

Respect: Virtue and Necessity

To achieve results a company's employees all have to be pulling in one direction – no matter what personal differences they might have. That can only be achieved with mutual respect, writes Tilman Eckloff.



Our world is becoming increasingly complex. Chances are higher than ever that in daily life, you will meet people with whom you share few values, attitudes or ways of thinking. So the probability of more, and more complex conflicts, has also risen, compared to days gone by. How people deal with these conflicts shapes their personal freedom and satisfaction. And it is also critical for the sustainability of larger systems – such as companies.

Individualism as an opportunity

Growing individualism and ensuing diversity present a giant opportunity for the companies of today. They spell the chance to become sufficiently adaptable as an organization to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex environment together. Only those organizations that are diverse, and have discovered how to benefit from this diversity, will be sufficiently adaptable to respond to changing environmental conditions, and thus flexibly to change.

Persuasion without coercion

For this to work, it is essential for individuals to support and pull together in the direction such large systems are moving in, rather than work against it, or drift off into their own parallel systems. This demands a social web that connects individuals so that they pull together, transcending their differences. Otherwise, there is the all-too familiar danger of a slide into departmental warfare, niche-building, suppression or inefficiency. But what is the secret – how can individuals be persuaded to work together with others on a larger project, without the use of force? How can friction be minimized, and cooperation be as satisfactory as possible?

Being not indifferent to differences

In these situations, mutual respect becomes particularly important. At its heart, respecting people means two things: firstly, to recognize their differences as equally valid, and secondly, to be open to their influence to a certain degree. Thus mutual respect is prerequisite in order to steer a complex system, without indi-

viduals relinquishing their individuality, or compromising this so far that the system loses its adaptability.

Real respect motivates people

Current studies show that if people in a company actually treat one another with respect, this is a motivating force and source of satisfaction for employees. They are more engaged with their company, identify more readily with management and feel more closely connected to the company. Moreover, in times of crisis, respected employees can be managed more easily. Many employees actually claimed that a boss who is respectful to them is more important than good pay, a safe job or promotion opportunities.

No empty phrases

But it is important to note: respect only brings results when it is paid more than just lip service. Employees notice when respect is feigned. If employees are merely used as a means to an end, for example to make a superior appear in a better light or just to improve the bottom line, the exact opposite sets in. Unmotivated, frustrated co-workers will react to their boss' empty phrases by doing the minimum possible.

Respect is therefore not only a virtue, but a necessity for setting up satisfactory cooperation and for surviving in the modern world – be it as an individual or as an organization.



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