

Thinking Fundamentally

Working at the heart of the edge
Kye Nelson

I've long been fascinated by the fertility of some theoretical work: the way it forms a seed or foundation for the work of many other people, often in times and fields distant from its own, in ways that could never have been predicted by its maker. This formulation of TAE centers on practical know-how that ordinary people might use to create theories with some of that power: theories with “magnetism” which, as they attract other people, can restructure thinking so that over time a whole field or culture might shift in subtle but important ways. To generate such theories, one needs to start in a strong position.

I'm using the word “theory” very broadly here. In addition to scientific and philosophical theories there are many other conceptual structures which we don't ordinarily think of as theories but which in fact *are* theories of a kind: for instance, the vision, mission, or strategic plan of an organization; the core curriculum of a school; even the plans for a building or the design of a new product. This process can be helpful in forming any new conceptual structure where it would be wise to take account of the actual experience of people.

I divide TAE into five phases. Before going into more detail about steps 0 and 1, I'd like to note what the “point” of each phase is—the job it does, and the payoff.

In **Phase 1—*Entering the implicit***—we enter into that which is before words, so that we can deepen our understanding at a point where we know more than words can say. We choose our entry point by finding where we *feel* the limitations of the public understanding, a spot which matters to us, where we know something is needed. The “murky zone” that we enter is “thick” from years of experience. So that our knowing here can be a lodestone throughout the TAE process, we take some time to be with the body feel of it, **before any words**. Then we can carry this **felt sense** with us as we begin to find the crux of what interests us, and to write something down. We pinpoint where the public understanding doesn't actually work, so that there is an apparently illogical quality in what we know.

In **Phase 2—*Evoking experiencing***—the job is **to create evocative language**. But before we can do this, we must discover how we are continually misunderstood when we use the ordinary public language. We are caught in a mesh of assumptions that “come with” using these words. As a result, when we attempt to describe something we know that actually is new, it appears illogical. This could leave us stranded in an autistic world; but there is a way out. Instead of talking *about* something “over there”, with evocative language we can *bring* someone here.

In **Phase 3—*Abstracting patterns***—we allow ourselves **to be surprised by an emergent “something”** arising from the intricacy of specific instances of the thing we know. First we tell the

“stories” of several such instances so that we have this intricacy in several separate strands. Next we articulate a pattern we find in each, so that when we cross them, these strands can show us additional detail in each of our instances. The additional detail may be something unexpected. But together with the unexpectedness, there is also a “yes, *of course* that’s so” —a recognition—which is one of the hallmarks of this kind of thinking.

Now we can find a “seed” which encapsulates the intricacy of our knowing in a simple but powerful form. This makes it possible to “have” what has already become very complex so that it can grow, but grow coherently, as the nuances of the new detail begin to crystallize around that simple shape.

Often these first three phases of TAE are all that are needed. They give us a new understanding and a way to communicate something informally. The next two phases allow us to deepen our understanding and to communicate it formally, as we “open up” this something and build a theory.

In **Phase 4—*Deriving a core structure***—our task is **to derive relations between the terms which form the core of a formal theory**. Derivation is methodically using the power of the word “is” between terms, to bring out precisely how they are inherently related. When we complete this phase, we have formed a nucleus or core structure which is the “engine” of a formal theory, and have shown that what before appeared illogical actually makes logical sense.

And in **Phase 5—*Developing implications***—we let the theory “talk back” to us, as we further develop and apply it **to change the way key concepts are understood** in our own field and in other fields.

In short: thinking at an edge is *entering* the implicit, *evoking* our experiencing with language that “brings” someone here, *abstracting* patterns from the intricacy, *deriving* a core structure, and *developing* implications.

Phase 1: Entering the implicit

This process is powerful, and gains momentum as step builds on step. It is very important to position yourself well at the outset. Therefore, I begin with a “step before the steps”:

0. Positioning yourself. Begin by “clearing a space”. At first, simply write down whatever comes into your mind. This is an opportunity to put down the baggage you are carrying around—what you need to remember to do, what you are saying in your head to this person or that... you know what needs to be written down, so that you can be at ease. Each time you write down another item, you may notice a further relaxation in your body.

As you begin now to reach the end of the conscious items, you can drop down a level. This is not as deep as you would go if you were meditating; this is “halfway down”. It is a level below words, the

level you drop down into spontaneously any time you don't have words *yet* but there is *something* you could say... you can *sense* it there... There is that familiar short pause... "um"... before the words come. Here, but deeper in the body-feel, is what we call the "murky zone".

