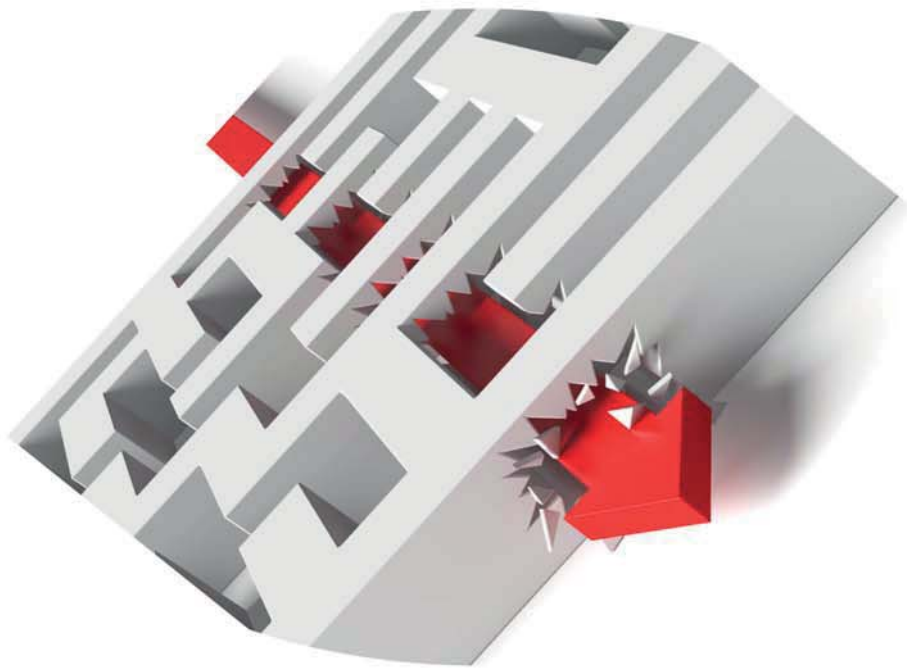


Breakthrough

The Art and Science of creating magical Change
by using the Example of Theory U



Sabine Reppert

Breakthrough

SABINE REPPERT

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Abstract

Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) is known as a methodology for leading profound change in organizations. At the core of this process lies the generation of a heightened state of attention called “presencing” in which the actual profound shift in groups or individuals can be witnessed.

The goal of this book is to reveal scientific indications that support the understanding of this “miraculous” change moment of the Theory U process.

I approached this goal with a theoretical analysis by extracting research results out of the scientific areas of positive psychology, behavioral economics and neuro-science based on a literature research and by correlating these research results with the propositions of the Theory U change process.

This work resulted with the proposal of a new explanatory model for the “miraculous” change moment of the Theory U process, which I call “The Biopsychosocial Model of the Presencing Effect”.

Furthermore the findings bring forth a guideline about the applicability of the Theory U change process.

This work aims to provide a better understanding about the biological, psychological and sociocultural principles that support transformational change, which is certainly of interest for many leaders, executives and business coaches.

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Introduction

One central question related to organizational change processes is how individuals and groups overcome habitual patterns in times where a true shift is needed. Immunity to change is one of the most important topics that leaders, executives and business coaches have to cope with (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).

Scharmer (2009) has developed a change process called Theory U that systematically enables groups and individuals to make a true shift – a “miraculous” change. This change is based on a state called “presencing” – a blend of the words “presence” and “sensing”. What causes the “miraculous” change in the moment of “presencing” remains a mystery even for the inventors of this methodology: Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers.

“The mystery at the bottom of the U...,” said Betty Sue slowly. “In the end, it might be impossible to give a very complex explanation about it. Some things are beyond human comprehension, and it’s actually unwise – some would say irrelevant – to try to analyze them too far”. “Why irrelevant?” asks Joseph. “In the sense that to be reverent is to be humble in the face of “the gods” – something larger than your mind can encompass.”. “Maybe this is as it should be.” said Peter. “I agree that it would be unwise to boil it down into an “official account”. But I think that our experiences and ways of thinking about presencing are different in subtle ways, and it would be useful to tease out these differences”. (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004, pp. 219-220)

This book picks up on the above-mentioned quote and aims to identify scientific indicators that support the understanding of this “miraculous” change moment of the Theory U process. Furthermore this work teases out differences to the “traditional” change approach invented by Schein (1993).

The results of this book are relevant for leaders, executives and business coaches in a sense that the scientific factors, which enable transformational change, are in general better understood.

The practical consequences are possibly a more specific application of the Theory U change process due to a better understanding of the underlying principles.

This understanding is desperately needed in these days where disruptive technologies and trends force companies to substantially change in order to stay competitive. Employee participation and brainstorm are no longer enough in order to create the necessary innovation leap. Very often breakthrough experiences are necessary. But there are rare.

The good news: Creating breakthrough experiences of a profound change within a group of people that seemed to be stuck does not necessarily have to happen by accident any more. They can be created systematically.

