Emergent Leadership

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Emergent Leadership

Emergent leadership theory relates to individuals, organizations, living institutions and the process of change. Traditionally, it describes the process by which an individual emerges as the leader of a group. Currently it focuses on the process by which leadership arises collectively. This paper describes both processes and describes Learning Organizations, Theory U, and Presencing as constructs of emerging leadership theory.

Emerging Leadership theories build on or expand previous leadership theories by attempting to answer questions raised by earlier approaches. Many of the theories we classify as 'emerging' were proposed in the 1970's and 1980's. Although they have been around for many years, they are still considered 'emerging' because of the difficulties researchers encounter when testing social science theories (Evans & Lindsay, 2012).

Emerging leadership theories include situational, contingency and transformational leadership. Early theories proposed that great leaders were born with the necessary traits and characteristics to lead followers. Leadership theories began to focus on situational and contingency leadership during the second half of the 20th century. These propose that leaders must adapt their styles to the specific situation or traits of the workers (Kelchner, 2014). Unlike earlier emergent theories, which try to match leadership styles to appropriate situations (Northouse, 2012). Learning Organizations and Theory U address the processes by which leadership can arise collectively and organically from the group process.

Individuals as Emergent Leaders

Emergent leaders arise in many types of organizations, and under different formal leadership structures. Emergent leaders are group members who are not appointed or elected to a leadership role, rather, their leadership develops, 'emerges', over time as a result of the

interaction within the group (Levine, 2014). Emergent leadership is displayed when others perceive one person, regardless of the person's assigned position and when group members support, accept, and encourage that person's behavior (Northouse, 2012).

Emergent Leadership as a Collaborative Process

Emergent leadership theories propose that current models and paradigms of leadership and management are not capable of generating complex solutions to systemic problems. Practitioners of these strategies do not have the necessary qualities of awareness, attention or consciousness to facilitate change at a systems or global level. Emergent leadership theories propose that for new and effective leadership to emerge we need to develop much deeper personal and organizational capacities of attention, reflection and engagement. We must identify and actively pursue the future we yearn.

Peter M. Senge, a leading Emergent Leadership theorist, defines leadership as "the creative tension between the current reality and the aspiration or vision" (Senge, 1990, p. 384). According to this definition, leadership requires generative thinking to identify the current reality, define the vision and create or pursue strategies to move from the present to the desired future. The role of the leader is to facilitate ongoing and deliberate examination of self, organization, systems and their roles in achieving a desire future.

Learning Organizations

Emergent leadership requires current organizational systems to be transformed into inclusive places of ongoing learning. In 1990, Dr. Senge published *The Fifth Discipline* to articulate and promote the idea of learning organizations to address leadership and management needs of the business community. Learning organizations have the potential to be highly innovative because they include more voices in generating ideas and making decisions than do

traditional organizations that have a clear hierarchy set in place. They can manage risk effectively because they are aware of inter-connected and related systems on many levels. They increase their own capacities through education and experimentation, and they may have greater loyalty and retention as employees are involved in creating the identity and goals of the organization.

The Five Basic Disciplines of Learning Organizations

Within a learning organization, members collectively and simultaneously engage in five basic disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, team learning and shared vision.

Systems thinking. Systems' thinking is a conceptual framework that helps people identify patterns and change them (Senge, 1990). Systems thinking illustrates that the world is created of related forces, that people are connected to others through many overlapping systems within the whole, and it helps people identify and change the patterns in those forces. It helps individuals and organizations to see that they are part of the problem and the solution.

Personal mastery. Senge compares personal mastery to the skill of a master craftsman who develops the skills to masterfully shape his environment. People with high levels of personal mastery continually clarify what they want from and in their life. They patiently focus on that and continually develop the skills and insights necessary to achieve their desires. They see reality objectively and the individual's commitment to personal learning affects the organization's learning and vice versa.

