

## Leadership: the Clueless and the Non-knowing

From an article about Federal Councilor Baume-Schneider in the Tagesanzeiger of June 17: "In the parliamentary technical commissions, it causes astonishment how open-heartedly the studied social scientist admits her legal deficits and lets her experts have the floor. "If you, as a federal councilor, let people know at a commission meeting that you're the person with the least expertise in the room, you won't be taken seriously," says one experienced council member."

Makes me wonder. Does this mean that you will be taken seriously if you deny your professional deficits and act as if you can easily keep up with all the specialists present, which is completely implausible? From which decade does this model come from? How often have you been a specialist in a room with an executive and had to exhaustingly mobilize all your breathing techniques to keep from bursting, while constantly being corrected with half-truths in your core subject?

But that's not all: shouldn't it concern us that in such commissions it apparently "causes astonishment" to let the experts speak? After all, that sounds like they're somehow just a nuisance. "Shut up, lawyer, I'm a council member after all"?

Well, now I assume, of course, that the quoted "experienced council member" is not just stupid either: clearly it does badly if I head an area, especially a technical commission, and am absolutely clueless. Of course, I need to know something about the field I'm leading, but in a leadership position, I should above all be the person who can lead best, right? And I'll venture a bold assertion here: if you have someone who leads excellently, can recognize and positively influence the quality of a discussion, and ensures that those who have something to say get a chance to speak, then that leader's expertise may well be relatively small, and the result excellent.

The opposite is not the case, because then a single expert opinion simply dominates. And one thing I can tell you from experience: developing leadership quality takes significantly longer than acquiring knowledge, so it is better to start with a specialist deficit than with a leadership deficit.

But the key point here – sorry I took so long to get to it – is this: There is a difference between the clueless and the non-knowing.

Modern leadership concepts, including all agile models, naturally assume that it is useful to see oneself as a non-knowing person when approaching a problem, and to use this non-knowledge as a source of curiosity and openness – this illuminates the blind spots, protects against hasty conclusions, increases the diversity of perspectives, and thus leads to better decisions.

On upper floors, this doesn't seem to work (yet), or at least not most of the time. We seem to be dealing with a kind of emergence. It exists in physics: at lower and lower temperatures, certain materials suddenly become superconductors, for example. And it also seems to exist in hierarchy: at a certain level of hierarchy, it suddenly seems to be about power and heroic qualities again.

But this would logically mean that the quality of discussion and decision-making in the hierarchy gets worse and worse towards the top – not a reassuring thought, if you ask me. Or would you, as a senior executive, like to have to conclude that everyone in the company is discussing things more intelligently than you are? Aside from the fact that that wouldn't be nice for yourself, it would also be pretty bad for your company, between you and me.

We need more non-knowing. You shouldn't be clueless, but non-knowing very often.