

## NEXT CULTURE WORK:

### Who am I in the Company? – Ideas about a Different Kind of Job Title.

In most of the companies an old traditional concept is applied, which is not really questioned. It is the concept of positions or jobs and related to that the concept of according titles of employees. Over the years certain names for specific job descriptions have been established in the business world, which are by now well-known by most of the business people: clerical assistant, developer, CEO, Technical Manager, Purchasing Manager, Key Account Manager, Press Officer, Chief of Marketing, etc. At first sight, it seems to be useful to entitle a certain task field and thus standardize the tasks. However, only few people seem to be aware of the fact how constricting standardized titles are and how they limit existing potential.

Standardized titles put employees automatically into certain drawers. If for example a person has the title “Clerical Assistant Materials Management”, they are limited to what they do according to their job description. In the specific case a clerical assistant has to work off e. g. small tasks and do a lot of paper work, but is in general not allowed to think visionary and apply extraordinary methods. This is different for somebody having the title “Purchasing Manager”. Already the spin of the title empowers the corresponding person to take over more responsibility and lead other employees. Yet there are numerous people with titles of seemingly high positions who have anything else but sustainable leader qualities, but think that they are allowed to reign and use power just because of their title.

Standardized titles support hierarchical thinking and competition. They are generally assigned by top management and have the purpose of categorizing employees. By using hierarchically assigned titles employees become measurable, because the higher the title, the higher is usually the salary.

In addition to that many people in companies seem to define themselves and identify with their titles. A title that is higher in hierarchy does generally not only mean more money on the account, but also more recognition. It is therefore not surprising that many employees strive for a higher title to get seemingly more recognition. An unconscious judgment oftentimes goes along with each standard title. A person with a higher hierarchical title is often paid more deference to. Many employees show for example more respect towards a CEO than towards a clerical assistant or assembly worker. This judgment also shows in modern society in the fact that the first question being asked when you get to know a new person is oftentimes: „So, what do you do for work?“ It is first of all about what a person HAS (money, possessions) and DOES (position, title, etc.). It is rarely about what a person IS. The essential being qualities of a person are not considered resp. completely forgotten.

In the business world there is a fierce hierarchical competition about positions and corresponding titles going on, which is sometimes played out pretty obviously (e. g. the recent example at VW) and oftentimes very subtle. If the chance of getting a glorious title is big, the incredible game of cutting chairs and ousting colleagues starts.

Yet standardized titles are anything else but glorious, because they are very much limited to logic and linearity. The title of a purchasing manager is for example in itself hierarchical and the corresponding employee mainly has the possibility to lead others in a linear way. The same also applies for other titles. Through the linearity standardized titles limit employees to the actual doing of a task so that the corresponding title owner becomes an easily replaceable resource. If an employee leaves the company it is very easy to advertise the same position with the corresponding ordinary title and put another person on this position. Through standardized titles people in companies become exchangeable, while the unique, the human qualities of being fall by the wayside.

Ordinary titles are usually carved in stone. The focus is on the professional competence scope that is assigned to a title and within which the employee is allowed to move. At the same time certain titles require a certain kind of acting. The title of a CEO or department leader does e. g. often mean that the person has to know everything, has to have things under control and is the lonely wolf at the top. A clerical assistant on the other hand is allowed to work to order, because they are for handling paper stuff.

Last but not least, ordinary titles are especially one thing: boring and dry.

And now? How could a different kind of title assignment look like? And what would extraordinary titles be like that describe how employees ARE in contrast to ordinary titles?

First of all take into consideration that it is possible to create titles that cannot be found on the form of the fiscal authorities. When choosing an extraordinary title, the focus is on the being qualities of an employee and on respecting them for what they ARE. Just by choosing the title the employee is empowered to bring in completely his talents and qualities in the company.

In contrast to ordinary titles, which are usually assigned by the management board, an extraordinary title is chosen by the employee and does not have any hierarchical reference at all. There are neither leaders, nor managers, nor CEOs. This idea could for many managers already sound like an apocalyptic nightmare, because what should they use for self-definition if not hierarchical power positions?

When starting the experiment with extraordinary titles, it is important to consider that the old hierarchical structures are deeply anchored in people. It would therefore not work to force employees to choose a new title on the spot. It is rather an experiment for bold pioneers, who are ready to create a different kind of working environment and to go forward. The other colleagues will follow in their own pace. A mid-sized company in the Franconian area of Germany has started this experiment in the bigger scope of reorganization and the results are stunning.

It all started with the question of an employee „Who am I in the company now that we restructure?“ (At this point it is necessary to mention that the restructuring is about changing from a hierarchical organization to a so called network or galactic organization).

