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Speaker

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**Dr. Joost  
Kampen**

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Researcher and change consultant  
with work cultures of neglect/abuse



# Destructive behaviours in neglected organisations

## Dr. Joost Kampen on working with destructive leader and employee interactions

*We are excited to announce **Dr. Joost Kampen** will speak about “neglect in organisations” at the European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics in Amsterdam, 2025.*

### Joost Kampen (PhD)

Dr. Kampen is an expert in organisational change. Joost wrote articles about neglected organisations. He developed a framework for destructive non-leadership or systemic negligence in organisations. One of his books is “Learning to intervene in neglected organisations: Lessons from practice”. Oscar, the founder of the Peace Conference, came across this book when he was working on a project with the European Commission in Brussels.

### What is a neglected organisation?

“As an organisational sociologist, within neglected organisations, you can see how leaders and employees seek to avoid taking responsibility. They behave like neglected children, who are street-smart, but use all kinds of survival mechanisms to avoid doing the work in the way that it should be done.”

### What made you focus on destructive behaviours?

“When working with a public transport organisation earlier in my career, we found that employees would use cover-ups, lies, and cheating. At the time, it made me question: ‘how are these people raised?’. They also mentioned that their employees had been neglected. When I dived into the academic literature, I accidentally stumbled upon an article from the field of remedial teaching about neglected children. Then the idea started to emerge that perhaps the leadership may behave like neglecting parents and employees like neglected children. So, by looking at the lived experiences from organisations, I defined systemic interactions that would – both intentionally and unintentionally– turn out destructive. This can be in three ways. Top-down, leaders may exclude, bully or ‘forget’ to invite the colleagues they dislike. Or they may not speak up for those lower in rank. Then, within their roles, colleagues can bully another. And bottom-up, employees may try to sabotage their team leader with a complaint towards the confidential counselor, saying that they feel intimidated when they have in fact been held accountable for not questioning their colleagues more constructively.”

## Can we thus talk about perpetrators and victims in the workplace?

“I find the terminology a bit judgmental. It is too easy to say that the leaders are ‘the perpetrators’ and their employees ‘the victims’. I know of no organisational leader who thinks at the start of their work day about who they are going to hurt. What I am interested in is not the psychodynamics, the personal psychology, but rather the systemic dynamics. I focus on the actions and inactions that may be undertaken and the effects thereof upon the behaviours and the collaboration. Organisations are mini-societies, with parallels to families. After all, many parents are not aware of their actions towards their children. It would be too one-sided if we would say that parents, or, in parallel, the leaders of organisations, are the perpetrators, and the children, their employees, the victims. As Rutger Bregman says: Most people are not naturally bad. Yet, and I would like to add this, our actions can have destructive and bad consequences as well. Out of inability, without help, we simply do not know how to do it any differently. This core assumption I’m taking from remedial teaching: We should not add to the blaming. It is why I focus on the division of tasks, roles and responsibilities.”

## That sounds perhaps a bit too practical and hands-on, if you’d ask me?

“I don’t think so. Within the context of neglected organisations, we first need to make sure that processes are running again in the way they were intended. Shall we first do the work as it should be done? As soon as the house is in order, we can start to innovate again. Only when you do not have the expertise inside the organisation, you may request this from the outside. However, a social reality analysis, why we do what we do, is difficult for managers seeking to outsource their responsibility toward externals who do, what I call, destructive consultancy.”

*Parents and children generally mean well, just like the leaders and employees in business. Yet, our actions and inaction may be unintentionally destructive nevertheless. We can stop this by just getting the work done – and no longer add to the drama that neglected organisations love to make.*



### What do you mean with 'destructive consultancy'?

"Destructive consultancy is when external advisors write proposals that make them a lot of money, but do not help their client. For example, lots of consultants view a work culture scan as paid acquisition with many hours that can be billed. Yet, instead of creating a proposal based on a solid analysis, they grab a standard – often too long – leadership program, for which they can bill a program manager. Another example is when an independent consultant investigates in-house cases of misconduct. These are examples that show how leaders have lost touch with the functioning and development of their organisation. This you cannot outsource to consultants. It only exacerbates a culture of not taking your due responsibility."

