

A pyramid of parental engagement: what works in child protection

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Overview

- Definition of parent engagement
- Current state of child protection in Australia
- Envisioning an alternative
- Pyramid of parent engagement
- Questions

Defining engagement & user participation

User involvement can encompass many activities from participation in decision making and representation in policy forums, through to consultation and information giving, paid employment and peer-led services, delivering education and training, self-help and mutual support groups and involvement in individual treatment decisions. It can be seen as a democratic right and an ethical requirement.

Hinton 2010, p.13

Current state of child protection

- A system in crisis
 - Numbers of children in care doubling every 10 years
 - Plagued by government inquiries (over 40)
 - Ritualism of apologies
 - Trauma of removals reverberates historically – in families and across communities
- Institutional processes are investigative, adversarial & adjudicative
 - Rules not relationships are at the core
 - Interventions currently try to regulate parent behaviour and teenage behaviour through court
- Engagement and trust within and between everyone affected is low
- Expensive (\$3 billion per annum AIHW 2012)

Current state of child protection

The two greatest problems today when we talk about these ‘intractable problems’ are

- 1) we believe that nothing works, and*
- 2) we don’t have a clue from what theoretical basis or framework we are working from*

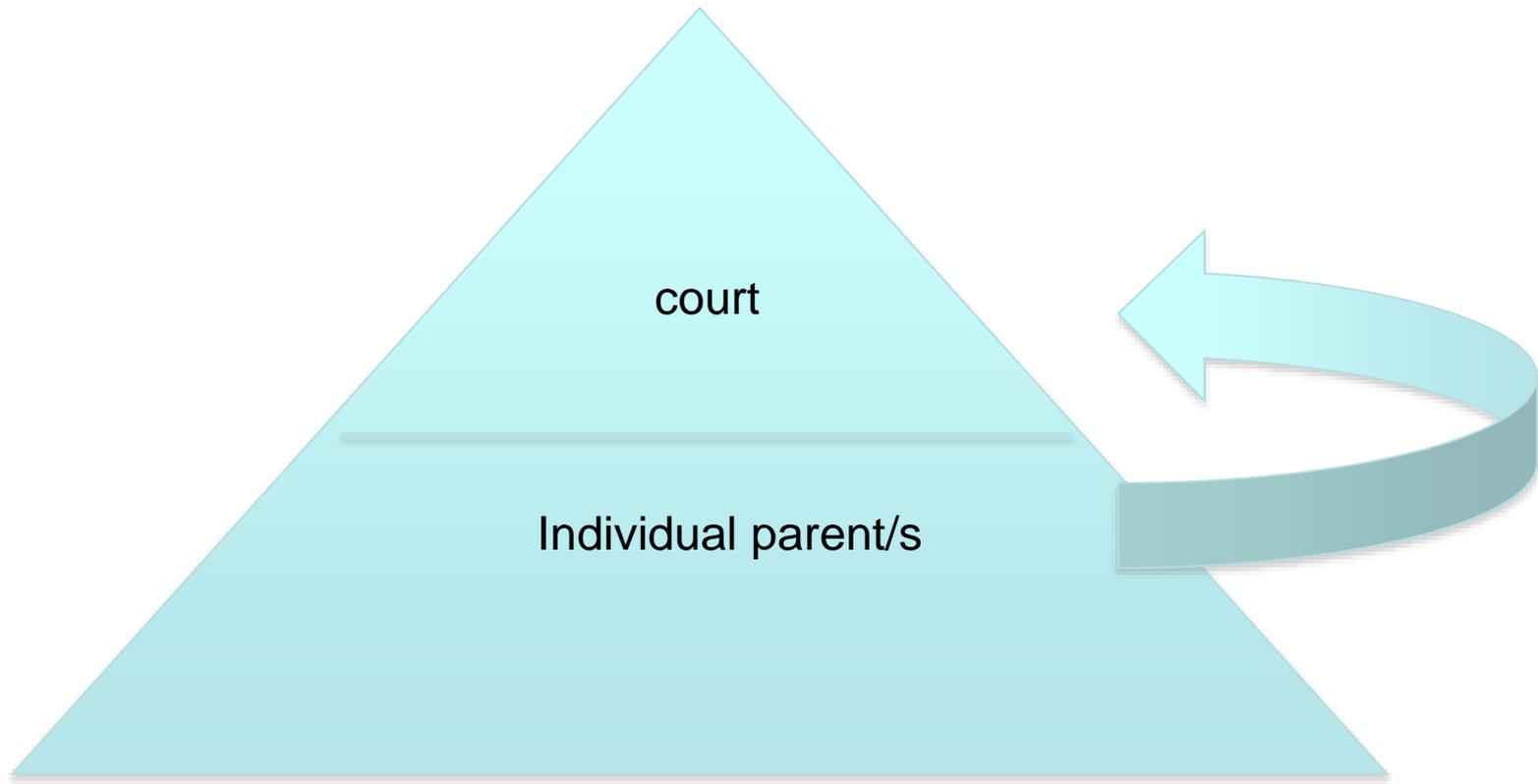
Matt Casey

(Goulburn, Family Therapist,
former Senior Detective for 30 years, New South Wales)

