

Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership: A Review of Erik Lemcke's Guide for Collaborative Organizational Development and Transformation 1)

Many years ago as a young academic I met the Dutch psychiatrist Bernard Lievegoed and the work of the Netherland Pedagogical Institute, N.P.I., and was deeply moved by their work in organization and community development. I decided to take a leave of absence from my teaching job at M.I.T. and spend a year or more as an intern at their home office in Holland.

Upon arriving in Holland, I began the process of learning Dutch and participated in staff meetings, research seminars and training sessions. I also discovered a rich treasure chest of papers, talks, articles and research notes on the concepts and methods which the members of the N PI had developed over the previous twenty years since the founding of the institute by Dr. Lievegoed in 1954. The documents were all in mimeographed stencils which gives you some idea of how long ago this was.

Erik Lemcke's new book is a wonderfully updated version of this stencil library, containing many of the essential insights, methods, approaches and underlying principles and philosophical assumptions of a Social Ecology worked with by the many consultants, advisers, and facilitators who are members of the Association of Social Development, ASD. Members of the Association and their affiliates work in most European countries and in the U.K. Canada, the U.S., Australia and New Zealand as well as in Russia, and many countries in Latin America.

Erik wrote this book not only to share his personal experiences working with the concepts and methods of Social Ecology but because he felt that there was not a current summary of the rich legacy of insights accumulated by these consultants and their movement. "I am motivated to write this book because I sense that many of Social Ecology's methodologies and insights are more valuable than ever before, but nevertheless are in danger of being forgotten." 2)

The basis of Social Ecology as practiced by the members of the Association for Social Development is understanding and facilitating the process of development as experienced by individuals, groups, organizations and society. As is the case of our own individual life journey there is a natural development process in all social entities moving from a time of birth through childhood, youth, maturity and aging to an ending or death. If we can bring consciousness and awareness, a learning orientation, to this process of maturation then authentic development can occur allowing us as individuals and our social creations - families, groups, companies and other organizations to achieve something of our true intentions, of our purpose and mission. Helping individuals and organizations to understand and work with these stages of development and their characteristic challenges and opportunities is a hallmark of this approach to institutional and social development.

A second foundational concept of this approach to personal, group and organization development is that of threefolding: just as we have a body, soul and spirit so do groups and organizations as expressed in their cultural and value system (spirit), their relational system (soul), and their economic and technological system (body). I have found it helpful in working with organizations to ask how is your dialogue with the spirit (values, mission, purpose), with people (customers, suppliers, co-workers), and with the earth (finances, resources, economy) as this gives a general picture of strengths and weaknesses and offers a foundation for further inquiry and work on transformation.

These foundational concepts are dealt with in the beginning of the book which then moves to describe three basic capacities which the advisor and facilitator needs to master in order to be helpful to their clients: the art of asking meaningful questions, the art of listening and observation, and the art of review, of looking back in order to learn.

Part 2 of the book explores collaborative processes to improve group functioning and team-work, including functions of group leadership and the challenges of healthy team development. A significant aspect of working groups in organizations is the challenge of forming judgements and making decisions together. Here Erik gives a detailed description of a process developed by Lex Bos, one of Lievegoed's early colleagues, called Dynamic Judgement Building, which can be used to deepen and improve collaborative decision-making. The exploration of judgment-forming and decision-making constitutes Part 3 of the book and together with Part 2 will be of great interest to facilitators and coaches.

Part 4 constitutes the heart of the book as it deals with organizational change processes, leadership and conflict resolution. Of particular interest is the section called "seamarks" which would be better described as navigational aids in starting initiatives, also described in some detail by myself and Tyno Voors in *Vision in Action: Working with Soul and Spirit in Small Organizations*.³⁾ The subsection on organizational change processes includes a very useful description of the phases of organization development, organizational change models and strategies and a short section on the learning organization. This is followed by a description of a U-Procedure used in change processes also worked with by Otto Scharmer in his work on Presencing and Theory -U.⁴⁾ The discussion of social ecological approaches to leadership and the concept of horizontal and sustainable leadership is then discussed.

Drawing on the work of the Austrian organization development consultant and author Fritz Glasl, one of the founding members of the ASD, the last section of Part 4 contains a very useful although condensed approach to conflict resolution work. Part 5 of the book, prior to the brief conclusion, focuses on Personal Leadership and Inner Development with a fine section on meditation which draws extensively on Arthur Zajonc's insightful work, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry*, followed by a brief introduction to consciously working with our individual biography.⁵⁾⁾

The book consciously links the approach to Social Ecology practiced by the members of the ASD to the spiritual legacy of Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian philosopher and spiritual teacher

and the founder of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education. The extensive Appendix, which is almost as long as the text of the book itself, contains a brief description of Steiner's work and provides many examples of the working methods and seminar designs used by Erik Lemcke and his Scandinavian colleagues.

As the book is really a guide and workbook, rather than an in-depth presentation of particular perspectives and methods, it will be of most use to practicing consultants, trainers and facilitators who already have a wealth of experience from which to assess its value for their work. I highly recommend the book and have added a list of resources in English for readers who want to deepen their understanding of this unique spiritually based approach to Social Ecology and social healing pioneered by Bernard Lievegoed and his co-workers at the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute,(NPI)⁶

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Notes:

- 1) Erik Lemcke, *Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership, A Guide for Collaborative Organizational Development and Transformation*, Emerald Publishing, Bingley, U.K. 2021
- 2) Lemcke, p.xxv
- 3) Christopher Schaefer and Tyno Voors, *Vision in Action: Working with Soul and Spirit in Small Organizations*, Steiner Books, Hudson, N.Y. 1996, pp.59-101
- 4) See C.Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, The Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge, Mass. 2007. Also *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*; Berrett-Koehler, Oakland CA, 2017
- 5) Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*, Steiner Books, Great Barrington, Mass. 2009
- 6) Resource List of Relevant Materials in English working with these ideas:

Adrian Bekman, *The Horizontal Leadership Book*, Alert Verlag, Berlin, 2010

Steve Briault, *The Mystery of Meeting: Relationships as a Path of Discovery*, Sophia Books, Forest Row, U.K. 2010

Fritz Glasl, *Confronting Conflict: A First-Aid Kit for Handling Conflict*, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, U.K. 1999

Alan Kaplan, *Development Practitioners and Social Process: Artists of the Invisible*, Pluto Press, London, 2002

Martin Large, *Social Ecology: Exploring Post-Industrial Society*, Hawthorne Press, Stroud, U.K. 1981

Martin Large and Steve Briault, *Free, Equal and Mutual: Rebalancing Society for the Common Good*, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, U.K. 2018

Bernard Lievegoed, *The Developing Organization*, Tavistock, London, 1967.

Bernard Lievegoed, *Phases: The Spiritual Rhythms of Adult Life*, Rudolf Steiner Press. London, 1998

Christopher Schaefer, *Partnerships of Hope: Building Waldorf School Communities*, AWSNA, Chatham, N.Y. 2012

Signe Eklund Schaefer, *Why on Earth: Biography and the Practice of Human Becoming*, Steiner Books, Great Barrington, Mass. 2013