

Change of Perspective: Concerns instead of Goals or Interests

Today, working goal-oriented has become so self-evident that we often consider it the only possible promising way of working, especially in a business context. Yet this is only a child of modernity, of rationalism; most recently, the goals also had to be SMART. A very successful concept on which our current success and prosperity is based. And its crisis.

Because this way of thinking has premises that often do not correspond to today's reality, too complex, uncertain, contradictory, open are the situations and processes in which action must be taken. It must be possible to define goals in a meaningful way, otherwise goal thinking quickly becomes dysfunctional and expensive, as the daily change zigzag in companies shows. It is true that things seem to be easier to "get a grip" on with goals, since precise goal setting, planning, implementation and control promise the longed-for security and efficient progress. But only as long as things don't get too complex and nothing unforeseen happens, because then blockades, conflicts, crises, crashes occur. Open processes cannot be reinterpreted as closed processes in the long run: the unforeseen is their essence. And: open processes cannot be controlled, only mastered!

In addition, the pursuit of goals must not cause too much damage, which then has to be "repaired" in a second step, when they can no longer be ignored. Be it the rampant stress and burnout of the individual, be it the accelerated crisis susceptibility of the whole, many of today's difficulties are based on the over-focusing of goal thinking, i.e. the blinkers of conclusive-optimized planning that "overcomes" all obstacles by fighting or fading them out.

In certain areas, however, a less goal-oriented, but instead strongly interest-oriented way of working is also common. For example, in grassroots, participatory organizations such as many educational institutions, independent schools and NGOs. Or in politics, when it is primarily about achieving majorities, and in administration, when the application of law according to the aspects of equality and justice is in the foreground. Or in systemic consulting work, which, especially in its early days, was in danger of hardly advancing the cause because of all the circular movements. In all these cases, the change of perspective consists in moving from the strongly emphasized level of interests, power, values or relationships - without reducing them - to a stronger focus on the matter at hand, thereby releasing a directed dynamic of togetherness. Because ultimately, in all these areas, the purpose of the work is to (jointly) shape the respective circumstances.

The concern-oriented approach combines the best of both worlds. It works with concerns instead of goals, a concept that retains many of the advantages of goal thinking but avoids its disadvantages. And it takes on the important concerns of the interest perspective, such as participation or equity. In a nutshell, concerns are "directed togetherness," i.e., orientations that do not negate the context in which they stand, but include it. In this way, they can be similarly directed and dynamic as goal concepts, but remain connected. And through the constant feedback in the togetherness (harmony), a "navigating on sight" along the concern is created.