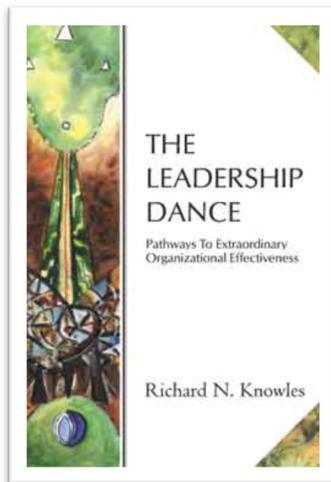


book review by john varney

the leadership dance

richard knowles – centre for self organising leadership



Knowles' book is both very useful and enjoyable. It is of our day, dealing in the language of complexity science and emergence, while being rooted in his practical experience of management of chemical manufacturing with Dupont.

Knowles draws upon, internalises and interprets ancient eastern wisdom in focusing on modern western organisational issues. This wisdom comes mostly in the form of the enneagram, (Greek for nine-sided figure) which Knowles came across initially through Charlie Krone and then traced back to the writings of J.G. Bennett and Ouspenski.

The enneagram, which has latterly found popularity as a personality type indicator, is more properly positioned as a process design tool. I am not sure that Knowles 'invented' it, as he states, but he has certainly brought new understanding and a specific interpretation that add to the management and leadership repertoire. Using it, he explains the interconnections between many aspects of management and illuminates the factors that distinguish self-organising human systems from control and command hierarchies.

Knowles also uses and explains other frameworks in his philosophy that make it a complete toolkit for those involved in hauling organisations away from the machine paradigm to something more whole, healthy and alive. Unlike management models, frameworks demand that you make them your own and imbue them with life, so that they can illuminate the living entity you wish to understand. Having travelled a similar path of discovery, but as an outsider to organisations, I find much to agree with and to build upon in this book.

I recommend it without reservation. Read it, try it out, test and learn, make it real for yourself and thus shine a light around you as you create value in all you do.

John Varney helps organisations with strategy innovation and cultural change. As facilitator and coach, his challenge, empathy and support lift the aspirations of individuals and teams.

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