

Excerpt

On Fields

by Otto Scharmer

A field is, as every farmer knows, a living system—just as the earth is a living organism. I grew up on a farm in northern Germany. One of the things my father, one of the pioneers of biodynamic farming in Germany, taught me, was that the living quality of the soil is the most important thing in agriculture. Each field, he explained to me, has two aspects: the visible, which is what we see above the surface; and the invisible, which is what we find below the surface. The quality of the yield—the visible result—is a function of the quality of the soil, of those elements that are invisible to the eye....

The issue in working with social fields is that we haven't yet learned how to see below the surface, how to decipher the subtle structures and principles of the territory underneath. We haven't got the proper methods and tools yet that would allow us to dig beneath the surface to learn what otherwise would remain invisible. And yet, as every practitioner or experienced consultant knows, it is this invisible territory that is the most important when it comes to creating the conditions for high performance in teams, organizations, and larger ecologies....

In my research I found that the attention of the actor, group, or organization is exactly the blind spot that corresponds to the invisible quality of the field underneath the surface. The term "field structure of attention" allows me to get my arms around a surface layer of social fields that is still somewhat accessible to scientific observation. Just as my father taught me that the most vital layer of the soil is right at the surface, where the ground is permeated by light and air, in social fields the corresponding area is where the light of consciousness—our attention—meets and is permeated by that which normally is in the background of our awareness—the structure based upon which we pay attention to the world.

From "Presencing: Illuminating the Blind Spot of Leadership." Draft, 2002. ©Otto Scharmer

Otto Scharmer's most recent work has included research, in collaboration with Peter Senge and Joseph Jaworski, in the form of dialogue interviews with 130 eminent thinkers on leadership, strategy, and knowledge creation. A synthesis of this research has resulted in a theoretical framework and practice called "presencing," which he elaborates in his forthcoming book, *Presencing: Illuminating the Blind Spot of Leadership*, as well as in a co-authored book with Peter Senge, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, titled *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*.