



The New Protreptic: The Concept and the Art

Ole Fogh Kirkeby

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Over the past decade, managers have increasingly become aware of the need to refocus their organizations on the demands of creativity. This has become especially apparent in light of the recent international financial downturn, as this type of structural crisis can only be met through innovation. Innovation - by definition a social enterprise - demands open and committed dialogue. To understand how dialogue has become increasingly important to leadership, this book explores the notion of the protreptic. First articulated in ancient Greece in the 4th century, protreptic dialogue is a means of direct exhortation to pursue a just life by addressing core values: the good, the just, the true, and the beautiful, and hence, involving attitudes such as generosity, decency, honesty, and empathy. Protreptic dialogue is about realizing the deepest inherent values that control our lives. While this form of dialogue has informed philosophers, lawyers, political theorists, and humanists since the Renaissance, and while it developed and shaped the European tradition of consulting and mentoring through the 19th century, it is important to conceive of the protreptic in contemporary terms. Unlike the ancient Greeks, the present world faces a diversity and plurality of cultural values - the condition of globalization and a much greater stress on individual preferences in the workforce. Possible differences between personal values and the organization's rhetoric makes it possible for the employee to choose his or her own way. Acceptance of these differences is prerequisite for an affirmation of community that is chosen with genuine autonomy. Leadership is required to meet the great task of mastering this dialogue and to set people free. Protreptic dialogue does not address the person as an employee, but as a human being. It opens the possibility of a totally new approach to organizational communication by evading the traps of shallowness and instrumentalism that, to an increasing degree, have begun to dominate value-based management and corporate branding. Protreptic dialogue offers the possibility for both the leader and the employee to know themselves through reflective cooperation on the basis of a well-examined life. It is the necessary condition of genuine leadership, which is needed now more than ever.

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