Here you can ask yourself: "What else is here that would like to be written down?" and notice the 'something' that comes... then words for it... and ask again, until you can feel that your inner space is clear.

Now you can find your beginning place.

A good place to begin is where your loving is. There is something which draws you to deepen your understanding of it, again and again. Where is there something like that which would be satisfying to play with, just for the joy of following that deepening understanding at *its* edge?

An opposite way to begin is with some frustration or irritation you have about how something (current theory, or practice, or available tools, or the current architecture, or...) is limited and doesn't function very well, **at this point, right here:** this is a spot where you know **something more** because you work here all the time. You can *feel* the limitations of the public understanding, and you know something is needed here. Without this, something is stuck, or not working well, or people somehow drop out of the picture, or...

There may not be a problem *for you* at this spot; simply a need to communicate your knowing here so that others might benefit from your experience. But it may not be this simple: the usual thinking may be getting in your way, so that what could be, *can't* be.

Or, it may be that what you would most like to work on is a question—not a spot where you know something, but a spot where you *don't* know something. You can follow the question back to *something* that led you to ask that question. Your own experiencing will be there, something solid underneath the question or problem. *That* is your spot.

Frequently the general topic will be set by external circumstances—what you are paid to think about, what you have been asked to write about... Or, you may need to think together with a group of other people about something that is of common concern. Within that general topic or group you can still find a specific spot that is yours to explore, distinct from the other members of your group. When you are choosing what to work on, the temptation may be to choose something really "big" to think about. It may seem counter-intuitive, but a good way to think big is to start with something small and seemingly *unimportant* that happens all the time, in a variety of contexts. The more common the experience, the more basic it is likely to be. Something that appears commonplace may be able to show principles that could be very useful, because nature is *already* using them frequently.

When the spot is right, you can feel, "to me, *this matters*". And, you can feel that your experience "speaks" right here. Your whole being gets a little more open and spacious because working on this is a right thing for you to be doing. It makes your heart smile.

At the same time you may have a sense that you only “sort of” know something here...nothing you actually have words for. But even so, if the spot is right there will be a sense of ease about working here. Here you are on home ground.

Regardless of how you have come to your spot, now notice that there is a key concept or move that shapes much of what people say or do at this spot; the concept of This concept is valuable, because But what is left out of this is (and you might notice that saying it the way you just did doesn't work in practice because people).

Write down whatever you need to, to mark this spot and to hold any threads that could get lost as you move on. Write until you feel that the page is holding what you need it to hold.

1. A knowing. Just a little on from what you can easily say about this spot, there is a zone which is thick from years of experience, and in that murky zone—so far before words that it's hard to stay there—there is **something** which draws your interest.

It may well be findable in some simple and seemingly unimportant thing you do every day which has this knowing in it, so that when you think of it, it comes with a kind of a smile as you say, ‘oh, well, *that...* but, that's just *obvious!*’ It may seem odd... marginal... unconventional... awkward... too small and slight to matter...

You can sense many instances of this in your experience. But it's difficult to talk about. You know *more* than you can say, here.

If you take some time to be with the body feel of your knowing of this **before any words**, it becomes very much “here” with you, and you can come back to *just this*, any time. So take a few minutes to play with this **felt sense**: to “taste” and “smell” it, to touch it...

You can carry the now-thick sense of it with you as you begin to write something down about it: first, write **a paragraph or two** without thinking about it very much just yet; next, **a time something happened that has to do with this**; finally, **a short sentence which points to the heart of this**, and which has the feel of the process you are speaking from.

Savor your sentence for a little while, noticing where it feels most alive to your felt sense. Find **one word or short phrase in your sentence** which holds the crux of what interests you here. Then you will be building from where this feels most alive *in you*.

2. Where logic fails. Does what you know here seem illogical in some way? Paradoxical or contradictory? What appears illogical can be especially valuable, because it shows *where* the usual thinking, which would seem to apply here, breaks down.

Find a spot where two contradictory characteristics appear to be “working against” each other. For example: something moves only when it stays still; or the deal only closes when you’ve found a way to keep it open; or you can only work with the parts when you are working with the whole; or you only know how to do something when you stop knowing. Look for something like that.

