

## Are you Soft enough for the Tough Business World?

"Soft" is the last word you want to be described with as a manager, right?

By the way: the fact that "steel-hard" is obviously a predicate of nobility for managers, gives a deep insight into the traditional professional culture of this profession. The upcoming generation of managers – and indeed many experienced leaders – already see this culture much more critically than it appears to the outside world.

This shyness towards the "soft" is all the more astonishing when you see the hype surrounding topics such as resilience and mindfulness. If you look for example, what promotes long-term satisfaction, health and efficiency, you will find things like the ability to enjoy, a well-developed body feeling, differentiated self-perception, ability to make contact, spirituality, and meaning of life. With the best will in the world, these are not dimensions that would be described as "hard".

Everyone wants to be resilient, but not soft. Perhaps that is why "soft factors" have such a difficult status, because there is this word...oh God.

Resilience still has it easier than mindfulness: the former fights at best against the unword "soft", the latter has to compete against "esoteric". Here we definitely end up in the panic zone of the business world. The panic over esotericism is so great that everything that could even remotely be associated with it comes under the spell. This goes so far that sometimes even spirituality – and thus a basic dimension of human existence – immediately falls under suspicion of esotericism. Where have we got there?

Those who are soft are at best regarded as failures. At least that fits into the war and combat metaphor that still dominates the management world, and you can sort out failures. But esoterics? There the reactions rather resemble flight reflexes. It's like being in danger of getting infected with a deadly disease, which is furthermore visible from a distance through green-yellow pustules.

It has often been oracled recently that the long-established large corporations are doomed to death because they either die from their hierarchical structure or are disruptively swept off the market by small, clever start-ups. I do not share this hypothesis. But in dealing with soft qualities, they have a real gap to their younger competitors, and that can become a big problem in the long run. Too often these topics are burned off as exotic events: "Was fantastic with this Kung Fu master, very inspiring". Yes, but what about six months later?

Well, thanks to Ramon Zenhäusern, at least the term "birnenweich" will probably be included in the Duden, that's a start.

It's funny: the advantage of soft qualities can be found everywhere: a hard attack is followed by a soft technique (a propos martial arts), the trees that are still standing after a hurricane are the flexible ones, and even engineers realize that skyscrapers that are supposed to be earthquake-proof are the ones that can sway. Managers will soon be the only ones who think they have to be steel-hard above all – no wonder when they break in a storm.

If you have a top position to fill with great charisma, and you send candidates into an assessment, measure dimensions like the ones mentioned above: Enjoyment, body awareness, self-perception, contact skills, spirituality, meaning of life. You would have a good chance of getting capable leaders with integrity who will be able to cope even with hard times.

Ask yourself from time to time whether you are soft enough for the tough business world - it could help you to master the operative pressure and the ethical challenges of everyday life.