

Systemic Consulting

The organisation as a living system

Systemic Consulting – *The organisation as a living system*

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Originally published under title: Systemisch adviseren

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ISBN 978-9492331519 (NUR 801)

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Preface

In this book Siebke Kaat and Anton de Kroon are walking a new path.

Systemic-phenomenological work originally began with the method called constellations (family and organisational), which is now known far and wide. During the last 15 years constellations have taught us how social systems, including organisations, are put together. The focus, naturally enough, fell upon the quite spectacular method of constellations; the disadvantage here is that the quality of the method depends very much on the person applying it, the facilitator of the constellation. Siebke and Anton have made a complete U turn, by focussing on making the systemic body of thought applicable without being dependent upon constellations. It provides you with a tremendous feeling of pleasure when, with the perfect question or observation, you suddenly feel light streaming into a problem again. Well, you don't master the art of true systemic perception in five minutes. However, what you can do in five minutes is begin to familiarise yourself with its language.

Siebke and Anton are professionals with broad and practical experience. They are clear people, firmly grounded – not afraid to get their hands dirty - but never just drifting along. Already, for over a decade, they have been using systemic perception in their practices as consultants and, even more importantly, in their everyday lives. Systemic intervention is actually more a deliberate and permanent approach than a temporary tool. You are it rather than do it. In the same way that a craftsman's chisel becomes a part of him. From the outside it looks as if it is only the hammer that hits the chisel; inside him a very different process is going on. This is the systemic way; the way of Siebke and Anton.

In this book you'll accompany them and, quite often, they'll let you go off on your own. Trusting you and certain that, with the systemic compass to hand, you will have a pleasant and helpful instrument to guide you through the forest that is called an organisation.

Jan Jacob Stam

Thank you

Here, in front of you, lies a book on systemic consulting. For us, the authors, it is more than that. It also represents our own development as we grew into becoming systemic consultants. The road we travelled is one without a clear starting point and most certainly without a clear point of arrival. Development carries on.

Thank you to everyone standing behind and beside us.

A great number of experiences, courses, teachers, colleagues, assignments and talks have formed both of us. They provided us with a leg-up when needed and moments of reflection that contributed significantly to our development. Even if we do not name them here, all have their place. We sincerely wish that each one of them recognises a little of their ideas or situations in this book.

In addition there are the people who stimulated us to share our development and our views about our profession in the form of a book.

Participants, in courses we gave, asking us to write down what we were saying, were a stimulus to do just that. Jan Jacob Stam certainly played that role as well; from his intense involvement with the systemic approach he is always inspiring experiments and innovation. At just the right moment he would ask "*How are you doing with the book?*"

Finally, this book would not have come into existence without support, during the writing process, from the people in our personal lives who gave us the time and space the work demanded and those who read the manuscripts and made valuable suggestions.

Thanks to all the organisations.

Our thanks to our clients, the organisations and their people, for whom we worked over a number of years, and where we were able to learn about this living organism called an 'organisation'.

Innovation and growth come to life via exchange. In trusting to let go of habitual approaches and concepts, the option of renewal is revealed. Through our work we learned new paths and new ways to walk them. All the examples in this book derive from our own practice; they are a small window into a much larger body of work.

How could we, the authors, possibly restore the balance in taking and giving with everyone who has contributed, over the years, to our development and, through that, to this book? The most precious gift is, possibly, that we have nurtured ourselves with what we received and have passed it on to others: organisations, consultants and managers.

With gratitude,

Anton de Kroon

Siebke Kaat



Introduction

Consultants are usually invited to work in an organisation when its own managers are unable to find solutions to business problems. Then expert help is brought in – on a temporary basis.

Systemic consulting is uniquely different from any other consulting approach in that it is not the consultant who is the expert, but the organisation itself. What then is there for the consultant to do? That is what this book is about.

How did it begin?

Systemic consulting is tremendously inspired by the body of thought that underlies working via organisational constellations. Once we learned to facilitate constellations, we started acting from that attitude and knowledge in our day-to-day consulting. Increasingly, we became successful in translating the guidelines for facilitating constellations into forms for our own attitude as consultants. And here, exactly as is the case with facilitating constellations, our awareness was, and is, a crucial source of information. By asking ordinary questions and making ordinary remarks we learned that, together with the client, team or internal consultant, we could gain insight into the way organisational systems react, move and survive.

Nature continues to amaze us. Looking at the exchange among all living creatures we are awestruck by the individual species and with the beautiful coherence between them all. By delving deeply into living systems, time and again the organisation appeared in our mind's eye as a specific kind of living system. Both a living system and also an ordinary system with needs, embedded in and dependent upon a bigger whole.

A wish

Via this book, we hope to encourage you to take a systemic view of organisations and to show you how you can contribute towards the vitality of the systems into which you are invited to help.

We are constantly walking two, if not three, paths in this book. Beside the theory we give plenty of examples from our own consultancy practices, in the hope that this makes the theory clearer for the reader and easier to