

# The Blind Spots in Otto Scharmer's Theory U

## The Reconstruction of a (Change-) Management Fashion

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Following a long period where the concept of a learning organization was the most popular way to implement change projects, consultants have now begun to promulgate Otto Scharmer's Theory U. A description of Theory U from a sociological perspective reveals that Theory U has the typical structure of a management fashion. A typical feature of management fashions is that their concepts are outfitted with the signals of scientific competence, the suggestion being that whatever has been proven scientifically is also helpful in organizational practice. Screening out conflicts of interests is likewise characteristic for management fashions. In Theory U, it is primarily the special emphasis on the community aspect that serves this purpose. Theory U also resembles a management fashion in as much as it holds out the promise that an organization — all of society, or even simply one individual—will be better off than beforehand after it has run through the various phases of the change process.

Following a long period where the concept of a learning organization was the most popular way to implement change projects, organizational developers and systemic consultants have now begun to promulgate Otto Scharmer's Theory U. It is a phase model which is intended to allow all participants to achieve a desired state. The first phase, "downloading" in the world, where, according to Scharmer, one still sees "through the eyes of conventional thinking" begins at the upper left of an imaginary "U". Descending down the left side of the "U", this is followed by the phase of "seeing" during which "the voice of judgment" is to be suspended and a fresh look taken at "reality". According to Scharmer, during this phase the object is to "open the mind". It is followed by the "sensing" phase, during which all participants are supposed to "connect with the field, immerse themselves, and view the situation as part of a whole", thereby achieving an opening of the "heart". The goal of the subsequent phase is "opening the will" and the phases of "letting go" and "allowing to arise", during which one is supposed to connect with the "inner source". When one has

figuratively arrived at the bottom of the “U”, which is a place of inner silence”, all participants are supposed to ask the question of who they are and what their tasks consist of. This is the so-called “presencing” process. Then, following a renewed “opening of the heart” and a phase of “condensation”, the visions that have emerged from this “deeper source” are to be crystallized. This is followed by a renewed “opening of the mind” which is meant to permit the mutual exploration and development of the future through practical activity. In the final phase, called “performing”, innovations are to be shaped through a change in day-to-day practices (Scharmer 2009b: 42).

Theory U enjoys great popularity in areas of the change management scene, making it difficult to criticize. This is not so much because the theory doesn’t contain weaknesses, inconsistencies, or idealizations. Rather, as an approach—much like many other management fashions—it immunizes itself against criticism. According to the following quotes from a short publication by Otto Scharmer, criticism threatens to disrupt the “new field quality of collective thinking, speaking, and acting” that emerges when “groups and individuals begin to connect with their highest potentials”. The danger is that criticism will interfere with the “expanded body of resonance” that has begun to “vibrate”. This disturbs the process through which a “heightened level of individual awareness and energy”, a “higher degree of authentic presence”, and a “clearer direction and more profound and lasting personal and organizational innovation and change” are to be achieved. In addition, one violates the postulate that the greater the appreciation one brings to encounters with others, the greater the gift one receives from the encounter (Scharmer 2007: 210). If you don’t share in the euphoria over the innovative elements of Theory U, you run the risk of being numbered among those who “forever live in the past” and would like to return to the old order of things. Or, you are called a “defender of the status quo” who wants “more of the same”. If you express criticism, then you must not be an “advocate of transformative change” who “forges ahead” “into the open”, “intentionally lets go of the old self and seeks renewal from within” where a “new social field begins to emerge into the world” (Scharmer 2007: 203).

Ignoring Theory U's self-immunization tendencies, my goal in this article is to subject the theory to a critical analysis from a sociological perspective. Sociology—when compared to other disciplines such as education, psychology, economics, or political science—is characterized by a high degree of disloyalty toward the subject described. The other disciplines cited generally give due consideration to the system described. Radical alienation between the “description and that which is described” is normally out of the question. Successful reflection theories for the most part adopt positive self-descriptions of the respective system in “semantically elaborated form”. In contrast, the special characteristic of sociology is that it consistently constructs distanced descriptions of systems. Because of this, it is difficult for the described systems to come to terms with the sociological descriptions that have been created for them. There is always a contrast between a sociologically distanced description and an internal description, and with that a more or less disrespectful view opposing one that is more or less loyal to the system (Kieserling 2000: 39).

