

"For two decades, I have watched the wonderful impacts that Sami Cohen ... have had on people's lives and organizations ... I am delighted for the benefit this book will bring to many people."

Peter Senge, Best selling author of The Fifth Discipline



"1 - The 2 concepts that changed my life"

By

SAMI COHEN & PARTNERS

"Only when you enter the Now you can *truly* be with your customers, your employees, your spouse, your children..." *Sami Cohen*

The two concepts that changed my life

I want to share with you the two key concepts that changed my life:

- the description of the fabric of the Now
- the Self and the constructed self

Understanding these concepts has helped me to overcome fear and to stay rooted in the Now.

They are worth exploring in some detail.

The description of the fabric of the Now

The first concept is called:

“the fabric of the Now”

let's explore what is the fabric of the Now.

Many people think life is a kind of struggle. This unconscious belief has a big influence on how we experience every moment of our lives. Nevertheless, for each of those moments, we have a choice.

In every moment of life, we find ourselves experiencing one of two possible states of mind. We can conceive of these mindsets as two different “fabrics”. The first fabric is made of fear or lack (the sense that we are lacking, or missing out on, something). The second fabric is made of Presence, Love and connection with our environment and the people around us.

This state of mind is the “fabric of the moment,” it provides the context for what we perceive in that particular moment, how we perceive it, and how we react.

If the fabric of the moment is made of fear or lack, our attention will be focused on things that reinforce that fear. We will likely be in a reactive state – reacting to whatever makes us fearful.

On the other hand, when the fabric of the moment is made of Presence, Love and Connection, our perceptions and actions can freely stem from our true desires. So that fabric fosters the creative state.

In our experience, any given moment of our life can only be woven out of one of these two different fabrics, depending on our mindset at the moment's inception.

To better understand this concept, think about the fabric of the moment you are currently experiencing as you read these words.

Maybe you just came back from a rewarding day at work, and as you are reading this book, you are happy in your mind and in your heart. Even if it is only for a moment, you feel connected, in a state of love and compassion. For you, this moment is made of Presence, Love and Connection.

Let's suppose, instead, that as you are reading this book, your mind is preoccupied by a job you may lose, a difficult conversation with your spouse, anger at some of your family members, or a mortgage you can't afford to pay this month. How would you feel? What is taking place in your heart, in your body, in your mind? The fabric of this particular moment is made out of threads of fear and lack, which comes from your mind focusing on something you perceive is lacking in your life.

From the outside, in both cases, you are reading this book, but from the inside, as you read, you are having a very different experience of the fabric of the moment.

What distinguished the two different fabrics of the moment?

Each moment, including this very moment, is prefabricated, and we are in charge, at the moment's inception, of choosing the threads that make up this fabric.

We weave that fabric out of the fear and lack threads when we are focused on what we are afraid of or what we lack (which is a specific kind of fear). The moment we weave will have a predictable texture,

The other set of threads that we can use – Presence, Love and Connection – will weave a very different fabric.

Let's explore a few more examples. Imagine entering a job interview feeling ill-prepared or pressured to perform. In such a situation, we are likely to create moments out of fear and lack.

If we meet someone who we are interested in romantically, we may have an anxious need to be liked. So once again, the fabric of this moment is probably made out of fear or lack.

When we are afraid that our children will not love us, or when we are afraid of not being considered a good parent, a good friend, a good colleague, a

good... anything... again, the fabric of the moment is probably made out of fear or lack.

When we need to convince, to be right, to prove, to seduce... the fabric of the moment is probably fear or lack.

Will we be good enough at any given task? Will we succeed in leading others? Will we be accepted in a new community? All these examples, many of them unconscious, trigger a moment that is made of fear-lack.

It's important to recognize that there is nothing unusual or unnatural about experiencing such moments. All of us experience many of them every day. At the same time, it's important to understand that when we are experiencing moments of fear and lack, when we are focused on our shortcomings and ego gaps, we are not functioning at our greatest potential.

Walking into a job interview in a fearful state of mind will not help us relate to the interviewer, understand his or her needs and best share our qualifications for that job. How many anxious students forget most of what they have studied after they enter the exam room?

