

Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership

Praise for Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership

“In his new book, *Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership*, Erik Lemecke gives facilitators, consultants, and trainers invaluable insights and practical methods for healing social and organizational life. Clear, full of living images, theoretical perspectives, and helpful case studies, it is a treasure chest waiting to be discovered and unpacked. I highly recommend it.”

Christopher Schaefer, Ph.D.

author of Vision in Action, Partnerships of Hope: Building Waldorf School Communities, and Re-Imaging America: Finding Hope in Difficult Times

“*Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership* is a guide book for facilitators and also leaders in business, government, and civil society organizations. This comprehensive toolkit helps design and facilitate processes of individual, group, and organizational development for more meaningful and productive work. Deeply grounded in tried and tested theory, methods, and social processes arising from action research, this handbook is a handy yet profound resource for guiding organizational renewal and for thriving in this age of disruption. It is a real work of insight and love.”

Martin Large, facilitator,

author, Social Ecology (1981) and Common Wealth for a more free, equal, mutual and sustainable society (2010)

“As humanity moves from the age of competition to the age of collaboration, many people are beginning to realize that we need a shift in worldview and a shift in consciousness if we are to survive and are to create a flourishing and sustainable world. This Guide provides the framework for this shift as well as the tools and skills needed to get individuals, systems, and humanity from what does not work to what works for all.”

Judi Neal, Ph.D.

CEO, Edgewalkers International

“Few books bring the depth of knowledge about Personal, Organizational, and Cultural Change than this one. This easy-to-read book traces the roots of Social Ecology and gives numerous tools to create deeply effective consultation and organizational health. It is a must-read for senior practitioners and academicians in the field of social, personal, and organizational change.”

Marc A. Silverman,

Past President of International Organization Development Association

Social Ecology in Holistic Leadership: A Guide for Collaborative Organizational Development and Transformation

BY ERIK LEMCKE

Association for Social Development, International



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*I dedicate this book to the earnest followers of Bernard Lievegoed,
who intend to keep his principles and the Lievegoed Impulse alive,
bringing them futher out into the world.*

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Foreword

There are some books that must be written, and there are those that demand a specialized background, experience, and approach to be written. This is such a book – a necessary book. It is written by a Dane and in English. This is because of its subject, content, and message, which are universal. Therefore, this book can... and should... be read everywhere in the world where groups of people focus on balanced holistic social and ecological development. The message contained in this book appeals to all mankind regardless of country of origin, culture, religion, etc.

The author, Erik Lemcke, has an epistemic, business, and leadership-oriented background and experience that make him perfectly suited to write this book in particular ... this inventory of the important topic and concept known as *Social Ecology*. He has created a guide which provides a blueprint on how to merge these theories and practices.

It is hard to imagine a more relevant, and timely concept today than this. It is not a concept that is linked to a specific time period. The concept was relevant when Professor B.J. Lievegoed first introduced it in the 1950s and it will be relevant 100 years from now.

The book presents – as a coherent whole – a world view along with concepts, methodologies, and tools. *Social Ecology* is a practice based on research. It is a practice with suggestions on work methodologies and ways of being that are founded upon – and rooted – in comprehensive philosophical, psychological, and organizational research.

The book's timeliness can best be recognized upon the backdrop of F.W. Taylor's management theories. Taylor was an American engineer and father of management theory going back over 100 years. Taylor's ideas not only stamped but also dominated leadership/organizational thought and practice worldwide. Taylor's ideas are responsible for the almost indescribably dominant concepts of production and productivity which we see expressed throughout the world. These concepts nourish and have been nourished by greed and an almost ruthless lust for efficiency, whose damaging and self-destructive aftermaths are now becoming painfully obvious. *Social Ecology* offers another path to leadership and organizational development.

The book is about both private companies and public institutions, such as hospitals, universities, schools, etc. Everywhere, huge gains in efficiency and

productivity have been achieved, but the price to be paid is becoming so clear and significant, that it's becoming obvious that action must be taken, that tracks and directions must be changed, and that other management and organizational practices therefore are required.

The question that this book raises so pressingly in our day is: Are the leadership methodologies and tools used in society and business throughout these many decades the right ones to ensure a sustainable development of society and the business world in the coming decades?

