

BOOK REVIEWS

Lead Like a Swede: Navigating New Terrain With Solution-Focused Leadership by Jan Marklund

Jonas Wells^a

<https://doi.org/10.59874/001c.144577>

Journal of Solution Focused Practices

Vol. 9, Issue 2, 2025

This is a brilliant book — varied, generous and rich. Packed with a career-full of leadership insights, it will leave you overjoyed and grateful. How much time and energy could we save in our organisational lives if we all were fortunate enough to be engulfed by this variant of Swedish solution-focused leadership?

Lead Like a Swede: Navigating New Terrain with Solution-Focused Leadership by Jan Marklund

Routledge, 2025, 282pp, ISBN 9781032877754, £34.99 (e-book available)

Let me begin with an accolade. This is a brilliant book — varied, generous and rich. Packed with a career-full of leadership insights, it will leave you overjoyed and grateful. How much time and energy could we save in our organisational lives if we all were fortunate enough to be engulfed by this variant of Swedish solution-focused leadership? My mind boggles...

Jan Marklund's new book is his first in English. In some senses, it is re-write — a greatly enhanced and expanded version — of his 2016 *“Från tomgång till framgång: Lösningssfokuserade verktyg för nyanställda chefer”* (roughly, “From idle running to success: Solution-Focused tools for newly employed bosses”). It combines three distinct ideas: it introduces a Swedish leadership paradigm, provides offer of support for new leaders (the earlier book), and thirdly, presents solution-focused practice as it relates to leadership and work in organisations. Each element is enriched by building on the others, adding depth and description. At first, I thought this combination might prove unwieldy, but happily the elements fit really well together.

What is truly remarkable is how generously the book invites insights from literally hundreds of leaders from within Sweden and around the world into what makes Swedish leadership distinctive. Marklund is able to draw on almost 40 years of working with managers, and over 40 interviews.

My first introduction to this book was one of Jan Marklund's several book launch events. Reading it, I was surprised by the book's collaborative dimension as an endeavour in itself. Even at the launch, many people

^a Jonas Wells is an English/Swedish anthropologist working as a coordinating manager for something very Swedish — a coordination agency, a governmental body that finances and supports joined-up working between health care, social work, social insurance and job centres. Email jonas.wells@avesta.se.

presented the book – and Jan Marklund literally showed the collaborative ethos of Swedish leadership while hosting a general conversation about it. He stepped back to give others room to express themselves, alongside directing attention to things he found significant and worthwhile. The book does the same.

Approaching this review, I found my anthropological side noting that culture is contested, and that there are multiple views on what “Swedish leadership” actually is (or may become). Even having myself long worked in Sweden in organisational development, I do not always find it easy to portray Swedish culture, let alone leadership. Jan Marklund has provided an account that it is relatable even to someone like me who has worked predominantly in the public sector. There is a narrative many can ascribe to, about equality and inclusivity as a practical practice, collaborative joined-up ways of working and effecting a work/life balance with decentered teamworking and decision-making. Are these necessarily or particularly Swedish? Perhaps not, but I found them relatable, as I imagine many in Scandinavia would.

Are they connected to solution-focus? Yes, I think you can make that case, as you can with many things – and that is in no way a let-down. I find it fascinating how SF can almost seamlessly adapt to any professional environment or specific culture. You could argue that building on what is working is a common goal for humanity itself — there would be no living without it. These are questions worth pursuing, and while they are perhaps not at the forefront of Jan’s book, the chance to consider them as SF is becoming a global, transdisciplinary practice is welcome. This book can add to that discussion.

Returning to the book itself, I should note that substantial sections are devoted to sharing practical tools for leaders, new leaders, or after shifts that make one *feel* like a beginner again. As someone who has recently trained a wide range of leaders and professionals, I raced to the section on what helps training be successful. Many such parts of the book offer unexpected and balanced insights.

I think Jan Marklund’s book will appeal greatly to anyone wanting to get the most out of their team or workforce. It may help them empower employees — and make their own life easier. This latter point is often missed, but in my view, it is an essential selling point. The book furthermore delves into the nuances of leadership, as well as suggesting strategies that aid desired development, especially in the leader-worker relationship. The confusing and weird space that is work/life is undoubtedly where most of us spend most of our time. So, dipping into the book almost anywhere may provide many insights at once.

I should like to end with a personal address to Jan — and a play on the book’s title. I think as a reviewer I am justified in misreading the title. I read it as “Lead like *the* Swede Jan Marklund”. It really is Jan Marklund’s own leadership that shines through every page of the book. It is rare to find a

book so densely rich with over 40 years of SF experience in the organisational world. It is a testament to a life richly lived, and a gift for the next generation. Thank you, Jan.

Published: September 22, 2025 BST.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CCBY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0> and legal code at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> for more information.