In moments made of fear and lack, our potential is limited. Our focus is on our anxieties and our shortcomings, instead of on the world around us, and what we want to accomplish in it.

So, when is the fabric of the moment woven out of Presence, Love and Connection instead of fear and lack?

When we take a newborn in our arms, we don't expect anything from the newborn, nor do we think he or she expects anything from us beyond fulfilling the basic need of being held. The fabric of this type of moment is most likely woven with threads of Presence, Love and Connection.

When we listen to music, we may also experience a Presence, Love and Connection moment. High-performance athletes report moments they call "In the Zone." These moments are made of Presence, Love and Connection.

The beauty of nature often has the power to make us *shift* into moments of Presence, Love and Connection. It happens when we are contemplating natural beauty, not trying to explain the moment, but just being there with it.

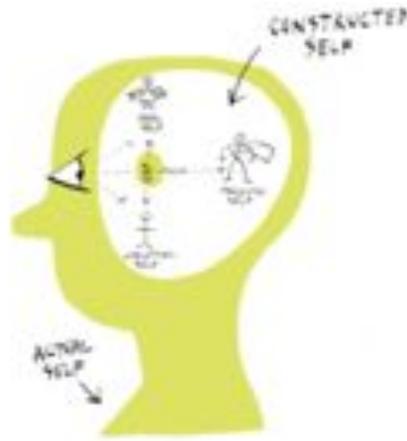
Here's a completely different example: Once, when I was driving too fast on a small road, a car appeared in front of me. The subsequent scene seemed to move in slow motion. I was not afraid. In fact, I had no thoughts at all in my mind. Instinctively, I turned the steering wheel left, then right. Somehow, I don't know how, I avoided that car, and came to a stop on the side of the road.

After I stopped the car, I started shaking with fear. I realized how close I came to dying. Dire thoughts flooded my mind.

The first part of my story, when I acted instinctively to avoid an accident, took place in moments of Presence, Love and Connection. In these moments, I had no fear, I was present, I had all the time and concentration I needed. This is what happens when we are totally present.

In the second part, as I contemplated what had just happened, my emotional state was very different. During these moments, I was agitated, my mind was spinning very fast, I could not control my anxiety. These moments were woven out of fear and lack.

Sometimes what should be moments of Presence, Love and Connection are instead woven out of fear and lack. Imagine once again holding a newborn baby. Sometimes there is anxiety and competition between parents over their children's affections. This kind of stress can create a moment of fear and lack if the parents are focused more on their rivalry than on the baby in their arms.



Fear and lack - Presence, Love, and Connection, there are, in our experience, only these two types of moments. Every moment of every day, we exist in one of these two states, and the transition between the two states can happen almost instantaneously.

The fabric of any particular moment depends on its origin, our motivations, and our hopes and fears. The most important element is *our expectation for what is going to unfold.*

Although it can be extremely difficult to shift the fabric of the moment from one of fear and lack to Presence, Love and Connection, It is not impossible. The first step is to become aware of the fabric we are experiencing at any given moment.

That's because the fabric of the moment depends less on a situation, and more on our attitude toward that situation. Even in times of war, people have described Presence, Love and Connection moments during situations of extreme risk, such as trying to save their comrades, while experiencing torture, and even in death camps.

A young Frenchman, Bernard Enginger – who went on to write books under the name Satprem – described shifting the fabric of the moment while being tortured by the SS during the Second World War.

At one specific moment during the torture, he realized that even though he was likely to be killed, deep down he was free. He realized that the SS could not impose their views on him. He was free to think whatever he wanted.

By accepting that his death was imminent, his ego lost all expectations. He let go of his usual ego needs. He was no longer at anyone's mercy. As incredible as it may seem, this new understanding gave him a huge sense of peace and freedom. Accepting death shifted the quality of his moment.

In the end, Satprem survived the war, and ended up traveling extensively around the world in search of this experience of freedom and of that quality of the fabric of the moment.

With awareness and the motivation to act, the fabric of any moment can be changed. It depends on our mindset, on our perspective. When we change our perspective, we change the fabric.

Recently, upon entering a business meeting, I was immediately struck by the dark and closed expression on the face of one of the executives with whom I was to meet. My first thought: "This meeting is going to be difficult."

