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The Art of Space Management

Roni Oren
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Roni Oren offers a decidedly different perspective on organizational management in *The Art of Space Management*. His approach is not surprising, given his varied background; the author holds degrees in psychology and philosophy, is an accomplished painter (his work appears in the book), and had a twenty-year career in human resources in some of Israel's leading companies.

Oren views "space" in the broadest way, relating it to the need for organizations to have open systems, or spaces, within them, as well as to the space that should be given to employees. "The level of employees' performance rises exponentially when they have a place in the organization," writes Oren, "a space for themselves and their skills and where they can express layers of their existence in the job place."

Oren begins by discussing the three main elements of space: goals, boundaries, and degrees of freedom. His description of boundaries is particularly intriguing. He writes that managing them is a critical issue: "When boundaries are given and held, our ability to handle difficulties and confront challenges rises immensely compared to a situation in which the boundaries are unknown or weak." Oren speaks of boundaries of time, accountability, and responsibility. He categorizes others as physical, professional, and value-laden. Of this last category, Oren suggests that values are "the most important component in the existence of a space," and he believes that without value-laden boundaries, it is possible that "everything breaks apart."

Oren next addresses "holding and containing" in space management. He indicates that managers must hold goals and boundaries to provide stability and that they must use containment to help minimize the anxieties and frustrations of people in the organization. In addition, the author talks about vision within an organization, which tends to come from senior management, and how one can learn to be an effective "space manager," or functional manager. Oren includes several case studies, most of which involve the human-resources function.

Both the content and the structure of *The Art of Space Management* are atypical. While it is clearly written, the text has a distinctly philosophical slant that serves to place organizational management on a conceptual plane. This could be intimidating to some managers who might be more comfortable with concrete examples than with theory. In fairness, however, Oren does use several specific examples for illustration. In terms of the book's structure, Oren includes space for comments at the bottom of each page and separates the chapters with black-and-white reproductions of his own paintings. In the one-page final chapter, Oren writes that his work is a "learning space" and that he intends to "leave it as such, without any recommendations or conclusions." This is certainly an unusual way to close a book.

Roni Oren's volume is thoughtful and unconventional. It is one that could very well open the door to entirely new thinking about organizational management.

BARRY SILVERSTEIN (December 4, 2012)

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