My assessment – as is the book's author's – that the answer to this question is clear: No. The thought patterns and perspectives that characterize modern leadership and organizational thought are too narrow. It is a business owner's or shareholder's perspective that focuses alone on the stakeholders' short-sighted and narrow economic interests, overlooking other equally if not more important interests. It won't do. It can't continue. It's not sustainable. We have to change course. And it is urgent!

That is why, of late, we can observe the search for alternatives to traditional leadership and organizational development (OD) tools. A search, which B.J. Lievegoed found relevant and important already back in the mid-20th century. Lievegoed stood in the forefront of this movement as an outstanding pioneer of European leadership and organizational theory development. This was expressed, among other ways, through Lievegoed's original and groundbreaking book from 1954, *The developing organization*. In this book, Lievegoed describes leadership

Leadership creates boundaries and space which makes it possible for the individual employee to utilize his knowledge, experience, creativity and fantasy in a fashion that brings the organization in the direction of a clear vision, and which gives the individual employee a better quality of life.

B.J. Lievegoed is very important in the development of leadership and organizational thought, and I would say, in reality, his contribution is strongly underestimated. This contribution is summarized in the term "Social Ecology" and Social Ecological methodology and tools... which are this important book's mission.

This is a very important book. It's being published at a point in time where the need for its methodologies and world view has never been greater. These days, all over the world, there is talk about the climate crisis, sustainability, the dramatic reduction in biological diversity, and of many other serious challenges – and opportunities. These developments and the attendant global risks have been so serious that in 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 goals for a sustainable global development. I maintain that this book belongs to this global sustainability epoch where the need for this book's methods and approach is more vital than ever before.

I welcome this book. I hope that it will find its way into the hands of those responsible for leadership and organizational practice as well as to students in

professional schools, universities, colleges, and other education/research institutions that concern themselves with community/organizational development.

Steen Hildebrandt, PhD
Professor Emeritus, Aarhus University, Denmark
Adjunct Professor, Copenhagen Business School
and Aalborg University, Denmark

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Acknowledgments

Through this book, I wish to honor those who lay the foundation of the Lievegoed Impulse and *Social Ecology*. I am full of gratitude to all of those who created the foundations of *Social Ecology* and the models which I have worked with since 1987. My intention is to use this Guide to describe techniques for using these models and thereby provide a modest contribution to their use and development.

I will first name the Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner, who as a social scientist and spiritual philosopher created the spiritual foundation for *Social Ecology*. Secondly, I owe a debt to B. J. Lievegoed, who with his understanding and ability – along with other colleagues in Netherlands Pedagogic Institute (NPI) – developed the platforms of *Social Ecology* and the Lievegoed Impulse. Through their research and not least practice, I credit them with transforming Steiner's Impulse to a functional theory and practice, which enables the healthy and moral development of individuals, organizations, and societies.

Let me mention a few more of the most important people on my path as a holistic consultant. There is Lex Bos from Holland, who in his work with Judgment Building/The Lemniscate has formed the foundation of my practice. Hans Brodal and Leif Nilsson from Sweden, who through courses have introduced and trained me in Social Ecological methods. Bent Engelbrecht from Denmark, who was the main initiator of Ankerhus, the “Institute for Social Ecology” – Denmark, with which I was a co-initiator in 1987.

My membership in Association for Social Development (ASD) since 1990 is important because it enabled me to establish a personal relationship with a group of people who, like I, have developed and practiced Lievegoed's Impulse internationally. Here, amongst others, I am thinking of Austrian Professor Friederich Glasl's knowledge and books. I also think of the Dutch Professor Adriaan Bekman, who in 1986, held the course that made me decide on future work based on Lievegoed's Impulse and *Social Ecology*. These are just a few of the people in ASD with whom I have had important conversations and development work over the years.

I would also like to mention my colleague in DanSET, Sigrun Hardardóttir, who for many years was an important collaborative and development partner.

xx Acknowledgments

This book would never have reached the publication stage without the assistance of my proofreader Eva Lønborg from Denmark and my old friend and colleague in ASD, Graeme Harvey from Australia. I also thank Graeme for his invaluable comments on the book's content.

I will end by thanking my wife, Jonelle, for her love and support during the process of writing this book.

