

Means and End

At this place, I've already argued that the term "change project" is nonsense. Or have you ever seen a project whose goal was to change nothing? Exactly. Change is simply a basic aspect of any project. You could just as well say "I'm going on a locomotion hike". Informative added value: zero.

It's never about change for its own sake. It's about making a difference, about achieving goals, and to do that, you usually have to change things. Change quite simply a necessary ingredient for that, almost banal: if you want to pursue organizational development, things will have to change. If nothing changes, the organization will remain as it is (from: "Fundamentals of Logic").

This does not change the fact that change requires a lot of attention and is practically always underestimated. In the end, however, it is always subordinate to the goals to be achieved.

This difference is significant: it places change as a means, not an end. It is worthwhile to keep means and ends neatly apart, respectively to assign things to the right categories. When change is made an end, or is perceived as such, you often don't have to wait long for the sarcastic remarks on the part of those affected "the main thing is to raise dust", "management by helicopter" and the like.

Change is not an end; change is a means. Profit is not an end; profit is a means to keep a company viable in the long run. The companies in which management has made profit the end are the suppliers of scandal stories rather than shining examples.

Distinguishing well between means and ends pays off in the matter at hand, but also in communication. That's because employees listen very carefully when leaders speak, and it starts with the choice of topics. If you talk about money all the time, people will think it's really about money. If you talk about change all the time, people will think it's mostly about throwing things out of whack. The impact of leadership is inextricably linked to communication.

When a workforce distrusts leadership, it often has to do with the fact that they assume leaders are looking at the means as the end, and that often sounds cynical: "we're trying to do something good and useful here, but they're just looking at the money there and putting on change exercises to prove their own relevance." Sometimes it hurts to hear that.

In my experience though, this is very rarely the case. On the contrary, in most cases, leaders put a lot of thought into how to do their jobs well and meaningfully, and they take it anything but easy. I would like to passionately take up the banner for these executives.

It's all the more tragic when they lay the wrong tracks in terms of communication and forget to talk about the things that are actually important, but often sit in the second row behind operational and business requirements, trying to somehow still get in the photo.

My recommendation: think hard about the "actually," get clear about what that "actually" is about, and talk about it publicly. What is means, and what is end? What is meant to improve? How is what is to be created good, useful, responsible? That's where you'll quickly end up with meaningfulness and with values.

And yes, please make sure they are in the photo. Preferably in the front row.