Then I remembered that his boss had told me about a difficult situation in this executive's personal life. My heart filled with compassion. My expectations changed. The fabric of my moment shifted.

We often believe that someone else is weaving the fabric of our moments. But it is empowering to think that each one of us is our own fabric maker, and that we alone choose the threads with which we weave the moments of our lives.

Much of the book will detail how we can best choose those threads, but let's first explore the "fabric of the moment" concept in more detail.

Once again, the quality, the "*fabric*," of each moment of our lives can be described according to the threads used to create it, either "fear **and** lack" or "Presence, Love and Connection." All of us have experienced this subtle distinction, probably without paying a lot of attention to it.

When we are conscious of the distinction, it is easy to tell if the moment is either a moment of Presence, Love and Connection, without expectations,

or a moment of fear **and** lack, **in which** we are expecting to get love, attention, or anything else from **someone else**. An expectation coming from fear or lack puts us **in a reactive state**, at the mercy of **an outcome**.

The fabric of the moment is chosen *before* the moment is experienced. It comes from the state we are in at that moment's inception. Were we in a state of fear **and** lack or one of Presence, Love and Connection? *That state will provide the threads to weave the fabric of the moment.*

In summary:

Any moment can be made of one of two possible "fabrics": "fear **and** lack" or "Presence, Love and Connection."

Our expectations, our perspective, our intent, and our goals are key to the choice of the fabric of our moments.

The choice of fabric comes from the state we are in at the moment's inception. If we are experiencing fear and lack (i.e. a feeling that we are lacking something in our lives that we need), then the threads will be made of fear and lack. Similarly, if we are experiencing Presence, Love and Connection, then the threads will be made of Presence, Love and Connection.

The awareness that we are our own fabric-weaver, that we have the power to choose the state we are in at any moment's inception, can help us shift the quality of each moment of our life... at any moment in our life.

Here's an example. In a letter I recently received from a friend, he described the following experience:

I've been working on becoming aware of the fabric of the moment. I think it's going well. I find it fairly easy to do. I am coming to realize the extent to which I am responsible for creating my own moments. The other day, I had an encounter with an airline representative who refused to put us on an earlier flight when we learned that ours would be delayed. I tried to monitor my interior state as I dealt with her. To make a long story short, I didn't get the earlier flight. But by consciously trying to "create the fabric of the moment", a potentially unpleasant encounter ended up being an enlightening one. I was ready to be blustery and angry. But I stopped myself, and shifted the moment. I guess, in that moment, I accepted that she couldn't really do anything to help me change my flight. Instead, we swapped personal stories, and I walked away feeling rewarded, with a sense of connectedness.



Awareness is the first step, but if you don't consciously decide to shift your state moment by moment, it won't change on its own.



Is the quality of your life important enough to you for yourself and for the people around you to study more about the *Shift*?



More examples of the “fabric of the Now” concept will follow in the chapters to come. Can you think of any personal examples?

The Self and the constructed self

The second concept is the distinction between

“Self and constructed self.”

There are four of you.

Not four distinct human beings, but rather four distinct selves within you, and within every one of us. One is an actual human being. The other three are “pseudo” beings.

Maybe it’s more precise to say it this way:

There are four “you”s.

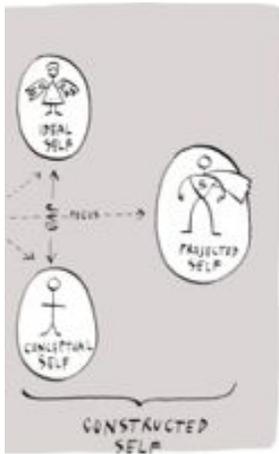
One of you is your actual Self, the part of you that is real, with basic needs such as air, water, food, sleep, shelter and security from physical harm. This is the part of you that is aware of your own existence. It is the part that thinks and decides.

Here is a graphical representation of who we are, our actual Self:



The other three selves together make up your “constructed self.” These selves are concepts you created with your mind at a very early age and which evolved over the course of your day-to-day interactions with the outside world.

