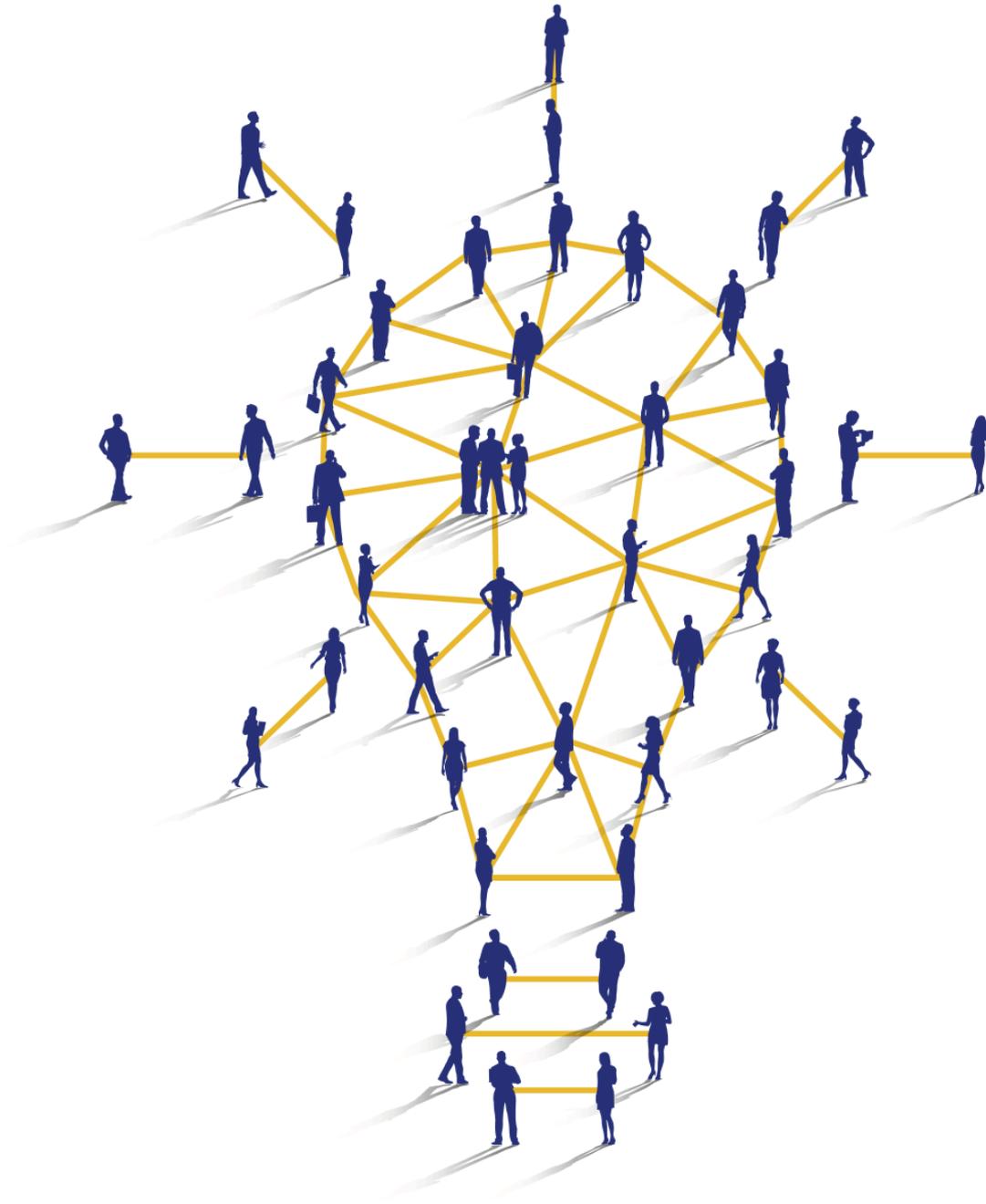


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SYSTEMS INSPIRED LEADERSHIP

How to Tap Collective Wisdom to Navigate Change,
Enhance Agility, and Foster Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

If you are interested in a model of leadership that is better able to navigate the complexity and disruptive forces of the twenty-first century, this book is for you. This approach to leadership is less stressful and overwhelming and will help you leverage the intelligence and creativity of all. We call it Systems Inspired Leadership™ (SIL), an innovative approach to leadership that creates from the wisdom of the system without telling people what to do. It builds shared leadership at all levels of the organization. SIL is part of a growing trend towards more collaborative and collective leadership models.