1 Objective

1.1 Goal

Theory U is recognized as a leadership framework and process of leading profound change and innovation and has been developed by Claus Otto Scharmer (2009).

What is special in the Theory U change process is that this process focuses on leading to an inner shift of the participants on a much deeper level than the mental level. At the tipping point of this change process, the bottom of the U, stands a moment, where it can be witnessed how people or a group of people simultaneously change their being and their self image in order to collaboratively nurture the best solution. This is a miraculous moment of stillness and looks like a deep shift from inside and is being called “presencing”. As a consequence the change from the inside is creating the desired change on the outside.

The goal of this work is, to describe and to explore the moment of miraculous change at the bottom of the U in the Theory U change process.

It is my aim to provide different views into the “miraculous” change moment from the viewpoint of different scientifically recognized and models and research results. The findings are supposed to provide a new explanation of what is happening in this presencing phase at the bottom of the U.

My intention is to answer the following main questions:

- What are the characteristics of the Theory U change process?
- What is this moment of miraculous change at the bottom of the Theory U change process and how can it be characterized?
- Which scientific factors contribute to the Presencing Effect – the miraculous tipping point in the Theory U change process?

- How can the moment of miraculous change explained in different ways and how does a explanatory model look like?
- What do the results reveal about the applicability of the Theory U change process?
- Which further research questions would contribute to a refinement of the results of this book?

1.2 Current Status of Research

Theory U has been the subject matter in couple of theses. Some of them focus on analysis empiric field observations, like Wyrsh (2013), Chlopchik (Chlopchik, 2013, 2014) and Hinske (2009). Clopchik and Hinske correlate the “miraculous” change moment to Argyris’s models about organizational learning: the double-loop and the triple-loop learning (Argyris, 1976, 1982).

Olstrøm (2011) interpreted Theory U as an example of how religion is applied in modern western management.

There does not seem to be any publication yet that aims to systematically explain the miraculous change at the bottom of the Theory U process from a scientific point of view.

1.3 Impact

The results of this book are supposed to lead to a better understanding of the basics that systematically enable transformational change.

This work hopefully inspires many business coaches and leaders and executives in order to better conquer the challenges of today’s fast changing business world.

1.4 Methodical Approach

The methodical approach used within this book is a theoretical approach based on research in literature. Two main categories of literature are being considered:

1. Literature that describes the Theory U framework
2. Scientific models and research results that seem beneficial for the explanation of Theory U Presencing Effect. Those models and research results originate from the scientific areas of behavioral economics, positive psychology and neuro-science and have been researched and selected by myself to the best of my knowledge.

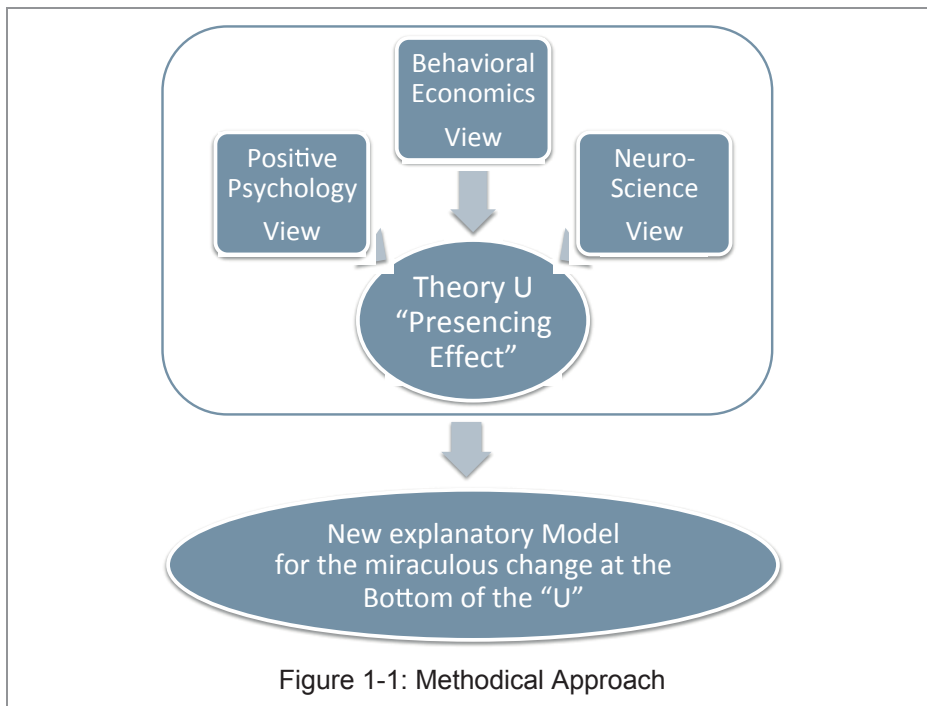


Figure 1-1: Methodical Approach

The essence of this approach is a comparison between the propositions of the Theory U framework and explanatory scientific models and research results that lead to a new understanding of the miraculous change at the bottom of the Theory U Process. This correlation results in 12 major findings.

