

A PROCESS MODEL SCIENTIST: What Does It Really Mean in Practice?

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INTRODUCTION

At home the unit-model scientist looks into the eyes of the child, and the child looks back. But the scientist thinks: Isn't it sad that you are really just a machine . . . ! The natural sciences cannot really construct living things, but the unit model leads one to assume that some day we will (Gendlin and Johnson, p. 1).

I once was on my way to become “a unit-model scientist,” a concept used by Gendlin to describe a person operating in the current scientific world-view. One of the features of unit-model science is explaining reality as being made out of separate units. I wanted to be a scientist as long as I remember myself. But after my Master’s degree in Neuroethology, I couldn’t continue. I felt that I’d been cut off from something alive in me . . . the scientific world view made me feel as though I were living in a machine-like, meaningless universe. I left science, convinced I’d never come back.

Seventeen years later, in a Focusing session, I got a felt sense that my whole body was becoming a DNA helix. I listened to the information which was encoded by this particular DNA, and what came, surprisingly and whole, was a message to go back to science and try to be a process-model scientist. That session was like a quantum leap that changed my life direction completely.

This article is an opportunity to reflect upon the six months since I started my journey as I felt sensed my way back to science. I hope that in subsequent articles I will write about Focusing with the scientific research itself.

I DON'T WANT TO PROVE SCIENTIFICALLY THAT FOCUSING WORKS:

Naturally I intended doing a Ph.D. in the field I came from . . . but every day for a week, in the left side of my Focusing body, the immune system appeared . . . inviting me to be friendly with it . . . and have it as the subject of my research. I acceded.

“And no, I don’t want to prove scientifically that Focusing supports our immunity or helps us while sick or wounded,” I explained to everyone, including my supervising immunologist, who thought this approach would be my primary interest. “That I know already. I want to find out how Focusing supports my scientific work and myself during that work. I want to find out how to move back and forth from scientific knowledge to my embodied knowledge and not to discard either of them.”

I recently facilitated a workshop entitled ‘Focusing and Science: Two That Are One.’ After people volunteered responses as to what they thought characterized science, I invited them to sense how they experienced the term ‘science’ inside. The sharing was fascinating, touching so much of what this article is about. One of them said, “*There is a precision in science . . . it feels pleasant yet I felt that there is also precision in my body, a different kind of precision . . . it would be so exciting to bring this precision into the precision of science.*”

And that is exactly what I want to do.

TWO INTERWOVEN RESEARCHES:

So while writing this article I’m also writing my research intentions for the Ph.D. committee in the university. For me it’s really two interwoven research projects. One is academic; its temporary name, “Pro-resolving properties of human macrophages from malignant, inflammatory and autoimmune disorders”. The other is independent, process based, and of course interwoven into the first.

My “independent” research question is: What does it mean in practice to be a process model scientist?

In another Focusing session the term ‘connected scientific knowledge’ appeared. It seems linked to the work of a process model scientist.

WHAT DO I MEAN BY CONNECTED SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE?

What I understand so far (and I’m just in the beginning of exploring this) is that connected scientific knowledge is the result of producing explicit scientific knowledge while sensing the wider environment in which the research is going on. As a process model scientist, I am aware of how my body is connected to and affected by everything that is involved in creating the scientific knowledge.

I want to work in the lab like a ‘regular’ scientist, yet hold close to my heart Gendlin’s principle of Interaction First:

The body IS an interaction process with the environment, and therefore the body IS its situations. The body isn’t just a sealed thing here, with an external situation over there, which it merely interprets. Rather, even before we think and speak, the living body is already one interaction process with its situation. The situation is not out there, nor inside. The external “things” and the subjective “entities” are derived from one single life-interaction process” (Gendlin, 2004, p. 3).

Practically it means, for me, felt sensing the implicit interactions with the whole system I am working in and exploring how I am being affected by it.

So what am I interacting with?

- Space (my research is a co-operation of a lab in the university and a lab for bone marrow transplantation in a hospital)
- People (scientists, doctors, patients)
- Methods and materials
- Objects
- Scientific texts
- Scientific ideas

And more . . .

