



Roswita Königswieser

The Leadership Phenomenon

KÖNIGSWIESER & NETWORK
Systemische Beratung und Entwicklung GmbH



1. Leadership concepts as a mirror of the times and the respective organisation

We cannot speak about leadership without being clear about the concepts of leadership and management. There is an overwhelming amount of literature on the topic. It is difficult to find the “right” thing.

Leadership concepts always reflect the times and the societal values, the people (see G. Morgan) and how they interpret the concept of leadership.

2. Psychological approach, systemic approach

Principally we differentiate between concepts that focus on the personality and individual leadership styles, for e.g. the grid model, different tests and other concepts that see leadership in the context of the organisation and the relevant environments.

This starts with Hersey/Blanchard and “situational leadership“ and ranges to the systemic approaches of, for example, Baecker and us.

Experts agree that enhancing the competences of managers and the accompanying training programs only constitutes one part of professional leadership in organisations. Much greater importance is attached to a vision shared by everyone in the organisation that makes a common leadership culture, structural prerequisites and the appropriate leadership behaviour possible in the first place.

Modern qualification concepts therefore do not only focus on people, but require first and foremost experience sharing with regard to best practice and interactive learning methods and as intensive a dialogue with the executives of a company as possible (see P. Fischer).

This is the only way to confront the specific situation of a system and to create leadership fundamentals that “fit“.

3. What does professional leadership mean?

Depending on the complexity, the situation dynamics, the unpredictability and diversity of developments, appropriate, successful or professional leadership comes into play.

The following chart shows different types of leadership according to different contexts.

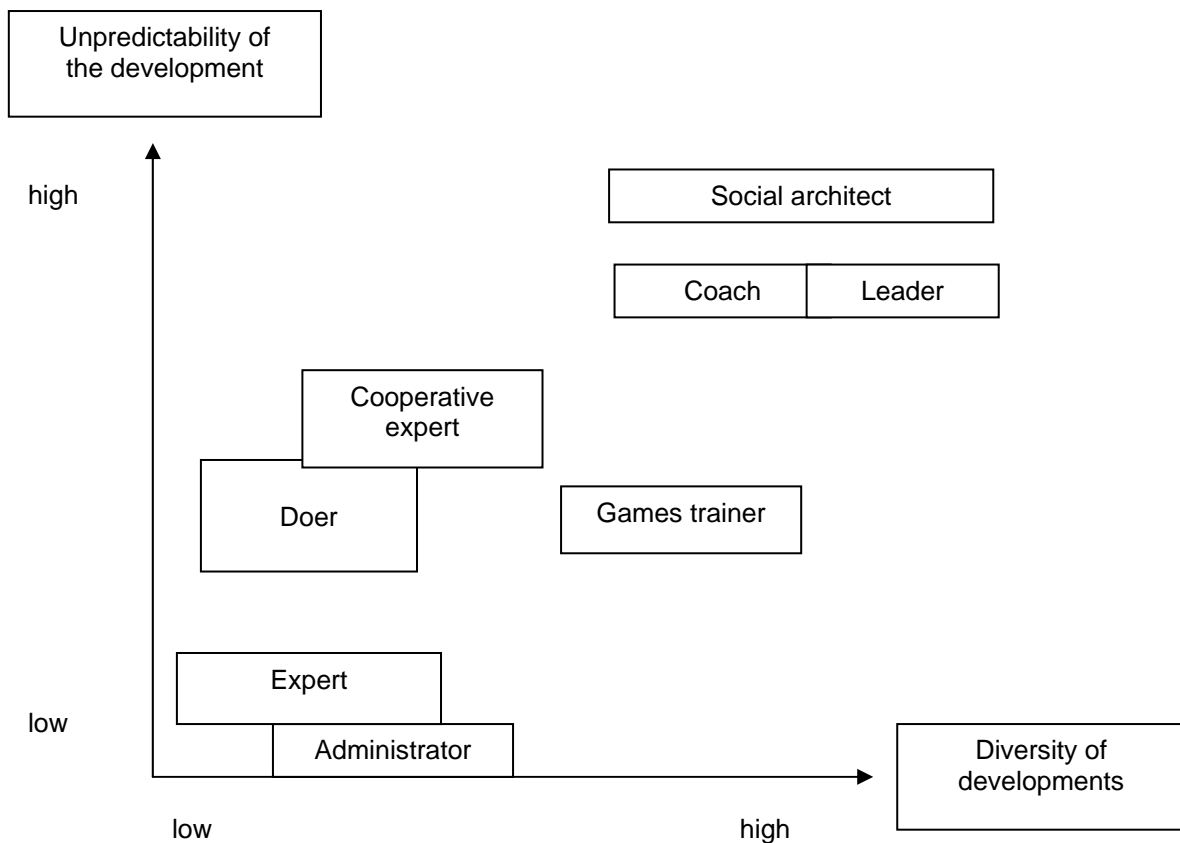


Fig. Context based professional leadership (B. Heitger)

The weaker the dynamics and the complexity, the more routinized and programmed the procedures are, the greater the need for an expert. The greater the complexity and number of layers, the more important a self-steering process supported by a coach with the process know-how of a “social architect” and – above all - the ability to steer communication processes and to show leadership (vgl. R. Königswieser).