This spot is where you are most likely to be misunderstood, a spot where, from the outside, this might not seem to make sense. Too often we feel that there is something wrong with *us* at this juncture. But what you know here is so: it has happened. You can build this illogical quality into the word or phrase in your sentence which holds the crux of what interests you here. Then what you build can move beyond the usual logic at a point where the public understanding doesn’t actually work.

To build the illogic into your crux (if it’s not there already), **add one other word to the crux word or phrase which describes the funny kind of you are talking about.** You may need to change the rest of the sentence as you do this.

Let’s say the thing that really interests you is what you are calling “movement”. But it’s a funny *kind* of movement you mean, where something moves only when it stays still. To build the illogic into the spot you are interested in, you could call it “still movement” –or perhaps you notice that what you’re actually interested in after all is the stillness, this funny kind of stillness that isn’t really still because movement happens there. In that case your phrase might be “moving stillness”.

Phase 2: Evoking experiencing

3. How words fail here. The already existing concepts are too thin to say this, or they carry with them assumptions which don’ have room for this. Sometimes you may think the words you have used for the crux of this have said “it”, but if you **look the crux words up** in the dictionary, or ask yourself what people usually mean by that—or if you ask another person to tell you what “an y fool knows” that this word means—you’ll get something else, not *this*.

You might find that part of what others come up with, actually fits. Sometimes a word someone else uses is so exactly right that it feels like the person who said it understood your felt sense better than you did for a moment, and has shown you something true and very exciting about what you are working with, which you hadn’t seen so clearly before.

But always, also, what other people say *doesn’t* include all of what you mean, in some important way.

Notice what they’ve missed. Go back to your felt sense and **try another word or short phrase** to solve the problem that the cluster of wrong meanings represents. It should be a phrase which could substitute **at this same slot in your sentence.** Don’t use a synonym: instead find a word or phrase which brings out this “missing” aspect of your felt sense...

Again, use the dictionary or other people to see where the new word or phrase breaks down.

Again try to find **another word or short phrase** that will really work at this spot in your sentence... and again, see how it doesn't.

Your felt sense of this has more specificity and is different than any of the existing concepts here. Words bring many different meanings and assumptions which can appear to leave you isolated, without any way to say this. No established word or phrase will work here. It cannot, if this is new.

You may be tempted to re-write your sentence, which by now may seem hopelessly antiquated. Resist the temptation, for the moment. You will have the opportunity to start fresh just a little further on.

These three attempts at saying "it" begin to make a sort of a triangle around your felt sense, because each time you tried a new word or phrase, you were bringing out a new aspect of your felt sense.

4. Words can work. Now, don't think about what each word or phrase usually means. Do the reverse, and become the owner of the language. One at a time, put each word or phrase back into the "slot" in your sentence, each time noticing an aspect of your felt sense which this sentence does articulate. What would you *like* this word to mean? Each brings something different. Write down **the "something" each word or phrase brings**, in a few words or a sentence. You are elucidating for your own use, the job each word does for you. It's a private step, as if you are writing the dictionary.

You can show the triangle if you put *all* the words, and what they bring, together at that slot in your sentence, so that they **make a string**.

For example, if the sentence began as "Something deft is freely staying right where it really goes.", at this stage it might look like this: "Something deft is *freely staying* [plenty of time for the movement], (*not-exactly following* [an attention so close it almost anticipates the other, without hampering the other], *disciplined knowing* [inhabits a familiar pattern or form while delighting in this instance of it],) right where it really goes."

The "..." in the string holds a place for the "more" which is not said with these words (or any words).

5. Words can evoke *this*. Language has the capacity to create new meanings. Making use of this property of language, you can create **an evocative sentence for each word or phrase**. Each sentence takes off from what you wrote down for yourself about each word at step 4, but here, rather than writing for yourself, you are writing for others. Evocative language involves the senses and thereby the body. It takes your listener "by the hand" and "brings" them to a "location" where they can *experience* what you mean, instead of your attempting to describe it to them. Sometimes

metaphor will do this, as will setting two elements alongside each other that would not normally appear together.

What you say couldn't be understood at all unless someone looked for what your sentence could mean and found *this*. When you make such sentences, then this might *be* found. At least anyone reading them would see right away 'something' s being said here which I don' t know yet."

For example: "This movement takes no time at all, because it's happening so slowly."