A description of Theory U from a sociological perspective reveals that Theory U has the typical structure of a management fashion. A management fashion is never satisfied with simply attempting to optimize organizations but always holds out the promise of changing individuals and society as well (Chapter 1). Another typical feature of management fashions is that their concepts are outfitted with the signals of scientific competence, the suggestion being that whatever has been proven scientifically is also helpful in organizational practice (Chapter 2). Screening out conflicts of interests is likewise characteristic for management fashions. Lean management and business process reengineering, for example, emphasize the win-win situation involved for all participants and thereby systematically exclude conflicts of interest. In Theory U, it is primarily the special emphasis on the community aspect that serves this purpose (Chapter 3). Theory U also resembles a management fashion in as much as it holds out the promise that an organization — all of society, or even simply one individual—will be better off than beforehand after it has run through the various phases of the change process. There is also a dominant purpose-rational notion in Theory U that a change process should be driven by a previously defined target state (Chapter 4).

The goal of this article is to use features that are typical for management fashions to systematically elaborate the blind spots in Theory U. By addressing the blind spots as an evaluation approach, I am drawing on a concept of which Otto Scharmer also avails himself. In Theory U, Scharmer claims to shed light on the “invisible dimension of the social process with which each of us is occupied in daily life, whether consciously or not (Scharmer 2009a: 38). In the process he also would like to shed light on the “blind spot of the social sciences”. The theories of social science are not able to bring into view the “inner place”, the “source” from which “our attention and intention originate”. The “source or depth dimension of our social experience of reality” remains hidden to the social sciences “because they are not willing to bend the beam of our observation, redirect it, and ultimately refocus it back upon its source” (Scharmer 2009a: 463). My purpose in writing this article is to draw upon sociology to include an even more abstract level of observation and, to paraphrase a statement by Scharmer, thereby “shed light on the invisible dimension of the social process” which would arise if consultants, executives, or politicians were to become involved with a process such as Theory U entails. Altogether in the spirit of sociologist Niklas Luhmann, the purpose of this article is therefore to offer an explanation through clarification.

### 1. Blind spot. The simultaneous transformation of absolutely everything

Management fashions require a dramatic crisis as a point of departure for a diagnosis—and so it is with Theory U as well. The current crisis, according to Scharmer’s tenor, entails not just one individual executive, or an organization, or a certain country; it is a crisis of society on the whole. “While pressure around us increases and the degree of freedom decreases”, the unintentional side effects and consequences of our actions are multiplying. A “thriving global economy” notwithstanding, “three billion people are living in poverty”. We are spending “enormous resources on health care systems” that “merely tinker with symptoms and are unable to address the causes of health and sickness in our society”. We also pour

“considerable amounts of money into our educational systems, but we haven’t been able to create schools and institutions of higher education that develop people’s innate capacity to learn” (Scharmer 2007: 203). We are living, according to Scharmer’s dramatic escalation, on a “thin crust of order and stability [that] could blow up at any time” (Scharmer 2009b: 1).

The reaction to this crisis is the proclamation that “great transformations” are necessary. In the framework of “re-acting”, “re-structuring”, “re-designing”, “re-framing”, and “re-generating”, according to Scharmer, the object is to perform completely “new actions”, create “new structures”, set up “new processes”, establish “new thinking”, and create a “new self”. It is not enough to change only organizations or individual aspects of them. The object is to change “the self” of the people involved and thereby to lift “society” overall to a new development level. Here we find a pattern of argumentation that is typical for management fashions. Initially, their point of departure are the changes that must take place in an organization, but they assert that along with them society as a whole will change for the better. There is talk of the “micro-, meso-, macro-, and mundo-level of social systems” that Theory U can access and change (Scharmer 2009b: 232).

Yet at this very point Theory U falls short. The central insight of systems theory states that social systems operate in entirely different ways at different levels (see the fundamental work of Luhmann 1975). A face-to-face interaction based on communication between people who are actually present functions entirely differently than a marketplace in which goods and services are exchanged with a time delay and over great distances. A family, with its orientation toward intimate communication, uses an entirely different rationale than an organization that is oriented toward communicating decisions or a protest movement that is communicating values. And the changes in communication among members of a team conform to entirely different principles than changes in society (for an overview, see Kühl 2015).