We can also represent these selves graphically:



Everyone has a constructed self, and everyone – mostly unconsciously – keeps a constant focus on the three components of that constructed self. These three components are a constant preoccupation as we go through the moments of our lives. We can give each of them a name:

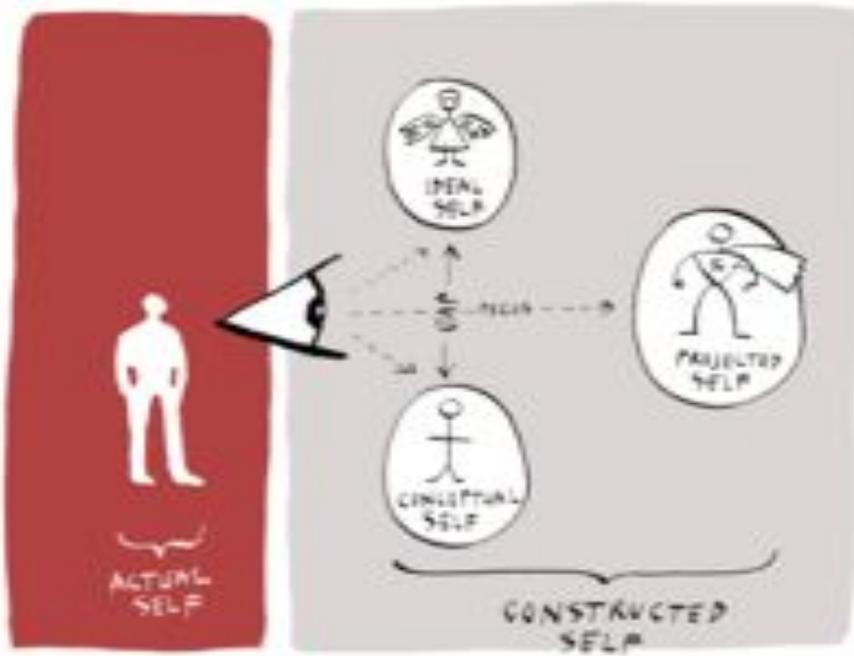
1) Our *conceptual self* comprises all the concepts, judgments, and evaluations we have about ourselves. Our conceptual self is the person we *think* we are.

2) Our *ideal self* is the person we idealistically wish to be. It is a fantasy we know we cannot achieve, although we secretly wish we could.

3) Our *projected self* is the person we want other people to think we are.

All three of these selves are different, but they all have something in common: All of them exist only as ideas in our minds, not in the real world. They constitute the “constructed self” because they are all constructs. They cannot feel, they cannot think, they cannot decide anything. But they do have an *important* influence on us. We often become so preoccupied by this constructed self that we confuse it with our actual Self.

This constructed self is at the center of the problem we do not know we have.



We do not physically embody either the image we try to project or the ideal we would love to be. Instead, our (physical-mental) Self – your **actual** Self – perceives these constructed versions of ourselves.



How can we apply the Self and the constructed self to our daily life?

To think about the Self / constructed self distinction in a familiar way, imagine introducing yourself to a stranger at a party.

In that circumstance, most people would mention their profession, or what they have studied at school. They might mention their hometown, their marital status, their children, or their hobbies. They would provide a verbal resume of their life's achievements, their training, and their social position.

If I were to introduce myself, I would begin by saying, "I am an engineer, I am a father of two, and I am happily married..."

When I introduce myself, I also subtly want other people to think that I am intelligent, creative, and responsible. I will not say it so blatantly, but I will find ways to try to foster these impressions of my "projected self."

Think for a moment about how you would introduce yourself in such a situation.

I am...

How would you introduce yourself?



Does your introduction describe who you are, or does it instead describe your education, your social status, or your best qualities?



To describe myself to someone I have just met, I usually mention my career, my marital status, and some of my qualities.

Doing so requires an “I” that observes and thinks, and a “me” that is observed and is the object of thought.

The “I” that observes and thinks is what we refer to as our actual Self. It is who we are – a sentient conscious being. The “I” chooses the thoughts on which to focus. These thoughts trigger emotional and physical body responses.

As the “I” observes the “me,” what does it see? According to Cohen’s model of the Ego, the “I” sees the constructed self. Thus the “me” would be what we call the *constructed self*.

