

Surrounded by idiots

This is the title of a book by Thomas Ericson. It is about our everyday struggles with diversity. Why do we often find it so difficult to accept other people for who they are without devaluing them or being afraid?

Peter Näf

Thomas Erikson approaches the topic using the DISC personality profile. This divides the different characteristics of people into four basic types, each of which is assigned a colour. As I explained in the article «Why I don't use personality tests», I find it difficult to categorise people in this way. Nonetheless, reading the book is a win and thanks to its humorous exaggerations a pleasure.

People are different

To describe the human personality, I prefer a mixture of Friedemann Schulz von Thun's value square and Daniel Ofman's core qualities model; both are based on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics.

In summary, the model states the following: People have strengths that turn into weaknesses under pressure. To compensate, they must therefore develop a complementary strength to avoid falling into the trap of their own weakness. And finally, people are allergic to the exaggeration of complementary strengths. Everything clear?

An example: An active person becomes impatient under pressure, which is a weakness. His development potential therefore lies in the complementary strength of patience. This prevents him from falling into the trap of his own weakness, i.e. becoming impatient.

Everyone thinks everyone else is an idiot

Patience - a strength - turns into passivity under pressure; a weakness to which the active person reacts allergically. He has no understanding for this, as inactivity does not exist in his world of experience. He assumes that there is something wrong with his temporarily passive fellow human being - so he must be an idiot.

The naturally patient person, on the other hand, reacts allergically to the exaggeration of his complementary strengths of activity, i.e. to impatience - a characteristic that does not exist in his world. The impatient (normally active) person is therefore not entirely in the right mind for the patient person - so he too is an idiot. To make matters worse, both players - the active and the patient - often interpret the occasional exaggeration of the other person as malice and take it personally.

Much would be gained if we humans knew our strengths, weaknesses and allergies better and did not see the irritating behaviour of our fellow human beings as bad intentions. Instead, we could recognise it as a temporary overload that has nothing to do with us. And if we also recognised that we too behave in ways that are impossible for others under pressure, we could treat each other with more respect.

After all, life would be terribly boring without our fellow idiots.

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