

Walking the
Perspectivity
Path The power
of dialogue
Hans Keijzer



This book is an utterly authentic message – written straight from the heart – by the late Hans Keijzer, a highly successful senior officer of DSM, one of the world's most admired and successful global companies.

Its central message outlines the hidden elements necessary for an organization or team to perform at an exceptional level. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the quality of leadership essential for success in the accelerating complexity we will continue to face in the coming decades.

Joseph Jaworski, author of the international best-sellers Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership and Source: The Inner Path of Knowledge Creation, and chairman of Generon International

With *Perspectivity* Hans Keijzer developed a philosophy and created a movement for addressing the world's most pressing issues.

An approach to better understand the value of viewing and using multiple angles.

Feike Sijbesma, CEO Royal DSM

Full of surprising wisdom, and potentially transformative for any leader who experiments with the many specific suggestions offered here. A rare and moving book.

Betty Sue Flowers, co-author of Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future

Hans Keijzer was a man who wanted to change the world by taking away barriers to dialogue and helping people handle their fears and misconceptions. Hans takes us through various anecdotes and incidents from his life which show how simple experiences from day to day life can be brought together to resolve complex social challenges. This book is a nourishing tale of building collaborative communities like *Perspectivity*, giving everyone a first-hand account of this new approach to solving problems.

Anubhav Khanduja

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The power of dialogue

Hans Keijzer

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Perspectivity 

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Foreword

When Hans Keijzer asked me to write this foreword, we both knew that he had very little time left. It was an impactful moment. We discussed many aspects of life in general and Hans' life in particular. Reviewing one's life is perhaps the ultimate exercise in "perspectivity". It is tragic that Hans did not live to see his life's work published, but we can be very grateful that he was able to complete the manuscript. And I consider it an honour to be able to pay my respects to Hans by making a small contribution to this great book, whose themes are very close to my heart.

Hans Keijzer spent most of his working life at Gist-brocades (the company for which I also worked) and Royal DSM (which took over Gist-brocades in 1998, and of which I am now the CEO). We worked closely together for many years, and we shared a passion for people and sustainability. At DSM, sustainability is a core value – a responsibility, but increasingly also a key business driver. Hans was passionate about DSM's ambition to develop solutions for a more sustainable world, for example by building a circular economy or redesigning our economic system. Hans' mission became to add a new dimension to the way the world deals with complex issues and the manner in which people interact with one another.

In 2006, Hans founded the Perspectivity movement, which he defined as follows: *Perspectivity is both a movement of people and a central idea about how human interaction should change to make mankind fit for coping with the challenges of our modern, complex, diverse and interdependent world.*

The "challenges" in this definition are twofold. The first is that our global society is confronted with many issues, such as the consequences of an aging and increasingly urbanised population, the uneven distribution of the use of scarce resources and the production of waste, the effects of climate change and the search for alternative energy sources, the need to combat global hunger and provide health and nutrition for all, but also the impact of globalisation, (youth) unemployment, and political populism, to mention but a few. The second is that, over the past few generations, our society has become infinitely more complex and "connected", with ever more (and ever more diverse) stakeholders who all feel that

they are party to any given (social) issue. As a result, these issues are becoming ever more difficult to resolve. In fact – and this is a key topic that Hans addresses – they can only be sustainably resolved if all stakeholders fundamentally change the way they interact with one another. This is especially the case since there is no actor, no government, company, NGO or academic institution that can solve these issues alone. So we need to collaborate. This requires that we synchronise our thoughts and align our approaches.

The key to effective interaction, as Hans emphasises, is dialogue, in the true sense: people making an honest effort to understand each other's motives, goals and concerns by embracing differences and trying to find common ground. This is important for building trust and enabling all stakeholders to contribute to a solution, which by definition will be a shared solution.