This idea is not new. More than a century ago, William James suggested that these two meanings of “self” could be distinguished from each other (James, 1910). Contemporary psychologists and neuroscientists tend to agree (e.g., Klein, 2012; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012).

Philosophy and psychology offer different understandings of what we usually call the “self”:

- Philosophers sometimes describe the self as comprising a person’s essential qualities.
- Psychologists have conceptualized the self as the representation of one’s identity. One early formulation of the self in modern psychology makes a

distinction between the self as “I”, the subjective knower, and the self as “Me”, the object that is known.^[1] James, W. (1891). *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1890)

In Cohen's model of the Ego, the distinction between the “I” and the “me” is critical to understanding the essence of the self. To clarify this idea, consider the analogy of an apple tree. Do you think that we can understand or describe wood, the essence of that tree, by analyzing an apple? The apple is the product of the tree, but analyzing an apple will not help describe the tree's wooden essence.

Just as an apple cannot give us information on the nature of the tree, our training, social status, or achievements cannot give any reliable information about the nature of our Self.

By definition, the “me” cannot be the observer. The “me” – the constructed self – is the thought, not the thinker.

Cohen's model of the Ego hypothesizes that the “me” is entirely a cognitive construct and that it does not define our true Selves (the “I”).

The “me” or the “constructed self” has no actual existence as a being. It is simply a set of thoughts, beliefs, and conclusions – *again, a cognitive construct.*

This construct includes all the attributes, qualities, images, hopes, and dreams we have in mind about ourselves, all of our thoughts about our skills, accomplishments, behaviors, personality traits, relationships, social roles, and statuses.

These are the things I focused on when I introduced myself. The person I introduced was my “me.”

Does our “me” describe, or allow us to understand, who we really are?

Certainly not. I am describing what I can do, how I can perform. But does that capture the nature of who I am?

To put this in a deeper context, it's helpful to contemplate an analogy:

Imagine two completely identical, perfectly designed mechanical clocks, made with very high precision. Imagine that an expert mechanic built one of the clocks and that the other was built by a state-of-the-art digital machine tool. Both give perfect time. We can see no difference in their performances.

As we admire either of these perfect products, can we understand the essence, or nature, of its maker?

Of course not. One maker is a human being and one is a machine. Their essences are totally different, and yet they both produced the same result, the same outcome.

If I really want to describe who I am, it is not by saying I am an engineer, a father, and a husband. Like many people, I can confuse my **education, my career** and my social roles with who I am. Like many people, I may think I am the sum of my social status, my training, and my accomplishments. But that's not really who I am. My essence is something different.

By describing myself as intelligent, creative and responsible, I again confuse my essence with an abstract summary of how I sometimes behave (or would like to think I behave). Nothing in what I have expressed describes my essence. Instead, I am describing my beliefs about myself.

What we say when we introduce ourselves in this way may be true, but it does not really describe who we are. We are much more than a list of our accomplishments, roles, and personality traits could convey.

This insight is reflected in a statement made by the actress Rosanna Arquette, the president of a television festival in France, in an interview with a French newspaper reporter:

"It took me a long time to admit that being an actress does not define who I am as a person. It's a job, like any other job. What really defines me, I am searching for it somewhere else. I am better in my skin than I ever have been. I am happy with who I am." Var-matin. June 17, 2012, page 14.



If we come back to the fabric of the moment concept:
*What in your opinion has been the fabric of Rosanna Arquette's realization?
Fear and lack or Presence, Love and Connection?*



Roseanna Arquette says that being an actress — part of her “me”— does not define who she is as a person. When she says, *“What really defines me, I am searching for it somewhere else. I am better in my skin than I ever have been. I am happy with who I am,”* she is making a distinction between her “I” and her “me”, between her actual Self and her occupation.

Some people may disagree and argue that being an actress does indeed define her. After all, she's not a nun. She's not an accountant. She's an actress.

But being an actress defines her career, not her Self. It does not define who she is, but only what she does. It gives no information about her essence.

That said, Roseanna Arquette has an uncommon clarity about herself. Most of us have trouble simply and organically experiencing our actual Self.

What prevents us from doing so?

A problem most of us do not know we have.

To better understand this problem, and how it fits into Cohen's model of the Ego, an illustrative example is presented in “The problem we don't know we have”.