This process is called “social differentiation” in sociological systems theory: Theory U negates it. In the case descriptions presented by the people who work with Theory U, it emerges clearly that this approach primarily serves to clarify the position of individual people within teams or groups. When Otto Scharmer attempts to describe how

organizational or even social change can be accomplished using Theory U, these processes remain surprisingly vague. They then amount to helpless ideas, for example, that society could be changed if people across the world listened to his online courses on Theory U and then came together in real or virtual groups with the goal of changing society. The illusion that such extensive changes can be made may be produced through short-term community experiences in more or less virtual gatherings, but it has nothing to do with a fundamental understanding of differentiation in modern societies.

## 2. Blind spot. The suspension of the differences between science, economics, politics, and religion

Theory U claims to link new scientific insights with spiritual elements in a way that allows a new political, economic, and religious practice to emerge. It asserts that in the “development of the fourth field of social becoming” practitioners in business, researchers in science, and those seeking meaning in religion will come together and create a common field. In the words of Otto Scharmer, Theory U is a “new science” which brings to light the “invisible dimension of social processes” which “each of us confronts on a daily basis”. To that end, science must be guided by the “will of wisdom” (Scharmer 2009b: 14). “Today’s transformation of science”—which is the phrase used to proclaim almost every paradigm shift—is “no less revolutionary than Galileo Galilei’s in his day”. And—Scharmer’s proactive immunization against criticism races ahead—resistance from the “incumbent knowledge holders will be no less fierce than what Galileo encountered in his day”. One must ask oneself, he writes, “what the synthesis of science, social change, and the evolution of self” could look like (Scharmer 2009b: 14).

Later, when it comes to documenting the scientificity of the theory, Otto Scharmer does not provide quotes that reference specific page numbers in the scientific works of others, as is customary in academic research. Instead, he mentions in his foreword that the elaboration of his theory was informed by the thinking of a wide range of prominent thinkers, among them Friedrich Nietzsche, Edmund Husserl, Martin

Heidegger, Jürgen Habermas, and Peter Senge, not to mention “some of the old masters” such as Aristotle and Plato. This is followed by additional references that are specific for his approach such as his “encounter with the work of artist Joseph Beuys” and the work of Rudolf Steiner, whose “synthesis of science, consciousness, and social innovation” was a significant source of inspiration (Scharmer 2009b: 30).

For management fashions, it is common for their respective representatives to outfit them with signals of scientific competence. For Theory U, this includes not only ten years of research activity (Scharmer/Käufer 2008: 5) but extends to establishing affiliations with universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. It has become customary for renowned universities not only to employ researchers who submit to the usual publishing mandate—which is to say, they write peer reviewed papers for academic journals—but also scientists who service the interface with economic and political consulting (see Convert/Heilbron 2007: 44).

Particularly for US and Asian universities, this is important not only for organizing the exchange of personnel between academia, politics, and business, which is somewhat uncustomary at many European universities. It also serves to provide at least a hint of practice orientation for the enrollees who are paying good money to obtain an MBA degree (see Mintzberg 2004).

The suggestion is that “good science” is also “good practice”. Scharmer’s approach, therefore, belongs in the tradition of those who see a close nexus between science, business, politics, and religion. One need only think of the demands for a democratization of science (in particular, see Feyerabend 1983), the many reflections on how research could be conducted in the real world through action research (for an overview, see Greenwood/Levin 2007), or the assertion that scientific research could spread out over an extremely wide range of locations using the so-called “Mode 2” approach (see Nowotny et al. 2001).

In the final consequence, Otto Scharmer’s thinking—like that of Peter Senge—amounts to a dedifferentiation of business, science, politics, and religion. Yet sociological systems theory points out that subdomains of society develop their own rationales. It is a specific characteristic of modern society that economic, political, religious, and scientific orientations fragment into separate fields, as opposed to the

Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age where they were fused (for a short overview, see Luhmann 1977). Economics, with its monetary considerations, functions entirely differently than science with its truth orientation, politics with its power orientation, or religion with its offer of explaining the inexplicable. In systems theory, the concept used to describe this development in modern society is called functional differentiation (on the relationship of this concept to social differentiation, see Tyrell 2008).