This means that we need to recognise and identify the differences between our individual viewpoints and understand how these influence the way we look at things. For example, climbing a mountain is always a challenge, but people who look up and see rough and steep slopes will find the challenge much bigger than those who are on the other side of the mountain and see a passable winding road. Without a real and genuine understanding of each other's point of view, we will not be able to synchronise our approaches.

Unfortunately, in our modern society there are many barriers to true dialogue and shared solutions. In politics, even in modern democracies, we not infrequently see a focus on debate and on explaining one's own position at the expense of showing a genuine interest in the opinions of others. This sometimes results in polarisation, in creating “winners” and “losers” – a situation which is sometimes amplified by the media, which can yet further sharpen differences.

We may also question whether we are developing the right skills to deal with “perspectivity”, since in education, the emphasis is very much on “inside out” skills (logical reasoning and social skills, to bring one's vision and ideas out into the world in a convincing way), while “outside in” skills (opening one's mind and heart to the identity, convictions and passions of others, and appreciatively understanding these) tend to receive less attention.

At the same time, the root causes of the world's biggest problems, the “system flaws”, are not always effectively analysed and addressed. An example of this – one that Hans also mentions and which I have described on many occasions – is that the financial economy (“the tail”) has expanded its impact so much over the past few decades that it is (almost) wagging the real economy (“the dog”), instead of supporting and facilitating it. This flaw was one of the causes of the global crisis that started in 2008.

To prevent polarisation and to achieve effective decision-making and action-taking, we need to promote dialogue and appreciative understanding, with passion as a necessary ingredient to move things forward. Hans gives many examples of how this can be done. I feel proud that he picked several examples from the work environments that he and I shared at Gist-brocades and DSM.

I also feel privileged that I have been able to witness at first hand how Hans put his ideas into practice. For example, I saw Hans (an early adopter of the DSM Diversity Programme) demonstrate in his own team that diversity really pays off if you are willing to invest in the laborious process of inclusion.

I was especially touched by the way Hans applied the concept of Perspectivity to the last phase of his life. In almost every chapter of this book, Hans writes about how his illness develops and how he is becoming more and more aware of his impending death. And yet this is not a sad book. On the contrary, it is a book full of hope for the future. It illustrates what Hans exemplified throughout this life: the power of being true to oneself and others. As Hans writes, paraphrasing Joseph Jaworski, one of the many thinkers who inspired him:

If you follow your heart and set out to do something good, your life will be enriched in many unexpected ways and will develop in an upward spiral in which “everything comes together”, a spiral that is good for you as well as for the world.

This is how we will remember Hans Keijzer: as a catalyst for change and improvement.

On behalf of our dear Hans, I would like to express my profound thanks to his

wife Henriëtte, his mother, sister and children, his Perspectivity group, and many former colleagues and friends, without whom he could never have developed his thoughts on Perspectivity.

Feike Sijbesma

CEO and Managing Board Chairman of Royal DSM



The need for a fundamental change
in human interaction



For a long time, the notion has been developing in my mind that, if our world is to thrive or at least survive, a fundamental change is needed in how we humans interact. At the same time, I have become ever more motivated to play a role in effecting that change, if only to make some repayment for the privileged life I have led. I was born into one of the world's richest and freest countries, brought up in a stable, loving family, and educated in excellent schools and universities. On top of this, I have had the good fortune to have a career in international companies with historically rooted social and environmental value systems and open cultures. I have, thus, had the opportunity to develop myself and acquire a broad spectrum of academic, business and social skills, and to do so in great liberty and without worrying about being able to provide a comfortable living for myself and my dependents. In such a situation, it is only natural for the mind to start developing ideas about what can be done beyond what is immediately required. I was therefore naturally attracted to finding out more about how people can work and live together more happily and effectively. In 2005, I decided to take a concrete step in this direction. This eventually led to what is now Perspectiveity.

This book is the story (or should I say my story?) of the incubation, birth and further development of Perspectiveity. What is Perspectiveity? A worldwide network of people who try to make human interaction processes more appropriate to the needs of today's complex, diverse and interdependent world. It takes a whole book to explain the complete world of principles and ideas behind this; and then, of course, you will only have my perspective of what Perspectiveity is.

