

# For the leaders' sake

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## From answers to questions

A leader must know why she does and says things. The purpose is the most important guiding light of the actions of a leader. But many of us made the experience that what we expected when we initiated an interaction with our teams did not actually come true. The team did not really understand what the core idea of our request or initiative was. The purpose is there, but somehow the message is misunderstood.

by Tommi Gustafsson

Peter Drucker wrote a long time ago that for a manager, it is more important to ask good questions than to come up with good answers and explanations. Questions create a thinking process and a deeper understanding, which can lead to commitment and an intrinsic motivation to act.

### Ten effective tools for leading people

Strong commitment and intrinsic motivation to act, to implement a change or to fight for a difficult project is only born through personal insight and choice. Therefore, we need to give our team the necessary insights so that they can choose to commit themselves.

To help out leaders in need of a proven way to achieve understanding with their team, we have developed ten practical tools for asking good questions and creating insight. These tools are based on our experience from decades of managerial development and we have found them to work well in different cultures (although they may help with different things in different cultures). They are suitable for different management levels (see box). The core idea of the tools is to move from an answer-based management, giving directions and telling people which steps need to be taken, to a question-based management that requires the people to think. Processing the hard questions together with colleagues and the manager gives everyone a chance to understand the chosen solutions on a deeper level, with deeper commitment.

## Make people participate

To show how these methods can improve your leadership work, we picked out two and explain them in a bit more detail in the following. With the »self evaluation« tool, one moves from a situation where only the manager gives feedback on a performance, to a process where the team members are also asked to evaluate their own performance. They are asked to think about development areas and what they want to learn. This makes a huge difference for the participants, as they feel more present, involved and motivated and this will lead to an equally huge difference in future results.

The OPERA tool is another example. If you want to improve any meeting in which you work on a complex question with many different opinions, use the first step of the five-stage OPERA process. Ask everyone to write down their own thoughts on the issue in silence on a piece of paper. Take three to five minutes for this task. After that it is easy to involve everybody in a good dialogue. If you want to improve the process even further, use the second step: form pairs that discuss the issues before the common dialogue. These steps work well with any group, across cultures and hierarchies.

There is a similar story behind all ten tools. They are a practical way to change your own behavior in important situations and at the same time influence the behavior of others in a positive way. The core ability that managers learn when they move to the question-based style is to process issues together with their people, using the brains of the whole team. This collection of tools is called the »Processive Leadership Approach.« ●

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»Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then help to orchestrate the energy of those around you.«

Peter Drucker

## Ten effective leadership tools

### 1 QUESTIONS

Good questions involve the whole group.

- ▶ To challenge activities, guide independent development, create common understanding.

### 2 EMPATHETIC LISTENING

A coaching approach.

- ▶ Increases the manager's understanding about her group's thinking and people feel they matter.

### 3 THIRST – WATER

Questions concerning an important topic.

- ▶ To create a need and will for change and then plan concrete activities.

### 4 SCALES

Make a +/- analysis of a topic visible.

- ▶ One way of processing resistance to change and laying the foundation for a decision (see page 29).

### 5 GROUP MEMORY

Make the common thinking process visible for all and guide it.

- ▶ Makes a common process more effective, we are on the »same page.«

### 6 MENTAL PROCESSING

Plan a leadership situation.

- ▶ Results in a manuscript for leading people.

### 7 OPERA

Most effective participative meeting tool.

- ▶ Create a common solution to a problem and the commitment to carry it out.

### 8 SELF EVALUATION

A guided process for evaluating actions.

- ▶ The group takes responsibility for their actions and improves them in the future.

### 9 DRIVING PILES

Direct someone toward taking responsibility if the self-evaluation does not work.

- ▶ Support the person in taking responsibility for their own actions.

### 10 MAP

Plan for longer mental processes.

- ▶ To maintain long-term focus, energy and commitment to something important.