1.5 Structure of Document

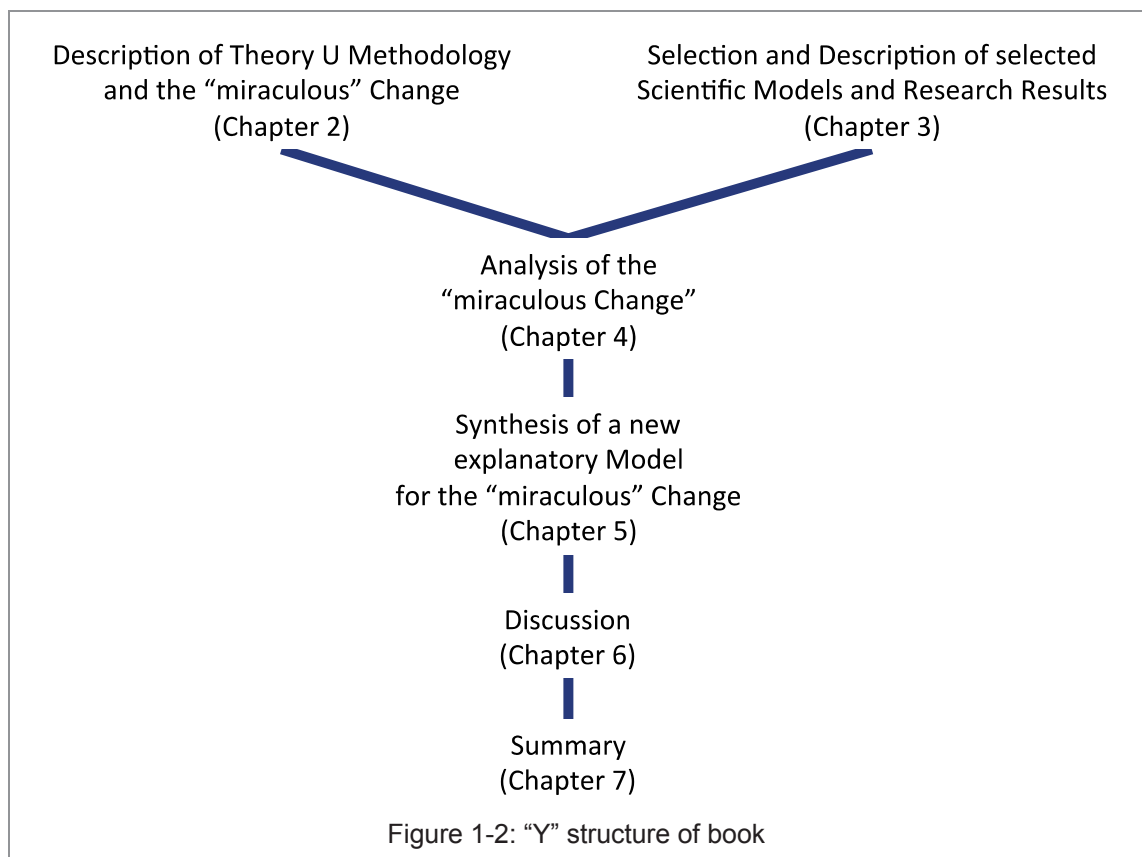
Chapter 2 depicts the Theory U process and sets the focus on the miraculous change at the bottom of the Theory U process along with examples.

Chapter 3 contains a selection of scientific models and research results that are being used in chapter 4 for a cross-reference analysis in order to distill findings about what happens at the bottom of the U.

The findings of the analysis in chapter 4 are being synthesized in chapter 5 and set together to a new explanatory model for miraculous change.

In chapter 6 I critically reflect the approach of this book and the results.

In the end the goal, the approach and the results of this book are being summarized in chapter 7.



scientific results allows a more specific application of the Theory U change process for the above-mentioned applications.

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About the Author



Sabine Reppert a professional coach and business consultant and the founder and director of Intent-X Limited, a coaching institute for disruptive change. Sabine is based in Hong Kong and supports individuals and organizations in turning disruptive change into ingenious innovations and growth.

She holds a M.Sc. in Mathematics and a M.A. in Business Coaching & Change Management. Furthermore Sabine is a European Coaching Association certified Business- und Management-Coach (ECA) and a Member of the International Coach Federation (ICF). Sabine derived her unique skills for creating deep transformational shifts very effectively from her comprehensive training as a Wingwave® Coach in Germany, Brennan Healing Science® Practitioner in Miami FL, USA, and the Theory U change process thought by the Presencing Institute, Cambridge, MA, USA.

Before working as an independent coach and consultant in Hong Kong and Germany, Sabine has been developing her career in the international transportation industry for almost 20 years. She went from programming to modeling interoperable train control systems, to managing the development of those kind of systems, to marketing and product management of train control systems and finally to selling those systems. Sabine also spend three years in New York City, NY, USA, turning a crisis project around for modernizing the operations control for the New York City subway.

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