Most of the principles and ideas that constitute that "Perspectiveity world" have not been developed by me or other people in Perspectiveity. They come from people such as Kahane, Jaworski, Weisbord, Van de Heijden, Cooperrider, Bohm, Senge, Scharmer, Hermans, and many others. What we have done in Perspectiveity is to put the principles, ideas and methodologies from these people into one all-encompassing framework. We have also made the implementation of that framework personal and scalable. It is our belief that if you want to succeed in helping the world adopt more effective interaction processes, you should start at home, with your partner, family, friends and neighbours. If you don't succeed there, there is little chance that you will make an impact on any larger scale. It is for precisely this reason that I have chosen to write this book, using examples ranging from the very small and personal to the globally well-known and impactful.

Pietralunga, Umbria, Italy, September 2012

Between 2005 and 2012, Perspectivity gradually took shape and developed into something substantial. All that time, I was working with a fantastic group of volunteers to bring the initiative forward. In that period of building, I had little inclination to consolidate anything. After seven years, however, during our summer holiday, I had apparently reached a natural point of reflection. It was under the blue sky of Umbria, Italy – where my wife Henriëtte Coppes and I had hired a lovely apartment at a beautiful *agriturismo* appropriately named Casale Il Sogno (House of Dreams) – that I started thinking about writing a book on Perspectivity. I did this firstly to get to grips with the whole concept myself, and secondly to share the ideas of Perspectivity with the world in a way that would stimulate readers to embrace new ways of interacting. After about two weeks, I finished the outline of the book. It would be about the events that led to the creation of Perspectivity, about how it developed, and about what it could mean for the future. I sketched the design of the book as an approach with two “layers”:

- The first layer would be a narrative of the events and actions that led up to and shaped Perspectivity, and would include examples of how the journey transformed me personally.
- The second layer would be a description of the concepts of effective human interaction which we learned and further developed through these actions and events, and which culminated eventually in a form of credo: the Perspectivity Passion Code.

I looked upon the writing of the book as a long-term project. In October 2010, I had scaled down my job at DSM by one day a week to allow more time for Perspectivity, which by then had grown into a worldwide network supported by a foundation with charity status. However, the actual time I devoted to it had grown far beyond that single day, and evenings and weekends were often filled with Perspectivity work. So I looked upon the book-writing exercise as something to start slowly and accelerate after retirement, some four years down the road. I therefore drove back home from Italy with the idea of tucking the sketch of the book away, letting it ripen in my mind and first concentrating on my work at DSM, clearing the backlog of e-mails and reports that had accrued during the holiday period.

Maastricht, Netherlands, Tuesday, 30 October 2012

Bad news

The clock radio wakes us at 5:45 a.m. with music that is far too intrusive. I turn it off: nothing is allowed to interfere with the concentration I will need to get through this day. First to the kitchen: one litre of water in one jug, one more litre in another. In the first jug, I dissolve two sachets of a white powder called Moviprep. With a part of the water from the other jug, I make tea. I take both the tea and the Moviprep back to bed and get a warm and tender kiss from Henriëtte. I raise the head of the bed and start drinking my way through the fluids. One glass of the repulsive, chemically flavoured solution and one glass of tea as a reward. When the tea is finished, Henriëtte goes down to make beef tea with the rest of the water from the second jug. The instructions say that I have to take the full two litres of fluid between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m., and I just manage this. The Moviprep does its work: it dissolves the contents of my bowels so that I can empty them in order to present a nice, clean interior to the doctor, who, later that morning, will take a look inside.

At 12:30 p.m., at the Maastricht Diagnostic Centre, the news is not good. I have a sizeable tumour of the large intestine. Henriëtte and I take it with composure: we had suspected as much for two weeks, and now we have certainty. Sad certainty. It will take a scan to know how bad it really is, but certainly it isn't good at all. Suddenly our energetic, engaged, and healthy life is a rollercoaster.

