experiences that focus on developing specific skills, such as facilitating multi-stakeholder collaboration and igniting the changemaking potential and collective power of teams and organizations. It has also hosted retreats that support social entrepreneurs to examine what holds them back and what activates their potential. Participants are supported to develop their self-awareness and openness as leaders, as well as essential skills such as deep listening, empathy, and trust.
- Ashoka staff members are also part of these learning experiences, which allow them to deepen their own leadership capacity and develop the skills to hold these spaces.

Variations of these learning spaces have also been developed across Latin America, South East Asia, South Asia, and Africa. Each Fellowship team works together to share their experience and learnings. The program that has been developed in Europe is a result of the practices and lessons sourced from around the world.



“To me, this impact leadership training is the best Ashoka can offer to its Fellows, this is really perceived as the true added value of the network. I am more conscious of the role I have to play as a leader of systems transformation.”

Participant of Fellowship Europe Program

Example 2: The Presencing Institute



MIT Sloan School of Management Senior Lecturer Otto Scharmer and colleagues cofounded the [Presencing Institute \(PI\)](#) to create an action research platform at the intersection of science, consciousness, and profound social and organizational change. One of their key contributions to the world is Theory U. Theory U is a process and change framework with a set of methodologies to address the world's most pressing global challenges while also supporting the leadership development and capacity building of changemakers around the world.

During the past two decades, Theory U has evolved and been expanded through the learning, practice, applications and prototypes of thousands of organizations and communities worldwide. This work has become foundational support to thousands of changemakers and leaders from across sectors to a) step into awareness-based leadership, b) find ways to enable everyone to be a changemaker and contribute to the greater good and c) find novel approaches and solutions in navigating an era of unprecedented disruption and potential for transformation. A founding principle for their work is the link between inner and outer work: "The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor."

They do this through immersive and transformational journeys (a few examples listed below), which are intentionally and carefully designed learning spaces for co-creation and collective action. This is reflected in the last 5 years, where PI's reach has grown from having a small community of a few thousands to hundreds of thousands in more than 185 countries.

- The [Theory U MOOC: Ulab](#) provides social entrepreneurs with tools that develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership [Theory U: Leading from the Emerging Future](#)
- GAIA Journey: an online, multi-local/global learning infrastructure, created in response to the Covid-19 epidemic and the call for action on climate change, that has mobilized thousands of people to reimagine and reshape the future that we want to embody and enact, both individually and collectively in the face of this global crisis.
- Societal Transformation Lab: the annual cycle of capacity-building and innovation, taking learners and changemakers through a process of systems thinking and analysis, to identify and prototype actions to bring about transformational change.
- Ubuntu Lab: an innovation and change program by and for African citizens to develop openness as a key interior condition for systems work and changemaking leadership and to develop initiatives for their community, organisation, country or Africa as a whole.
- SDG Leadership Lab in partnership with the United Nations, a series of Labs to support UN Country Teams to activate their collective potential to achieve the SDGs.



“In this new context for leadership, strategic communication will help to organize an ongoing conversation which ultimately will lead everyone as an active player into a collaborative journey of mindset transformation. This is the path to turn everyone into a changemaker. Leadership in the age of social networks is above all someone who understands the conversational nature of human society and the communicative nature of organizations.”

Ricardo Neves, Ashoka Fellow, Brazil, author of the book “Sensemaking: Leadership for Purpose – Strategic Communication for a World of Exponential Complexity”