Connected scientific knowledge is created when I'm turning inward to sense not only scientific terms and ideas, scientific results and conclusions but also the interaction with the people, materials and objects in the lab, as well as the wider system (the patients from whom blood was taken, the building in which the lab is located, the lab animals and their fate), etc.

How can I feel all of the above?

Your physically felt body is in fact part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people—in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is the body as it is felt from inside (Gendlin, 1981, p. 77).

Through my body, I can sense everything that is around me, and that felt-interaction gives rise to knowledge that emerged from interacting with all the above, not just with pure scientific data. I hope that such a process will help me find out how science can be made from a place that is not disconnected and disembodied and how it can be more life giving.

I am just starting this fascinating journey, yet there is so much I've already documented in my date-log. Every visit to the lab is full with instances I can learn from. Here I want to share some vignettes exploring what connected knowledge can look like.

11/19/10: I Focused about my goal: to move freely between the field of science and the generating process. *I felt a deep crack in my heart . . . I remembered how meaningful science was for me and how I lost my way there . . . and now there is a fear that I may lose my way again. After a long Focusing session the heart becomes a flexible whole—holding vaguely the memory of what happened but becoming a healthy heart again.*

What I've learned from this particular session (and many more that addressed the fears arising from moving back to science) is that science was for me much more than a field of study—it was like an inherent destination. And when it was blocked, something in me shattered and I have moved to an opposite pole of human experience. I left scientific inquiry and all the knowledge and experience I had gathered there, and went for a journey to challenge my assumptions and beliefs about the nature of reality, and explore dimensions that are considered non-scientific.

Now, I am in a personal journey to move beyond the split between science and process; between outer knowledge and inner sensing; and between material things and love.

12/6/10: When I came to meet the scientist in whose laboratory I'm going to work, he very sensibly asked me if I'm willing to work with animals.

"Definitely not," I replied. "What are my options?"

"Well," he said, "coincidentally, yesterday a team from the lab for bone marrow transplantation suggested that we do a joint research project. They are working with people who have Multiple Myeloma. Are you willing to work with human cells?"

"Yes," I said, "and by the way, I love coincidences . . ."

Before meeting with that team from the hospital, I sensed into "the sick people": *I feel weak, I feel life is leaving me . . . I feel despair and how my body is falling apart from within . . . I literally almost collapse. I remember Focusing . . . I move to a wider Presence, acknowledging the pain and fatigue . . . slowly I feel life energy gathering in the middle of my body . . . this energy is spreading into every single cell . . . I realize how, in the depth of death and despair, there is a life energy and healing.* I remember Gendlin's quote:

"If there is something bad, sick, or unsound let it inwardly be and breathe. That is the only way it can evolve and change into the form it needs" (Gendlin, 1986, p. 178).

What was so important for me with this session was the heart-connection of the research with the sick people themselves. I was not working with human cells without acknowledging the suffering of the actual people they were taken from.

12/10/10: I have articles which I need to read. I need to learn what this lab is specializing in. I don't understand anything. I read them again and again, and it's like banging my head against a wall. I Focus: "What is between me and understanding the articles?" . . . *My body is becoming smaller and smaller . . . I'm afraid to shrink to a dot . . . it's like entering a prison cell and being locked away . . . it's terrible . . . I don't have an independent existence . . . it feels like I'm locked in somebody else's thoughts . . . it's about freedom in many levels . . . science feels deterministic . . . the philosophy of Gendlin speaks about the generative body but entering those texts, this worldview, brings the anxiety of having no freedom. All of a sudden a wild white horse appears, he is radically free, with no reins or saddle. He is the freedom barometer . . . he will help me to notice if I lose my independent thinking . . . it feels better . . .*

After several days the articles opened up. Although I still didn't understand the concepts and their literal meaning, I could feel the meaning. It felt that "underneath the page" there is a space I can move in . . . it was like the article became three dimensional . . . now, six months later, I also understand the concepts in their public meaning.

4/14/11: I've noticed that when I read articles or thesis works, I skip the 'materials and methods' section, not wanting to read about the procedures they do to the lab mice. Even-

tually I had to pause and give space to the disturbing feeling that I had tried to avoid by skipping the ‘materials and methods’ section.

I feel awful for the mice . . . their fate is determined . . . wild mice live in freedom, these mice have no hope . . . I want to bury my head in the sand . . . I want to let them free . . . I have images of Jews in the holocaust . . . my body is shaking . . .

