

**Partners in Learning
Learning to Lead Change: Building System Capacity
Leadership for Change Library**

King Arthur's Round Table: How Collaborative Conversations Create Smart Organizations

D. Perkins

Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2003

274 pages

Organizations, says Perkins, can engage in progressive actions or regressive ones. Progressive interactions are process smart and people smart. Process smart means that progressive interactions exchange information and ideas in ways that foster astute decisions, good solutions, and far-seeing plans. People smart means that progressive interactions foster the cohesiveness of the group, leaving people feeling good about working together and looking forward to doing more work together. Forces for cohesion outweigh the conflicts.

The problem is that when stress or disequilibrium occurs, people tend to become more regressive. In other words, at the very time people need to be at their progressive best (to solve complex problems) they are at their regressive worse (acting out, avoidance).

Perkins calls for *Action Poetry*: the language of real change needs not just explanation theories, or even action theories, but good action poetry — action theories that are built for action — simple, memorable, and evocative. Perkins recommends that we seek to establish *developmental leadership*. The development leaders need to act not just progressively but with high visibility, not so much proselytizing as altering, exposing, and explaining — raising consciousness casually in the natural flow of working together.

Why We Like This Book

It is full of wisdom concerning group dynamics and organizational intelligence. It talks simply and elegantly about complex group dynamics with process smart and people smart ideas for creating progressive interactions. It gives us a core solution. Along the way, Perkins indicates how likely regressive behavior is to rear its ugly head, especially when the going gets tough. We like the balance paying equal attention to what is needed (progressive cultures) and how likely we are to falter (regressive cultures).

We also see an affinity with Heifetz and Linsky's *adaptive challenge*. Both books call for a new kind of leadership to help foster leadership in others to solve problems hitherto not addressed effectively. These books take us into the real complexity of organizational problem solving, indicating the huge challenge, but providing directional solutions and ideas that give us confidence to tackle the most intractable problems for the better good of the organization and the people in it.



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