

## **A Groundbreaking, Monumental Work About Leadership**

### **(Foreword from the Danish language version of Theory U Leading from the Future as it Emerges)**

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*Theory U* was published in the United States in 2007. It was a response to a strong yearning evident in many sections of society. There was an accumulated need for this particular book. Its author had traveled extensively, met, talked with and talked to people in many parts of the world. The dialogue about the U was already in full swing when the book came out. The new consciousness implicit in the U-thinking was already developing. The book is a manifestation and an opportunity to take some deep, cognitive steps. The book has received a lot of attention, in fact, an unusual amount of attention the world over. And that is well deserved, for it is the most important book that has been published in a long time... not only within the narrow field of organizational leadership, but within the social sciences in general.

It could be argued that this book is about the present seen from the perspective of the future. It is about the present – in as much as leadership is executed in the present. But leadership may originate in the past – in concepts and experiences of the past; or it may be based on ideas and systems which have yet to emerge, through an appreciation and understanding of the future. This real-time creative meeting, in a fully inspired present, between constructs of the past and constructs of the future is the core of the theory U.

It is a great honor to be asked to write the Foreword to such an important and outstanding book. I have known the publisher and Ankerhus for many years. I have also known Claus Otto Scharmer as a colleague for a long time. Our first meeting took place in Denmark during an Ankerhus seminar, more than 10 years ago – on a beautiful summer's day in a bright, sunny meeting room overlooking the blue waters of the Little Belt.

*Theory U* is a beautiful book. It embraces the light intensity of summer, while incorporating the dark, deep seriousness of winter. It is a courageous book infused with a determination to discover and understand. It contains so much wisdom, clarity and hope that it is bound to be immensely influential in our understanding of and capacity to lead businesses and the world into an enormously complicated future.

"We live in an era of intense conflict and massive institutional failures, a time of painful endings and of hopeful beginnings. It is a time that feels as if something profound is shifting and dying while something else, as the playwright and Czech president, Václav Havel, put it, 'wants to be born.'" These are the opening words of C. Otto Scharmer's monumental work about leading from the future. The crisis of our time is not only the crisis of one leader, or one country or one conflict. The crisis of our time is the collapse and demise of extensive, old, social structures and ways of thinking, and it is the duty and almost unfathomable task of our generation to develop a new system that will replace the old one. This book will be a valuable tool.

The purpose of the book, according to Scharmer, is to portray a social technology of transformational change, which will help leaders meet the challenges they will be facing in an increasingly complex and unpredictable future. The subtitle: 'leading from the future as it emerges' indicates that Scharmer recognizes two different sources of learning: learning from past experiences, and learning from the future 'as it emerges', which means, as the future manifests itself for us. It is an extremely important statement and a key concept in the innovative thinking presented by the new social technology, Theory U.

*Theory U* is a vision of a new global society, which will replace the present industrial society, now in its death throes. At no time does it pretend that the answers will be easy. Outdated, simple models from the past cannot be repeated. The book points directly to the individual, reflecting human being to be co-responsible for developing the future: the human being, who acts from his or her open heart. The solutions are latent inside us, if we, i.e. you and I, are willing to see, sense and have the courage to put these solutions into practice. Novel ways of thinking, deep changes in attitudes and social awareness, and new, conscious rules of behavior are required, in addition to fundamental changes in leadership and ways of cooperation. But solutions *do* exist. There *are* paths leading forward. And if we choose to, we can find them and follow them.

We have to go back to names like Kurt Lewin, H. A. Simon, James March, Edgar Schein, Chris Argyris and Francisco Varela and other giants of social science in order to find works and scientist that can compare with Scharmer's *Theory U*. It is a remarkable and promising interpretation of the kind of society and ways of thinking which will have to replace the industrial society of the present. It has great social insight and devises methodologies which can and will help us form and create the society and the companies of the future. The theory and its concepts are consistent, multi-faceted, balanced and thoroughly debated and verified. The book will undoubtedly create a new movement, and generations of scientists and practitioners within the fields of social science and organizational leadership will build on C. Otto Scharmer's gigantic, landmark contribution.

Writing this book has presented a formidable effort by its author; a similar effort is required by the reader. The book is meticulous and pedagogical in its presentation and at the same time demanding and comprehensive. A hearty welcome to *Theory U* in Danish.

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