



The Triumph of Emptiness: Consumption, Higher Education, and Work Organization

By Mats Alvesson

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In this book, Mats Alvesson aims to demystify some popular and upbeat claims about a range of phenomena, including the knowledge society, consumption, branding, higher education, organizational change, professionalization, and leadership. He contends that a culture of grandiosity is leading to numerous inflated claims. We no longer talk about plans but 'strategies'. Supervisors have been replaced by 'managers', managers are referred to as executives. Management is about 'leadership'. Giving advice is 'coaching'. Companies become 'knowledge-intensive firms'. The book views the contemporary economy as an economy of persuasion, where firms and other institutions increasingly assign talent, energy, and resources to rhetoric, image, branding, reputation, and visibility.

Using a wide range of empirical examples to illuminate the realms of consumption, higher education, organization, and leadership, this provocative and engaging book challenges established assumptions and contributes to a critical understanding of society as a whole.

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- Sales Rank: #1957850 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2014-10-21
- Released on: 2014-10-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.10" h x .80" w x 9.20" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"The author, a leading management scholar and a major sociological thinker, punctures the grandiosity and narcissism of our times when we succumb to the illusions that image, hype, and empty talk create value, when everyone must claim to be cutting edge and a world leader. Alvesson succeeds brilliantly in demonstrating that behind such grandiosity lurks an emptiness of meaning, of value, and of imagination. His powerful critical discussions of modern consumption, higher education, professionalism, and leadership insinuate that our current malaise goes far deeper than the economic crisis in which we find ourselves. This is a book that breaks loose of the management publication ghetto and demands to be read by everyone."-- Yiannis Gabriel, Chair in Organizational Theory, University of Bath

"In *The Triumph of Emptiness* Mats Alvesson demonstrates the considerable value of critical theory for understanding everyday life in contemporary Western societies. Refreshingly astute as regards our current state of institutional being, this book is engagingly written and well-grounded in the best critical thought has to offer. Alvesson has once again accomplished what he does so well: think a vital subject through with wit and insight."--Mary Jo Hatch, author of *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*

"*The Triumph of Emptiness* is a provocative, insightful, and highly ambitious (even 'grandiose') indictment of consumption, work, and the organizations in which it occurs, as well as higher education. They are all critiqued for their grandiosity, inflated and distorted images, and mindless competitiveness. This is an uncompromising work that is likely to both enlighten and infuriate the reader."--George Ritzer, Distinguished University Professor, the University of Maryland

"*The Triumph of Emptiness* pulls back the proverbial curtain on our current society to reveal the empty truth behind our illusions of grandeur. Mats Alvesson leads us on a critical, smart, and often amusing romp through a world in which everything is excellent, advice is known as 'coaching,' and 'vice presidents' are a dime a dozen. He shows the increasing gap between reality and fantasy, need and want, and product production and the illusions necessary to sell them. Higher education is not immune to these trends, with ideas of 'college for all' and the pronounced dumbing-down of university study. If you are interested in the strange paradox in rich societies of how we can have so much but not be any happier, read this book."--Jean M. Twenge, author of *Generation Me* and co-author of *The Narcissism Epidemic*

"This is a well-written, powerful book that makes you think and reflect about some of the key issues of our time. You couldn't ask for more." --*Times Higher Education*

About the Author

Mats Alvesson, *Lund University, Department of Business Administration*

Mats Alvesson is Professor of Business Administration at the University of Lund, Sweden and at University of Queensland Business School, Australia. Recent books include:

Qualitative Research and Theory Development (Sage 2011, with Dan Karreman)

Interpreting Interviews (Sage 2011)

Metaphor We Lead By: Understanding Leadership in the Real World (Routledge 2011, ed with Andre Spicer)

The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies (Oxford University Press, edited with Todd Bridgman and Hugh Willmott)

Understanding Gender and Organizations (Sage, 2009, 2nd ed, with Yvonne Billing)

Reflexive Methodology (Sage, 2009, 2nd ed, with Kaj Skoldberg)

Changing Organizational Culture (Routledge 2008, with Stefan Sveningsson)

Knowledge Work and Knowledge-Intensive Firms (Oxford University Press, 2004)

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