Mental models. Mental models are the deeply ingrained assumptions we carry. Consciously or unconsciously, they influence how we understand the world and determine the actions we take. Successfully working with mental models requires that people identify and

scrutinize their personal mental models. It requires the "ability to carry on 'learningful' conversations that balance inquiry and advocacy, where people expose their own thinking effectively and make that thinking open to the influence of others" (Senge, 2004, p. 8). Mental models become ingrained in organizations and thus change, within organizations requires collective examination and dialogue around the values, patterns and constraints organizational mental models carry.

Shared vision. Building a shared vision refers to an organization working towards a common future it needs, and principles and practices that will bring forth that shared vision. The vision is not the 'vision' that is created by an executive or a board and then is passed down to the rest of the organization. Building a shared vision requires individuals to share and discuss their personal vision, and in the examination of their personal visions for the future, forge together a common identity, work towards common ideals and create a shared vision amongst the whole. An organization-wide sense of purpose and responsibility rises up out of this generative thinking and it is essential to a learning community.

Team learning. Team learning is contingent on the members' ability to stop assumptions and engage in genuine group thinking. It requires they learn how to recognize patterns of team interactions that promote or hinder team learning. With individual learning, team learning is often accelerated and without team learning, organizational learning is impossible (Senge, 1990).

Roles of Leaders in Learning Organizations

Leaders in learning organizations are designers, teachers and stewards who are responsible for "building organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision and improve shared mental models." (Smith, 2001)

Leaders utilize these three roles in learning organizations in order to guide people in making sense of the situations they face.

Leaders as designer. The leader's first task as a designer is to create the architecture, or governing ideas, upon which the group will govern itself: common purpose, vision and core values. This provides the framework for productively dealing with critical issues and for individually and collectively mastering the five core basic disciplines.

Leaders as teachers. Leaders can influence views about events, patterns of behavior, universal structures and the purpose. "Much of the leverage leaders can actually exert lies in helping people achieve more accurate, more insightful and more *empowering* views of reality" (Senge, 1990, p. 353). Most leaders and organizations deal with events and patterns of behavior and largely ignore universal structures and purpose.

Leaders as stewards. The leader's task is to become a steward of the vision that provides meaning and unites people in an organization. A leader's role is not to define and present the vision, but to help manage it for the benefit of others. This stewardship helps individuals shift from seeing only events and patterns of behavior in their organization to simultaneously seeing its purpose and structure. From this, they develop an understanding of their individual and collective role in the organization.

Following *The Fifth Discipline,* Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer researched the reason that organizational change is not always possible. The concept of 'presence' was coined from this research, combining present and future. Presencing is where a new reality enters the space to allow listening beyond our mental models. In their book, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, the authors encourage the individual and the organizations to achieve deeper levels of awareness and learning in order to achieve new results.

Theory U

Theory U: Leading Profound Innovation by Presencing Emerging Futures, links mindfulness and the transformation of business, society and self. The theory focuses on the element of attention as the fundamental source of results. Theory U provides a framework for shifting attention, presence and sensing, that can lead to thoughtful self-awareness and universal change. Theory U proposes to identify and explore the inner source of leadership through theory and practice.

Figure 1

Structures of Attention for Social Emergence

Field	Micro:	Meso:	Macro:	Mundo:
Structure of Attention	THINKING (individual)	CONVERSING (group)	STRUCTURING (institutions)	ECOSYSTEM COORDINATING (global systems)
Field 1: Operating from the old me-world	**Listening 1:** Downloading habits of thought	**Downloading:** Talking nice, politeness rule-reenacting	**Centralized:** Machine bureaucracy	**Hierarchy:** Central plan
Field 2: Operating from the current it-world	**Listening 2 :** Factual, object-focused	**Debate:** Talking tough rule-revealing	**Decentralized:** Divisionalized	**Market:** Competition
Field 3: Operating from current you-world	**Listening 3:** Empathic listening	**Dialogue** Inquiry rule-reflecting	**Networked** Relational	**Dialogue:** Mutual adjustment
Field 4: Operating from the highest future possiblity that is wanting to emerge	**Listening 4:** Generative listening	**Presencing** Collective creativity, flow rule-generating	**Ecosystem** Ba (the Japanese word for place.)	**Collective Presence:** Seeing from the emerging Whole

FIGURE 2. HOW THE STRUCTURE OF ATTENTION (FIELDS 1–4) DETERMINES THE PATH OF SOCIAL EMERGENCE

Note. Taken from *Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges* by O. Scharmer.