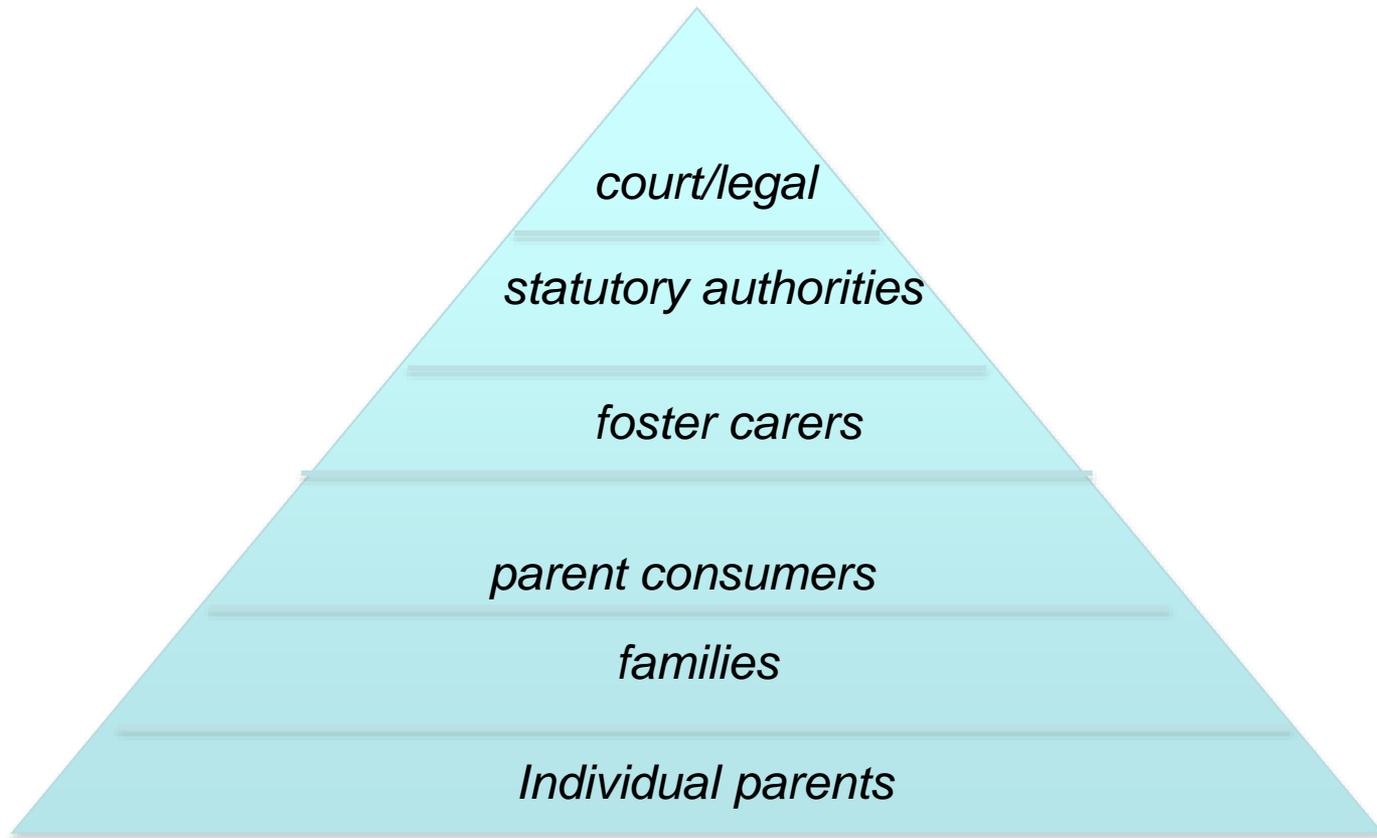
Envisioning an alternative

- Protecting children while preserving and supporting families - not an irreconcilable position
- Ethically, ‘family engagement is a way to uphold both child and family rights’ (Pennell et al. 2011)
- Policy intent on engagement – translation lacking
- Focus on national and international strategies/ approaches which emphasise engagement & show promise
- A pyramid of parental engagement presents opportunities at multiple levels of the child protection service system

