

Developing Collaborative Intelligence and Overcoming Stuckness in Teams: The Transition Toward Self Organizing (2018)

Abstract of a forthcoming book by Jan DeVisch and Otto Laske

This book aims to provide new answers to the question of how teams can become self-organizing, and how the transition to self-organization can be facilitated based on insight into adult development. The point of departure is that there is no one-way-fits-all approach to realizing self-organization. The intervention process dealt with in the book is based on the understanding of individual developmental differences in maturity as well as the different developmental levels teams as a whole embody.

Insights about cognitive adult-development gathered by research since 1975 help us distinguish between three possible spaces of awareness, or “We Spaces”: (1) the ‘space of making continuous improvement’, (2) the ‘space of re-directing end-to-end processes or value streams’, and (3) the ‘space of transforming business models’. In these three spaces not only are challenges time-framed in different ways but participants engage differently as well, based on maturity levels.

Our hypothesis is that in order to successfully address the challenges teams define for themselves, each “We Space” requires a different level of emotional maturity as well as complexity of thinking. Ideally all team members would see challenges in the same way and would be capable of addressing them. This, however, is rarely the case in reality because teams are *developmentally diverse* (composed of different maturity levels). This results in two distinctly different team dynamics.

The first team dynamic emerges when a majority of team members follows a team minority acting from a lower developmental stance and set of tools. As a result, the challenge the team poses for itself is narrowed and becomes the victim of a downward spiral of interaction within the team. The second team dynamic creates an upwards spiral for its team members as they succeed in uplifting the less developed members of the team towards constructive and positive collaboration, with extraordinary results.

How exactly, then, does a team become self-organizing (never being so initially)? To achieve self organization teams must become aware of adult-developmental differences as causes of their stuckness. Only then can they deeply understand, and take on, the task of creating enough collaborative intelligence for coping with the challenges posed by their interaction. In our view, this amounts to becoming aware of, and building, a second job level, referred to as 'Job 2' (in contrast to 'Job 1', the agreed-upon task of a team). In light of this additional job, building collaborative intelligence is about coping with developmental differences within a team. Insufficient collaborative intelligence leads teams to get stuck in incommensurable goals, strategies, and organizational development plans.

The book is fashioned as a practical intervention guide for senior managers. It proposes series of intervention strategies for developing a sufficient degree of collaboration to prevent deadlock. Interventions discussed entail supporting teams on how to engage with their challenge in more productive ways through new types of team dialogue, building maturity and thereby addressing team challenges in increasingly different and more open ways,

The book comprises 6 chapters, each of them described briefly below.

Chapter 1 establishes the purpose of the book and its main structure. Chapter 2 explores the *individual* perspective of senior managers and provides a basic introduction in developmental differences, and to how such differences create a new Job ('Job 2') for leaders as well as followers. Chapter 3 explores the *team* perspective, describing the upwardly and downwardly divided dynamics of teams in general; it continues to explore the guiding principles and leverage points needed for developing collaborative intelligence in upwardly and downwardly divided teams in each of the three "We Spaces". This exploration focuses on finding ways to change team dialogue and thereby shift developmental diversity in the team in a positive direction.

Chapter 4 addresses the *organizational* perspective and the question of how a company can create an enabling environment to facilitate the transition process to self organization in different "We Spaces". It focuses on novel coaching roles, as well as the multiplication of feedback and governance processes required. Chapter 5 discusses how to scale up self-

organization in the larger *society*. It considers the question of self-organization in social networks and social movements. Chapter 6 is a closing chapter reflecting on what an adult-developmental approach to teams means for the future of leadership and followership, a future to which we refer as humanistic management 2.0.

The need for the book arises from the fact that concepts derived from cognitive-developmental research since 1975 have not found their way into the business world yet. For this reason, available thinking about team development is heavily influenced by frameworks formulated from a behavioral strengths and weaknesses angle, and severely narrowed to team members' interpersonal process rather than also including their cognitive capabilities.

By contrast, this book focuses on broadening and deepening the quality of thought-based dialogue through the lens of how individuals differ in their framing of reality, both emotionally and cognitively. Since emotional and cognitive development are not distinguished in the extant team literature, and thus cannot be seen in their close relationship either, the book introduces an unfamiliar angle. We shed light on pervasive simplifications of team collaboration by using plenty of case examples.

Readers of this book will discover ways of supporting the transition towards different kinds of self-organization at different levels in an organization, thus of preventing teams from getting stuck, and enabling them to build true collaborative intelligence.