

On the efficiency/ effectiveness of experts

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We regularly ask participants of expert seminars how they judge their own effectiveness in their organisation (real influence/theoretically possible and meaningful influence regarding the issue at hand). The replies usually fluctuate between 5 and 80 %. This relatively small portion of personal expertise flows into the company's relevant decision-making processes. If one considers that in the age of a knowledge-based society the competitive-clinching difference, at least in the medium term, lies in the knowledge that is 'built in' to the business processes and products of the company, then the alarming meaning of this statement becomes apparent. A low rate of effectiveness of available knowledge represents a waste that is barely acceptable. Here are some possible reasons for it:

- Not every piece of knowledge of the expert in his company is relevant to the system all the time.
- It is not always necessary to consider every professionally solid, sound recommendation in decision-making situations, which are often ambiguous and complex as well as being full of dilemmas that need to be balanced out.
- Knowledge also remains unused to a great extent because problem-solvers and decision-makers have no total overall-view of the existing knowledge available in their circle.
- Experts are unable to estimate the relevance of their knowledge correctly because they are not sufficiently informed as to the management's strategic considerations and/or because they are too far removed from the problem-solving and decision-making processes that would be relevant for them.
- A considerable part of this 'waste' can also occasionally be attributed to the experts themselves, e.g. because they are unable (or don't want?) to participate actively and effectively or maybe also because they think (fairly naively) that the whole world must know about their personal knowledge potential and 'they' could turn to them whenever they liked. Institutional as well as personal approaches lend themselves to making more effective use of the expertise available within the company. Institutional approaches are, among other things, measures taken by the knowledge management such as certain forms of knowledge documentation (yellow pages or the like), development and expansion of expert networks or strategy and dialogue forums for the purpose of information, exchange and generating of knowledge. In addition, transparent and attractive career paths for experts are attractive, not only for reasons of motivation but also because highly qualified experts often switch to management, since status and salary are generally greater higher up along the line. In this way, a company can lose a valuable knowledge carrier and gain an average manager in return. Personal

approaches are above all personnel development measures. To these belong, among other things, assessments, thoughts on careers, personal development objectives, seminars as well as individual and group training. Qualification fields are specialist further training (e.g. because of the well-known 'half-life period of knowledge'), further training in methodical questions (e.g. work techniques, project management, team moderation, presentation techniques) as well as further training regarding the expert's necessary social, political and personal abilities and skills.

1. On the roles of experts and managers

Clarity and awareness about roles are usually important efficiency factors. Experts and managers alike occupy certain roles from which they operate. An important basis for organisations to function well is a the behavioural role of its members which is suitable, calculable and complementary to the assignment and objectives.

The role of managers is basically to make decisions so that ambiguity is dispensed with, making it possible to get on with goal-oriented work. However, the important decision-making situations are as a rule characterised by complexity and uncertainty.

There is no suitable algorithm for this and also no single 'correct'. Instead, the matter has to be assessed, which is risky since the manager is mostly not in a position to grasp completely the relevant bases of his decision and the probable results and side-effects. Yet he still has full responsibility. In order to be successful, the manager is dependent on the quality of the experts' decision-making preparation. Managers have to trust that their experts identify with the joint objective, and not just because they have been given the assignment but will also act if necessary on their own initiative, should they recognise chances or risks through their 'expert glasses'.

The expert's role is basically to inject relevant knowledge in a goal-oriented and effective way into the relevant decision-making process. Effectively means: at the right time, at the right place, with the right people and in the right manner. In principle experts construct complexity and managers then reduce it again through their (risky) decision. It is in this way that the interplay between the two complementary roles functions.

At the same time experts have to realise that their individual view is important, but it is of necessity one-sided. It is only the puzzle of individual expertises that leads to the decisive result, and even so there are still relevant decision-making aspects, e.g. of a strategic or political nature. However, this called-for modesty should on no account cause the individual expert to hold back on the issue itself. An aggressive bearing is just as important as being able to see further than the end of one's nose as far as one's expertise is concerned.