Current state of child protection practice



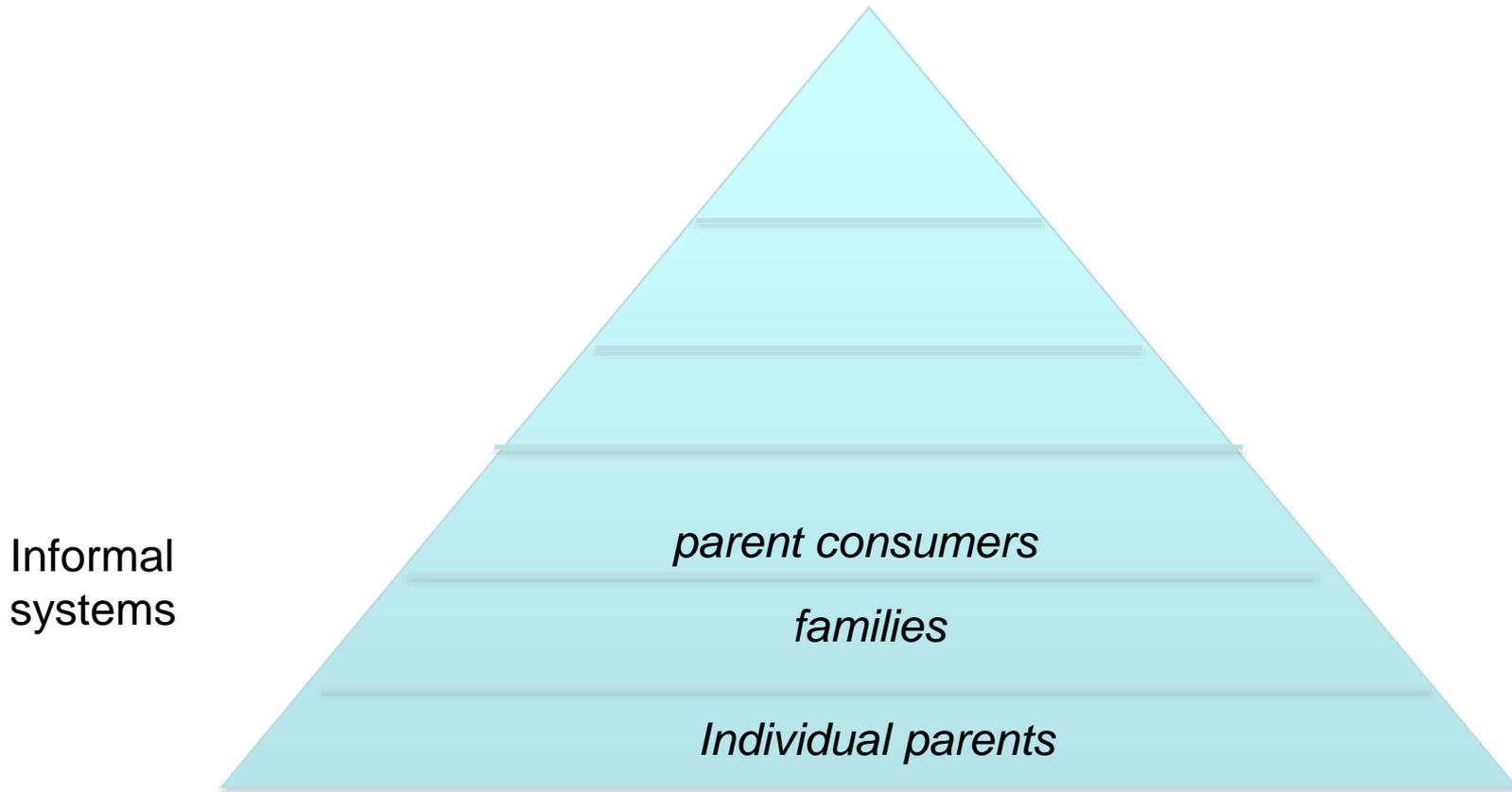
Pyramid of parent engagement



Envisioning an alternative

- Can we rethink the command and control lens and practice which characterizes most statutory child protection intervention?
- Can we have a conversation about child protection in terms of people and relationships?

Pyramid of parent engagement



Generic approaches, frameworks & practices that work in parental engagement

- relationship-based
- strengths based
- solution focused (eg case management, signs of safety, motivational interventions)
- family group conferencing
- family decision making
- differential response
- concrete assistance
- social learning models
- respite

Specific groups

- Fathers
- Parents or children with disabilities
- Culturally diverse groups
- Indigenous groups

Specific groups

- Fathers
 - National Quality Improvement Centre on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System
 - Bringing Back the Dads: Changing Practices in Child Welfare Systems
 - Lifetime Dads
 - Fathers-in-Training (FIT)
 - Engaging Fathers Project
 - Divine Alternatives for Dads Services

Parents/children with a disability

USA

- *Through the Looking Glass; Thresholds Mothers' Project,*
- *Invisible Children's Project; Family Initiatives at Employment Options; Positive Parenting Resource Centre; Ashbury House*

UK

- *Valuing Parents Support Service; advocates*

Australia

- *Healthy Start: A national strategy for children of parents with learning difficulties*

Culturally diverse groups