The twentieth-century paradigm of heroic and individualistic (“the-leader-knows-all”) leadership has become obsolete in a world that is increasingly complex and fast-changing. Still, many leaders and organizations work from this mindset, resulting in unhealthy pressure, anxiety, stress, and isolation.

Systems Inspired Leadership provides a powerful alternative. We have seen leaders become so much more impactful and fulfilled once they adopted a Systems Inspired approach and trusted what was trying to happen in a system.

Systems Inspired Leadership promotes a co-creative way of working that calls for a higher dialog quality than what normally occurs in organizations. It requires the ability to create psychological safety and ask challenging, disruptive, and catalytic questions. What’s more, SIL encourages a willingness to listen, share hard truths, and allow the greater wisdom of the whole to come through in the process. One of the unique qualities of SIL is the recognition that, within any organization, there is an integrated system,

and it too, has intelligence and a voice. Accessing that voice and wisdom will greatly help to navigate change, enhance agility, and propel innovation. And it will contribute to a deeper sense of meaning and belonging for the people involved.

Systems Inspired Leadership holds that leadership is a role of the system rather than of individual leaders and invites all employees and team members to step into their leadership. This requires leaders to perform their roles differently. In a way, they do less and become more curious and collaborative while focusing on what is trying to happen and tapping into the collective wisdom. This makes the role of a leader not only more effective but also lighter and less stressful, as they realize that not everything rests on their shoulders.

If you are drawn to the above, this is the book for you. Our primary focus will be on the “doing” side of Systems Inspired Leadership. We will reveal the five key competencies for Systems Inspired Leadership and give you practical tools and tips on how to develop and deploy them. And, we consider personal or vertical development of Systems Inspired Leaders and teams as a given, as otherwise success might be hard to attain. We therefore have paid explicit attention to this in the latter part of the book. Ultimately, the book is about growing your Relationship Systems Intelligence™ (RSI), with a focus on its five principles. At the end of the book, you will find recommendations for implementing this approach within your team or organization. And throughout, you will find stories and quotes from interviews we conducted amongst practitioners to illustrate key points and help you fully understand and implement the key concepts of Systems Inspired Leadership.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is meant to be a practical guide and field book, with some theoretical underpinning. We, therefore, invite you to explore it with a sense of adventure, visiting and revisiting the sections that grasp your attention and/or are most relevant to your current situation.

Chapters 1-4 provide the context, background, and origins of Systems Inspired Leadership and introduce the five key competencies. It is useful to start here.

Chapters 5-9 are the core of the book, dealing with the key competencies. This may be the area where you pick and choose, as a kind of manual. We have structured the material in such a way that you can go through it at your own pace. There is no fixed order to the competencies, so please feel free to select the ones you feel most aligned and comfortable with—or the ones that you find most challenging, depending on your learning style. Considering your team and its challenges, which competency might be most effective to bring into practice now? Make a commitment to yourself that this is not just an interesting read. Experiment with the ideas and practices in these chapters and find ways of prototyping them into your leadership life. This will not only help yourself evolving as a leader and human being, but also your team, the enterprise, and humanity.

Chapter 10 reviews the “being” side of Systems Inspired Leadership (this is about your personal or vertical development rather than your professional or horizontal development), and Chapter 11 discusses typical challenges that practitioners encounter when implementing Systems Inspired Leadership and ways to address these. In the Epilogue, we will sketch some possible broader applications of Systems Inspired Leadership. They can all be read on their own.