



## Book Review

**Erik Lemcke, *Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership: A Guide for Collaborative Organizational Development and Transformation*, Emerald Publishing, Bingley, UK, 2021, 288 pp, ISBN 978-1800438415, price (hardback) £75.00, indexes.**

Reviewed by **Christopher Schaefer**

Many years ago as a young academic, I met the Dutch psychiatrist Bernard Lievegoed and the work of the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute (NPI), and was deeply moved by their work in organisation and community development. I decided to take a leave of absence from my teaching job at MIT and spend a year or more as an intern at their home office in The Netherlands.

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 NPI had developed over the previous 20 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 UK, Canada, the USA, 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 of 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.'<sup>1</sup>

The basis of Social Ecology as practised by the members of the Association for Social Development is understanding and facilitating the process of development as experienced by individuals, groups, organisations and society. As is the case on 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 organisations – to achieve something of our true intentions, of our purpose and mission. Helping individuals and organisations 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 organisation development is that of ‘threefolding’. Just as we have a body, soul and spirit, so do groups and organisations 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 organisations 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 Lemcke’s 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 for improving group functioning and team-work, including functions of group leadership and the challenges of healthy team development. A significant aspect of working groups in organisations 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 judgement-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 organisational change processes, leadership and conflict resolution. Of particular interest is the section titled ‘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*.<sup>2</sup> The sub-section on organisational change processes includes a very useful description of the phases of organisation development, organisational change models and strategies, and a short section on the learning organisation. 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.<sup>3</sup> The discussion of social-ecological approaches to leadership and the concept of horizontal and sustainable leadership are then discussed.

Drawing on the work of the Austrian organisation 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.<sup>4</sup>

The book consciously links the approach to Social Ecology practised 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 book’s 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 practising 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.<sup>5</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 Lemcke, *Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership*, p.xxv.
- 2 Christopher Schaefer & Tyno Voors, *Vision in Action: Working with Soul and Spirit in Small Organizations*, SteinerBooks, Hudson, NY, 1996, pp. 59–101.
- 3 See C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, Society for Organizational Learning, Cambridge, Mass., 2007. See also *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*; Berrett-Koehler, Oakland, Calif., 2017.
- 4 Arthur Zajonc, *Meditation as Contemplative Inquiry: When Knowing Becomes Love*, Steiner Books, Great Barrington, Mass., 2009.
- 5 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, East Sussex, 2010.

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

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

**Martin Large**, *Social Ecology: Exploring Post-Industrial Society*, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, UK, 1981.

**Martin Large & Steve Briault**, *Free, Equal and Mutual: Rebalancing Society for the Common Good*, Hawthorn Press, Stroud, UK, 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, NY, 2012.

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