- community education, in multiple languages, on the statutory role of child protection authorities in Australia;
- community awareness-raising programs relating to family violence, supervision and disciplining of children;
- cultural competency training for caseworkers;
- further research to build understanding of the needs of children from refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds in out-of-home care.

Indigenous groups

- The use of cultural consultants in conjunction with professional staff;
- The necessity of long-term rather than short term programs;
- A focus on the needs of parents as well as children;
- A supportive strengths-based approach to families; and
- The use of structured early intervention programs while maintaining flexibility.

Examples of programs targeting parents – early intervention programs

- Newpin
- Safecare
- Parent Support Outreach
- Home visiting programs
- Nurse-family partnerships
- Intensive family support
- Practical and multi-dimensional support

Examples of programs targeting families

- Family group conferencing
- Eigen Kracht Conference (Netherlands)
- Kinship/network care

Examples of programs focused on parent consumers

- Peer support programs
- Birth parent advisors
- Parent consumer-led initiatives
- Bills of rights and service charters

“Sometimes I have to contain myself when parents talk about their lives. I want to cry remembering my life and hearing them going through the same thing.”

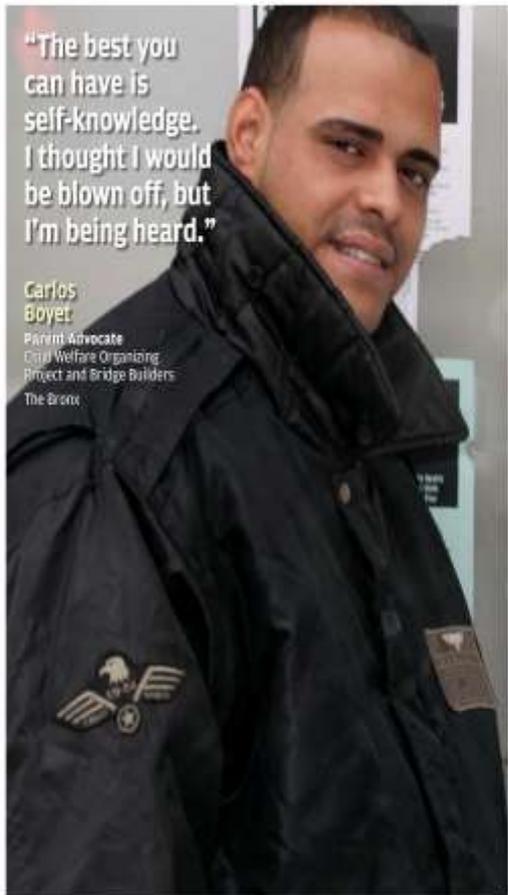
Tracey Carter
Parent Advocate
Child Welfare Organizing
Project and Bridge Builders
The Bronx

