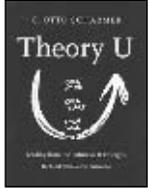




## LEADING AND LEARNING FROM THE FUTURE

BY CHRISTINE WANK



### Theory U

by C. Otto Scharmer

In *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges* (SoL, 2007), C. Otto Scharmer, senior lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, takes us on a journey to discover and fully use our sometimes hidden inner sources of generative power, creativity, and freedom to address current challenges and emerging complexities in the age of globalization. The book is a synthesis of more than a decade of in-depth research into how innovation and change come into our lives, work teams, organizations, and even whole systems.

In our world today, we increasingly face problems of a new kind of complexity, such as HIV epidemics or climate change, in which it is virtually impossible to clearly define cause and effect, the relevant stakeholders, or even the problem itself. Our traditional institutions and problem-solving patterns often fail in providing the right answers or even asking the right questions. In this context, we do not need “more of the same” but rather a shift in paradigm. Thus, Scharmer proposes a new model for understanding and facilitating profound change and deep learning. Instead of analyzing and referring to patterns of the past—which are often inadequate or might even be part of the problem itself—his approach centers on learning from and bringing into life the best of all future possibilities. Scharmer calls this process *presencing*.

In presencing, the leverage point for change is less on what we do or how we do something and more on how we approach or attend to a situation before we act: our interior con-

dition, the so-called inner place or source from which we operate. This interior condition structures our attention and shapes the quality and result of any action. Scharmer points out that this perspective is often missing in our daily perception of the world, in management and leadership literature, and even in science in general, which is why he calls it the “blind spot of our time.” By becoming aware of our blind spot, we at the same time discover an untapped resource and potential source of power that we can use to find innovative solutions to current problems and live up to our best potential—whether personally or professionally, organizationally, or even globally.

### The Journey Along the U

*Theory U* captures and structures the different movements of this deep change and learning process, which takes the shape of a “U.” You start the journey down the U by observing the world or a specific challenge with “fresh eyes” and an open heart and mind. You connect to the world outside of your own personal or organizational system and transcend your habitual and often narrow patterns of perception by suspending your inner voice of judgment and cynicism. Next—at the bottom of the U—you retreat from the outside world, find silence, and connect to what is emerging from within yourself, using your inner source of inspiration and will.

Scharmer believes that every person is made up of two selves: our current or old self that is often well known and shaped by past experience, and our future Self, implying our highest and best future possibility. At the bottom of the U, these two selves start to resonate with each other—we experience this feeling as a deep inner knowing of what we truly want to be

and create in our lives. This source of inspiration and intention is a powerful tool and catalyst for action; it can take individuals as well as teams and organizations from good to top performance.

Finally, as you go up the other side of the U, you bring the future into the world not by mere reflection and planning but rather by practice and doing. You develop prototypes of the future you want to create, and test and adapt them again and again before you finally implement them.

### Three Ways of Reading the U

*Theory U* is a treasury full of analytic vigor and empowering inspiration. It can be read and applied for practice in a threefold way. First, it offers a multi-step template for understanding how the process works. Second, it offers a range of principles and practices for individuals, teams, and organizations for training our senses and bringing the process alive. Finally, and on a personal level, it offers inspiration for sensing what life is calling you to do and discovering that there might be an even higher and greater future possibility that you could not have imagined before.

This book is sure to make an important contribution to not only the current discourse on change management and leadership theory but also to a growing community of practice committed to collectively creating profound change and innovation around the world. ■

**Christine Wank** works as a consultant and senior project manager responsible for organizational development for InWEnt Capacity Building International, Germany, an international human resource development and training organization. She has designed and conducted trainings applying the Theory U methodology and uses the approach for process consulting and facilitation of large-group change processes. In her work, Christine focuses on cultural and organizational change and innovation, leadership development, and systemic approaches to consulting and coaching.