
Book review: Let's agree to disagree: a critical thinking guide to communication, conflict management, and critical media literacy

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by Nolan Higdon and Mickey Huff

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Let's Agree to Disagree is an intellectual and pedagogical response to the acute symptoms experienced by modern society, namely socio-political polarisation, disinformation crisis and the destruction of public dialogue space. The book is written in the spirit of equipping citizens with critical thinking tools, media literacy and communication strategies that can restore the essence of democracy through constructive dialogue. As written in the introduction, "We hope this text can play a role in helping Americans escape the torpid state of polarisation and engender a renewed interest in collectivist approaches to contemporary issues" (p. 2).

In the context of organisational change, this book offers remarkable insights into the dynamics of communication, conflict management and the importance of a culture of critical thinking amidst the complexity of interpersonal and interstructural relations. The book's main emphasis is on transforming ways of thinking as a prerequisite for social and institutional change, in line with the principles of organisational change management. The author, Nolan Higdon, is a lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz, specialising in critical media literacy and digital culture. Mickey Huff is the director of Project Censored and a leading educator in journalism and media history. The two have collaborated on important publications on media manipulation and information politics, including the book *United States of Distraction* (pp. xiii-xv).

The book is divided into four main sections: Part I (Communication) discusses how to create constructive dialogue amidst a culture of polarisation and destructive conflict. The authors highlight how power, culture and cognitive biases shape interpersonal communication. They demonstrate the importance of active listening and understanding the sociocultural context of the other person, while introducing an inclusive approach to communication (pp. 21–55). Part II (Critical Thinking) introduces the framework of logical thinking, argument testing and ideology detection. It is here that concepts such as fallacies, cognitive bias and critical theory are elaborated with great applicability (pp. 67–115). In an organisational context, this section provides the foundation of reflective and analytical thinking that is needed for strategic decision-making based on data and reason.

Part III (Critical Media Literacy) explains how mass media shape public consciousness, as well as how information can be manipulated through ideology, media political economy and symbolic representation. The authors equip readers with tools to assess the credibility of information, including analyses of fake news, propaganda and journalism ethics (pp. 125–189). In organisations, this section is relevant for understanding the internal dynamics of communication, corporate culture, and strategies for building trust through narrative and information transparency. Part IV (Lead by Example) is a kind of practical



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The strength of this book lies in its depth of analysis and its ability to bridge the realms of theory and practice. Higdon and Huff not only convey ideas about the importance of critical thinking and dialogue, but also provide practical tools that can be implemented in organisations, classrooms and communities. They say that “Disagreement does not mean one accepts oppression or inequity. The challenge for democratic societies is how to manage such conflicts constructively” (p. 10). In the organisational landscape, this means acknowledging the plurality of values and reinforcing an adaptive, non-exclusive communication culture. However, the book’s weakness may lie in its predominantly American-centric scope, with case studies that focus heavily on US society and media. For global readers or multinational organisations, the very US-specific cultural and political context can be a challenge in translating the book’s insights into local practice. Nevertheless, the universal principles remain very useful.

The implications for science, particularly in the field of organisational change, are profound. This book presents a transformational approach to change based on participatory communication, ideological awareness and media literacy. The ideas are in line with the dialogic organizational development model, where the process of change occurs through engagement, critical reflection and open dialogue. As stated, “Constructive dialogue is civil, which means all parties involved engage in acts of reciprocity and critical thinking for the purposes of strengthening our democratic culture”

This book should be essential reading for anyone whose role is to shape a healthy and dynamic organisational culture. In the midst of rapid social, political, and technological change, this book addresses the need for an intellectual and ethical foundation for communication. Human resource professionals, organisational consultants, transformation leaders, lecturers and researchers in the field of organisational communication and change studies will find it of great practical and theoretical value.

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