Then

Tracey spent 13 years on the streets addicted to crack and lost custody of all 11 of her children.

Now

Tracey is married, has been clean since 2002 and has regained custody of three of her kids. As a parent advocate she handles a caseload of about 30 parents.



"The best you can have is self-knowledge. I thought I would be blown off, but I'm being heard."

Carlos Boyet
Parent Advocate
Child Welfare Organizing
Project and Bridge Builders
The Bronx

Then Carlos desired that he was the father of his child and then refused to make support payments.

Now Carlos fought in court to gain custody of his severely disabled son and is now raising him. As a parent advocate, he focuses on ensuring that his clients know their rights.

"Parent advocates offer hope to people in a hopeless situation."

Leeshorn Franklin
Parent Advocate
National Society for
Children in Families
Sydney, NSW



Then Starting when she was 16, Leeshorn spent a decade on drugs and on the street. She lost custody of her three children.

Now Leeshorn has been clean for 16 years, has custody of two of her kids and has added a daughter to her family. As a parent advocate her aim is to get her clients to understand themselves.



"I am your parent advocate, and you could say I am your voice"

Rosita Pagan-Cruz
Parent Advocate
Children's Village
Manhattan

Then Amid the frustrations of raising a family, Rosita took to drinking and became an alcoholic. She lost custody of three of her children.

Now Rosita has been sober for almost a decade and regained custody of her kids. As a parent advocate, she gives others hope, comfort and reasonable answers to their questions.

Informal social support

- Need multiple perspectives to understand it, its effect can be positive and negative factor in child maltreatment
- Defined as ‘the assistance that is available to a person from other individuals and can include emotional comfort, tangible (instrumental) aid like money, food, clothing; information or advice; help in decision-making

Informal supports – their role in abuse and neglect prevention (Merton 2013)