This was the first part in which I realize that scientists distance themselves (understandably) from connecting with the animals’ suffering. Letting myself get in touch with their suffering is part of creating connected scientific knowledge.

The rest of this process is very far from any scientific (or common) knowledge:

The creative person listening to me suggested that I turn towards the mice and ask them a question. The first question that jumps to my mind is: Why did you choose this fate? *I sense into them . . . their existence is a non-violent message . . . they enable people to cut them until humans will realize what they are doing . . . to them and to the rest of the animals on this planet . . . they choose science because it’s connected to the navel of human culture . . . It feels better, yet I still feel connected to the suffering of each individual mouse . . . to their mother who gave birth to the mice knowing they will be taken for experiments . . . then a new possibility appears—that humanity will find a way to move beyond experimenting with animals . . . it excites me, I want to contribute to this goal . . .*

4/14/11: I don’t like the space of the lab in the hospital. I sense into this feeling . . . *it feels dense and crowded . . . old and messy . . . full with angles and boxes . . . I wonder why scientists have to be in a space without beauty and harmony . . . this environment is not supporting a connected knowledge . . . but slowly I sense that it does still hold the spark . . . the flame . . . a spark that attracts those who are curious about the human mystery . . .*

I see how my body is so influenced by the space it is in. No wonder that not knowing these things led me so far from science 17 years ago. Now I have the Focusing process to support me.

Another example: There is a complex machine I need to work on. A nice woman tried to teach me for several days how to use it. I noticed that when I’m near it, I have a headache. I told her that. She responded that everyone in this lab suffers from headaches. The next time we approached this machine, I told her to wait a minute. I took a pause . . . I acknowledged the headache . . . I asked inside how can I be near this machine without getting a headache . . . I stayed a bit with what my body showed me.

This machine is very sophisticated, analyzing blood samples and showing the results as complex patterns of dots on the screen. I didn’t have time for a long Focusing session, I just sensed inside for a few seconds; it felt as if my body were being disintegrated into million dots, as if this machine were operating on me—no wonder it caused a headache. So I grounded myself, found the right distance from this feeling, moved into a wider presence, and the headache stopped.

5/5/11: I'm in the lab . . . I have to wear gloves . . . *I'm listening to my body . . . the skin feels repulsion from the material the gloves are made of . . . It doesn't want to put them on . . . my hands don't want the gloves either, for a different reason—they don't want protection or mediation . . . they want to be like a farmer's hands—immersing themselves directly in the clods of earth . . . I sense into the gloves—they feel like soldiers at 'the front', scarifying themselves to protect their wives and children . . .*

I continue that day to sense into every object I use . . . When I sense into objects, they unfold . . . revealing stories and memories. In a recent discussion Gendlin gave an example of entering into made forms:

Let's go into chair . . . we usually move it from here to there and take it as your concept of chair, but if you allow it to be the feel—then it becomes this chair, which you inherited from aunt so and so . . . and which you brought with you from the other place where you lived, and which has all this personal history . . . and not just that, but it has a factory in it that made it, and they made it back in the days when they made chairs like that and it has all of human history in it . . . this poor little chair brings you all of that because as something generated, the generating process is still there with you, it's never just in the past—it is there now . . . if you don't attend there, it is just a chair and you move it and you don't care which chair happens to be there, you need a chair over here and you move it . . . All the objects, all the situations, all the definitions, the cultural patterns, and different emotions are all **generated** . . . But this is not what basically is, what basically is—is the **generating**, what basically is, is like the living process itself . . . (Gendlin, 2011).

When I “go into” the objects in the lab, I feel that the objects around me are not separate units but are alive and meaningful and part of everything that is affecting my research.

7/15/11: I was Focusing about what is the essence of this journey for me so far. I got quite a spiritual answer: *I'm in a very strong movement into the heart of matter. I was like a hovering spirit, and now I'm entering matter. In this journey I encounter locked doors. I ought to sit in front of them and wait. . . . matter, like a religious text, is opening up for you when you wait . . . in the beginning I see just general words . . . then the letters in the text, like a carriage, carry me right into the depth of my DNA. Inside the DNA I find the peacefulness people are seeking. Scientists try to decode it with their minds, and succeed locally. That is the unit model. There is another way deep in . . . Inside yourself there is something that holds you with great care . . . and from there my research can be without fear. The connected scientific knowledge helps me to get there . . . move with my whole body into the heart of matter.*

WHAT DO I SHARE WITH PEOPLE IN THE LAB?

