

Foreword

This book is designed to offer a short guided tour through the worlds of work and organisations, from a 'systemic' point of view. As we live our individual lives, surrounded by all the myriad possibilities and limitations that confront us each day, we can so easily forget that we are also intimately connected to the larger whole. The 'systemic' way of thinking and looking at the world helps us become aware of the many mechanisms and dynamics that are at work in systems that we normally never notice. These are the dynamics that can, in one moment, give us the wings to fly and in another moment hold us completely paralysed and unable to act. The German philosopher and psychotherapist Bert Hellinger has discovered a way to make the hidden dynamics of any system visible. He uses what he calls the 'constellation' to do this. Gunthard Weber, together with many colleagues, has developed Bert Hellinger's pioneering ideas further and taken constellations into the world of work and professions and organisations. A 'constellation' has the unique capacity of being able to bring fundamental truths about any particular system to light. It bypasses the opinions or judgements that so we easily impose on reality and which tend to filter out and distort the truth. And, as such, the constellation approach is very directly connected with perceivable reality.

Constellations have been able to provide us with many new insights into how organisations actually function and how people within organisations can flourish. The interest in organisational constellations is naturally growing very rapidly

now with so much new information becoming available about what is actually going on in organisations, when considered from a systemic point of view.

I, myself, through my work as an organisational consultant, have now had six years of experience using the systemic approach in organisations. I've brought many insights together in this book, examples from our consulting practice, and my own experiences gained from working in the field of organisation constellations.

The material in this book is presented as a series of articles, arranged in no particular sequence. So I invite you to choose for yourself the order in which you read them.

If you are someone for whom the methods of organisation or system constellations are new you, might want to start with Chapter 7. How about a conducted tour? Perhaps, by wandering through the landscape of our working lives, with this book in your hand, your attention will be drawn to a few special places of interest. I wish you a pleasant walk as you explore!

Welcome to the system we call ' the organisation'

A systemic ' quick reference' card

Perhaps a couple of years from now you could be someone who is arriving at your first day in a new job in a organisation you will be working for. Alongside the standard issue of your I.D. card with PIN code, map of the building, org. chart and list of abbreviations used in this organisation, you are also handed a systemic quick-reference card. On this card you would be able to see, at a glance, all the most important systemic dynamics that are operating within the company for whom you are about to start working. These systemic dynamics are the invisible winds that blow through this company. These unseen winds have the power to give people wings to fly. Equally, against their wishes and without their being aware of it, these unseen forces can actually make people ill. The 'orgenogram' is a sort of org. chart of the history of the company. By looking at this chart, together with the systemic quick-reference card that you have been given, you would be able to get a much clearer picture for yourself of the place where you are about to start working and where you hope to remain happily working for the foreseeable future.

On the systemic quick-reference card the following dynamics of the company might be indicated:

The founder of this company was a man of ideals who wanted to help many people in a poor neighbourhood and decided to set up a co-operative venture to do this. After working in this company for many years he finally left to set up a new company.

Many of the present employees still remain more loyal to the original founder of their company than to the present board of directors.

Many years ago the company changed from being a cooperative to being a limited company and entered new market sectors. One member of the present board of directors still identifies himself with the original market sector that the company was working in, even though the company no longer operates in this sector. His fellow Board members often experience him as a bit of a 'pain in the ass', although some employees actually do like him very much.

In the management of the technical department a few black marks on the reference card indicate some areas are under pressure here: whatever they do manage to achieve in this particular department never seems to be enough and the illness ratio amongst them is pretty high.

After a re-organisation in the company six years ago several managers found themselves placed in positions that did not exist systemically within the organisation and ended up being

put in charge of a department that was not really necessary for the continuation of the system(one of these managers is presently applying for a new job at the moment)

The company as a whole has a lively balance in give and take with the provincial town where they are located: some local festivals are sponsored by the company and each year one of the company's production facilities is offered as the departure point of an ice-skating event. The city is proud to have this company located in their city and the company itself is openly proud to be rooted in this area.

Two of the five production teams have had, for many years now, a good atmosphere and a high problem-solving capability.

This is the case despite the fact that employees and team leaders in these teams have had to submit themselves to frequent job rotations.

We wish you a pleasant stay, a satisfying and increasing balance between give and take and we offer you a place that is right for you where you can excel.

An organisation

What is an organisation, really, from the systemic-thinking point of view that was first developed by the German philosopher and psycho-therapist Bert Hellinger in the context of family systems?

An organisation can have existed for hundreds of years. There will be no-one left who was there when it was founded and yet the organisation has remained essentially the same. An employee is connected for a certain time with an organisation, contributes to the development of that organisation, goes through personal development him- or herself, and then leaves. The place in the organisation that had been occupied by that person becomes available and someone else takes over that position for a while.

In an organisation people function as representatives in a system constellation. They take up a position. There are systemic dynamics operating on this position and also the personal dynamics brought in by the person who is presently occupying that position.

Then that person leaves, while the position in the organisation's system remains. The position gives a certain 'bandwidth' of freedom of movement to whomever occupies that position. Such a position carries with it both possibilities and restrictions, all embedded within the larger whole.

From this point of view is an organisation perhaps less malleable than we think or would prefer to have it be?

What makes an organisation healthy?

What conditions are necessary for an organisation to be healthy? 'Health' here means that the employees in that organisation feel good and are able to work effectively. It also implies that the organisation fulfils the purposes in society for which it was originally established and that there is lively exchange within the organisation itself and between the organisation and the 'outside world.' In short a healthy organisation is somewhere where you really would want to be working.

As a system an organisation has many parts: the workers, the customers, the products and services provided by the organisation, the mission or objectives of the organisation and many other elements. The system as a whole has qualities different from just the sum of its parts and can be seen, in this way, to be very much the same as a living organism. In the same way a whole human being possesses qualities that are more than just the sum of all of his or her organs put together.

The system of an organisation demonstrates its own set of dynamics. These dynamics are separate from the people who are part of that system in any moment.

When we talk of 'dynamics' we are talking about what is going on between the various elements in a system and the relationships those elements have with each other.

These dynamics directly influence the behaviours and feelings of those people within the system. Unfortunately system

dynamics are not directly perceivable and they work beyond the conscious domain of our everyday awareness.

The effects of system dynamics are noticeable enough though! Positive effects will be experienced by people and described in such expressions as: 'I am in the right place here.' 'We are working in an energetic organisation that is full of life.' ' We can respond to changes appropriately, are good at decision-making and have good contact with the outside world.'

The negative effects of system dynamics will be experienced as problems within an organisation: ' It's not working.' 'We have internal communication problems.'" It's like it is not allowed to work out.' 'We are not as skilled here as we know we are capable of being,' and so on. Actually these expressions of the problem are not the actual problem, but descriptions of the reactions of the system to specific system dynamics. Knowing this we can look at the presenting difficulties through different eyes: We can ask ourselves, for example: 'What is happening here in the background in this system, that causes people to experience there being a problem?.'

A system can function healthily if it takes the following basic principles into account:

1. Everyone has equal right to a place within the system
2. There is a correct order of positions within any system
3. In any exchange there needs to be a balance between give and take

In a healthy organisation all the people working in that organisation are seen for who they are. This is true not only