

Take on Board Podcast – Episode 256



Transcript – Dorrit Kromann speaks about using a psychological approach in the boardroom

Helga Svendsen 0:00

Today on the Take on Board podcast, I'm speaking with Dorrit Kromann about boardroom dynamics. Before we start the podcast today I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we record. For me I'm on the unseeded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, and I pay my respects to elder's past and present. I also acknowledge any First Nations people who might be listening today, I acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water, sky, culture, and country. I support voice treaty and truth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. And I stand in solidarity with First Nations people for reconciliation, and I encourage others in the Take on Board community to do the same.

Now, let me introduce Dorrit. Dorrit is on a huge range of boards asking for forgiveness if I mispronounce any of these. She's on Njord, a FinTech company, Fors, which is a supply company, Deedster Green, which is a tech investment company. And she's on a high school board in Roskilde. With curiosity, dignity, smarts, and justice Dorrit has been an ambitious inboards throughout her whole life. She has had an international career within financial business working for eight years around the world. She started out as a pioneer combining economics and computer science in her Master's at Copenhagen Business School in 1989. And then continued into organisational psychology, business turnarounds, and growth in her own company since 2003. By the mid 2010s, she left being operational and is now a full time board professional. Outside of her work. She's married to Christian and they have two sons, a 16 year old and a 22 year old. She lives in Denmark and has a part time house in the south of France, which is in the middle of renovating. Welcome to the Take on Board podcast. Dorrit.

Dorrit Kromann 1:45

Thank you so much. I'm really happy to be.

Helga Svendsen 1:49

Fabulous to have you here remind me who introduced us.

Dorrit Kromann 1:53

This is actually really just to take on this. It's so funny, because life is just coincidences, and life is building relations. So I reached out, you have to have the whole story because it's so interesting. What happened was that I got to know about a very interesting person in Sweden, she was changed her gender. She is a high profile CEO in Sweden, she gave an interview to Andrea who's a consultant in England. I liked the posts, and LinkedIn. He wrote me. We started talking, I told him about my book. And he said, this is so interesting. Let's keep in touch. I think I have somebody who would like to be on your board, because my book is develop. But we are living my word. So what is happening is that he put me forward to Lesley Antoun in Canada. And when we had the first board meetings, he said you should talk to help us medicine. Oh, my goodness.

Helga Svendsen 3:01

Isn't that interesting? I love that. I love the way connections work and connections work across the world. That is fabulous. Thank you, Leslie. And thank you to all of those different connections along the way that have meant that here we are having this conversation on opposite sides of the world. I love it.

Dorrit Kromann 3:19

Yeah, it's amazing. And that is the whole thing about the board that maybe I could just when we're talking about. It's all about how I wanted to make the most diverse board. So what I have on my board for the book, which is crazy. Why do you have a board for book, it's your book, because I want to live the Word. I started out to talk to my old professor at the University where I have a Master's of organisational psychology said, Would you like to go on the board? Because I want to do this. Wow, this is interesting. Then I spoke to that was also through a connection. Yeah, that was somebody I knew. And she said, but I don't have time right now bought professional, but unedited. She's just sold her business so and she did a startup and went to listed and took it off again and sold it to private equity. So she has a little bit more time now. She can do it. So she's on the board. She's Danish, so I have to that was two Danes. Then I got in contact with Astley because he's like the podcasts professional. He's young. Then I got in contact. Oh, of course. Well, Lesley, we talked about her. She was one of the first ones I spoke to. She is professional. She's in Canada. Now I have Fattoria she is a Danish scientist being working for diversity. And she is she's on the board now. She's a new member. And then I have Paul he is in Toronto. He is from Bangladesh. And I know him because I was working on a charity and then Mark back in 2006 I think so that's how I put up the board. I have also support a co writer she writes some of the book. Olga has been living in Denmark. I'm 16 years, she is originally from Siberia. And she's married to a Ukrainian. So it's just a mix in every angle, you

can mix it. And what I'm saying now is something that we cannot say usually, I have different color, different religion, different age, different gender. And I also have this very yelled at white male in his late ears, because I think everything needs to be on the board. And I think we have really good input on that board.

Helga Svendsen 5:32

Let's just take a step back, you've got this board for the book, what's the book explain the book to us.