Phase 3: Abstracting patterns

6. Instances. When you are working with something that has your own experiencing thickly underneath it, there are many instances of what you are working with, readily available to you. These are times something happened which have in them, in some way, what this is, and which also have in them what feels most alive to *you* about this. They could be (and usually are) actual real-life events, but could also be, for instance, a dream you had.

Ask your felt sense "when was there a time that has to do with this?" Then wait... let your felt sense "hand" you an instance, rather than bringing up an already-compiled mental list of times or going looking for them. Sometimes, what your felt sense hands you is a little surprising; not what you would have automatically reached for, but in some way "just the thing".

Anything which has actually happened has an intricate texture which can open as you look at it more closely. You can "tell" it in detail, as you would tell a story. For example: "The other day I was sitting in my studio as the light faded and night came on. It is much quieter there than at home, so I could hear the wind die down the way it does every evening as dusk comes. It was as if everything held its breath, and then a night bird sang. And right on the heels of the bird came the sea breeze, from the south."

Write down **several such instances.** If you are working with another person, tell your "stories" with so much detail that the incident comes alive as if the other person were there with you. Your partner will write each detail down, just as you tell it. Then these details can contribute their exactness.

Before you go on, be sure these stories have the "taste" and "smell" of the felt sense: the reason why it handed them to you. Also check and see if any part of the felt sense feels "left out"; if so, let a further instance come that does include the needed aspect.

7. Facets of this. Each instance shows a new facet of your emergent knowing, which no other instance shows so clearly.

Consider the event that each story tells about, one at a time. There is something that each event brings out, which is different from what the others show. Let **words come for what each story brings** without thinking too much about it, and write them down informally... For example:

“When it dies down inside like that moment between night and day, it opens a changing place so that a new movement can begin, like when the wind shifts direction to come from the sea.”

There is often an old familiar way that you’ve used to talk about this, and often the words you wrote down go back to this old way. For instance: “When I stay with not knowing, then I am in the present moment.” But see if you notice **something in each of your instances that isn’t quite familiar**, like this: “When I stay with not knowing *how* to do this, then a comforting not-comfortableness comes where I don’t feel very big at all, and in that I can rest by coming back to it like steering a car.”

Each story is contributing its own specificity. To *use* this specificity for your theory, for each instance you need to find a pattern.

But what is meant by “pattern” here? You can see it by noticing two sorts of words. First there are terms—specific “things”. In a way they are like the characters in a play. The second sort of words are “link words” which show relations between the “things” as if a story were unfolding: ‘when’, ‘both...and’, ‘are’, ‘certain’, ‘only...which’, ‘but’, ‘as’, ‘even though’, ‘is’, ‘and so’, ‘next’, ‘requires’, ‘so that’, ‘cannot’, ‘not’, ‘if...then’, ‘until’, ‘by’, etc.

The “characters” and the link words relating them make a pattern. There is also a “turning point” or climax in the “play”.

To notice the pattern, begin with what you wrote down informally for each story. To use one of the examples from above: “*When* [there is] a dying-down inside *then* it opens a changing place *where* a shifting-direction movement begins.” In this example, the process is beginning to show itself quite clearly: first *this* happens, then *this*, then *this*. But the “characters” in this “play” are not enduring *things* but ephemeral *states* which exist briefly, then fall away as the process continues to shift. (The “wind” metaphor which came spontaneously brings out this quality.)

This may not always be the case in describing experiencing. For instance, if you were a landscape architect, the knowing you were articulating might turn on something about how you respond when you experience a certain soil quality, or landscape shape. That quality or shape may endure, unchanged by your response to it.

If you are articulating a knowing from your experiencing, it’s not unlikely that in the pattern descriptions you would notice happenings, “locations” where they happen, conditions before they can happen, and states before and after they happen.

When the pattern begins to come clear, it makes it easy to ask new questions about it: for instance, when there is a dying-down inside, does it always open a changing place? If not, under what conditions does it open one?

Notice **the structure of what you’ve got**: in one of these examples there is a staying-with, and a not-knowing-how, and a comforting not-comfortableness, and a not-very-big, and a resting-in, and a

coming-back-to, and there are the links between them: *When staying-with not-knowing-how by coming-back-to where not-very-big then resting-in a comforting not-comfortableness.*

Each pattern is inherently related to the ones from your other stories, since each instance comes from one felt sense.

