

Book Review

Herwig-Lempp, J. (2013). *Resource-oriented Teamwork: A Systemic Approach to Collegial Consultation*. Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

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Herwig-Lempp is a professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Merseburg, Germany. This book is based on his personal experiences of working to improve the teamwork at a specific Family Support Center, accordingly, the first person is used throughout. Even though the author provides a ten-page chapter in which he attempts to build a case for differentiating between three levels of teamwork, he keeps his theorizing to a minimum. This is a practical book about how to develop better communication among virtually any kind of team that is task-oriented. The “resource-oriented” phrase in the title refers to the different skills and perspectives each member of a team brings to the team processes, but within the text itself, this is a relatively minor issue.

How might a clinical team improve if the team members treated one another with the same viewpoint with which clients are approached? This is what Herwig-Lempp means by the term *collegial consultation*. The second longest chapter in the book defines the clinical framework used at the Family Support Center, a particularly non-directive approach to systems theory in which the author assumes many perspectives that may have broad acceptance, but without any real discussion of evidence to support it. These are the essential components of the author’s clinical framework, and all of the techniques and advice presented in the rest of the book assume this orientation:

- Mandate – Collegial consultation is founded on the presentation of a colleague’s specific concerns or presenting problem and are constrained by this mandate.

- Resources, strengths and competencies – Collegial consultation relies upon the presumption that synergies will develop as different perspectives and ideas are shared.
- Increasing options – All collegial consultation aims to expand understanding and increase options.
- Client responsibility – The colleague with the mandate is the responsible party for determining what final decision or action to take following the consultation.
- Respect and appreciation – Collegial consultation requires mutual respect and appreciation.

There are a number of inconsistencies in Herwig-Lempp’s presentation. He denies that systems exist except as we choose to construct them, then goes on to list the elements of professional intervention that enhance the chances of effecting change without appearing to realize that he cannot have it both ways. He spends almost five pages defining *team*, then concludes that none of these definitions are important because any group is a team if they choose to self-identify as such. He clearly affirms non-directive approaches to assisting clients, but then asserts many absolutes throughout the book, especially the focus on mandate and expanding options.

This is a 216-page book with fewer than 70 references, no footnotes, and a three-page index. It does not rise to the level of a research-based mono-

graph, and the team communication techniques appear to be relatively prosaic. For example, the author spends 11 pages listing a variety of sentence prompts for team use in brainstorming activities. If someone is looking for a “how-to” guide to improve team communication, this could be a place

to start, but I recommend instead the delightful *Facilitative Leadership in Social Work Practice* by Elizabeth M. Breshears and Roger Dean Volker. (Springer, 2013) which covers leadership theory, group dynamics, and social work ethics in more depth without sacrificing any of the practicality.