

Dear Leader ...

Relationship development is possible. This is the book of the year for managers and consultants. Lone Hersted and Kenneth Gergen have compiled an indispensable book on relational leadership and dialogical skills in management. Is it a theoretical book? Yes, in part, but the theories...trigger a liberating desire to immerse one self in the book and to reflect on the many practical cases with questions. The authors call the practices "dialogical scenarios", which is a useful metaphor when we look at conflicts in organizations. The questions afterwards cover all levels of the organization and invite you to become a multi-being, and as a manager to find your own style.

Everything hangs beautifully together in this book. The first of the book's nine chapters introduces social constructionist thought about our many worlds and perspectives. Next, we look at dialogue challenges and competencies. Even our conventional patterns - including the essential good morning greeting (for everyone, but here especially for the head) - represent important dialogic competencies. Organizational conflict is a major challenge, and here it is important for the leader to take advantage of the ambiguity of utterances, as they provide an opportunity for bringing forth more prosperous scenarios. A great chapter on the "unmentioned elephant": Emotions, makes the work a handbook for managers. Here, their account of the "drama of my success" or "drama of justice" reflect recognizable patterns in everyday organizational life. Concepts such as creativity and innovation have too often become trivialized, but in this book we learn, for example, that "the essence of creativity is deviation." Last is an interesting chapter on the leader as coach, drawing elements in from systemic and narrative therapy approaches, including circular questions and externalization.

This book has thrown away the old metaphors for the organization as a machine that can break down. Old forms of leadership as management by fear and top-down are replaced by a dual commitment - to listen both for content and outcome, and most important, to trust the employees. However, the authors take into account that change is frequently ordered from above, so that the chapter on change through dialogue is for most managers probably the most important. Here one can find a coupling between ordered and improvisational change.

One of the key ideas of the authors is that the meaning of events is created in coordinated action, so everything is in continuous negotiation between you and me. This is particularly true in relation to the positioning and creation of good scenarios. For the authors, destructive dialogue leads to poisoned or broken relationships among employees, which in turn increase the vulnerability for the organization as a whole.

Most of all, this is a book on change for leaders who want more sustainable and creative dialogue; who wish to maintain a constructive relationship with their employees; and to develop organizations that develop and change effectively over time. I hope to hear more from Hersted and Gergen, who across Aalborg, Taos, and Swarthmore have engaged in this rewarding cooperation. They have written a good book... a must-have for any leader who wants change, who wants to succeed.

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