

Ruth Seliger

# Positive Leadership

The Management Revolution

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# Preamble

»Positive Leadership is a powerful tool. As a manager, I am responsible for making good use of it. But I have no other means to lead my team to success.«

Wolfgang Braunböck is the Senior HR Director at Oracle. He leads an international team of approximately 45 employees in Eastern Europe, Russia, Turkey, Israel, and Africa.

Several years ago, Wolfgang Braunböck visited a training course on Positive Leadership which I was organising. Afterwards, he started implementing the principles of Positive Leadership consistently in his growing team.

»At first, it was a culture shock for me. School makes you focus on errors quite relentlessly. You are always bad at things and need to get better. It took me a long time to pay attention to strengths instead. I have started to look at what matches my own strengths. And now, I am doing the same with my employees.«

Wolfgang Braunböck's employees say that communication in the team has become more open and there is a greater amount of trust. Especially the younger employees from the former »Eastern Bloc« are prepared to go that extra mile if they feel appreciated.

»It was an eye-opener for me when I realised I had to change my way of communicating. Communication is the key factor. It took time at first, but it paid off.«

Wolfgang Braunböck selects employees on the basis of their strengths; he promotes lateral cooperation within and among the regions he manages. He organises his division around the strengths of his team. With his 32 direct reports, he regularly exchanges views on the bigger picture of the organisation and their common tasks. He bases his decisions on the following principles:

- Continuity and reliability / consistency
- Transparency and comprehensibility
- Trust / no micro-management

A large network of managers has formed around him; its establishment would have been impossible without Positive Leadership.

And Positive Leadership has changed him personally, too:

»I have become more open, more positive. I feel a lot more confident.«

My journey into the wide world of Positive Leadership started in May 2000. The two founders of Appreciative Inquiry, David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, first presented their approach to the world in Europe during a five-day workshop attended by roughly 100 consultants from all over the globe. I remember spending three of the five days very sceptical: rose-tinted glasses, typical American white-washing, not systemic, one-sided optimism. Where was the balance?

But on the fourth morning, my head was suddenly bursting with new ideas. All of a sudden, I could think of thousands of opportunities to use this approach effectively. I was full of energy, optimism, and drive.

Back at work, I immediately started combing through my old concepts and documents and revising everything. My language changed, my work changed. It became lighter and more effective.

In 2007, I flew to the US to attend a large congress organised by David Cooperrider, who gathered »the field« together for the first time: Martin Seligman, the »father« of positive psychology, Marcus Buckingham, one of the designers of »strength-based management«, and many practitioners presented their concepts and experiences. I had the opportunity to introduce one of my own projects during a workshop. The congress made me realise that something great was happening here – greater than Appreciative Inquiry. Renowned universities all over the world have been researching this topic for years; a lot has been published and implemented. The notion of a radical use of resources is growing and developing. A new movement has emerged – a large, new field. It is a change in paradigm that is taking place in all fields of science and practice and finding its way into organisations and management levels.

For my »Jungle Book of Leadership«, I attached great importance to introducing a clearly structured model for systemic leadership. The topic of Positive Leadership was only mentioned very briefly at the end of the book, however – a pointer indicating that there is a lot more to say still. In this book, I carry on where my Jungle Book stopped.

This book is an opportunity for me to provide a detailed introduction into the broad field of Positive Leadership. It is a journey to the many roots, concepts, and instruments that come with a new understanding of leadership and organisations. It is based on a new worldview and a new idea of what it means to be human – beyond morality, but within an ethical framework.

For me, Positive Leadership is a systematic developmental stage of systemic thinking as applied to leadership. The systemic principles and fundamental assumptions, the image

of humans and the world, the understanding of organisation all constitute the basis for Positive Leadership. Positive Leadership is neither flowery nor esoteric. It is a path that shows how leadership will shape the organisations of the future.

Just as I did in my Jungle Book, I promise not to talk about a lot of new things here. Many of my readers will already be familiar with a lot of the thoughts and instruments presented in this work. The book is an attempt to provide an interested audience with an overview of the tendencies that influence the field of Positive Leadership and to consolidate the many aspects and ideas of the notion that has become known as »Positive Leadership«. It raises no claim to completeness.

I am a down-to-earth practitioner of the theory. Over the course of the past years, I have explored the field in greater depth, developed methods and concepts, and passed on the virus of positivity to many people and organisations. First of all, I infected my own consultancy firm, which has since specialised in this approach in the context of leadership and change management. In my courses, I have led managers to the »positive« path. Increasing numbers of organisations asked me and my institute to align their courses to the concept of positive leadership. Our work in the field of processes is oriented consistently towards the principles of Positive Leadership.

This is what my book is about. It is intended to encourage its readers to take action. The largest section of the book offers a wide range of practical case studies that illustrate how the methods of Positive Leadership were implemented, and what results they achieved.

By writing this book, I wish to introduce managers and consultants to the topic of »Positive Leadership« and familiarise them with it. I wish to prompt them to consider a new approach to leadership, organisation, and change. You are warmly encouraged to copy, be inspired, or simply become curious.

My personal passion for the Positive Leadership approach is rooted in a very particular hope: that treating ourselves and the world with appreciation and respect may cause positive change in both. Leadership plays a particularly significant role here, and it carries great opportunities.

I would not have been able to write this book without help. Many people have contributed to its completion: Matthias zur Bonsen, with whom I share a long history of cooperation and who has brought David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney to Riccione (Italy), David and Diana themselves, as they have been invaluable teachers and guides to me, my colleague Christof Schmitz, who continuously gives me new impulses and keeps his eye on

the topic with me, my colleagues in my company, who have been working with me on the development of this topic and field for many years, and last, but not least, my customers, who have become so enthusiastic about this topic. They have offered me opportunities to learn, try out the concept and its instruments in practice, and develop it further.

Vienna, March 2017.

*Ruth Seliger*

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