Dorrit Kromann 5:40

The book is actually taking everything I have done my whole life. I'm turning 59 this year. And I have been having a career that was I was 23, when I started up banks around the world in Geneva was there started up a new bank for dangerous things, banking. So what I've done all my life is to build bridges, and to make sure that both economy and but that was in the beginning, when I was a parent pioneer, that one, I put EDP together with social learning, and society in 1981, then I was I've been putting all the Organisational Psychology together with the business because I think they need to balance. So all this is what I do. I've been working really hard, a lot. I've also had my family where I'd stepped back a little bit not doing full time career. But I took on projects, and then I could relax a little bit. So I've been active all the time, I was kind of stepping back on the C Suite. But still working. Because I love work. I think it just gives me so much to work with different projects and do something that makes a difference. So all this summing up going into that I need to bring this together. So in last decade, I started on my professional board career, hands off, Nelson, as you say, like you said in the last episode of your podcast, and then I was on the boards. And I was thinking I'm using everything I know, I am on the committee of cybersecurity, because I have my IT background on the social media. Because on the communication, what I do is that I'm always combining things, and I can see how everything can be put into play. So then I thought when I started working on the board, wow, what is happening here. And I'm using my knowledge, my skills as understanding what is going on here. And now to understand when things just how could that be like a very good example would be, and I have to say that I'm not a person that says this is Oh, this is so sad. For me. This is just telling about a case, what happened was that I am always very well prepared. When I go to board meetings, I will never have 10 boards, I will only have the amount of boards that I can go thoroughly through the material I'm sent. So what I was I had been reading and I always write a lot of notes. And I put up a questions and this I don't understand. And this I do understand. And then we have the subject who came to the subject on the agenda, I had an input spoke up. And it was just like taking like any input. And then we it went on. I was just thinking, Well, okay, that wasn't something I should put up. It's okay, because it wasn't something that I that should have changed or anything but it was kind of strange that nobody understood what I was saying. Then five minutes passed. And suddenly, a man said exactly the same thing. And they started talking about it. And I was thinking what was going on. So what I did was looked at it, I stepped back, felt what was going on within me, I was kind of sad. And then again, I was curious. And fortunately I have such a good relationship with these people. So I asked this man, what happened? They didn't even notice. Okay,

then I started thinking about then I started exploring thing, what is going on? And I find out that the voice makes a huge difference. So right now I can hear myself. Because being at a podcast, I have to say something really smart. Like that, but instead it's actually being calm, talking very much lower. A lot of people I have heard some women say, I'm not going to change my voice, but it's not about changing your voice. It's about grounding your voice. Instead of being up in the high pitch that is not grounding. You can have a higher I don't know if you say pitch in English on the tone, the high tone, a low tone, but there is also too much energy in the instead of grounding your voice. So I just started training my voice with an opera singer. So this is just to tell you how much it really matters. What happens in a board room underneath the surface. And it's very simple. It's very, very simple. And there's nobody to blame about this, there's nobody to say, This is really bad you have, we have to change the board to listen to the high pitch. But it's the natural here, it's like saying everybody has to be 250. Or everybody, we have to make sure that the whole room is made for everybody. But the fact is that if you have a table, you have to have a chair, and you have to sit on the chair, it's kind of, of course, it's the balance. Again, it's not that if you're 150, then you cannot be in the boardroom. It's like, if you are 150, you have to also make sure that you have something to step on to be seen as well, because you cannot grow to 180. And you cannot ask everybody to be 150.

Helga Svendsen 11:08

As somebody who's not much more than 150. You can't turn into somebody different to what you are. There's a tiny bit you mentioned in there when you were talking about your voice, you trained with an opera singer, did I hear you say that? Yes. Can we just go down that side alley for just a moment, tell me more.