Otto Scharmer ultimately negates the differences in orientation of various subdomains of society by envisioning a process in which players from widely diverse fields create a common future through an undertaking that entails an amalgamation of business, politics, religion, and science. In his view, the same intellectual model that underpins his management concept, namely, a society that merges business, politics, religion, and science, will save the world. That may be an appealing dream, but it bears little relationship to developments in modern society.

### 3. Blind Spot. Resolving conflicts of interests in a community ideology

It is a typical feature of management fashions, that the importance of structural conflicts of interest is negated through a we-are-saving-the-world posture. In Theory U, one notices that the readers of a book by Scharmer or the participants in a change process are indeed always addressed as individuals, while the formulations used always target the whole. Otto Scharmer emphasizes that his considerations do not refer “primarily to individual leaders” but “to our distributed or collective leadership”. “Leadership in this century”, he continues, means “shifting the field structures of collective attention . . . at all levels”. (Scharmer 2009b: 19).

In Theory U, grappling with conflicts of interest is assigned to a phase of “communicative action”. A phase of downloading during which “autistic systems” exchange “polite phrases” is followed by a phase of debate where “adaptive systems” confront “divergent points of view” (Scharmer 2009b: 327). Here, we already see evidence of Scharmer’s aversion to debate as a form of dialogue when he states that



the “word debate” means “beat down your opponent with words”. Participants in debates use their “arguments to beat or best their opponent, defined as anyone with a different opinion”. While the “quality of the conversation” in debates does make it possible to “perceive differing views and perspectives”, when it becomes necessary for “team members to reflect on and change their basic habits of thought and guiding assumptions”, a different quality of conversation becomes necessary. (Scharmer 2009b: 271).

This is the point where Scharmer introduces the demand that the “communicative action” take place through reflective exploration in “dialogue”. The participants in the conversation are supposed to “speak of themselves as part of the whole” and thereby move from “defending to inquiring into viewpoints”. On this basis, one subsequently arrives at presencing, that is, “generative flow”. In the community, this leads to the emergence of “quiet, collective creativity”, a “creative flow”, and an “authentic self” (Scharmer 2009a: 232). There is mention of forming a “collective container” in which “emerging impulses for the future” can be heard “in yourself, in others, and between you”. It involves “common sensing”, immersing oneself in the “places of greatest possibilities”, the “common quiet” in which the “inner knowing” emerges that allows “common development”; it involves “exploring the future by doing” and “common development” that ushers “the new into the world” (Scharmer 2009b: 19).

This community ideology supports the suggestion that if everyone passes through the cycle of Theory U together, conflicts of interest between those involved will be reduced or even eliminated completely. It explains why Scharmer can envision that the World Bank, the Chinese government, McKinsey Consulting, multinational corporations, and NGOs “go through Theory U” together in a global process, thereby overcoming their conflicts of interest and “exploring a common future through action”. Otto Scharmer is therefore ultimately advocating old collective ideologies that deny the existence of opposing interests between individuals, groups, organizations, or classes (for variations types of community ideologies, see Krell 1994).

It is easy to understand the attraction of this ideology of community. The stronger the perception of opposing interests and lines of conflict, the stronger the need for integration and community. In this context, Nils Brunsson speaks of “reverse

coupling” (Brunsson 2003: 206). When a city council decides to reduce automobile traffic by 30 percent in 15 years, citizens accept that traffic is increasing. Launching an advertising campaign for “Swedishness”, makes it easier for a Swedish electronics company to transfer business locations to other countries. And by the same token it makes sense for the top executives of an organization to emphasize the “community” of all by proclaiming catalogs of values, publishing mission statements, or launching change processes with Theory U—while at the same time the centrifugal forces within an organization are steadily strengthening.

Sociologists are the last people to lack understanding for the functionality of this form of “organizational hypocrisy” (Brunsson 1989). Organizations depend on sprucing up their presentational side because otherwise conflicts with the environment would come too close to their core processes (Kühl 2011: 136). Certainly, the Chinese government, the World Bank, McKinsey, and Greenpeace are only extreme cases of organizations that need to make their presentational aspect look pretty. Yet if organizations believe too deeply in what they present to the external world, then they inhibit opposing interests from being articulated at all, thereby undermining organizational learning processes. The strong community orientation espoused by Theory U therefore carries the danger of this concept degenerating into a learning prevention theory.