In a one hour lasting process the employee distilled her actual being qualities that she brings into the company as well as her so called bright principles that support her work. This is a creative, non-linear, lead process empowering employees to take over responsibility and choose a title that is in accordance with them and at the same time has nothing to do with an ordinary title (e. g. an employee cannot pick the title „Manager“ or „Department Leader“ out of the blue). Here are some examples for extraordinary titles employees in the German company chose:

- Intersection Organizer
- People-Figure-and-Event-Coordinator
- Possibility Adventurer
- Evolution Architect
- Network Mediator
- Connection-and-Coordination-Designer
- Structure-and-Connection-Giver
- Possibility-Generating-Organizer
- Team-and-Production-Coordinator
- Possibility and Structure Smith
- Holistic-Awareness-Maker

Do you sense the different spin of these words? Extraordinary titles are inspiring and empowering. A “Structure-and-Connection-Giver” is for example something completely different than the former “clerical assistant archiving”. A Possibility Adventurer is something else than a classical CEO (and just to complete the story of the German company: in an employee meeting the CEO put down her official CEO title to dissolve the hierarchical structure even further and meet and talk with people on a level playing field. She even put the new title on her ID card. The CEO title is now only used for legal reasons in fiscal communication). An extraordinary title stands for a unique person with bright principles, talents and skills. Thus they are no longer a resource that can easily be exchanged, but a human unique.

An extraordinary title is not hierarchical and thus allows a game with more possibilities. It is flexible, wide and describes the being qualities of a person, i. e. how a person actually acts (in the sense of creating) and is in the company.

Such a kind of title describes the being and the potential of employees and enables them to actually bring in and develop their talents and act creatively and nonlinear. When having extraordinary titles, employees can no longer be put into a drawer and thus be made small or limited. The opposite is the case: new titles allow employees to take a stand for something bigger. You can sense this. Those who have already chosen a new, extraordinary title suddenly start unfolding and growing into their new roles. They radiate more, feel seen in their being and are much more inspired.

Worrywarts might now say that this is ridiculous and not stable with regard to e. g. customer acceptance. Well, the suggestion at this point is: Try it! In the mid-sized Franconian company the employees having chosen a new title, have not only put it into their digital email signature, but also

on their ID cards. The experience shows so far that the new titles are door-openers for interesting conversations. Since the employees can no longer be put into ordinary title-drawers, the human beings, the contact and the exchange comes again to the force.

Once again: This step is bold. And yes, there are employees, who do not want to take this step immediately, because the old structures are still very much anchored in them and it is too dangerous to leave the well-known territory. This is absolutely fine. When it comes to evolution there have always been some pioneers taking the first steps into the unknown before others could follow. This is also part of next culture work: new procedures are not forced by upper management, but evolve in the different teams.

In the following you find again an overview of the most important differences between an ordinary, hierarchical title and an extraordinary title describing being qualities.

Ordinary, hierarchical standard title	Extraordinary title
Hierarchical and assigned by upper management.	Not hierarchical. Personally chosen.
Height of salary is connected to the title.	Salary is no longer connected to the title.
Employees define themselves and the amount of recognition via the title. The higher the title, the higher the recognition.	Employees define themselves by their unique qualities of being.
Supports competition.	Supports teamwork and community.
Makes employees small.	Empowers employees to take responsibility.
Withdraws power, because the responsibility for the title is not with the employee.	Gives power, because the employee chooses the title themselves responsibly.
The title owner is a resource that is easy to replace.	Makes the title owner a unique person with individual bright principles, favors, talents and skills, who is therefore not easy to replace.
Can cause confusion, e. g. a CEO can lead through different departments such as sales, organization, technical department etc. The purpose is often not clear and leaves the counterpart in the fog.	Gives clarity about what is.
Is randomly authentic.	Is completely authentic.
Is rather carved in stone and limits.	Gives freedom and can be changed.

Ordinary, hierarchical standard title	Extraordinary title
The title "Leader of ...." is in itself hierarchical and offers mainly the possibility of leading in a linear way.	The new title is not hierarchical and enables a new game with more possibilities.
Only describes the doing according to the predefined job description.	Describes the being qualities, i. e. how an employee actually is and creates in the company.
Allows employees to only act in the scope of their professional competence that is connected to the title.	Allows employees to actually bring in their true talents and visions.
Is rigid and limiting.	Is flexible and wide.
Is limited to logic and linearity.	Allows development and non-linearity.
Is dry and boring.	Is inspiring, creative and empowering.
Having an ordinary title, the employee is immediately put into a known "drawer" by colleagues and customers. The human being is not considered.	The new title describes the being and potential of the employee and is a door-opener for interesting conversations. The human being comes to the force.

Are you ready for this extraordinary experiment?

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*Hint:*

*You find more about "New Work" in the book „Edgeworker: Beyond Leadership – It is Time for the Management-(R)Evolution!" from Nicola Nagel and Patrizia Servidio.*

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