

By Harald Korsten

## Germany, is it a "Desert" of Leadership?

### A Plea for a "Matter of Course"

In a nutshell:

- No time! Managers produce 80% of their overload themselves
- It's a fight against the daily insanity of meetings
- "Coaching behaviour" is not a management technique, but it should be implicit
- Only a systematic developer of employees can be a true manager

To lead means to develop. Managers have to develop their entrusted employee's, continuously and systematically, leading by encouraging. Anyone who doesn't want this isn't a manager. Anyone who doesn't have time for this point shoots themselves in the foot. Businesses that don't explicitly and strongly encourage employee development don't have a leadership culture.

"For that we have a personnel department" falls far short of the real needs. Only those that succeed in making themselves disposable in their current position systematically, only then qualify for higher positions on the management career ladder. Recognizing this mechanism means understanding the principles of "Leadership 2.0": Developing talents and skills systematically, including ones own.

In the first instance, these talents and skills have to be discovered. The conditions for this are well known: an ability to reflect, confidence, appreciation, constructive criticism and coaching behaviour.

### Management by Ignorance

The application of the above implicit behaviours is apparently rare. Only 13% of all employees in Germany feel emotionally tied to their companies and 66% are apathetic and work to rule. 21% are acting even in a destructive way! These are the results of the latest Gallup study called "Engagement Index 2010". The values of this have changed little since 2001 and the economic damage is estimated to be 123 billion Euros' per year!

When presenting the study results on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2011, Marco Rinc said: *"Many leaders still ignore the central needs and expectations of their employee's"*

The behaviour of management is a key factor in terms of the degree of emotional employee retention. Leaders often don't listen, they ignore suggestions, fail to give feedback and rarely show appreciation. How is that possible? Apparently these points are completely overlooked or not accepted by these types of "leaders" in terms of their development tasks. "This kind of leadership you'll do additionally!" said a Managing Director to one of his domain experts he had just promoted to Head of Department. This 1970s point of view seems to have hardly changed.

### Of course everyone knows how to coach

How can managers set goals, plan, put work packages together, run operations, solve problems, conduct an appraisal, get to know /familiarise new employees, run projects, etc, if he/she ignores a duty of care and the expectations of their staff, if they base their appraisals/ratings from a distance, fed by speculation and interpretation. Perhaps they don't even check to see if this approach is sufficient. This doesn't create trust, just the opposite.



## Wood for the trees.....

Instead of a leadership culture, a firm, hardly questioned culture of mistrust is the actual reality within many German companies. Historically, this culture of mistrust doesn't only happen in small and medium sized organisations and still goes on largely ignored.

Someone who really wants to know how their conversational partner "ticks" is curious and interested. They are interested in what someone is encouraged or intimidated by, what they imagine, what ideas, proposals, plans and objectives they have, their prospective, what this represents and why. A "real" listener asks and clarifies anything that is unclear with gracious tenacity, summarises and makes notes to keep track and establishes arrangements at the end. That's it, how else would it work? For those doing the above they are already practicing more than 80% of the coaching techniques that have been continuously popular for over 15 years.

Its clear that many leaders can't see the famous "wood for the trees". With such self evident truths for dealing with each other, must these things be relearned at the expense of leadership training? Perhaps. And perhaps "empathy" and "appreciation" have been inflated to meaningless verbiage.

How else could it be that the Gallup Engagement Index has taken place over a ten year period with no change in their findings? Perhaps managers are not leading when they know how to lead. "Knowing" doesn't mean "doing". That's irresponsible, and irresponsibility is the opposite of leadership. For years the main and often only argument for this non-leadership is "We don't have the time".

How can we complete the circle?



### "No time" 1: A quick tour of the "Meeting Culture"

Many executives complain about a lack of time. However, this does not keep them from spending significant amounts of work time in meetings, more or less prepared, no wonder. "I just don't have the time to prepare, its just one meeting after another!" Another week of chasing meetings often producing "Muda". Most people know this Japanese term for "waste of all kinds". Time, money, energy, not to mention motivation are wasted in such meetings, and everybody knows it. However it doesn't stop people from being happy to have endless discussions in rooms crammed with tables and chairs, IT equipment and other items, even in business meetings where problems should be solved, and judgments should be made. What about interaction, creativity, a goal orientated approach? What about a systematic and effective approach? Not to mention documenting the results. Nothing! What about a flipchart or pin board perhaps?