A facet is the pattern that is “lifted out” of an instance: first in informally noticing what the story brings, and then as you more formally notice terms and the relations between them. But a facet is also the sense, in the lifting out, of lifting an *aspect* of something “more” than just this one facet. The partial quality of a facet exists in the word “facet” itself. A facet cannot exist *as a facet* if there are not also other facets.

Each facet is a facet of a ‘something’ which is forming but which is not yet here. In a sense, the facets are a bridge to that something. There is a beautiful, flickering quality to the facets. They are facets of something which *isn’t yet*, but which is also not arbitrary.

Check each of these facets against your felt sense, until for each facet it says “yes, that’s got it”. When the facets are right you will feel bodily that you are headed where you want to be going. You can also find **a short “handle”** for each facet, which sums it up so that you can easily catch hold of the contribution it made. In the example above, it might be “coming -back-to”.

8. Crossing. The facet you lifted out from each instance can bring out further detail in the other instances. Take the facets from each of your stories, and using each as if it were a magnifying glass, look at your other stories so that you see **something new in each story that you wouldn’t have noticed before**. A “flavor” comes out that wasn’t “there” before. Consider each instance in turn. What further detail is brought out of each, when you bring the other facets to it in this way?

Make **any changes to each facet** which the new detail calls for.

Now write down a few satisfying words and short phrases from your work up to now. Define each by using what you said “around” them *in the facets where they were actually used*, so that you create **a small private dictionary**. This glossary can include key words you have used for years—for instance, words like “energy”, “time”, “space”, “listening”, “sensing”, “language”, “pattern”, “presence”, “system”, “organization”, “behavior” —*if, and only if, you used them in your facets*, so that they now are “surrounded” by very specific new language which comes from your experiencing.

For example, for a key term might be “the form”. It might appear in one of the facets like so: “Only certain moves which are possible right now will fit the form at a given point, but the form easily elicits these and they are compelling and satisfying. One’s own following of it, which is not -exactly-following, lets something new emerge in the form itself, which becomes clearer and clearer as it falls apart in that empty space and then becomes more complete.

The private dictionary definition of “the form” would look like this: “what easily elicits certain moves that fit it, what it not-exactly followed, where something new emerges, what becomes clearer and clearer as it falls apart in the empty space and then becomes more complete”.

As you look at your dictionary as a whole, only keep what feels good. It should feel complete enough, but not over-complex *for your purposes*. The dictionary exists to help *you* keep hold of the elements you are working with, not for anyone else.

An overall “something” is emerging. This is not something very general that the facets already have in common, but rather, what jumps out at you as you cross them.

It is *not* that there is some “but there already” correct generalization which you are attempting to “capture” accurately in words. It emerges; it is a surprise. It is full of life in its unexpectedness *and* the “of course!” which accompanies it. *Of course* this is here; and, how surprising!

Once it leaps out at you, you can write, just lightly, a description of this emergent something. Play with it, until what you’ve written has the taste and smell and feel in it, of the felt sense you started with. Of course the felt sense is much “bigger” and more developed now than it was in the beginning, but you can still recognize it, just as a parent still recognizes the “same” child at fifteen that they knew at age two.

You can feel the unity of all these threads that your work to now has drawn out of that original felt sense. A resolution comes, as if you were listening to a symphony which was coming to the end of a movement. The “original” shape appears again, very simply. This shape is like what was there in the beginning, but it’s not the same. It’s still itself, but in a fresh new form.

This **simple shape** makes it possible to “have” what has already become very complex, so that it can grow, but grow coherently. It may be a gathering together of your energies which fairly explodes with vitality, or on the other hand it may be a subtle feeling that something is working down under there. All the energy becomes coherently organized to support just one intention. It’s like a seed crystal at the center of a glass containing a saturated solution. It’s ripe; just a single tap and a crystalline structure will begin to form.

9. Living with it. Now all the nuances of the new detail can crystallize around that simple shape. The different strands arrange themselves—informally at first, as you **write down, just for yourself, what comes freely**. What wants to form of-itself can show itself. Then the formal theory construction which begins at the next step has that “of-itselfness” available to it.

In this spontaneous writing, often you are surprised by something new, or by something that seemed too small to be worth noting before, but which now becomes central.

You’ve completed the first two phases. Now you’ve achieved a way to talk about this informally. You can package it a little differently for different audiences, but your basic “talking points” are

here. This may be all you need. What you have at this stage is not yet a formal theory; if you need a formal theory, continue on to the next phase.

