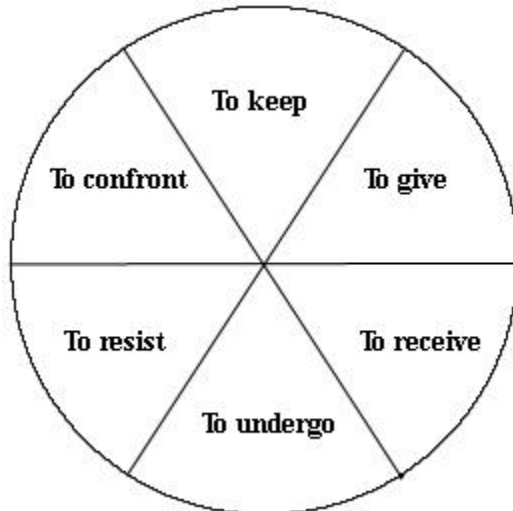




The Rose of Axes, applied on leadership

There are different ways to stand in relation to others. One way of looking at it is the relation-rose or the rose of axes (F. Cuvelier). This relation-rose tries to be the expression of a snapshot of behaviour in a relation to someone else, of a kind of an average behaviour in a relation during a certain time. One distinguishes six possible ways of behaviour.



In each of these kinds of behaviour the other partner in the relationship may react with behaviour from the same category or from one of the five other axes. The positions 'to give' and 'to receive' are complementary and easy to understand. One should take notice that there are many different things that can be given: products, care, elements of leading (for instance instructions), closeness, etc. Receiving is totally different from taking: with receiving there is an active accepting of the giver in his act of giving.

To keep is the withholding of things that could be given, explicitly withholding in a situation where giving could be expected. It is the position of the arrogant employer who makes his subordinates beg for help, and who shields himself very much. It is a very safe position, but the subordinates miss contact.

Confronting can mean: punishment, wage cut, getting angry, giving criticism, etc.

Resistance is different and is connected with the position of the subordinate. It concerns refusing all help, shielding oneself, not observing directions, etc. Explicitly protest against directions given by the boss is rather to be interpreted as confronting than as resistance. (Although not all authors would agree). An example: the employer demands that all phone-calls are answered by certain employees. When he is present the employees do it. When he is absent they don't. When he demands an explanation, the employees answer: 'Probably nobody was here'. This is the way of resistance. If someone would answer: 'This is not our job', than he himself is in the position of confronting.

To undergo: to let it be, to lose control over the situation, feeling guilty for not doing anything and still continuing to do nothing, being unable to say yes or no to an offer, and then feeling sorry for not participating, etc. Here



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the resistance is not against the outside world, but happens inside the person, as an ongoing internal conflict that leads to depression.

We can see three zones in interaction in the relation-rose: in the zone of giving and receiving there is cooperation.

In the zone of confronting and resistance there is conflict.

And in the zone of keeping and undergoing the relation-partners live beside each other, almost without any contact. The axes giving, keeping and confronting are positions wherein mostly the leader moves. Facing it are three positions (receiving, undergoing, resisting), these are the positions of the subordinates.

Seen from this model, leadership is thus the movement in the positions giving, keeping and confronting. This looks simple, but it is not so simple for a leader to always stay in these positions. One needs two very important elements: power and inner strength.

1. POWER: if the one seeking leadership has no power the subordinates will not accept him as boss. To speak with the terms of the axes-rose: they will not accept that someone at all times stands above the power-line (the line between the three positions giving, keeping and confronting on the one side and receiving, undergoing and resisting on the other side). There are different kinds of power through which one is accepted as a leader.

- formal power: the power given by the system, by the organisation wherein the boss and the subordinates are placed. It is the power the boss gets from his superiors and from the social context.

- sanction-power: this is the power someone has through the possibility to sanction someone (positive or negative).

- competence-power: is the power someone has when he is seen as competent for the task by the group of people which has to realise this task.

- information-power: is the power of the one who has a lot of information relevant to the task the group has to realise.

- referential-power: a boss has this kind of power when other people want to take example from him, want to be like him, want to be with him, etc. One says sometimes that someone like this has 'charisma'.



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Such power one has only in a certain area: thus an employer can have a lot of competence-power for nursing tasks, and none for psycho-social support-tasks. In the same way a boss gets only authority from his superiors on certain levels and his formal power on other levels is non-existent. Also the employer has only sanction-power in a certain area and in connection with a certain kind of work. And the same applies for information-power: everyone has only information on a certain level.

Concerning referential-power, it is less clear to prove that it applies only on a certain area.

A boss who gives leading for a task which is in the area where he has a lot of power is seldom under attack. Yet no leader is free from counter-reactions. Hence the second element, the inner strength, is needed to be a leader.

2. INNER STRENGTH: Even if the boss has enough power (a minimum of power is certainly necessary), he often gets opposition. In such a time he is very lonely. Even in times when he does not get opposition, he is in a very lonely, giving position. Hence the employer needs a lot of inner strength to be able to stay a leader. One could ask oneself: "Is it possible, when many subordinates protest against a boss, that he wins at the end? It is rather an unfair fight: one against many!" It may seem unlikely, but there is an important given in our culture that helps the boss: the subordinates are permitted to stand freely in the position 'resist', and this is very annoying for the employer, but in this position the employer still can make sure, although it is very difficult, that the task is realised. The employer does feel he is completely disapproved of and rejected, but if he has enough inner strength, and he can charge his batteries in time elsewhere, he can survive. But the subordinates can not be permitted to go above the authority-line themselves, for instance by attacking. It is indeed a cultural given that subordinates would not take this from each other. In other words, someone who attacks the leader takes a strong risk that everybody will turn against him. The underlying reason is that many people have a great need of a leader and feel unsafe when the position of the leader is under attack.



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