Erik Lemcke
Copenhagen
2020

Introduction to the Book

Today, in society as well as in organizations, there is an ever-increasing requirement for growth and efficiency. Concurrently, organizations focus on the quality of the work environment. Most managers and consultants have academic backgrounds in business and administration, and are trained in contemporary methods that focus on decision making and economic efficiency.

The question is: *Are these academic methods the best to further the development of society as well as organizations?*

Increasing numbers of men and women are looking for alternatives to traditional decision and management tools. They are looking for methods based on dialog which involve the employees in the development process; methods which are more creative in their approach to decision making; methods which are more co-creative and collaborative; holistic methods which can even be spiritually based. It is in this context that *Social Ecology* – which roots back to the mid 1950s and developed further over the next 60 years – is interesting.

After having been a traditional IBM consultant and manager for many years, I was ...myself... looking for alternative ways of developing organizations. In 1986 I attended a seminar about transformation given by Adriaan Bekman based on Bernard Lievegoed's holistic methods. During that seminar, I decided it was time to change direction in my professional life and use *Social Ecology* as its basis. In 1990, I founded danSET consulting, "Danish Social Ecology Transformation." The mission of danSET was to contribute to a Social Ecological Transformation of society and organizations, in that they became sustainable through the use of Social Ecological methodologies.

After having worked with *Social Ecology* over the past 30 years, I have decided to collect and categorize many of the methodologies and ways of working which I have used or find important as a facilitator and OD consultant.

This condensed Guide consists of two parts. The main body introduces the working methods which are useful to process consultants, development consultants, and holistic facilitators. The second part consists of appendices which describe the different tools, methods, exercises, and seminar programs. Readers interested in the spiritual aspects can find an introduction to the spiritual images found in *Anthroposophy* which lie behind the Social Ecological methods.

From the very beginning, Bernard Lievegoed and his associate Lex Bos discussed naming the new methodology *Social Ecology* – the terminology used in

Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.¹ However, this name was not accepted by the University of Rotterdam in 1954 when Lievegoed formed the NPI. This is why, in most countries, the methodologies are known as “NPI methods for organizational development.”

Bernard Lievegoed formed NPI in 1954 and was a pioneer in OD based on *systemic thinking*. Already in *The developing organization*, the title of the first chapter is: “Thinking in systems and models as a basis for modern management.”²

The methods can also be called Rudolf Steiner’s principles for adult education as Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual Picture of Man is the platform/basis for *Social Ecology*.³ Readers are encouraged to refer to A2: *Anthroposophical spiritual terminology*. This appendix is included for readers with interest in the spiritual aspects. *Social Ecology* methods can be used without going into this area/level.

Social Ecology can be described as a *holistic* way of working which strives to create balance in organizations and human beings. This can be expressed through questions like:

- How is it possible to develop healthy organizations where human beings thrive and experience opportunities to develop themselves as responsible people?
- How can one create a company culture which inspires life long learning?
- How can one create conditions for job-based learning?
- How does one stimulate impulses of sustainability and responsibility in the way the corporate world utilizes natural resources?

The basic intent of Social Ecological thinking is to develop individuals who take free initiative in securing sustainable/healthy development in their communities based on socially responsible actions within the inner life of organizations and within their local societies.

If you as a consultant or manager are looking for methods to implement spiritual leadership in your organization, you will find a lot of inspiration in Social Ecological thinking/methods.

The Purpose of Social Ecology is to...

- provide valid methods and processes which give adults tools for lifelong conscious learning and development
- create an understanding of how to behave in social and ecologically responsible ways in relation to other people, groups, and organizations
- create healthy organizations where individuals can use their free will to take initiative and create working conditions based on a culture supported by dialog.

¹A.1: p. 136.

²R.1. B. Lievegoed (1973, p. 21).

³The terminology Picture of Man stands for both “the image of human being” and “the image of feminine/masculine” and is used in all parts of the book.

The Frame of Social Ecology

- is a holistic approach to transform and develop individuals and organizations
- covers topics from the range of personal development to the range of organizational development
- is a collection of methods and tools developed from 1954 onwards and transferred to practitioners often in verbal form or in short articles
- is part of system-thinking methods⁴
- is a systemic way of thinking and consciousness
- focuses on co-creation, collaborative processes, and leadership for organizational change
- takes inspiration from the organic way in which nature develops
- focuses on ways of developing the individual consciousness and its ability to come to inner freedom
- was developed by practitioners who shared a common spiritual view
- is a path to inner development based on *Anthroposophy*. *Social Ecology* is not just another business methodology; one lives with it and it can become an integrated part of one's personality.