Both Learning Organizations and Theory U identify leaders as servants or stewards to address the needs of the organization and world. Theory U's perspective is overtly global. It recognizes a responsibility to shape the larger social and ecological whole and provides a

methodology and context that helps leaders uncover their best future self through four fields of structure of attention (Chlopckzik, 2014). In the above figure, the four fields refer to the place from which we function. These fields are present at the individual (micro), group (meso), organizational (macro) and ecosystem (meso) level. The first and second fields are a reactive operation, in which the individual operates from the old-me world, and from the current-it world. The third and fourth fields are generative fields of operation, where the group may operate from the current you-world to the highest possible future (Scharmer, 2005).

This theory requires those who decide to follow a U movement adopt new and unexplored perspectives, and be willing to go against the norms and step out into the unknown. A prerequisite for establishing good 'presencing' is the way in which we are able to listen (Hall, 2004). Scharmer has divided listening into types of listening or levels:

1. Downloading: When transferring information that is already largely familiar, people only listen to reconfirm what they already know. Individuals listen to reconfirm habitual judgments (Scharmer, 2007).
2. Factual listening: This kind of listening is objective by nature. When listening is focused primarily on objects or facts, potential and novel ideas could cultivate (Scharmer, 2007). People only listen attentively when the information is different from what they know. They disconfirm anything that is new, and in the same process, add new information to the information that is already known (Hall, 2004).
3. Empathic listening: Paying close attention when engaged in conversation creates greater awareness of the place from which listening stems (Scharmer, 2007). By empathizing and seeing through someone else's eyes, people are able to understand and respect the other person.

4. Generative listening: This refers to the ability to connect to the emerging highest future possible. Through dialogue, one begins to realize that who they were at the beginning of the conversation, is no longer the person they are at the end. Through dialogue they have become connected to the place of future possibility, of a deeper source of knowledge (Scharmer, 2007).

By connecting their own intuition with the environment, they tap into pure thoughts and ideas. In order for an organization to attempt and successfully embark on the U journey, it must cultivate seven capacities:

1. Holding the Space (also known as Downloading): It asks the leader to invite everyone in the group to co-create a solution, not to hand them a solution. The leader must begin by creating the space to "invite others in". The key to holding the space is to listen, to connect with the four levels of listening, to be intentional and to keep attention focused on the highest future possibility of the group. The key is for others to contribute once the space has been created (Scharmer, 2007).
2. Observing (aka Seeing): It requires the groups involved to stop their inner chatter and judgment on one's self and others. This requires participants to suspend the voice of judgment (VOJ) to open up a new space of inquiry and wonder. Without suspending the VOJ, any attempts to get to the place of future potential will be ineffective (Scharmer, 2007).
3. Sensing: (aka letting go): Sensing is the ability to connect to one another through an open heart, an open will and an open mind (Hall, 2004). Individuals need to work on real projects in real contexts that they care about, only in these scenarios will people cultivate the capacity to appreciate and love (Scharmer, 2007).

4. Presencing: The fourth capacity of the U process encourages the group to connect to the source; to connect to the most profound area of one's self and will. The open will enables us to begin to act from the emerging whole. Individuals must care about what they do to let this process manifest within each individual (Scharmer, 2007).
5. Crystallizing (aka letting come): This capacity demands the group to engage in something specific, for a particular purpose and set of outcomes. It is in this moment that a committed group and its intention can attract others to its cause (Scharmer, 2007).
6. Prototyping (aka enacting): In prototyping the participants are asked to integrate the intelligence of the head, heart and hand. This is in the context of practical applications. Although the intelligence of the head is important, it is equally important to develop the intelligence of the heart and hand. This learning requires us to reach into our best future possibility to create breakthrough ideas so that we may avoid issues dealing with only the rational mind (Scharmer, 2007).
7. Performing (aka embodying) is essentially learning to play all of the components at once (Scharmer, 2007).