Dorrit Kromann 11:26

So what I did was I experienced this, I've been experienced this before as well thinking, being like, that's just something wrong with me somehow that people are not listening. And it's probably not interesting what I'm saying. So all this was coming in, and I was thinking this was just different because it was interesting. And I saw that somebody else saying it, it was different. So I thought, what can I do? Then I read, as I said, I started looking at this, I'm gonna read it, that it was actually because this is very interesting that people start not listening to the woman's high pitch from their teens, because they want to extract themselves from the motherhood. So they start flat stomping listening to that. So that's really important that you know that. And then I went to the surplus, I saw that she was I was actually in a meeting. And we talked about this. And then another woman told me that she's been doing this exercises with her. So I talked to her. And what we did was we were up walking in the forest. And we said, what we said was, we started singing, we were doing. And just feeling yourself and talking quickly. And I was getting feedback on my voice all the time. So that was so the exercise is really interesting. And it actually, for speakers, it actually helps you not to overdo your voice. So it's an a good investment, it's as good as going out to learn how to use your Excel sheet.

Helga Svendsen 13:01

Yes. And to my mind, it's partly about that tone, but also about, as you said before, the grounding of your voice and the grounding of yourself. So that there is a grounding of your voices also, breathing, slowing down, delivering a message so that there are sentences that have a small break in between so people can process as well without at all just running into one big thing. Interesting. And I imagine an opera singer, they need to breathe, as well. So it's when to breathe, and how to breathe and how to keep the voice protected the voice that is so interesting.

Dorrit Kromann 13:37

Yeah. And in Denmark, we have a tendency of saying, yes, like, like, there's a things like that. So you kind of take out the power of the voice by breathing in and breathing out while you're talking. I mean, you have to take in and then talk. So there are a lot of a lot of techniques that you can get into and help you out to do this in the right way. So just, there's just to mention a small part of it. That is what is happening.

Helga Svendsen 14:07

You're building on your diverse and great experience, both inside the boardroom and outside the boardroom. I'm already sensing like you'd said before about how you build bridges, you know, there is this sense of curiosity and connection and trying to bring some of these ideas together. And now this book around boardroom dynamics, what's the name of the book? Is that going to come after the book? You're just in the process of writing it right?

Dorrit Kromann 14:32

That's correct. Yeah. And for the time being, the title is Board Dynamics. And the reason why it is like that and not board psychology is because I think it's again, it's a balance. It's a bridge building, and it starts out here like this in any living organisation. We talk underlying that it's a living organisation. We know all operations, all operating organisation, we look at them, we know that we have to do You have a personal profiling. So to set a team profile, we have to have HR to build together the people with the strategy on that is working in a living organisation and operational organisation today. So what is happening is that, and I will go a little bit back on the history, lights, now I'm going to offend, but I'm going to put it a little bit black and white, okay, and I'm probably offending a lot of people back early with boards, it was old men's network, old boys network, it was people sitting on the board, that's I played it's what we said in Denmark, you I'm sitting on the board instead of working on the board. So things are working out, there have been scandals, we all know them, then they blow up now. And then in all these world crisis's, like the it bubble, the financial crisis, we all know them. So then it takes out suddenly, we need to do some good governance. And they work really hard and all boats are working on that. Even small boards everybody's talking about you have to do it the right way that all that and your compliance and, and a lot of people are taking these