**"Ping Pong" debates!** This equipment, necessary for effectively carrying out meetings are apparently bordering "esoteric frills" for many people involved. Ironically, the moderation method has been around in Germany since 1973. "Yes, we once went to such a seminar. But I have no time left for those antics now." Time for enforcement strategies, "Assertion addiction", winners and loser – games, recognisable by "Ping Pong" – debates, driven by infinite loops of "Yes but!" seems to be the norm.

This is reminiscent of the gardeners rake with no teeth, difficult to use and time consuming, and as he scrapes together the leaves someone asks him. "Why don't you get a better rake, one with teeth?" What do think is the gardeners reply is? "I don't have the time". Exactly! In relation to meetings it's no wonder that people simply "switch off". They distract themselves by pulling out their lap tops, make less than discrete phone calls in full view of their fellow participants with little or no regard for the space of others, and the result? Except to say fewer decisions are made and so more meetings are scheduled. That's part of the everyday madness participated by hundreds of thousands of "lemmings" everyday.



"No time" 2: Coaching Not coaching stifles motivation and commitment. Emotional disengagement from the job and from the organisation will be the inevitable result. Not coaching leads to congestion and overload. Around 80% of time wasted is self made/inflicted.

Anyone who has worked for just a few months in any company knows: Whoever gets information, advice or instructions, tends not to perform tasks with the required commitment and the necessary concentration. This becomes particularly striking with pre-given problem solving instructions. Employees put less effort into work if they didn't produce it, if they weren't part of the development process and couldn't contribute their own ideas. Often time-consuming rework is necessary: check again, calculate, evaluate, meet customers, make calls, present, and telephoning. Such "guided" employee's also tend to ask more questions more frequently: On one hand it's due to resigned convenience, on the other hand, out of uncertainty. Uncertainty leads to a "hedge" mentality. Hedging mentality is a reflection of irresponsibility both are produced by "managers". "But what should I do when they come running to me for any every little detail!" It's a self-fulfilling prophesy in its purest form.

In many companies, executives spend far more than half of their daily work time with readily avoidable control-, inspection- and amendment tasks (CIA). They don't notice it because they have become accustomed to being in a slow creeping process, or they don't know otherwise from the outset.

What helps? Help people to help themselves. Let them find solutions for themselves. This well known behaviour has been rewritten for approximately the last 15 years known as "Coaching".

How does coaching work? Take an employee, who comes with a problem to his boss. Both know that the problem falls within the responsibility of the employee. Now the boss has two choices:

**Hamster wheels!**

1. He gives advice, even instructions. In short term thinking that tends to go faster than systematic exploration such as: "What do you want to achieve in practice? How will you achieve your goal?" He who gives advice, takes responsibility. That's old hat. If it goes wrong, the staff rightly say "I've only done what I was told." Advisers and instructors are producing CIA hamster wheels and a daily dose of demotivation for their employees. So they are producing fluctuation, uninspired work-to-rule and even their own work overload.
2. He coaches, depending on the situation between for 1 and 45 minutes. This is intended to be time well invested in the medium term. If he has coached in his area of responsibility for only a few months consistently, he recognises his CIA hamster wheel. Amazingly he has already saved more time and become increasingly focused on the tasks for which he is actually paid. He checks his judgments and provides his opinions on an informed basis. He makes decisions with clarity, confidently and more often. He succeeded in getting even the most deeply unmotivated employees to be now increasingly more interested and to get involved. He is now a real promoter. He is now qualified for higher positions, see above.



Now we've come full circle.



## Conclusion

Motivated employees are increasingly committed. They become more dedicated with increasing self-confidence and personal responsibility. With increasing autonomy they identify themselves with their work, and with their company. Becoming emotionally tied, they are increasingly interested in meaningful changes. Willingness to change is the breeding ground for innovation. Change-ready employees are increasingly motivated producing a value added spiral, powered by "Coaching Behaviour".

Coaching Behaviour is not a management technique, but is seen as basic and natural leadership behaviour. There is no way of avoiding it. Experience has shown that 95 percent of all employees respond from the start to coaching, 60 percent of them even like it.

Leading by promoting leads to increasingly motivated and responsible employees, and is a simple matter of fact for the true and unsurpassable leader.

## *The Author*

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