

## Leadership and Acceptance

The last few months have forced many of us to come to terms with things we were not looking for, and we all had to find a way to deal with this particular situation.

An important ingredient for this to succeed is acceptance - the acceptance of what is and what cannot be changed. Psychologically, acceptance frees capacities that were previously bound by fighting the unchangeable, by anger, by grief, and gives way to the search for viable solutions. And then a paradox unfolds: the acceptance of the restriction increases inner freedom.

This concept appears in different contexts again and again in a similar way: In psychotherapy, in mindfulness, or even in the Serenity Prayer, as practiced by Alcoholics Anonymous, which says: "God, give me the courage to change what I can change. Give me the serenity to accept what I cannot change. And give me the wisdom to separate the one from the other."

Although mindfulness has made a timid entrance into the business context, nobody ever talks about acceptance, everybody just talks about stress reduction. But what is even less discussed – not at all, in fact – is acceptance in the context of leadership.

At first glance, this is not surprising, because the generic mandate for a manager is not to accept things as they are, but to change things. A manager who sits on his chair like a Buddha, transfigured, watching the world go by and responding to the ever more urgent appeals of his employees to do something at last, only shows a distant smile? That does not fit, and does not work.

Of course, it is part of a manager's job to change things and get things moving. But there is a tendency to tense up in the process. Then this task is declared as a fight and dressed in words taken from the vocabulary of warfare ("Sun Tsu for managers" and the like. One could think that you are out to kill your competitors). This is mainly exhausting and not very effective, at least in the long run.

Acceptance can help. Acceptance does not exclude having a high ambition and wanting to change and develop things out of this ambition at the same time. But it helps not to overdo it. If you consider how much energy is wasted fighting against things that are the way they are – time, financial possibilities, own limits, characteristics of other people, uncontrollability of complex systems, unpleasant facts, etc. – then it becomes clear what potential is waiting for you.

Those who cultivate the quality of acceptance can make the paradoxical experience that conflicts often simply dissolve when you stop fighting. Many people do not dare to do this, for fear of being overrun when they stop fighting. The opposite is the case.

Where does this lead? It leads to composed engagement. One of my favourite expressions. The wise distinction between what can be changed and what is to be accepted catapults leadership into another league. Composed engagement bundles forces where they have the most effect, allows determination without aggression, opens the view even to unpleasant facts and thus to better decisions, and on top of that, it is good for the nerves.

Of course, it is okay to question in an entrepreneurial and disruptive way whether what is supposedly unchangeable can be changed, after all. Innovation depends largely on this. But for it to remain in a healthy balance, leadership and acceptance need to be integrated. This increases the chances of sustainable corporate development. And we will definitely need that.