courses in or education's you are here for one thing, it is to make value to the owners, whether it being non profitable, or whether it's being a business that you have to make sure that the shares are rising to the sky, whatever, you have to make value for the owners. And you do that by deciding on the strategy, you do that by making sure that the economy is good. And you do it by making sure that we do it in the right way with compliance. But everything like that is over the surface. And the boss is pretty good at it right? Now, of course, you have a lot of some that do not. But in general, it's awareness. Now we talk diversity. That's the next part. It's been running for a while, and we are really working on it. Like in Norway, they have a quota, we're talking about quotas, and then mark, someone did some don't. So a lot of things are talking, that's just the on the gender diversity, but you also should do everything on what I'm saying young, old, gender, colour, religion, everything, you should do that. But that's kind of the topic right now, I'm looking into the future saying, we're going from, as I said, sitting on the board to working on the board. And when you have a working organisation, what happens, it becomes a living organisation. And then you have to apply everything you know, from the operating organisation, to the board. And already here, a lot of people would say, we can't do that we don't have we don't even have time to cybersecurity ESG all these agendas today. So now you want us to be like a working organisation, a living organisation. But what I say is that, if you don't in the future, it will be like what I experienced with my voice, things are getting stuck. If you don't look at genders underneath the surface, you get stuck. So when you get stuck, you start looking and talking about the other things that we carry into the board. What I do in my board meetings for my book, is that I asked people to spend five minutes fully uninterrupted. Just make them think about what they are right now. Where did that come from? what's on their mind, I call it MC apps and make their own? What is just recognize their own state of mind? That's probably the best to recognize that instead of my discipline five minutes, did I come from a fight with my friends or colleagues? Or did I come from a fight with my team? Or? Or did I come from a beautiful meeting where everything just came into place? And I'm really happy and I expect that the same thing will happen now. Whatever do I come with into this meeting? After the meeting what we do is that we spent a half an hour a lot of thoughts have a starting to do that spending some time bought some our or bolts own time. What we do is that we do it as a press Study Group, which is empty your head. What do you feel? What do you think? What do you fantasize about? Just right now as we are here right now, people think it's crazy. But what I do is that are making it a little bit more again, building a bridge, applying it to the agenda, which is we are in a board and we have a target. We have to do this so I'm making it a little bit more are less hippie and more business. So we can talk about anything. But it is a way to make sure that the group is working and understand what's happening underneath the surface. And I can tell you one thing that came out, the first time I did this was one of the young people at the board was saying, I have not contributed so much, I kind of experienced that it's new for me, he was new, and he was young, it's new for me. And I think, to me, it's just very slow. The board meeting so slow, and that was because it was a starting meeting. And I was going through the bylaws, I was going really slowly, like you know, from any agenda really strict, it is very important to follow the agenda. That was so nice. What happened at this half hour, where we empty out again, was that the older persons said, Being here is kind of trying to figure out what is the purpose, it can be a little bit can give a little bit of anxiety being new that not knowing everybody in a new setting and on teams and so on. So I really liked the structure. And I liked the pace of it. Because the structure makes gives me the safety nets for me. So you see, if you don't, that all this is happening every time you go to a board meeting, every time this will be try to think about your board meetings. Can you remember one saying? Can we just stick to the agenda? Oh, yeah. Do you

also remember somebody just? Well, I think we should keep on talking about this is really important. And they're just kind of going out of string where you're just like, how are you going to come back from that compact come back, right, because you're totally off the agenda. So you will see, don't you have a meeting, but you can see that some people are impatient. And other people are like, let's stick to the agenda. And other people are just going out there. So it's this kind of that what is happening all the time. So what my book is about is understanding what is underneath that. goal oriented surface, the surface that I just said, making sure that the company is running and making sure that they do it the right way to provide value for the owners. Underneath that surface, you have other goals, and everybody has a role, you have hidden rows, like there will always be that person in your organisation who is complaining. And that is extra protections into that person, because there's probably a lessons for being a little bit not positive. And then it's just so fine that I don't have to be possible to because I can just trigger that person, then you have underneath the surface roles. All this, I have to get credit to stain this song. He is the professor on that when I was taking my education. And I've been working with this psychodynamic psychology since 2003. Because it's so important to understand this. And he has to build a full model of that, to understand this, and I'm applying this to the board now. So there are so many things happening underneath the surface, with the borders and so on. I could just continue talking about this. It's just there's so many things to look into, which is the problem and the book.

Helga Svendsen 23:24

Might need to be a volume one, volume two. And indeed, just so people know, this is the episode I'm obviously doing with Dorrit as she is developing her book, we're gonna come back once it's published. So we'll get to no more than Oh, my gosh, but you are right. Dorrit, we have covered so many great things today and some really practical tools in there for people to use as well. What are the key things you want people to take away from the conversation that we've had today?

Dorrit Kromann 23:50

And I'm not going to repeat some of the things I said I have been kind of putting a focus on a little bit here. And there. There's so many things trying to give some examples. And just to sum up, one thing is that what is the most important thing for you, as a board member, is to practice yourself understanding. And the organisational standing of the board to practice of practice, whatever you practice, you become good at. So that's one thing that's really important for me to say. And my book, I have purposely made it as a handbook. So you can use it to practice because I think that's important. So the takeaway when I have been looking and working at this for a long time, I couldn't help looking into Kierkegaard, the philosopher, he came up to me and that's what happening sometimes things just pop up. He says, and I'm quoting life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. So what I'm actually preaching here is that you should stay in the here and now. So I'm kind of adding and that's really arrogant to add somebody as important as here could go but for this kind unsexed, what I'm saying is to stay in the present, that makes you able to understand what is going on underneath the surface. Because if you kind of become present in where you're at, instead of thinking, What is going on after this meeting, what's going on before the