5/15/11: I'm in a lab meeting. They are discussing two alternative research directions for a Master's student . . . I don't yet understand the details . . . I'm checking with my

body . . . *the first idea feels heavy; it feels like a dead end . . . something you can kick but get no response . . . I'm sensing the other direction. It feels light, lighted, with potential energy.* They choose the first direction . . . I don't say anything. Yet, it is so exciting to go around the lab, sensing all these things, knowing that if they knew what I was doing, they would be sure that I'm crazy. In the beginning when I shared a little bit of why I'm there, it felt as if I were speaking to them in a language they don't understand. Their gaze became blank.

At this point of writing this article, I need to pause and collect my thoughts. I come from a field of interaction. This is the philosophy and the practice. In my Focusing life outside the lab I work with people who are interested in that. I teach it, live it and love it. The learning I'm doing now is how to be my true self in the heart of the unit model field. Most of the people there are not interested in interaction; they see themselves as units, as separate from matter, from each other. I'm learning how to be there and to do what they are doing without letting myself forget the interaction. I'm learning how to listen to 'mind talk' and hold the *more* that is there. Sometimes it's very difficult; I ask myself what am I doing here? How did I get myself here? There is so much noise around; my body feels like a fish taken out of the water. These are the times when Focusing is so supportive, helping me gently to carry forward.

In July something exciting happened: another Ph.D. student asked me what I am doing when I'm not in the lab. I told her about Focusing. She was very interested and asked if I could recommend something for her to read. Sometime later she suggested that maybe I should do a workshop for the people in the lab . . .

7/19/11: Today I dared for the first time to listen in a Focusing way. I was in the other lab, in the hospital; someone was teaching me a long procedure, and while doing so, also complaining about how her research is stuck, how frustrating it is . . . she doesn't know what to do any more. Her speech was fast . . . she didn't breathe at all. We stood near the centrifuge, waiting for it to stop. People were passing by, occasionally speaking to us. It wasn't at all the quiet setting I'm used to while Focusing . . . but still I reflected back what she said and asked—as if it were the most common thing—what comes in her body as she's speaking. "I feel a pressure in my chest" she replied, "as if something is stuck there." Now I was in my "territory" . . . I invited her to acknowledge that feeling, and stay a bit more with it . . . she was quiet for some moments, then took a big breath and looked at me in surprise: "It feels lighter there," she said with a smile. "I need to speak with my supervisor. For too long I've been locked inside my situation." The machine started to beep. A universe of opportunities opened for me.

FURTHER DIRECTION:

I didn't get yet to the exciting stage of using felt sensing while designing experiments and thinking about results and next steps. This is the challenge lying ahead of me. I don't know what will be the possible outcome of all this. Gendlin is describing the product of a 'unit model science':

A combination "cowpig" was recently created. It could not stand up and was therefore not a practical success. It was also in constant pain. Currently it

is often said that “evolution” is now happening through science. But evolution was in the interest of the creatures. The purpose of an all-lean pig is the market . . . The creature’s own interest does not enter in. Unit-model science is redesigning the plants, the animals, and now also us . . . The unit-model science is running ahead so fast, one cannot be sure that humans can catch up with its effects. Whole industries and financial networks invest billions long before anyone can know the eventual applications. And science itself is now partly on “automatic pilot.” The findings from one experiment can be put directly into the computer to generate the next experiment, without a human decision about what it means coming between (Gendlin and Johnson, p. 10).

I’m asking myself what will happen if humans will “come between”. What will be the qualities of connected scientific knowledge? How will that knowledge influence the “products” developed from it (for example drugs or technology)? How will it influence the people who will use these products? I don’t know when, if ever, I’ll get answers to those questions.

This project is a very personal journey and at the same time I feel I’m at the edge of something wider, something that is new to our culture. I know this because as I share my goal with more and more people, some of them step forward and offer their help. They say, “We feel it is important; we are here for you if you need support.” And this touches me deeply.

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