Back home, we get to work straight away: I call my boss and colleagues at work, and arrange a few things for the short term. I call my sister, the person closest to me next to my wife Henriëtte. It's a pity she lives a two-and-a-half hour drive away, but then again, it's a blessing that she lives close to my mother, who is 93. That will be the most difficult thing: calling my mother. She is incredibly bright and fit for her age, and she enjoys life, but having lost her husband and seen all her friends die over the past thirty years, she wouldn't really mind if it all ended for her. She hardly ever speaks about her fears, she is a very level-headed lady, but the one thing she has mentioned regularly is that the worst thing that can happen to a parent is to lose a child. She knows: she has seen it happening around her. When I call her, she keeps her spirits up. "We have to wait and see, and hope for

the best,” she says, and I agree with her. My sister goes to visit her after my call, and then calls me. She tells me how my mother cried and wanted to trade my fate for hers. It’s the first time that day that I break down too. I gather myself and call my foster son, Karim, and my foster daughter, Lily. In the meantime, Henriëtte has informed her children, family and some close friends. We start to get used to the phrase: “Things don’t look good for Hans.”

First sentences

With all the immediate actions having been taken care of, my mind sets off in a negative direction: were there signs that something was going wrong in my gut? Could I have done something different, or acted earlier? Did the doctor miss something? And why should it hit me? I see so many people around me who smoke or drink heavily but are seemingly healthy. Isn’t it unfair? I arrest my thoughts. Since my divorce, twelve years ago, I have decided to do away with negative energy focused on the past. I have learned to recognise and stop feelings of spite, resentment or revenge. In *Perspectivity*, I learned the professional term for this: future focus. I decide to approach my illness with a future focus and, instantly, my energy comes back. I have a loving wife, family and friends to support me, I have lived a healthy life and, as a result, I am in good physical condition. What better starting position could I have?

The idea that you can actually arrest your thoughts is also a central theme in *Perspectivity*. As described with such wonderful power in David Bohm’s essays in *On Dialogue*, we can organise feedback on the thinking process in our brain. We can challenge it for prejudice, for engrained negative thinking patterns and the like. A thought is not something that just happens to be, but the result of a thinking process that we can influence. In the case of my illness, I don’t have to feel sorry for myself: I can choose to see many reasons to be thankful and energetic.

After dinner that night, I am still restless. I had planned to take time to reflect on the framework of the book I wanted to write about *Perspectivity*. Now, the need to start writing it is suddenly urgent. And I do just this. I review the schedule I made during those carefree days in Italy, and I find it still very appropriate. The

only modification I make is that I decide to add a third layer. This will combine examples of what happens to me during the writing of the book with a description of how the Perspectivity principles apply to the challenges that lie before me. And so, on 30 October 2012, I write the first exploratory sentences of this book.

How to use this book

Perspectivity is both a movement of people and a central idea about how human interaction should change to give mankind the ability to cope with the challenges of our complex, diverse and interdependent modern world.

This book describes how, for a long time, the idea grew in my mind that the need for this change in human interaction was urgent and that I should take the initiative to do something myself to get it going. During that period, some of the principles of this alternative way of interacting had already dawned on me. They emerged from experiences in my work and personal life, and from external context in the books and ideas of others. In 2005, I took the initial step towards action. I invited a number of individuals to explore the Perspectivity ideas with me, and a growing network of followers emerged. The book relates not only my personal experiences in life but also the development of the network and, most importantly, the new ideas that kept enriching the model of the desired way of human interaction.

This model will always be under development, but, as it stands today, it is described in the Perspectivity Passion Code. It depicts an all-encompassing process of interaction that we call “inspired dialogue and self-reflective learning”. It incorporates many principles and techniques, partly derived from others, partly originating from ourselves.