#### [4. Blind spot. A management fantasy that has been enriched with esoteric terminology](#)

At first glance, Theory U is an entirely normal phase model. Like most phase models, it conveys the suggestion of progress. The claim is made that the individual, the team, the organization, the state or even an entire society—all of them—will be refined after passing through the various phases. A similarity can be seen with Karl Marx’s phase model, whereby mankind, following life in a primitive society, must first pass through a slave society, then feudal society, and later capitalist society before it can overcome class distinctions in a communist society. Yet this suggestion of progress is often contained even in small management phase models. In so-called PCSAM processes, problems are first analyzed, then the causes are defined, which leads to the

development of solutions, which ultimately results in action. In the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, the object is first to set up plans for achieving previously defined goals, then implement the plans accordingly, check the results by examining whether the goals have been reached, and, if that is the case, to finally establish the procedure as a new standard in the organization.

The attractiveness of Theory U is that it takes the classical phase models circulating in the management field and loads them with esoteric ideas and concepts that are popular in parts of the change management scene. It is no coincidence that the phases of Theory U remind one of the seven phases of a Yogi. First, a Yogi must realize that all “true knowledge” comes from within. He then grasps the causes of his suffering and, in the phase of Samadhi, allows himself to merge entirely into his “self”. Building on that, he realizes he no longer has to perform religious acts. In the next phase, he gains complete control over his mind, subsequently liberates himself from all external processes and, in the final phase, thereby obtains a state of absolute freedom. In contrast to Plan-Do-Check-Act cycles and PCSAM processes, which have a somewhat technocratic feel, Theory U is rich with the poetry of change.

What is easily overlooked in light of Otto Scharmer’s poetic language is that Theory U ultimately amounts to an esoteric variant of classical purposive-rational thinking. Even if he emphasizes that the “U” functions as a “holistic field” and no longer as a “linear process”, one still sees how similar it is to the PCSAM phase model, the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, and Kurt Lewin’s “Unfreeze-Moving-Refreeze” model. Ultimately, Theory U also revolves around analyzing the present state, identifying problems, formulating common goals, developing new opportunities, trying them out, and then implementing them. Granted, it has its own content emphasis. Ideas for the future of the organization are supposed to be “born” of the organization itself. According to Scharmer, the idea is not so much to borrow concepts that were developed elsewhere, but to recognize the blind spots in one’s organization and use these insights to bring the future “into the world”. The idea of prototyping also represents a variation on other purposive-rational management concepts in as much as it no longer assumes that a perfect solution can be found on the first attempt. Rather, one must first tinker with unfinished solutions before a new approach sorts itself out.

Nevertheless, Theory U is ultimately dominated by the well-known approach of viewing everything in terms of a common purpose. The end product is always something like a common goal, except that it is now referred to as forming a “common intention” for which one would like to connect with others; a future that “wants to evolve” through oneself; a “landing strip of the future”; or “opening innovation spaces” (Scharmer 2009b: 204). Talk of goals has now been replaced with the notion that in addition to the “self” consisting of what a person, group, or organization has become based on the course of its previous life, there is yet a second “self”, namely, the person or the community that one would like “to become in the future” (Scharmer 2009b: 27). Rather than speaking of goals that management is meant to reach, there is now talk that the “essence of management” is to “recognize and operate from the highest possible future” (Scharmer/Käufer 2008: 4). From “the perspective of the future” what is leadership supposed to represent other than orienting actions to targets or goals that were envisioned together?

While that may be true—and this is the pivotal question—do organizations and the lives of human beings largely function in the way Theory U construes them. In the meantime, it is well documented in organizational research that if one assumes that the players generally act in rational ways as they pursue solutions for previously defined problems, one succumbs to an illusion. All too often, the goals that have been set are unclear or contradictory; frequently, the best suited method of solving a problem is not known; and the composition of decision-making committees is often the result of happenstance. The revolutionary idea proposed by Michael D. Cohen, James A. March, and Johan P. Olsen (1972) states that players link solutions and problems only loosely, sometimes even noncommittally. From this perspective, problem solutions are nothing more than a very coincidental “alliance” consisting of problems, solutions, and players. The decision-making process is like a waste paper basket filled with problems, players, and solutions that bond more or less randomly. Of course, it can happen that a solution is being sought for a specific problem in this process. Yet just as often, perhaps even more frequently, the case arises that a solution is being sought for a problem that has recently emerged. This occurs, for example, when a large number of important problems have accumulated in an organization. In order to cut through the

complexity that the multitude of problems has created, a player looks for a problem that will fit a solution which happens to be present anyway. Another common situation arises when problems that have required a solution for some time, but could not be paired with one, are simply shelved by decision-makers—for as long as it takes for a better decision-making opportunity to present itself. Naturally, it becomes clear that this is not a good problem solving method. Still, it allows for the possibility of choosing between alternatives, and solving problems even when the organization is plagued by things such as ambiguity, a constantly changing environment, or equivocal and conflicting goals.