meeting, then you can really feel, why is something stuck? Why am I stuck. And that makes it possible to move on, and have an even more efficient meeting, I have two key words for people. If you understand this, then it's you become competent, and you become confident, which is what you need to be in a board. And to finish, I have a little exercise, maybe you can use it, maybe you can't. But I challenge you. So I challenge you. And I say, I bet that in every meeting, every board meeting two to five hours, however how long they last, you check out, we cannot stay focused for five hours. So I challenge you to do this on purpose, to do a conscious checkout, to use it for you to stay in the here and now. So this is what you could do. Every time you switch to another subject on the agenda. It just check out for one minute, doesn't have to be long. In the beginning, it probably is a little bit longer. But take your time, everybody does a check out, what you do is that you sit on your chair, feet on the ground, relax, feel your feet on the ground, you probably know about this from meditation. It's just simple as that, when you do that, then you just sense your own state of mind. Where am I? Am I angry? Am I tired? And frustrated? Am I whatever? Am I happy? Am I feisty? Am I whatever happens whatever feeling that comes up or to censor yourself, then what you do is that you close your eyes. And you just for some seconds, and you open your eyes again, and you look at each member around the table in the board, not trying to force eye contact, just sense them just look a little bit round. And when done that, then you come back to yourself. And you just sense what's going on right now in the room as it is, what do I sense to a sense that somebody is sad to a sense that the room is full of anchor, or is to a sense that the room is empty of energy, then you are in the here and now. And you can understand what's going on. And if I mean going further on, you can even voice it now. And then because then when things are voiced, then it becomes up in the air, and everybody's conscious about it. And then it can start to mingle out and not be somebody else stopping the process. When you practice this, it will take you one minute in the beginning will take a little bit more. It's just a simple exercise. And I'm trying to make more than like that. So that summarizes what I think that's important. And this is just a practical example of how to do it.

Helga Svendsen 28:16

I'm going to try that at my next board meeting in a couple of weeks time Dorrit, and I love the feet on the ground that grounds you, you know your feet on the ground on the ground, too. I love it. Thank you. Are there any other resources you would like to share with the Take on Board community? Yeah,

Dorrit Kromann 28:31

Thanks. Of course, when my book comes out, I hope that it will be a resource for yourself for everybody that will do this. And I've done it in English, because I think it's important to have it International. And then until then what I'm working with is like staying this home, as it said before, and then there have something in Danish. But that's, that's not good. Because that's not for everybody. But this son has has, you have a lot of things that he has done on siblings and everything, but you bring the family on to your work and so on. But everything is on a working on organisation, but looking into that this home will be your key to go forward. Also, I'm working on using personal profiling, if you understand yourself, I'm not saying that personal profiling is correct. I'm saying that

it's a possibility of you thinking whether it's great. What I'm working with this as well as BS, I'm a psychotherapist in what's called a near effective relational model by Lauren Taylor. Go into that and look at exercises on what he says how you kind of get into your own sensitivity and feels in the here and now. He's got two books out. The last thing is that we didn't get into that, but I think you should know that. We're working on social learning and practice communities to understand and to work better with committees because committees are kind of developing in the boards right now. So that will come up us and these are the basic things elements that were the basic Lego bricks that we're working on right now.

Helga Svendsen 30:04

Oh how fantastic. We'll look, we'll make sure we put links to all of those things in the show notes so people can find them are dark. Thank you. There is so much in here, some really practical tools, some really great ideas for people to explore, to connect and to build bridges with and to be curious about, I can't wait for your book to come out. So we will definitely get you back here. But in the meantime, thank you so much for sharing some of your wisdom and some of your curiosity with the Take on Board community.

Dorrit Kromann 30:32

It's been such a pleasure. And it just gives me the energy to continue to do that. Because writing a book is really, it's tough, and you feel really down on them. But just knowing that getting this feedback is just amazing. And I think it's so important to get this out there.

Helga Svendsen 30:49

Well. I'm going to put your details in the show notes as well. So people feel free to get in touch with me or with Derek directly with any feedback about what you've heard today. Fabulous. Thank you.

Dorrit Kromann 30:58

Thank you.

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