Chapters 1 to 10 each cover one principle or technique. These are analysed and then elucidated using examples from private and business life, from the Perspectivity movement and from external sources. The examples run from the very small and personal (to encourage the reader to personally enter into the situation) to the large and well-known (to show global relevance). Then each chapter contains a

personal story about my medical process and how Perspectivity applies to the way I experience and handle that process. Each chapter ends with a summary of the principle or method and the way it can be applied. One way to read the book would be to read all the summaries first to obtain an overview, and then (selectively) dive into the analyses and examples for inspiration.

Chapter 11 is a key chapter. It describes how the various principles and techniques come together in the concept of inspired dialogue and self-reflective learning. Central to this structured process is the principle that participants should engage alternately in appreciative understanding and self-expression.

- Appreciative understanding is: suspending judgement and prejudice and listening openly with the aim of truly understanding the other in order to discover common ground and expand it by embracing differences.
- Self-expression is: seeking self-realisation by developing and expressing one's unique and pure authenticity, aiming to distinguish oneself and excel to achieve something better than what is currently available.

Inspired dialogue and self-reflective learning does not come about easily. It needs to be diligently designed and facilitated, and must be adapted to the particular situation every time. To aid this design and facilitation, we have selected and further developed a number of “dialogue-enhancing processes” that can be applied in various sequences and combinations. Amongst these processes are scenario-based planning, system analysis, Future Search, appreciative inquiry, World Café, and many more. Chapter 12 provides an overview of these dialogue-enhancing processes. This chapter is particularly interesting for those who wish to start applying the “Perspectivity mode of interaction” in concrete settings, when a group of people have become stuck in a complex social issue and something needs to be done. It can be applied at any scale, from small problems at work to wider issues in the neighbourhood, right up to the current global climate crisis.

The book ends with two annexes focusing on aspects of our society which get in the way of inspired dialogue and self-reflective learning: education and media.

My purpose

Now that you know the structure of the book, it is probably a good idea to share with you my purpose with it. That purpose is a very ambitious one, and it is twofold. In the first place, I intend to explain the Perspectivity ideas in a way that you will want to embrace them and apply them. Secondly, I hope to convince you that the need for Perspectivity-like human interaction is so urgent that you will choose to play a role in making this happen. I hope this book contains sufficient tools and ideas to allow you to start experimenting. If you do, you will find that the rewards are immediate. And you will find that the Perspectivity Network is there to support you. Just visit www.perspectivity.org.

Acknowledgments

When I started my Perspectivity initiative in 2005, little existed but a vague idea and some money in the bank. Still, eight people found this sufficient basis to commit themselves to further investigating and developing these ideas. A movement needs an initiator, but it will stall in its tracks if it is not supported by followers who dare to commit to something new, uncertain, controversial, and even risky at times. I would like to thank those eight: Henriëtte Coppes, Khadija El Hamdoui, Charlotte Keijzer, Herman van der Meijden, Hein Oomen, Frans Ottenhoff, Sander Simonetti and Eelke Visscher. Without them, Perspectivity would not be what it is today.

In a broader sense, I would like to thank all the hundreds of people around the world who are embracing and supporting the ideas and activities of Perspectivity. The forest would not have grown without you.

A special thank-you also goes to those who developed and promoted the Perspectivity Game. It has become an inspiring motor for the awareness of Perspectivity and has helped establish hubs of activity around the world.

In 2011, a group of professional consultants decided that they wanted to merge their ideas with those of Perspectivity. This resulted in the Perspectivity Passion

Code, which now serves as the compass for a volunteer network that exists side by side with a commercial enterprise. I would like to thank the Perspectivity Enterprise people for taking that initiative: in doing so, you gave a tremendous boost to the growth and robustness of Perspectivity.

I would also like to thank two marvellous companies, Gist-brocades and DSM, which, with their values, their open international cultures and their ample development opportunities, enabled me to develop the skills and experience that have laid the basis for all my further work on human interaction.