The seven Theory U leadership capacities are the conditions that must be in place in order for the U and its movements to manifest. Without them the U cannot come to life (Scharmer, 2007). Thus, these seven capacities must be in place in the organization for the entire U process to work.

The journey that may take the group from Field 1 to Field 4 is composed of five movements. It is called the U process:

1. Co-initiating: refers to building a common purpose for the group. In order to be attuned to what life calls one's self and others to do, individuals must deeply listen to what is required of the group (Scharmer, 2007).
2. Co-sensing: Asks the group members to observe everything that is happening in the group. It is about sensing deeply, sharply and collectively. When members see everything with clarity they are aware of their own collective potential (Scharmer, 2007).
3. Presensing: This stage is the bottom of the U. It requires the participants to let go of past assumptions, and assume an open heart for the self in the future. It is a place of reflection and retreat to allow the inner knowing and deep thinking to surface (Hall, 2004). Once a group crosses this threshold nothing remains the same, the group members involved begin to operate from a heightened level of energy and sense of future possibility (Scharmer, 2007).
4. Co-creating: In this stage the group prototypes solutions. As the group prototypes, the answers to questions become clearer. This process demands letting go of things that are not really needed in order to be clear about what is really needed, for solutions to "let come." Members must constantly reflect and refine their practices to move forward to what could come next (Scharmer, 2007).
5. Co-evolving: At this state, the group reviews what has been learned in the process and act on new ideas. They start to think and act in a larger context to have the highest impact on the system or situation at hand (Scharmer, 2007).

Theory U requires mindful development of these capacities for both individuals and the organization. Mastery of these skills requires time and effort, which is why many organizations

draw back from the challenge. However, Dr. Scharmer and his team are proving that by implementing Theory U concepts, solutions to modern day problems are being solved.

Contemporary Case Examples

Ford Motor Company had experience developing the five disciplines in the early 1990's, through the Center for Organizational Learning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At that time, the implementation of the five disciplines produced positive results: new model launches, less rework at the factories, better cost management, and better communication across the organization. In 2003, the IT Department consulted with Senge's Society of Organizational Learning (SOL) to carry out the Edison Project. The Edison Project aimed at reducing IT fragmentation across the organization. The Chief Information Officer, a believer in systems thinking, suggested taking a different approach on this project; instead of applying a quick fix, the team was encouraged to take a universal approach so that the interrelations of the whole system (customers, servers, applications, and programmers) could be seen and understood. The team was able to identify three main critical topics: technology, adoption and network effect. These topics had never been identified before; once these topics surfaced, the IT department had a better understanding on how to approach the customers, increase the rate of adoption, and lower the implementation costs. Ford's management team recognized the success of the systems thinking approach, and many more projects were lined up. By 2004, Ford had over 75 projects requiring a systems thinking approach. Ford's new challenge was to generate enough systems thinking practitioners within the company to take the lead on the new projects. Since then, Ford has been training its employees in the foundations of systems thinking, archetypes, designing interventions, mental models and communications (Seligman, 2005).

Other companies that have benefited from the implementation of the five disciplines include Intel, Shell, Girl Scouts of America, U.S. Navy, Nike and the World Bank Group, among others.