Phase 4: Deriving a core structure

10. An interlocking structure. Theory makes an interlocking structure, and builds into that structure what you would like to safeguard here. A theory positions major features in relation to one another. Then later, secondary features can be positioned in relation to these. Theoretical “mapping” happens as concepts are defined in terms of their relations to the other concepts. The felt sense “pushes back” against the theory and shows where the map does not yet include *this* odd little wiggle just *here*.

Let yourself feel like a cat sitting in the sun, with your eyes relaxed, not looking at anything in particular but aware of where things are in general. Now, bring this awareness to what you have been working with, to the whole extent of the original felt sense *including the “illogical” quality of it*. Let yourself feel, without yet making words, ‘there is *this*, and *this*, and *this*...’ simply noticing that there *are* different entities in this “landscape”.

Let a few tentative phrases come for the main three or four...for the moment, these **terms** are the major features in your “map” of this landscape. It could be that these are phrases you’ve already been using; or they could be new. Two of these terms should hold the two contradictory “positions” in the apparent illogic. Check to see that the felt sense feels included within these terms.

For example, my terms could be coming-back-to, resting-in, and not-knowing-how

Now **define each term in relation to the others**. Take two of the terms, put an “is” between them and correct the resulting sentence until your felt sense is content with it. For instance, “A *is* B” might change to “A *is a kind of* B.”

Create a sentence like this for *each* of the three or four pairs of terms. For example: “A *is a kind of* B. A *is what shows where* C. B *is possible only if* C.”

With the terms from above: Coming-back-to *is a way of* resting-in. Coming-back-to *is what happens when* not-knowing-how. Resting-in *is possible when* not-knowing-how.

You’re creating a structure that comes from the living process and doesn’t violate it. Play with the terms and sentences until your original felt sense says ‘aaah’ as if it just got a home.

11. Inherently related terms. Theory also explains. Something lies under or between these terms, so that what appeared to be illogical actually makes logical sense.

Explaining is all about noticing how-come. So, take the two terms that are holding the illogic for you, and ask, “How come I need *both* of these?” Ask this question by using “is” to link the two, but not the same way you used it in the last step. Let the sentence bring out why you *want* both these terms.

You will get something different than you would find if you looked at each term one at a time and asked “Why do I need this, and this?” With the latter you get isolated functions, but “is” shows you the living thing between the two: what one term “gives back” to the other in their interaction. These two are “helping” each other. Each one has something it’s naturally “good at” *in relation* to the other. Notice your felt sense of **what it is that is happening between them**. What they are *doing together* explains the apparent illogic of finding them together.

Let **one or more new terms** come for this something.

As I notice what is going on between “resting -in” and “coming -back-to”, I see: “Resting -in is when you keep coming-back-to, and coming-back-to is giving up what isn’t resting -in.” At first this just seems like the old familiar concept of “letting go”. So I wait a bit.

I begin to notice a precision here that’s different than the old “letting go” concept. “Giving up what isn’t resting -in” tells me exactly what I “give up”: all I give up is whatever isn’t “resting -in”. So I add a word: *only* giving up what isn’t resting -in. “*Only* giving up” is much *easier* than “giving up”; it’s a *restful* resting-in.

At step ten, you may have used the word “something” at some key point in your sentences. Notice: something is being pointed to by that “something”. It may mark the “under or between” though it does not yet make it explicit.

For example, at step ten the terms “the form” and “the authority of the hand not -exactly following” give rise to the sentence “The form *is* the authority of the hand not-exactly-following.” The felt sense corrects the sentence to read “*Something beneath* the form is what the authority of the hand not-exactly following can sense and is actually following.” Both sides of the illogic appear in the corrected sentence, and the “something beneath” is beneath both. So at step eleven I ask: what *is* that “something beneath?” Then I wait for what the felt sense wants to show me...It responds: *a kind of bone beauty*.

You are noticing where there *has to be* something, because you can see its effect in the apparent illogic. Perhaps sometimes one thing happens, but another time something else happens. *What’s right there? What makes the difference?* Be a little like an astronomer noticing permutations which imply something *has to be there*. Spend a little time with your felt sense of the something that is being shown by the “behavior” of all the rest...

