



II. A hierarchical leadership style increases performance but could demotivate employees

In our reflections on this topic it is important to distinguish between a hierarchical *structure* and a hierarchical *culture*. Control and influence organisations are very different in nature. A hierarchical structure is quite important since we use it to define managers' roles and responsibilities. Although new structural models for start-up companies are on the way, we do not want to question the current corporate structure as yet. Over the years, the corporate hierarchical structure has evolved into a hierarchical leadership style; this is known for keeping a certain distance and involving positional thinking, instead of encouraging closeness and eye-level encounters with employees.

This leadership style could prove to be ineffective at addressing the challenges of the future. We can still achieve rather good results with this so-called 'old management' style; however, these come mostly at the cost of a positive atmosphere and emotional environment in the department or organisation. If the climate in the company becomes more demanding as a result of changes or drastic restructuring, a general uncertainty will emerge among employees. The point we need to make here is that this typical 'emotional' uncertainty cannot be dealt with through a purely 'technical' hierarchical leadership style. Rethinking is required, moving towards an open style that promotes more closeness through transparency.

According to a study by the Institute for Leadership Culture in the Digital Age (IFIDZ) in Frankfurt (Germany), the terms 'unlearning hierarchy' or 'heterarchy capability' and 'transparency' or 'transparency orientation' have this year again been listed among the most essential leadership competencies. The study also describes the interesting leadership competence 'appreciation/employee orientation'; this denotes the importance of focusing on the individual needs of the employees as well as their potential, strengths and development areas.

How can I better motivate my employees?

In many management seminars, the most frequently asked question is: 'How can I better motivate my employees in my current challenging and volatile environment?' In such a situation, the manager might well have just asked the following: 'I am reaching my limits with my usual leadership style, what remaining options do I have?'

The answer will include directing the leader to a more transparency-oriented approach, which will replace the felt distance that forms part of the hierarchy leadership style with the openness of the heterarchy style. The word heterarchy stands for an encounter at eye level and involves the manager standing side by side with their employees. The outcome of this will be that employees become more independent and will shoulder an increased amount of personal responsibility. This people-oriented leadership style creates an environment in which personal motivation, as well as emotional security, can grow. When employees feel emotionally safe, nothing less than true loyalty is the outcome. The above-mentioned process will lead to more personal involvement by staff members and a noticeable increase in their performance. In this way, we are creating a high level of performance, without the increase in stress that usually goes with it.

In summary, one must honestly say that just a little bit more empathy and a bit of extra appreciation alone (as the so-called icing on the cake on top of our old leadership style) will probably not lead to great success. For this reason, we do need to explicitly abandon the old style and adopt a new way of thinking about our employees. Additionally, we need to honestly reflect on our own personal leadership styles.

Abandon the old style

As leaders, we are not accustomed to unlearning something or having to do without something that initially brought us benefits. Many managers have certainly felt more secure because of their position; thus, a request to give up this mode of thinking might not be very attractive to them personally. Directly giving orders and swiftly delegating through the famous drop-and-run method, instead of letting employees truly participate in a conversation at eye level, might not seem to be a very advantageous option for some of us either. It all shows that we do need some additional and personal direction if we are to make this journey towards transparency.

The seminar '**Unlearning Hierarchy – Learning Transparency**' with the **Six Leadership Competencies** will support managers in how to offer an in-depth and personal experience. This interactive course does not deliver quick tips and tricks; rather, it wants to help leaders face a paradigm shift in their leadership style by truly involving hearts and minds. Stay tuned for more articles on this topic.



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