According to this thesis, what does professional leadership mean?

Leadership in our opinion is only professional when the organisation develops successfully within its own frameworks and in line with evolving challenges. (see R. Seliger).

Three characteristics can be identified on a concrete level:

- **Clarity**

Professional leaders are clear about their own roles. This is how they stand out. They make sure that expectations others have of them and their own expectations of others (managers



and employees) are negotiated and clear (see J. Margetten). They make clear decisions and follow them through.

- **Steering instruments**

They are experts in their field but above all have authentic communication abilities because this is their core competence. In simple situations they lead according to the rules, in more complex situations by means of feedback processes and process architectures (e.g. dialogue platform, workshops, sounding-boards etc).

- **Dealing with uncertainty**

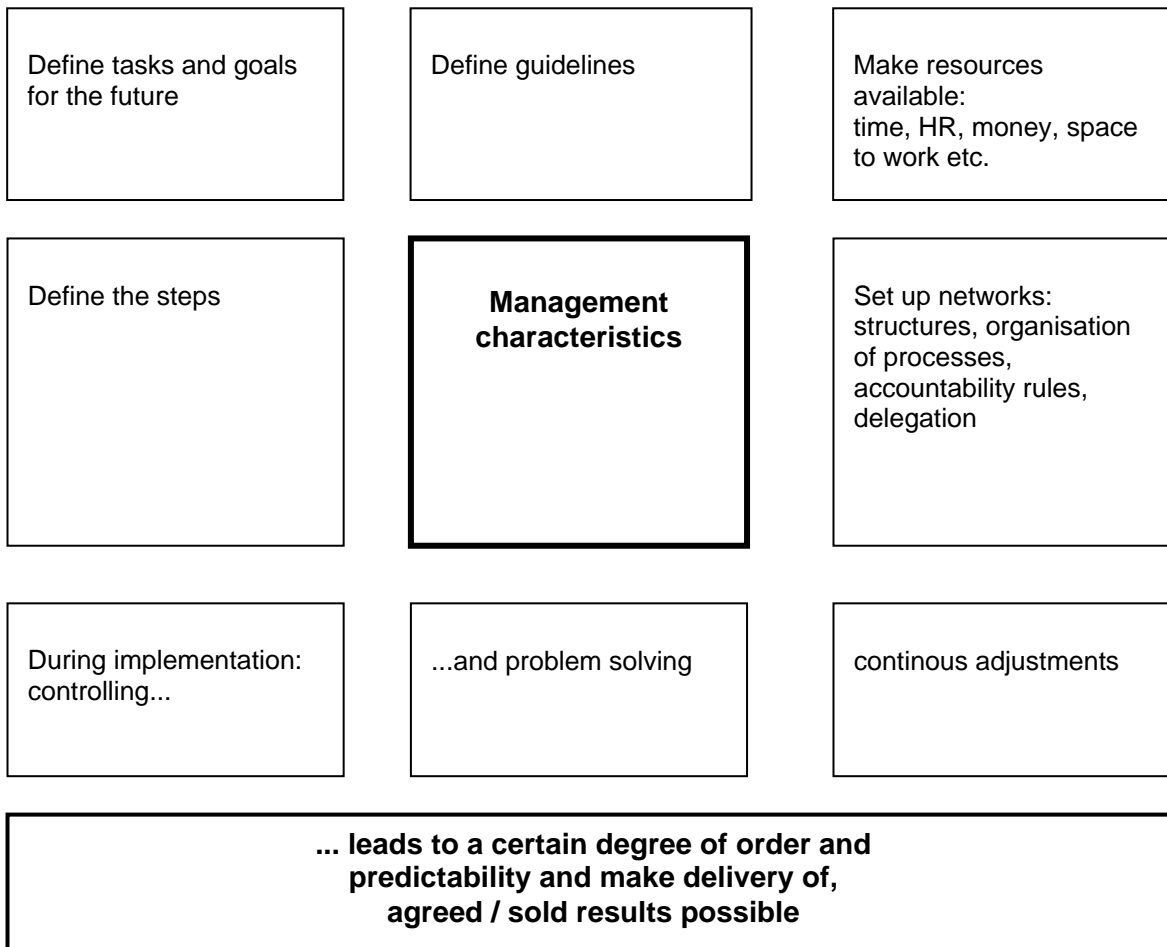
Professional leaders know that they tread on unsure ground every day and don't try to hide it. They know how to manage the contradictions and paradoxes that are always inherent (e.g. conflict of interest between the customers and the profits, between cultures, between changers and those who want to avoid change, between rationalization and development (see D. Neuberger) – and are not under pressure to always have to know more than their staff. They develop solutions together. They are aware of their “sandwich situation“ and try to compensate as the case may be. They do not push everything up to the next levels but assume responsibility, not only for their own area of influence.