Another way is to go into the “big categories” and rummage around, and find some way there to relate two of your terms. This can give you some traction when experientially you don’t see anything yet. You can ask yourself: What, anyway, *is* the nature of ‘any human being’, or ‘any organization’, or ‘any living thing’, or ‘all learning’, or ‘all healing’, or ‘all creating’, or ...so that *of course A has to be B?* Then wait...there will be *something*.

You may find that the implications of this new thing ripple through much of what you have been thinking and doing up to now. When you form theory, you form something which can “talk back” to you. It shows you possibilities you hadn’t seen before, which follow, logically, from your terms and their relations. Some of these inferences bring an immediate “of course” because they are showing you something that was always implicit in what you knew.

Write down what you are noticing. The *kind* of language you use to write down your observations here may be very different than the descriptive language of earlier steps. The most natural language now may be the language of logic: propositions which lead irresistably one to another like a stream going down a mountain, cascading from pool to pool, just following the “natural gravity” of the argument where it is impelled to go. There is no requirement to find such language here. If such language does begin to come, stay with the felt sense and let *it* say what comes next at each turn.

12. Forming the nucleus of the theory. A theory has a nucleus or core. It is just what needs to be included for this theory to function as *this* theory. These few essential elements work in concert, and without all of them, the theory is clearly incomplete and doesn’t “fly”.

The nucleus grows, like a tree, out of the point where what had appeared illogical in your knowing now makes sense. And like a tree, each “branching” must grow out of the prior growth. The nucleus is the trunk and primary branches of this “tree”: only what would kill the tree if it were cut.

Begin with the new term which came at step 11. From it, one step at a time, derive the more-than-logical which it now explains. To derive each next term, make just one move repeatedly: first, notice how the nucleus is not complete with what you have so far, because....then, bring in a next term which the sense of not-yet-complete “wants”, using the word “is” to bring out the relation between the new term and one or more of the terms which preceded it. Continue until you have brought in both terms which hold the illogic, and your felt sense is satisfied that the core structure of the theory is now here. Adjust it any way you need to, until it feels exactly right. Keep it as “lean” as possible.

Each “is” forms a link so that there is **an unbroken “path” between the term at the beginning and the terms at the end.** Each new term both *is* inherently what preceded it, and also brings a new distinction *in kind*: For example, “A *is* B when C. C *is* a kind of D which E. E *is* where F.”

In one sense, you are making a path from A to B; in another sense you are simply walking the path

that is already there.

As you are deriving the nucleus, it can help to go back and look at the shape you found at the end of step eight, to see if there is something more it shows which is still needed.

Phase 5: Developing implications

13. Extending it. Here your theory gets to become vast.

Derive **the secondary structures** of the theory. Your facets may help you see what more needs to be included here. You may also find that new instances come naturally which have something you now need. Derive needed terms, one term at a time.

Notice where this theory wants to go on, where is there a gap. What itchy spot wants something more? What was it anyhow that made this compelling?

You can begin to extend your theory by bringing to it one or more large topics, finding how each such large topic is understood differently when seen as *at least* this. If the current view of human beings, or organizations, or living things, or learning, or healing, or creating, or, makes *this theory* impossible, then if the theory is sound it implies *a change in how we understand* any human being, any organization, any living thing, all learning, all healing, all creating, It tells us properties that each of those larger things must necessarily have *for* this to be possible.

For instance: “Any human being *is at least* the possibility of a coming-back-to.” ..Well yes, we *are* a coming-back-to. That’s what makes me recognizable to me as the “same” person I was when I was two.

Choose such a category where it would be natural to apply this theory, and a term from the nucleus which “wants” to be used here. Make a sentence with the two, also using “all” or “any”, and “is at least”. Notice that yes, this is right, because... Continue with other terms from your theory.

14. Implications. So far your theory has been like a hermit; now it is time for it to return to ordinary society and daily life.

Within your field, describe a central theoretical topic, and a problem which is related to your theory. What is a key concept in the established theory about this topic? What does current theory say right there? What interesting problem exists when this is the understanding, such that your theory can contribute something? Describe how your theory changes that understanding.

It may help here to go back to what you wrote when you were first positioning yourself, at step 0.

Your theory also has implications in areas other than your field. Allow an instance to come from your felt sense of when you were applying this in another area of your life, where it led to a positive outcome. Then bring an area of human endeavor or any basic institution to your theory, which is clearly related to your instance. What is implied by your theory here? In what kinds of situations would it be appropriate to apply it?

