

AUTHORS' PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION (2012)

This book was published in Danish in 2007. In direct translation, the Danish title was *Ethics in organizations – from good intentions to better possibilities of action*. Our primary intention with the book was to unfold relational ethics in organizations to help shape constructive possibilities of action for members of organizations in difficult situations. The book was well received in Denmark, and we note that some of the concepts we launched have subsequently become more firmly established in management, consultancy and the development of HR methods. This applies especially to the use of the concepts of relational ethics, moral obligations in work communities, bifurcation points, and mutual relatedness within organizations.

This book has become a source of inspiration for reflective managers and consultants and has been included in the curriculum of many educational programs and training courses on management and consultancy work. During the three years since the first edition came out, we have also had the opportunity to discuss the concepts, concerns and messages of the book in an international setting. We have found it particularly rewarding to discuss the perspectives of relational ethics with Peter Lang, Kenneth J. Gergen, Mary Gergen, Sheila McNamee, W. Barnett Pearce, John Winslade, Ilene Wasserman and Jill Freedman— all of them inspirational people whose thinking and work have had a great impact on our consultancy work and writing

over the years. In these discussions it was exciting for us to encounter interest and curiosity about the ideas in the book, which were unfortunately inaccessible, as the book was only available in Danish. That led to the idea of having the book translated into English and published by the TAOS Institute. We owe a great debt of gratitude to, especially, Kenneth J. Gergen, Sheila McNamee and Dawn Dole, who have been instrumental in making this possible.

After the decision to translate and publish the book we have abbreviated the Danish book in an attempt to further clarify its key messages. We would like to thank our translator, Dorte H. Silver, who has done a very competent job. We are keenly aware that translation is a demanding task that not only involves comprehensive language skills but also the ability to grasp subtleties of meaning in different cultures. The latter aspect is particularly challenging in a book of this nature, where the key underlying point is the creative powers of language in specific contexts.

The book is written in a Danish setting and influenced by a Scandinavian, democratic approach to management. The nine stories take place in a Danish culture with its underlying assumptions and norms, but we hope that the key features and aspects will be recognizable to an international audience. As the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2006) wrote, translation is impossible: The best we can hope for is to become guests in each other's cultures. We hope that readers from other parts of the world will find it interesting and worthwhile to become guests in a Danish culture as they read this book.

One particular challenge in connection with the translation was the many references in the original edition to Danish books and articles that have not

been translated into English. Most of these references have been omitted and the points of view explained, but we have left some of them in, as they are simply indispensable.

Another challenge was the translation of words dealing with ethics and moral. The word *ethics* comes from the Greek “ethikos”, which stems from “ethos”, meaning *custom*. The word *morals* comes from the Latin word “mos”, meaning *mores, customs, manners, morals*. Thus, the original meaning of the two words is very similar. Indeed, the word *morals* (*moralis*) was coined by Cicero as a translation of the Greek *ethikos* in his work “De fato” from 44 BCE. In contemporary use the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. We have chosen, however, to distinguish between them. When we use the word *ethics*, we refer to ideas, principles and reflections on an abstract level as in the naming of ethics theories like the theory of virtue, the theory of duty, the theory of utility – and in our case: relational ethics. When we use the word *moral*, we are addressing dilemmas, choices and actions in everyday life in organizations. In line with this thinking we have chosen this book’s title: *Practicing relational ethics in organizations*, thus addressing both reflections and actions.

We hope that this book – in its current English edition – may help build relationships and dialogue across national, cultural and organizational boundaries.

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