Otto Scharmer & Theory U – Inspirations summary box

Key concepts, claims and elements

* **Theory U** emerged out of Scharmer's studies into the secrets of successful leadership at the MIT.

* **Focus**: working with collective states. "***Presencing***" as an attitude of maximum conscious awareness in the present moment which allows to sense into future possibilities that want to materialize.

* **Core claims**:
- The success of any intervention depends on the **inner condition of the intervener** and hence, we should deepen the quality of our present awareness in order to achieve better results.
- On societal (and global) level, we are collectively producing results that nobody wants. Therefore, we must shift the focus of our awareness from outside behaviors and effects to their inner sources.
- *Presencing* requires us to slow down our mental activity, suspend habitual patterns of thinking and to be open to what wants to emerge from the field of not-knowing. It then creates a sense of connectedness with our fellow (human) beings from which a sense of commitment and empowerment to work towards desirable futures can emerge.

* **Essentials of Theory U**:
- Theory U explains the art of deliberatively working with social fields of attention and awareness.
- The deeper and more intense the quality of awareness, the more powerful and effectively transformative are the solutions that emerge from a social field.
- The U Process is the art of modulating social fields in order to take participants from habitual, more superficial qualities of awareness into deeper and deeper ones.

* **The seven field qualities of a U Process:**

- ***Downloading***: habitual thinking and acting strongly pre-structures what is considered to be possible

- ***Seeing/Debate***: becoming fully aware of all available data in a given situation (infinite curiosity)

- ***Dialog***: Sensing into the situation with body and mind and seeing/experiencing oneself as part of it

- ***Presencing***: suspending all previous modes of awareness and becoming fully present for what is

- ***Crystallizing:*** staying connected to the source while clarifying the vision and intention to go forward

- ***Prototyping***: producing a prototype as quickly as possible to obtain feedback from the field

- ***Co-creating/Performing***: fine-tuning the prototype and implementing it in real life systems

* Each field quality has an opposing, antagonist quality (*blinding, de-sensing, absencing, manipulating, blaming, abusing* etc.). Together, these build an *absencing* cycle*.* Qualities of awareness can be shifted purposefully from *absencing* to *presencing* (and vice versa).

* In order to **implement systems change**, we have to address **three fundamental divides:** the ecological, social, and spiritual-cultural one and heal the respective disconnects through more presence.

* In view of using Theory U for transformative systems change, integral politics can work with eight "**acupuncture points**" to intervene more effectively, i.e. on a deeper level of awareness.

* We need **infrastructures** to co-initiate, co-sense, co-inspire, (and) for prototyping and co-evolving.

Source: Scharmer, C. O. (2009). Theory U: Learning from the future as it emerges. Berrett-Koehler.

Further reading: IO 1 chapter 7