In the final analysis, the choice of esoteric terminology in Theory U conceals that it amounts to nothing other than a linguistically obfuscated management fantasy. As a rule, political processes are not defined by a sequence of “giving and holding space”, “looking inward”, “sensing”, “presencing”, “condensing and crystallizing”, “prototyping”, and “bringing into the world”. Instead, what we often see are prototypes of solutions that were created for entirely different problems but are subsequently pressed into service for a problem which has become acute.

Organizational decision-making processes generally do not conform to the phases set forth in Theory U. Rather, the phases of “giving space”, “bringing into the world”, and “looking inward” run parallel to one another, and the processes come about more or less by coincidence. It is similar to choosing a life partner. All of the possibilities offered by Internet platforms notwithstanding, you don’t choose a life partner by following a strict sequence of phases that entail “giving and holding space”, “looking inward”, “sensing”, “presencing”, “condensing and crystallizing”, “prototyping”, and “bringing into the world”. Rather, in the majority of cases, a life partner crosses your path as a (more or less) desired solution which then links to you with all of its problems. In organizations, and outside organizations, too, life is much wilder than Theory U would have us believe.

#### 5. Summary. The usefulness of the concept in consulting work

Management methods wear down over time. No matter whether it's lean management, business process reengineering, or learning organizations, at the beginning their formulas, success stories, and the praise they reap make them so secure that any kind of fundamental criticism is viewed as heresy. The person who draws attention to the blind spots during the initial phase of a new business model that appears to be rational, is generally ignored or becomes the subject of discrimination. Yet the model exhausts itself through application in practical situations. It loses its originality. As weak spots emerge, those initially gushing hopes are disappointed. And even if a handful of consultants and managers attempt to prolong the wave with submissions such as "How to Practice Lean Management Correctly", "Reengineering Flaws and How to Avoid Them", or "The Learning Organization. Getting It Right", the model loses its shine.

Certainly, when these concepts are published in expensive glossy management books and packaged in animated PowerPoint presentations, they initially appear far more attractive than the status quo as it is perceived by employees. After all, according to Niklas Luhmann (2000: 336), the projects have not yet been subjected to the "acid test". But the more one of these new concepts is implemented in practice, the clearer it becomes that it harbors the same discrepancies as all the other well-known organizational concepts that went before. The more intensively guiding principles such as lean management or business process reengineering were applied, the more obvious their blind spots became. As children's literature has already demonstrated, the more often the Emperor appears in public, the clearer it becomes that he has no clothes.

Theory U—it's only the latest twist in the invention of something that is allegedly new. Using great drama, it points out that the old principles and concepts no longer meet the requirements of altered environmental conditions and that the old organizations, or even social models, must be replaced by new, more convincing ones. Down to the details, the construction of Theory U is fundamentally identical to the concepts of other celebrated or self-celebratory authors and management gurus such as Tom Peters, Peter Senge, or Jeffrey Sachs. The special feature here is that Otto Scharmer has a more esoteric mode of expression than the others, using terminology such as "spirituality", "personal mastery", "flow", "value constellation", and "vision quest" (Scharmer 2009b: 81). This explains why his approach has been especially well

received in several areas of the systemically oriented organizational development scene.

The benefit of Theory U is that its rhetoric is particularly change oriented and therefore inspires the courage to make transitions. Organizations, it suggests, must to a very significant degree simply ignore the uncertainty that precedes every decision. They must first do something, persuade themselves that their actions were correct, and then continue to pursue them systematically (see Brunsson 1989). The art of organizing increasingly entails treating uncertain knowledge as if it were certain and thereby arriving at confident, convincing action. The ability that is becoming more and more crucial to managers is to view things as confirmed that should actually be called into question (see Weick 1985: 315). This is the very point where Theory U provides important assistance.

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