

Cornelius Riese

**Employer
Attractiveness
and Leadership**

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Employer Attractiveness and Leadership

An Impetus

Translated from
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1. Motivation

Employer attractiveness is the central prerequisite for the success of organizations of any kind. In the truest sense of the word, it is of fundamental importance for overcoming strategic and everyday challenges.

Good leadership, in turn, is the basis – and therefore the necessary condition – for a sustainably high level of attractiveness as an employer. Both aspects are inextricably linked.

For many decades, this insight led an often anecdotal and nearly scientific niche existence. It is only with the concrete visibility of demographic change and the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic that it is becoming common knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that there still seems to be a lack of implementation in many places.

The aim of this book is to provide food for thought on how employer attractiveness and leadership can be shaped both institutionally and individually.

Meanwhile, numerous how-to books have been written in this field. They often claim to be universal, boasting a high level of conceptual coherence. However, when reading them, I

regularly had doubts as to whether structure, systematics and checklists are the best formats for learning about this topic.

In this respect, this publication is not intended as a source of advice, but as a source of inspiration – an impetus. Everyone may find their own personal connection, be it from a particular statement or a marginal facet, as inspiration for thought, reflection and personal development.

In my own professional role, I have been able to deal intensively with the topics of employer attractiveness and leadership, especially in recent years. In the first step, I therefore present my personal experiences in a concise and alphabetized form.

One question immediately arises from this: How useful, how representative and how applicable are these findings to other sectors and institutions? Against this background, the second step will be a reflection – or, to put it more soberly, a quality assurance.

I am very grateful that renowned entrepreneurs and business leaders have agreed to reflect on my “alphabet” and share their experiences and recommendations. What all the interviewees have in common is that I was able to get to know them in different contexts and was impressed by their work.

On the one hand, from family entrepreneurs to employed managers, they constitute a heterogeneous group, differing for example in terms of industry affiliation, age, gender, character and functions. On the other hand, a certain homogeneity in terms of the representation of large, established companies was equally apparent to me.

Beyond this publication, it may be of interest in the future to include the insights of managers from other areas of society, be it politics, the military, science or the start-up environment.

2. **The Alphabet of Employer Attractiveness and Leadership**

An alphabet is something fundamental – like a periodic table of language, so to speak. The letters are the elements. In this respect, it provides a framework that is suitable for a structured representation of a phenomenon and enjoys frequent literary use.

Be that as it may, one could argue that such a framework risks seducing an author into making arbitrary choices, forcing a search for terms merely for the sake of using up letters whether they are suitable or not.

For my part, however, the alphabetical structure has helped me to summarize my observations, experiences and findings on employer attractiveness and leadership. It starts with “coaching”!

► **Coaching**

An elementary component of leadership is to support team members in their personal growth, thus fulfilling their tasks

in the organization more effectively, and enabling them to take on more. This support can take various forms: questioning their approaches, giving pointers on their personal impact, making your own networks available to them. The term may be a bit hackneyed, but this coaching is also a form of empowerment.

An often-observed, undesirable law of anti-proportionality: the higher the level of management, the lower the amount of feedback and coaching from the next higher level.

A desirable law of proportionality: the higher the level of management, the greater the proportion of coaching activities for the team (and the lower the proportion of detailed technical work).

A phenomenon in many organizations: leadership support usually limits itself to the workplace – and yet practical advice at the interface between the private and professional spheres (e.g., life organizing and personal resilience) is often held in particularly high regard by employees.

► Commitment

People have a keen sense of what drives others: selfishness or the big picture? The best judges are the fans in football stadiums. Ask them! Which is more important – what's on the back of the jersey (the player's name) or what's on the front (the club)?

A manager's personal credibility depends on an unequivocal and unambiguous commitment to “their” team – that is, their organization.

It is often more difficult to remain loyal in situations of professional frustration. However, there is hardly anything more damaging for everyone involved than flirting with leaving your entrusted team – even once – and making these feelings known.

► Communication

Many rhythms shape the course of an organization's year. The calendars for financial committees are well established, and dates for supervisory board meetings are planned years in advance. In contrast, a comparable rigor for communication between employees and managers is lacking in many companies, even though it is urgently needed.

This regularly leads to a conflict of interests: Direct communication with the workforce (digital or physical) is rightly demanded, shows appreciation and approachability, and is particularly effective. This is all the more true, as cascading communication across hierarchical levels usually does not work and does not penetrate the “layers of clay”. The consequences of this are unequal levels of information and resigning to the sad realization that “you can only really find everything out through the grapevine”.

On the other hand, it is essential to involve managers in the information sharing processes in order to gain support and avoid surprises. You cannot avoid conflicts of interest; you can only manage them. Use all the instruments at your disposal in a well-planned and coordinated manner.

Another insight from recent years is that internal communication channels, such as a lively intranet (with a comment function), are central to corporate culture. Upper management should take at least as much care with internal communications on strategic issues or issues that affect the workforce as it does with its report to the Supervisory Board.

► Corporate values

Almost all organizations, especially companies, have a strategy and extensive planning tools. Even if planning is often little more than replacing pure chance with calculated error, it provides orientation as to which direction to take.

Do you then have to deal with “softer” issues, such as an abstract corporate vision or corporate values? Comments frequently heard in practice: “Yes, a process like this was carried out a few years ago (the older ones still remember).” “I can still roughly remember some of the results. At some point, however, it fell asleep.”

The hurdle for company management to address these issues is quite high. Possible reactions: “Aha, now they’ve organized one of these silly training sessions again.” “That won’t work, anyway. Don’t we have anything more important to do?” You are immediately suspected of management esotericism.

Nevertheless, it’s worth the effort: without formulated corporate values, for example, how can you ...
... set standards of behavior and resolve conflicts?

... measure the progress of the organization in qualitative performance dimensions?

... ensure a cultural fit when selecting managers?

... build a credible employer brand?

The dilemma of how: a decentralized (“bottom-up”) approach runs the risk of self-employment in hundreds of workshops, while a centralized (“top-down”) approach poses the challenge of a lack of anchoring and acceptance among the workforce. A possible middle way: pragmatic development by the management team using suggestions from company focus groups (e.g., junior staff) and external parties with a good view of the external image of the organization (e.g., brand agencies).

► Decision-making

Leadership is a service for an organization. The core of this service is decision-making. Nothing paralyzes an organization more than managers who are unwilling or unable to make decisions.

Particularly frequent and extremely damaging in organizations are “hot potato” issues, which exist in horizontal and vertical forms.

Horizontal: An unpleasant topic – difficult to decide, many advantages, but also significant disadvantages – is tossed back and forth at the middle management level. Nobody wants to be responsible. Everybody has pertinent tips. Nobody wants to communicate the issue to the relevant managers. Time passes. Resources are wasted.