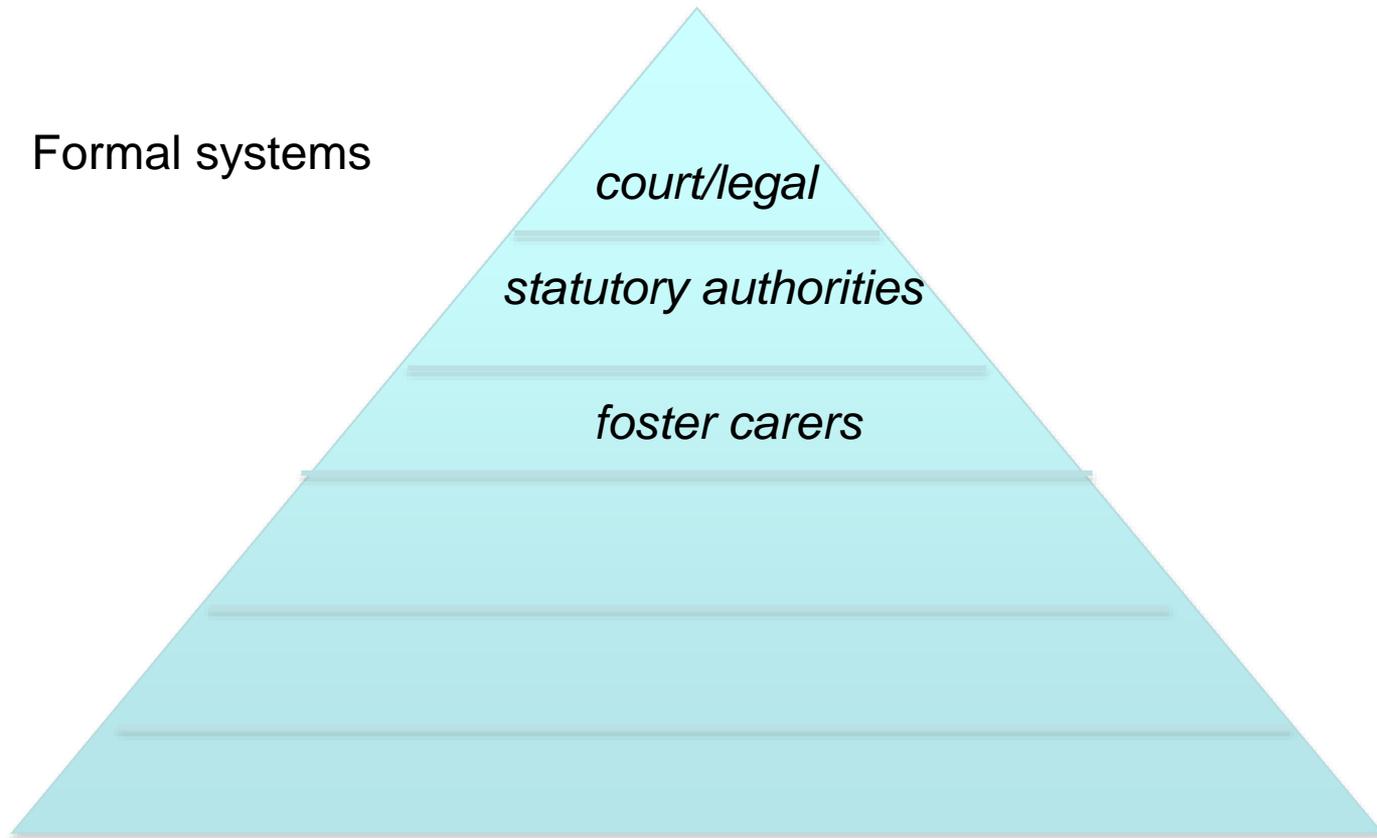
- informal supports have potential to serve as protective influences on children's safety
- reform efforts needed at every level of our community of practice to move towards community-based child protection
- need to change program/service environments rather than targeting only families deemed at risk

Informal social support (Merton 2013)

- plays an important role in protecting children from abuse and neglect – is not well understood nor utilised
- is multifaceted
- nature/functions/multiple loci in which it occurs

- A side effect of decline in social connectedness has been the *professionalization* of child protection services. (McLeigh 2013)
- use of informal resources within a family's community can serve to reduce caseloads (McLeigh 2013).

Pyramid of parent engagement



Examples of programs focused on foster carer/birth parent relationship

- Handling child removals
- Relinquishing counselling
- Ice-breaker meetings
- Visit coaching
- Birth parent mentors and peers
- Family finding
- Visitation coaching
- Family reunification
 - Co-parenting programs
 - Parent partners
 - Birth family-foster family connections project

Programs focused on the statutory authority

Australia

- Practice First (NSW)
- Family Responsibilities Commission (Qld)

UK

- Social Work Reclaimed
- Volunteers in Child Protection

Canada

- Hollow Water Community – Holistic Circle Healing Child

USA

- Welfare Practice Model (Minnesota)
- Citizens Review Panels
- Joint response protocols



CSVIA



Programs focused on the court & legal system

- Therapeutic jurisprudence
- Enhanced legal services for parents
- Court based demonstration projects
- Family drug treatment courts
- Trauma-informed courts

Key operating principles of restorative approaches in child protection

- participation and inclusion in processes even if decisions are not in their favour;
- effective communication, listening;
- respecting rights (including cultural);
- shared decision-making for solutions; and
- sustained support and time to change.

A restorative approach in child protection

- Focuses on altering child protection processes to minimise adversarial processes that can be both traumatic for the child and damaging to the relationship of the parents
- impact on the emotional life and on psychological wellbeing of children, their families and communities



‘Why do we collectively create results nobody wants?’

‘Leading from the emerging future’ (2013)
by Scharmer & Kaufer