4. Difference between leadership and management

How is leadership different than management? We see leadership as an overall concept, but define management more along the lines of “pointing the way“, setting boundaries and controlling; leadership on the other hand is based on characteristics such as visionary powers, strategic skill, initiative and the ability to motivate. Management leads to order and predictability, leadership to mobilisation and movement. Thomas Hagedorn has laid out these differences in the following overview:

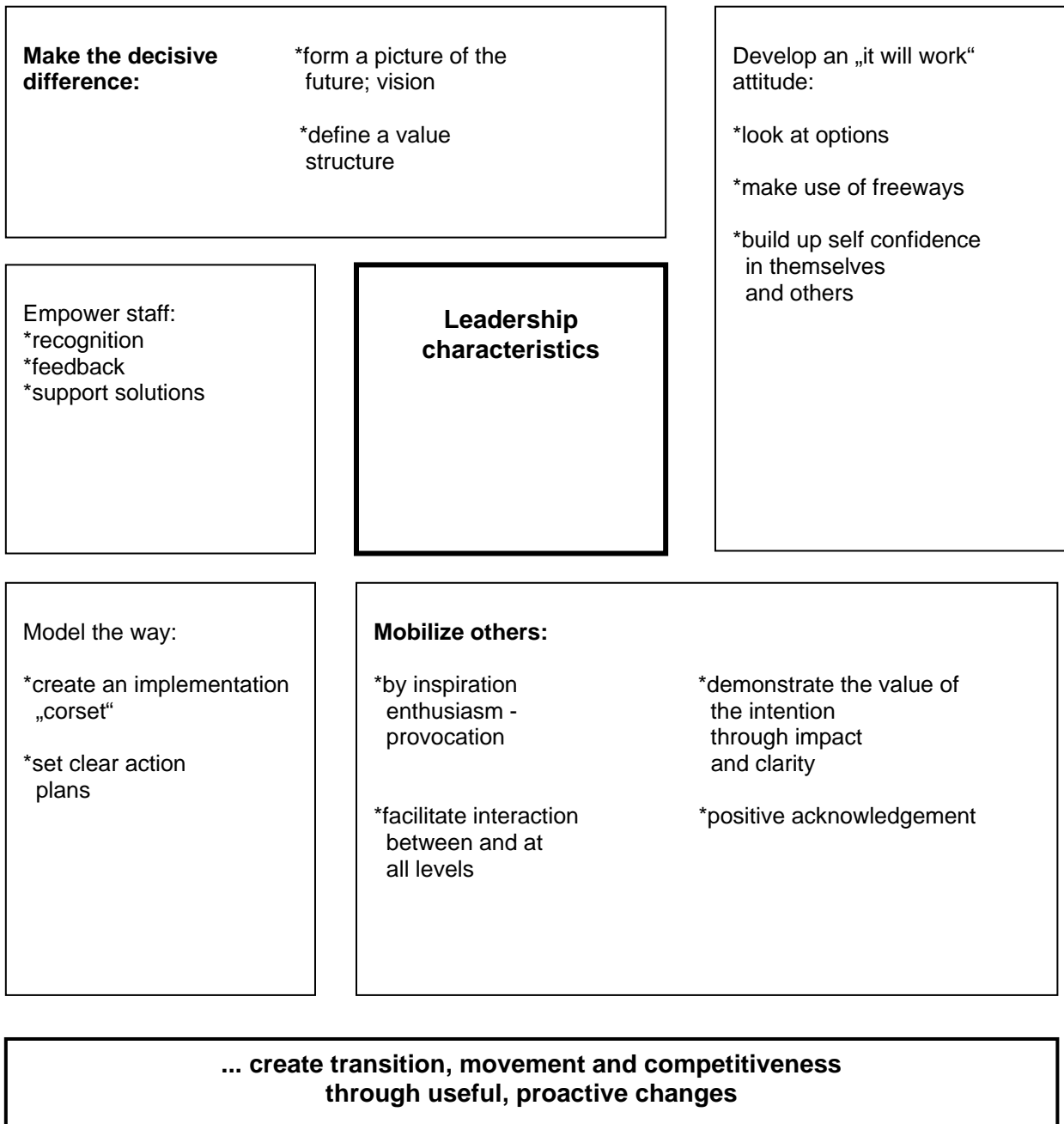


Management ...