Finally, I wish to thank from the bottom of my heart my sister Charlotte, Herman van der Meyden and my wife Henriëtte Coppes for taking it upon themselves to make sure that any loose ends in the book that I can no longer deal with due to my illness will be tied up and that the book will be printed and distributed. It gives me great peace of mind to know that this work is in their capable hands.

Maastricht – December 2013



The laws of nature

Of physical processes and harsh realities



Youth and early career

In the introduction, I describe how I started Perspectivity because of my fascination for the processes of human interaction. There was something before this, however: a fundamental interest in *physical* processes. My father was the director of a co-operative sugar beet factory in the north of the Netherlands, and when I was a young boy, he regularly showed me around his steaming and pounding universe. It was a wonder to see complete dunes of sugar beets disappear into the cutters and diffusors at one end of the factory and, after a complicated process of extraction, purification, concentration, crystallisation, separation and drying, form mountains of glittering white sugar crystals in the silos at the other end. The sweet smell, the heat, the noise and the sheer scale of the operation were overwhelming. My father was literally at one with the place, running up and down staircases, leading me through hidden doorways, stopping here and there to conduct brief conversations with the supervisors and operators. And he would always spread some sugar-broth from one of the crystallisers on a glass plate, hold it against a lamp and either lovingly or disapprovingly judge the quality of the crystals with his eyes and fingers.

Sugar manufacturing in the Netherlands is a seasonal affair, and the entire sugar beet crop needs to be processed during the “campaign” that lasts from mid-September to early January. At the beginning of my father’s directorship, the reliability of the factory was low, and it was often a struggle to get through the campaign at all. This period was full of tension: “the factory” determined our family life. My father would sometimes take me to the plant even when it was down. I would quietly stand by while he engaged in frantic discussions with his staff about how to get the operation running again. Afterwards, he would patiently explain what had been going on, and he was not above taking me seriously if I voiced some of my own ideas about the problem. Year by year, the plant grew in capacity as well as reliability, and during the later years of his career, the campaigns came to be anticipated with confidence, even a sense of joy.

After finishing at my *gymnasium* (high school), and having spent a year as an exchange student in the USA, making the choice for my further academic education was not difficult. It would be technical, and, after a broad review of the options,

I decided to enrol in the Mechanical Engineering department of the Technical University of Eindhoven. Early in my studies, I felt much more attracted to the design of factories and processes than to workshop techniques, machine-building and detailed scientific research. Although my parents had left me completely free in my choice of studies, my early immersion in the processing industry had done its work.

For my engineering thesis, I took the quickest route out of the theoretical environment of the university and applied, and was selected, for a year of practical research in a pilot facility of Unilever in the UK. After graduation, I was offered a job at a Unilever research and development site in the east of the Netherlands. With the typically self-confident “can-do” attitude and drive of people that age (I was 27 at the time), my life moved into fast-forward mode. Within a space of only three months, my girlfriend, who was teaching in vocational education near Amsterdam, managed to find a new job close to the Unilever site. We got married, we moved into a new home, and we both started in our new jobs.

I spent three interesting years at Unilever, developing new food processing equipment. As part of my management development programme, I was soon invited to participate in audits of factories in Europe. These audits focused simultaneously on economic, organisational and technological aspects, and were conducted by a multi-disciplinary team drawn from various Unilever staff departments. This approach fascinated me, and I had a great time, gaining deep insights into a range of operations in Europe for which I developed technological optimisation proposals. The atmosphere during the periods I spent in some of these factories (especially during night shifts, when you learn the most) reminded me of the sugar factory. With one big difference: back then, I had only been an observer. Now I was supposed to contribute. I did so with enthusiasm and naivety. The latter was forgiven by the senior members of the team, who navigated with great aptitude the sensitivities that existed both within the audit team and in relations with the management of the factories. The work gave me a first glimpse of what it takes, beyond just having ideas, to actually get sensible ideas implemented in a complex environment.