Corporations, non-for-profit organizations, and government agencies have all applied Theory U in some form. The scope of projects includes sustainability, women's empowerment, education, finance, health, and leadership. One of the ongoing projects of the institute is the SEWA Project in Ahmedabad, India. SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association) is a 40-year-old trade organization, which aims to empower poor, self-employed women in India. As India's economy and demographics change, SEWA members have experienced a diminishing number of younger members. SEWA is facing the issue of reconciling the aspirations of four generations of SEWA members. On April 2014, the Presencing Institute offered these women a workshop introducing the tools and methods of Theory U. The objective of the workshop was to have the members prototype the organization's desired future. The SEWA participants were able to incorporate the lessons learned in their personal life, within SEWA, and in the community (Presensing Institute, 2014).

Other institutions and organizations that promote emergent leadership based on the concepts developed by Senge and Scharmer include Authentic Leadership in Action Institute, MIT CoLab, Global Alliance, Synergos, the Sustainable Food Lab, United in Diversity, and the GIZ Global Leadership Academy.

Strengths and Critiques

Strengths of Learning Organizations

The strength of the theory of learning organization lies in its process of adaptive and generative learning by individuals and groups. This results in lasting motivation and better

results. The vision and systems change occurs from the bottom up and is not from the result of one person or the dominant group imposing their will onto another. This inclusivity motivates lower performing members and allows leaders to come from any rank, often without title. This approach to leadership establishes that leadership is a process embedded in all interactions of a group and not just in one individual. It takes power from the assigned leader and redistributes it throughout the organization, forcing people out of their comfort zone and challenging mental models, and creating interplay of 'creative tension' between reality and vision. The change also has a higher chance of sustainability because the individuals in the organization have gone through the process of self-awareness and transformation.

Critiques of Learning Organizations

Through learning organizations theory can facilitate powerful change, there are some drawbacks to its overall effectiveness. Transforming an organization into a learning organization is a profound, disruptive, demanding undertaking. Management's tendency to not share control, and to value learning as a means to meet their own goals rather than valuing learning for it's own sake, are the two factors that hinder implementation because they limit the capacity of people involved in the learning process to transform the organization.

Emergent Leadership is a complex process that creates chaos. From the chaos, innovation emerges. By challenging the old, deeply held ideas and long existent systems, leadership emerges. Innovation is not easy and innovators may violate some of the key assumptions of a professional community and thus may be ostracized, or excluded (Scharmer, 2007).

Strengths of Theory U

The strength of Theory U is that it creates whole, universal change that addresses adaptive challenges. It is widely applicable to modern day challenges as well as multicultural

settings. For example, the U process facilitated conversions in Germany between a network of doctors, patients and insurance providers. As a result, the network expanded its efficacy, providing better avenues of care for patients (Scharmer, 2007). Many more examples demonstrate that the process of Theory U, though difficult, provides positive results that strengthen businesses and groups alike. Another example is Eileen Fisher, Inc., whose implementation of Scharmer's framework helped their struggling clothing business see the need for group discussion and taught them how to get fresh ideas from a variety of people within their organization, resulting in a re-birth of their fledgling business (Presensing Institute, 2014).

Critiques of Theory U

The process of Theory U is difficult to complete because it requires a willingness from all in the organization to participate in introspection, personal and professional development, and to be committed to the group and its goals. Theory U creates profound universal change, which causes anxiety and is not easily tolerates in personal or professional settings. The required development shift is not easily implemented, no matter how much work goes into preparing the group for the work ahead.

Reams (2007) points out further issues with Theory U. He notes that the lenses through which many of the tasks are viewed in Theory U process assumes that a preferred alternative can be created to the world's present condition. Reams believes the U process should be more centered on the present than the future.

Conclusion

Through emergent leadership, as envisioned by Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer, individuals and organizations cultivate a deeper sense of awareness. From there, comes enhanced

sensing and listening abilities, as well as new innovative ways of thinking. This abstract generative thinking drives organizational strategy and problem solving. Given the present socio-economic world challenges, a paradigm shift is required to truly achieve a universal change in our capitalist hierarchical system. The Fifth Discipline and Theory U suggest that the answers to our current problems rest in the knowledge that the collective holds; only by releasing the collective wisdom and fostering economic activities that enhances the wellbeing of everyone, not only a few, the world economic system will be updated.

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