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ROLE – A MISUNDERSTOOD CONCEPT

We all play roles

The role is a concept from sociology. On one hand it describes the range of behavior of the roll holder in a certain situation. On the other hand, it expresses the expectations of the environment towards the roll holder. A successful role occupation thus harmonizes the definition of the role holder with the expectations of the environment. Many people reject the concept because they confuse it with acting and lack of authenticity. Thus, we constantly fill roles without realizing it. We are our parents' child, mother/father of our children, friends and colleagues. And we show different aspects of our personality in all these roles. When we take on a role, we determine what we show of ourselves and thus remain authentic. Roles simplify group events by defining behavioral probabilities and limit moments of surprise. Defined roles in the company thus simplify the contact with colleagues. They offer protection and security.

Role as a topic in coaching

In corporate reality, the role concept seems to have lost popularity. Hierarchies are deliberately broken down in order to facilitate communication across different levels. In addition to advantages, this approach also brings disadvantages. Role confusion and unclear responsibilities are a burden on employees. Since unclear roles also mean that the behavioral probabilities are unclear, people have to constantly negotiate their relationship with others in their everyday work. This keeps them busy with demarcation and (unconscious) role definition, which is tiring. These are frequent topics in coaching. For example, managers are often concerned with defining their leadership role and developing a personal understanding of leadership. The new understanding must then be communicated internally to various stakeholders and implemented. This will reintroduce the roles. A good mixture of renewing outdated concepts and preserving their positive aspects is urgently needed.