The concrete fields of conflict lie between the professional aspirations of the expert on the one hand and the economic or political objectives and parameters of the company on the other, e.g. keeping to costs and deadlines versus excellence and high quality. Such conflicts can arise from the contents of a customer-required specification or come into play 'live' within the framework of a decision-making meeting. The expert must try to find an appropriate balance in his behaviour between adamantly insisting on his own standards (is the price for the requested curtailments really clear to the decision-makers?) and holding back on his own demands for reasons of rank.

Occasionally experts demonstrate patterns of behaviour which reduce their effectiveness for the organisation. Their specialist view is (hopefully) discerning but it is partly very narrow. Some are disappointed and annoyed when their factually-based and well-founded suggestion is not included in the decision. They then react truculently and reduce their input. If the narrowness of the view is combined with huge ambition, another problem can easily arise, namely a destructive rivalry between varying part-expertises. Which standpoint is going to win through is then the question and actually (almost) regardless of the initial situation and the definitive objectives. The manager has to decide nevertheless, but his basis is then no longer neutral, perhaps it is merely the result of group-dynamic processes.

If, finally, an expert with false ambition encounters a rather uncertain and indecisive manager, it can easily come about in the end that it is not the executive's discernment but the one-sided biased intimations of the 'grey eminence' that are decisive. He/she then operates in the background and virtually slips into the leader-ship role.

On principle, experts should not force certain decisions or put something into somebody's mind but build suspense up by explaining options, conditions and correlations. Only thus can the real complexity 'out there' be realised and suitably dealt with by the manager. As a rule the tension arising through uncertainty and contingency is felt to be unpleasant and the need arises to regain certainty and alleviation of suspense by coming to a rapid decision. But if this need is given into too soon, the quality of the decision suffers. The results for the organisation are

unfavourable, sometimes fatal. Experts are therefore also duty-bound to sustain suspense for a while in order to give possible new and really innovative solutions a chance.

2. Necessary competences for the effectiveness of the expert

The expert's basis is of course his skill. The quality of his expertise (in terms of the concrete questions of the company) is therefore the main effect factor.

In order to be able to inject his expertise effectively into the relevant problem-solving and decision-making processes, he also needs social, political and personal abilities and skills. It is not only a question of being right oneself, it is also a question of asserting ideas as well as the concerted generating of innovations.

A basic knowledge in the areas of business economics, management and leadership is valuable so as to be able to dock on – with the prospect of success – to the relevant decision-makers and also to increase one's own knowledge and understanding respectively regarding pivotal decision-making criteria.

An elementary factor is the ability to make good personal contact with managers, decision-makers and other experts. That is a main requirement in order, on the one hand, to realise what strategic and other considerations currently prevail in the company, to which the expert could direct an important contribution, and on the other hand to become noticed and known personally.

Generally speaking, self-marketing is an important aspect in the work of effective experts. By this we mean the ability to make oneself and one's expertise noticed in a suitable way and in the right places, so that the company is aware of the resources available.

Being able to make contact and communicate go hand in hand. Effective experts can understand and make themselves understood. This is, for example, also necessary for discussions clarifying contracts and acquisitions.

A large part of the expert's work takes place in a team. Here it is important to convey one's own expertise to other experts and to combine it with the expertise of others, always keeping the objective in mind.

Since decisions are not only made rationally in the sense of higher-ranking objectives but are also always (more or less) determined by interests, the expert's micro-political skill gains in meaning. By this we mean the ability to see

through micro-political manoeuvres and when necessary to take the initiative and join in relevant decision-making processes so as to exercise influence there and then in a transparent and constructive manner. The expert is by his very role the advocate of rationality and objectivity in the decision-making process. That also means facing up to the obvious and not so obvious activities of others who have one-sided interests and can thus weaken the super-ordinate objective.