

Identity theft is not always illegal

In March, the Sonntagszeitung newspaper published a short note on an exhibition by UBS about its early corporate history. UBS wanted to show "how its predecessor banks contributed to the successful development of the Swiss economy." Alfred Escher plays an important role in the videos shown. The newspaper's comment: UBS had "acquired a founding figure in passing, so to speak, through the takeover of CS, which it is now using for its marketing."

Is it.

Alfred Escher as a founding figure of UBS? A bold thesis. "Predecessor bank"? Has UBS become a "successor"? Have I missed something?

What kind of signal is it that UBS has to steal its roots if it wants to describe them? Does it not have enough identity itself? Does this story include those who were part of Bankverein and Bankgesellschaft at the time? And if not, how do they feel about it?

Perhaps the intention is to express appreciation for the history and experience of the many colleagues who have joined from CS. That would be wise and advisable in itself. However, this approach is a risky one, because there are delicate differences and border areas between appreciation, appropriation and expropriation. Until now, CS employees have been part of their own past and identity; is this now being hijacked? And how are they to be persuaded to fit into a UBS culture if UBS presents itself as a descendant of CS? Who is actually in the lead here?

Just because I married my wife doesn't mean I've experienced her biography, does it? Okay, the analogy is flawed, UBS-CS was not a merger (and even if it were, the analogy to a wedding would still be very flawed, I know), but a takeover. But you can't just swallow someone else's identity. I don't become a schnitzel because I eat one. Okay, that was silly, I didn't mean that CS and a schnitzel...this is getting a bit out of hand, but you know what I mean, don't you?

Of course, in any takeover, it is extremely important to reflect on the different histories, cultures, experiences, habits, implicit assumptions, etc. that come together, especially when one part has to essentially fit into the other. If this reflection does not take place, these different inner worlds will simply work underground instead of in a reflected and integrated way, more or less diffusely throwing sand in the gears.

Approaching this debate with decency and prudence in order to achieve genuine integration is extremely challenging. After all, the identity of everyone involved starts to vibrate, not just those who join. It has to if something common is to grow. After all, many things need to be renegotiated, defined and communitized together.

I doubt that an act of appropriation is helpful here. It would be at least as important to come to terms with the company's own identity as UBS. A company that wants to integrate something must first know what it wants to be.

But perhaps all that is an fact happening, and many more good and right and prudent things, too. What do I know, it was just a short newspaper article that gave me a few thoughts, and I haven't seen the exhibition either, I admit. So: in dubio confidence.

In any case, it can't hurt to pay close attention to the aspects mentioned. Here's to a successful outcome, in everyone's interest.