Leadership...





5. Dangers of misunderstood leadership

We disagree with exaggerated interpretations of leadership that equate the term with charisma, “visionaries on cloud 9”: qualities such as charisma, charm, humour, powers of conviction, passion and inspiration crop up. These and similar images are conjured up in magazines and articles: “Leadership: the royal path to management?” (e.g. in Manager Seminars Nr.28/97).

A study by Wiebler (see the magazine “Leadership and Organisation 1997) at the University of St. Gallen warns of leadership supposedly based on such charismatic abilities. This is not only exaggerated and unrealistic, it threatens the empowerment of the staff, is tempting and manipulative.

6. The Phenomenon of Leadership

We agree with human resources developers that leadership only works when we feel an underlying authenticity. Sincerity means being true to yourself, your own strengths and weaknesses, it means working on yourself. It means trusting people. This is only possible when you trust yourself, when you yourself see a deeper meaning in life and are satisfied with yourself.

Rudolf Mann recently wrote in an article titled “The Path to Holistic Leadership“ published in the Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung that it’s about an attitude that sees its most important task as responsibility for ones own actions and the wish to develop self empowerment in the staff. It is about creating room for people to work together on a meaningful, satisfying and fulfilling task. Energy is unleashed to surmount stumbling blocks and to increase the company’s vitality.

It is about living instead of just talking about it, being open-minded to new learning processes, finding creative solutions together, curiosity and interest in being different.

A leader in this sense knows that behind everything our senses perceive, behind everything that is obvious to us, lies something else, something hidden, namely the unconscious and that the reason why something happens only becomes apparent during the course of a process.

Leadership is characterized by a specific attitude and approach based on a conscious and respectful perception of the world and its people, including ones self.

This affects all levels but is particularly noticeable at the communication level: it is not about being right, talking or forcing people into doing things but rather about recognizing that



everyone is right from their point of view; differences should be regarded as enriching and should be put to use.

This attitude energizes a company. A power is unleashed that drives communication, performance and change processes.

Physics teaches us that movement is only possible through energy. This is also true for companies. But it is not mechanical, electrical or kinetic energy, not thermal or atomic energy, it is life energy, vitality. It comes from people. We are energy channels and energy amplifiers. Permit me to put it in this slightly exaggerated way: we can let the endless, universal life energy flow through us and direct it at a goal. We can emit as much energy as we want because it always replenishes itself if we keep ourselves open to it. If we close ourselves up to it, it is lost.

Loss of energy manifests itself in the company as resignation and influences performance and creativity. This in turn has an effect on profits.

Life energy within a company is the input tax for profits and expenditures, which we will illustrate later in business figures.

Leadership means energy work, i.e. increasing a company's potential.

When a company has learned to manage feedback and conflicts and to see these factors as a motor driving innovation, success-oriented dynamics come to life, rooted in vigilance and critical, constructive awareness. This leads to a good feeling of fulfilment. Leadership contributes to this. If such a culture can be established, an early warning system will then be in place to secure the future. In this sense, leadership is not reduced to the skills of a few individuals. It is a quality stamp for the whole system. (R. Wimmer: The Future of Leadership, ZOE; 4/1996).

This same basic message is brought home to us in the acclaimed concept by Kouzes and Posner (1995) who sum up the leadership qualities as follows:

- “inspire a shared vision
- challenge the process
- enable others to act
- model the way
- encourage the heart”



7. Summary

- Leadership is an authentic, credible course of conduct rooted in an attitude and not a technique.
- The key is one's own personal development. Reflection, time out, feedback processes are important steps in this process.
- The relevant contexts must be taken into account in order to act appropriately.
- Steering contexts means creating structural frameworks to create room for leadership.

Literature

B. Hersey, K.H. Blanchard: Management of Organizational Behavior, 1977

D. Baecker: Posttheoretisches Management, Merve, 1994

R. Königswieser, Ch. Lutz: Das systemisch-evolutionäre Management; Orac, 1992

R. Königswieser, U. Cichy, G. Jochum: SIM salabim, Veränderung ist keine Zauberei, Klett-Cotta 2001

G. Morgan: Bilder der Organisation, Klett-Cotta 1997

P. Fischer, W. Sedovnik: Führung in globalisierten Märkten, in: Professionalität in der Führung, Hernsteiner 3/2002

R. Seliger: Professionalität in der Führung, in: Professionalität in der Führung, Hernsteiner 3/2002

J. Margelta: Managing in the New Economy, 1999

O. Neuberger: Widersprüche in Organisationen, in: R. Königswieser, Ch. Lutz: Das systemisch-evolutionäre Management, Orac 1992

R. Wimmer: Die Zukunft von Führung, in: ZOE 4/1996