

Beyond Crisis: Achieving Renewal in a Turbulent World

Gill Ringland, Oliver Sparrow and Patricia Lustig

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Review by Mike Brent

This is quite a daunting book of nearly 300 pages of dense writing. It sets out to help us – as the title suggests – get beyond the crises facing us. The writers have ambitious aims and a serious amount of confidence in their ability to do this. They tell us that organisations are toxic and that people at all levels are unsure about what to do. They inform us that staff have become increasingly risk averse and lack confidence. The good news is that the authors have devised the antidote for us ...

So perhaps you recognise yourself and your organisation – in which case you can plunge into the pages that follow. The authors build a framework to help us out of crisis based around five qualities of the PS-RO (which for you and me means “Purposeful Self-Renewing Organisation). These qualities are Machinery, Values, Options, Narrative and Insight.

Firstly the authors give us a tour of the crisis we are in and go on to describe what each of the five qualities mean and how we can use them to renew our organisations.

They do a very good and comprehensive job of describing the current and future challenges facing us, and charting the decline of dominance of the old world powers.

One of the things that senior managers will need to do is to continually take stock of the environment in which they find themselves and to respond to what they find. But you knew that anyway didn't you? They do point out that it will take a different form of leadership though, and they are quite clear

about this different style. Fortunately it will be one which you as an SF practitioner will recognise!

They suggest that what is needed are *'long purposeful conversations, backed by insight into which everyone with something to say has their voice'*. (page xv).

They point out the failings of the present approaches to managers and quote the great Peter Drucker who said in 1974 that not much had been added to the canon of management since Frederick W Taylor. They argue that everyone must take responsibility for leading – no matter what hierarchical level they inhabit.

So they lay out a convincing case for change and give us some pretty interesting facts and figures along the way. For instance, they point out that most of an organisation's new ideas come from outside, and of those which do come from inside most of these are contributed by employees (and not by the Research & Development department, for example). There are some pretty good links to the SF approach when they say that PS-RO processes need to engage with intangible factors such as the desire to understand and learn, and openness to possibility and curiosity.

Where this book is useful, I think, is in mapping out clearly the risks and uncertainties that lie ahead, and in making an attempt at pulling together some approaches that could be used. I like their focus on Narrative and Values as well as using Options, Machinery and Insight. It's not a particularly easy read and the diagrams – while useful - are not nearly as clear as they could be. But it certainly gives us food for thought and perhaps could be used by SF practitioners as a basis for approaching change and uncertainty in a structured way (if that is not an oxymoron).

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