



Living in Self-Generation

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We live in a field of presence; presence is always available to us. Yet when we live habitually, we are not aware of this, and naturally organize ourselves around our attachments and aversions. We live to maintain and protect our identity.

Figure 2.1 shows how we can respond to the events in our lives in one of two fundamental ways.

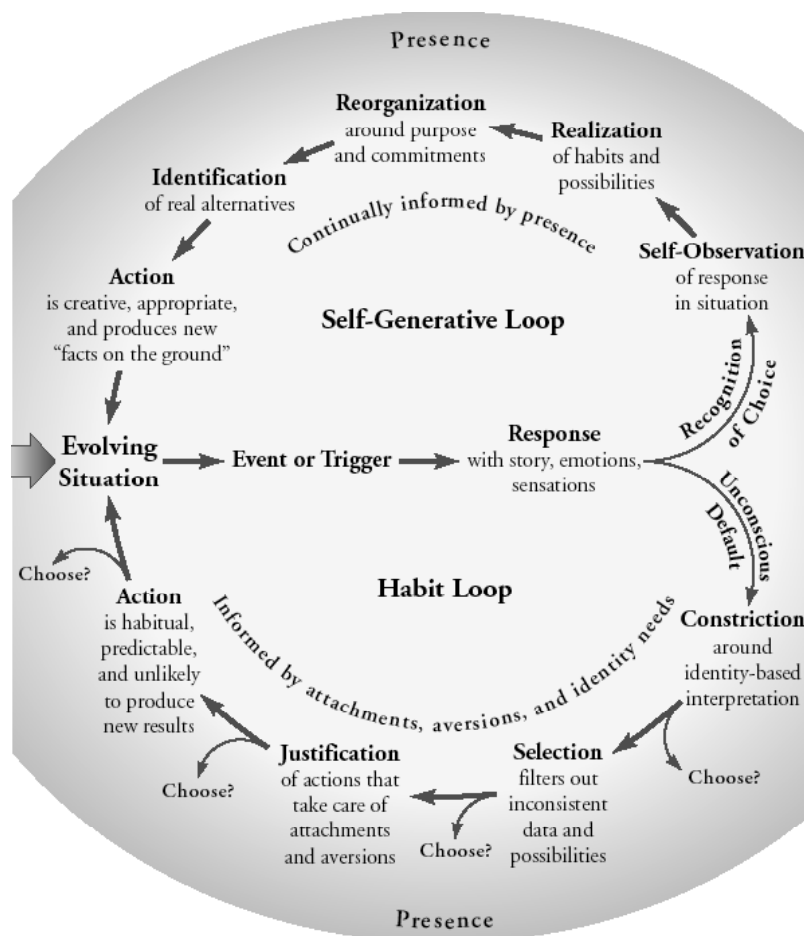


Figure 2.1. Habit and Self-Generative Loops.

Our lives consist of a range of evolving situations. Within each situation, an event often happens that presents us with a challenge; something in our habitual nature is triggered by the



event. Most often, we move automatically into the responses, practiced over decades, that have made us who we are.

This habitual response, as we've discussed above, is characterized by related phenomena that arise nearly simultaneously: a story or interpretation, emotions, and bodily sensations. When we are triggered, we are most likely to act unconsciously; our habits and practiced inclinations largely determine our actions. Unaware, we default into the *habit loop*.

Like it or not, we all spend much more time in this habit loop than we realize. Because we live in it, the habit loop feels comfortable and normal. We don't even see that we're in it. (In fact, to see that we're in it, from a place of relaxed awareness, is already *not* being in it!)

The habit loop works like this. As we respond to an unfolding event, we unconsciously default into our predictable ways of interpreting and responding. Specifically, our view becomes constricted around our interpretation of that event. Because our interpretation is identity-based, it is inseparable from the attachments and aversions that also produce that identity. Without knowing we're doing so, we see selectively, filtering out all data and possibilities that are inconsistent with our identity-based interpretations. We simply don't see other truths. Our awareness becomes self-sealing.

Our interpretation serves our identities by justifying habitual and predictable actions that take care of our attachments and aversions. In a sense, these actions are serving us well. However, identity-driven actions are much more effective at preserving and strengthening our identity than producing new results. We continue in our patterns, others do the same, and we get frustrated when things don't change. We see our difficulties as someone else's fault, or simply the way things are.

Informing this habit loop, and expressing themselves at every stage, are our attachments, aversions, and identity needs. Although this is not inherently a bad thing, this truth limits the range of what we can perceive and respond to in any given situation. For better or for worse, we humans organize ourselves in life primarily around preserving and perpetuating our identities.

Contrast this with the *self-generative loop*. Through practice, presence becomes increasingly available to us. We learn to see challenging moments as opportunities to wake up. Recognition of this possibility of choice brings us immediately into presence. The simple thought "A-hah! This is an opportunity!" invites us into self-generation, continually informed by presence. (At any time, even when deep into our habit loop, there is the possibility of recognizing that we're in the loop, and choosing to wake up into presence.)

In the self-generative loop, self-observation allows us to discern the first arising of our habit. Realization of our habit wakes us immediately into a vaster landscape of possibilities: we become self-aware and resourceful. Depending on how spacious and aware we are, more or fewer possibilities may be revealed.



With realization, we can reorganize ourselves around our purpose and commitments. Relaxed and present, we are not constrained by habit and are much more likely to see new possibilities that may have been available to us all along. From this expanded sense of what is possible, we can identify real alternatives, and choose new actions that are creative and appropriate. Taking these actions from a centered presence then creates new “facts on the ground.” We change the situation, so that our relationship to it changes and something new is produced.

Over time and with practice, we stabilize these new behaviors or actions so that we are comfortable and competent using them. (This is not shown in the diagram, as it results from repeated passing through the cycle.) Repetition stabilizes not only our new and more constructive behaviors in the specific situation (which we can think of as more useful, more evolved habits that will eventually become limiting themselves), but also our competence at living in the self-generative cycle itself (which, I suppose, we could conceive of as a meta-habit).

Presence informs every step of the self-generative loop. It is always available and serves as the oxygen, if you will, that allows self-generation. Presence endows us with the possibility of responding in creative and positive ways to anything that comes at us.

We can see that Janet began to reside more consistently in the self-generative loop. And we can see the possibility for ourselves that this learning cycle, in which we are constantly opening ourselves to new information and new ways of seeing and responding, can become a way of being in the world. The basic requirements for this are the components of self-generation. These can be learned and practiced, such that being self-generative is increasingly embodied in who we are and in how we lead.

This understanding of development, and specifically how self-generation supports our development of a new identity, is foundational to our work. It naturally begs the questions, What is our role as coaches in supporting this kind of development? How do we develop our own presence? And, how do we make the coaching moves to support leaders in their unfolding of a more powerful identity?

The answers to these questions are essential for responding effectively to the crying needs of our organizations, our communities, and indeed, our very planet.

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