### What is preventing leaders and employees to take responsibility?

"An organisation is not only about constructive leadership. It also has its practices of destructive leadership. That is a fact. Both consultants and business students need to learn about these 'less beautiful sides of workplaces' that often unintentionally emerge. For example, in lots of neglected organisations, full clarity has not been given and performance reviews are no longer conducted. People then invest their energy into placing blame outwards. Whole teams then 'play the victim'. Why would they do something differently when they were always ignored? In neglected organisations, they love drama. After all, it distracts us from looking at ourselves. We blow up things out of proportion and can then endlessly talk about them. Therefore, culture change in neglected organisations is about step by step improvements. So we should not add another culture scan, suspend and fire the manager, because it will start all over again with the next one. So I'd say: Perpetrator or victim? That's not the question. Let's simply act normal again on a day to day basis! There is then no need for drama, for seeking any perpetrators."

*Organisational life knows destructive leadership patterns. In neglected organisations, they love the drama. In order to stop this cycle, we just need to act normal again.*

*In neglected organisations, we should not add to the drama already present, because we would fuel a victim culture, that is unnecessarily and unfairly in search of perpetrators.*

*Dr. Joost Kampen  
Speaker EPC2025*

### Recommended online articles

- Kampen, J. & Henken, A.M. (2014). Intervening in Emotionally Neglected or Abused Organizations: Changing harmful routines in teams. Paper presented at Sixth Symposium on Process Organization Studies, June 19-21, Rhodes, Greece.
- Kampen, J., Henken, A.M. & De Caluwé, L.C.A. (2014). Strategies for Intervening in Organization Emotional Neglect and the Role of the Change Agent: A new concept for OD professionals. Professional Development Workshop at Annual Meeting 2014 of the Academy of Management, Philadelphia, PA.
- Kampen, J. & Henken, A.M. (2018). Organizational Neglect: the toxic triangle of deficits. Organizational Dynamics, 47, p.241-249.
- Kampen, J & Henken, A.M. (2019). Emotional Abuse and Neglect in the Workplace: A Method for Arrested OD. Journal of Organizational Psychology volume 19 (6): 49-62.
- Kampen, J. & Henken, A.M. (2020). Demandingness as OD Change Agent in Restoring Normal Organisational Life in Abused and Neglected Organisations. Paper Conference in the Cloud British Academy of Management September 2 – 4.
- McKnight, L.L. (2018). The Toxic Triangle of Deficits: Emotional Abuse and Neglect in the Workplace: Interview with Joost Kampen and Andre Henken. Management Consulting Division Summer 2018 Newsletter, pp.7-10.
- Kampen, J. (2011a). Interventies in verwaarloosde organisaties: een exploratieve studie naar diagnose en herstel. Proefschrift. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit.

### Recommended books

- Kampen, J. (2015). Emotional Abuse and Neglect in the Workplace: How to restore normal organizational life. London-New York, Palgrave/Springer.
- Catanzariti, J. and Egan, K. (2021). Workplace bullying (2nd edition), Reed International Books Australia, LexisNexis.
- Kampen, J. (2025). Veranderkundige methoden bij verwaarloosde organisaties: een nieuw model voor geleide organisatieontwikkeling. Amsterdam, Boom.
- Kampen, J. (2025). Leren interveniëren in verwaarloosde organisaties: Lessen uit de geleefde werkelijkheid. Vakmedianet, Zeist.



Want to learn more? Join us in person or online.

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# European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics

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"We are not at war, but not at peace either," said the new NATO Chief, Mark Rutte. "If you want peace, prepare for war." Is Europe at a crossroad towards more polarisation, identity politics, and war? Reflections on our human nature may help us find a sensible way forward.

At this year's peace conference, the first of its kind, an international group of scholars, experts and practitioners, will seek ways to explore how perpetrator-victim dynamics run through our lives, families, business and politics.

With guest lectures, workshops, personal and group reflections, we seek to embody the latest expertise from the research on war and peace.

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