What is a central topic in current theory in that domain? Within that topic, what is a concept related to your theory? How is this concept extended by this new understanding?

In practice, the development of a theory continues for years; such development could continue well past the end of your lifetime if your theory has particularly fertile implications. Using these steps is an iterative, or spiralling, process. Each time through, you find yourself with new problems which would not have been apparent before. Fixing these problems in the next pass introduces new problems. It also extends the horizons.

You will probably notice the temptation at some point go back to the beginning and start over. This is especially true for people who are second time users of the process. The first time you use TAE your focus is generally on getting a sense of the process. But the second time, you are ready to use it “for real”. Sometimes it is in fact the case that what you started with is not going to get you where you want to go. Beginning to use the steps and seeing what happens, will tell you a great deal about where you actually wanted to start. It is not unusual for someone who is using TAE for the second time to go back to step one several times.

But there is also often a temptation to go back constantly and refine your work, as the steps show you assumptions you didn’t know you held, and new avenues open. It is best to resist this temptation and go through to the end, before beginning at the beginning for another round. Each time you go through the steps, you will find yourself correcting and elaborating the work you did before at each step, to reflect where the last iteration got you.

Sometimes it is best to throw out the work from previous iterations and start fresh. You never actually lose the old development when you do this, of course, even when you begin from what seems to be a completely different starting point.

After the first few iterations, you may find that in order to continue, you need to build some new kind of “scaffolding” into the steps themselves. But when you are first working with TAE it is wise to let the steps as written carry you, until you get a feel for the process.

In most respects my way of thinking about TAE and Gendlin's are pretty close to one another.¹ Mostly our different perspectives on the process complement one another, so that wherever one of us stops, the other goes on. However, there are several points where the two versions of the process actually vary in their approach: step 8 is probably where they are most different. There are also differences in how we form a theory in steps 10 through 12.

The influence Gene Gendlin has had on my thinking is obvious and profound; but I am also indebted to: Christopher Alexander, for his fertile theory about the process of creating designs which are functional and alive, and for his beautiful example of how words can't say 'it' (A Timeless Way of Building, A Pattern Language, and Notes on the Synthesis of Form)... Robert Scott Root-Bernstein, for his investigation of what is worth investigating (in Discovering)... Donald Schon, for his reflections on what it means in practice to reflect on practice (in The Reflective Practitioner)... Steven Gould, for his description of the essence of a theory's core (in The Structure of Evolutionary Theory)... Glaser and Strauss (in The Discovery of Grounded Theory) for the insight that instances drive the process from the beginning... Jerome Bruner for his understanding of the narrative nature of human beings and their communication with one another (in Acts of Meaning) and for the way that we spiral around again and again in building our understanding (The Process of Education)... Susanne Langer, for her clarity about what a theory is in general, and for her particular theory about signs and symbols (see On Feeling and Form, and Philosophy In a New Key)... Gilles Deleuze for his discussion of concepts and their articulation (in What Is Philosophy?) and his play with unfolding, enfolding, refolding (in The Fold)... Kuang-Ming Wu for his translation of Chuang Tzu in which it was so easy to see the 'somethings' and the links between them (The Butterfly As Companion)... Chuang Tzu himself for his wisdom on the subject of 'cleaving to heaven-given lines'... Maya Lin for her example of utter commitment to making nothing but what emerges from the context, and patience in allowing the context to 'speak'... various writers on emergent phenomena, including James Gleick, Brian Arthur, and Margaret Wheatley... various other writers on good design in software development, including Shalloway and Trott, who show the 'responsibility' of objects to one another (Design Patterns Explained)... and, David Hovel, who (many years ago now) taught me a lot about elegant code by handing me his own, and who also started me on a lifetime search for the answer to the question "How do you draw a rabbit?" when he said "anyone who can't draw a rabbit is not an artist!"

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Kye Nelson operates antheosophia (www.antheosophia.org), a cross-disciplinary gathering place for emergent thinking, and teaches workshops in the US and internationally as well as consulting to people and organizations who are bringing emergent "somethings" into the world. She began as a programmer and software troubleshooter, and learned much there about the logical representation of situations. Her "other life" as a working painter has also informed her work with TAE, as she has grappled with the problem of shaping theories beginning from experiences whose intricacy seems impossible to represent in a simple and coherent form.