An International Network of Developers and Consultants

Since 1979, an international network of developers and consultants who base their work on the Lievegoed Impulse has existed. The name of this network is the ASD.⁵

The Form and Structure of the Book

I have decided to write this book as one facilitator giving experiences and recommendations to another facilitator or process consultant. Therefore, I use “you” when I address you as a facilitator.

The structure of the individual chapters is based on a training program which I have given for about 25 years in Lithuania supplemented by my experience in working professionally with *Social Ecology* in client situations. I will supplement the content with text and questions from existing literature.

The Lithuanian training program, “Personal development and change management based on *Social Ecology*” is a six module-training program for people wanting to deepen their understanding of social processes inside and outside organizations. It is especially targeted on people who are active in social change processes in their workplace or are employed as trainers or educators. Those wishing to enter these fields have also benefitted from this training.

⁴A.3: p. 189.

⁵A.1: p. 136.

Personal development is an integrated part of the training; it gives the participants new social skills and new ways of working independently. The education increases the participants' abilities to learn from daily situations at work and at home.

The training emphasizes some essential areas:

- The quality of dialog
- The art of questioning
- Working with reflection and the *looking back*⁶ technique for learning
- How to reach healthy judgments in problematic situations where there is no one answer to problems or questions in business/personal life.

How to Benefit from this Book

You can consider skipping P1: *Introduction to basic concepts in Social Ecology*, if your professional work already involves methodologies focusing on deep listening, the art of putting questions and the extraction of learning points.

P2 to P5 describe the different Social Ecological methods found in the book. If you are primarily theoretically and method oriented, this is where you find what you are looking for. These parts also include reflections on how to use the methods and what to be aware of when using them.

If you work as an OD consultant or facilitator, A5 is the chapter where you can find seminar descriptions referring to relevant theory and methods in different parts of the book, including references to exercises that are described in detail in A4.

If you are spiritually oriented and wish to know which images are behind the described theory and models, A2 is relevant for you.

To make it easy to navigate between the different parts of the book, there is a detailed index.

The Literature used in this Guide

The groundwork of *Social Ecology* was originally developed by consultants who were practitioners of NPI in The Netherlands, but has been further developed over time by consultants from England, Germany, Brazil, Sweden, and Denmark. A key part of this book is written based on translations of very early material from Dutch to Swedish or English. Problematically, this early Swedish material that I had access to has no author or date. Many of the methods described in the book were received via an "oral tradition" during seminars and development sessions, which I have attended in the 80s and early 90s, and adapted to my personal style and methodologies.

A small number of authors began writing about *Social Ecology* and the Lievegoed Impulse in the 80s and 90s. These books were written primarily in Dutch

⁶P1.4: p. 10.

and German, plus a few in English. Over time, more and more of the Dutch and German books had been translated into English. As these books were translated into English, I integrated some of this material into my consultancy and have incorporated it into this book. I also refer to a few books in Swedish, German, Dutch and Danish which are not translated into English.

My Motivation for Writing this Guide

I am motivated to write this book because I sense that many of *Social Ecology's* methodologies are more valuable than ever before, but nevertheless are in danger of being forgotten. Although books on *Social Ecology* exist – written by professors and practitioners – these materials are not used very much in academic management programs. The Lievegoed impulse and *Social Ecology* are little known – even in circles that work with transformation, change, and development processes based on methods like co-creation, holistic principles, and sustainability.

Today we have a generation of young, academically trained consultants who have some exposure to the Lievegoed Impulse, but many of them feel connected to newer and more fashionable ways of working which are more commonly used in our time.⁷

The Lievegoed Impulse contains lots of possibilities when working with *Social Ecology* in classical ways. In conclusion, I hope that this book will be an eye-opener for present and future OD consultants/facilitators who focus on holistic participatory processes, co-creation, transformation, and healthy development of organizations.

⁷In Appendix B, I shortly cover a number of these newer methods which function well together with the methods of *Social Ecology* and in many ways are parallel in their intentions: p. 241.