

Manuskript

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5...

Wey

A Plea against Identity

Within transforming society and the transforming market economy every development of companies and organizations is directly connected with global markets and the global society. In addition, the economic, environmental, sociological, psychological and political interdependencies and impacts require both a systemic review and systemic cultivation of development. When consulting for and structuring national or international, government or free-market organizations, the term "identity" always plays a role. This paper questions the meaning and the scope of "identity", and reassesses it: a proposal.

We Ourselves

In the course of its human resources development, a major German financial services provider aims to create a slogan to increase the „we“-feeling. To this end several employees take part in a brainstorming session. Five statements are finally selected:

"We are never satisfied."

"We always want to be better."

"We never stand still."

"Good service - our advantage."

"Our service - our future."

These statements, reflecting on the "we" of the company all deal with "we" or "us". Naturally. Like coming to terms with oneself, being occupied with oneself, as a challenge to oneself.

From the systemic perspective questions arise:

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Is it really a matter of "we" as "self" ?

Is it a matter of internal identity ?

Is it a matter of fortifying a fort ?

The following is intended as a response to the double question:

What remains of us in this total customer orientation ?

And

How do we reach our customers while being totally occupied with ourselves ?

Service

The term "service" is mentioned in the statements above that intend to strengthen the "we" feeling. For a number of years this term has served as a key word in the complex of service / customer service / customer orientation. The concept of "service" probably intends to solidify the "we" for the benefit of the customer. Let us assume that this intention has presently become the norm. (In reality, customer orientation has not really arrived in Germany. But that is another matter.)

The suggested statements, however, give an impulse to think beyond the previously attained understanding of "service".

Is customer orientation everything ? Could customer-orientation be a one-way street ? Or even a dead-end ?

Where do we go from here ? How do we get from today to tomorrow ?

Today

The dynamics of data networks have the greatest impact on the current situation of markets and society. We speak of the information society. Potentially, **every one of us can be reached at any time at any place by anyone** and, potentially, **every one of us can know about everything and everyone**. Realising this, the concept of "identity" has to be questioned.

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Boundary

These almost limitless opportunities for people in market economies do not suggest limitlessness. But, the concept of boundaries changes and therefore transforms the meaning of all concepts on either side of borders:

I, you, we, they, self, different, own, foreign ...

An analogy might throw some light on this. A stone lies amidst other stones on a stony bank, dark, smooth and heavy. The uniqueness of this stone lies in a thin white line that runs around it like the waterline on a ship. Unlike the waterline of the ship painted on its surface, it is not on the stone, but runs through it, a thin layer of mineral.

A bordering layer. Does this border serve to separate or to connect the two parts on either side of it? Are these even parts? Is not the whole stone a stone?

This analogy could aid us in overcoming polarized thinking: We/they, employer/employee, man/woman, right/wrong, subordinate/superior, service provider/customer, client/consultant, domestic/foreign, rich/poor,

Peter Brook, the renowned dramatist, said, while standing at the edge of the stage, "The event is the audience." With respect to the organizational and personal development of service providers this would mean:

The service provider is their customer.

Yes, this is where things must lead. Defining oneself: not through boundaries, not through being special, not through strength, not through the USP, not through uniqueness or preferential treatment, but out of connectedness, out of context, out of community, out of love and attention, out of the the definition of the other. The other defines me.

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The difference between myself and the other connects and defines us.

"A contrasting couple, standing opposite to each other, forms a plane on which there must be common language – otherwise one would not be able to determine that one is standing opposite to the other." (Urs Heckmann in "Die Burg als Marktplatz" / "The Castle as Marketplace", Hahnenklee 4/99)

The Other

To further examine the concept of "identity," let us consider the following thesis:

Someone who can be reached at all times at any place by everyone else is (almost) everyone else.

Whoever is able to know everything about everybody else is (almost) everybody,

When all others can know everything about one, all others are (almost) the one.

Does this sound appalling? Does it sound as if identities dissolve. Relax: identity cannot dissolve. Identity is, however, subject to constant expansion and transformation. Staying within identity without questions breeds isolation and isolation breeds fear.

But, when people are able to open themselves to this holistic identification with the other, the fear dissipates, a sense of liberation may even set in. Because whoever is (almost) the other, can see himself with the eyes of the other, can look at himself, can see himself as the other, can allow the other in himself, can accept the curiosity for the other, can allow himself to be distracted from self-doubt, freed from constantly driving oneself, freed of the constant need to win, can even applaud himself.

This is not dissolving identity. On the contrary, it is deepening, expanding, renewing identity as development, as

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change, as obligation, as responsibility, as a response to
the other.

Responsibility

There is yet another important factor in the examination of "identity". This is the statistical fact that sometime toward the end of this decade, perhaps today, maybe yesterday, the world population will reach a level where the number of persons living exceeds the number of those who have ever lived (Bernd Guggenberger, Die Beliebigkeit der Dinge, Munich, 1995). What does this mean in respect to the question of identity ?!

For the first time the dead are in a minority. We who are now living are the absolute majority. We could grab control. At least we should take over responsibility. The guilt of the dead can no longer be used as an alibi. The old excuses based on genealogical-linear developments are obsolete. The majority of those living determine as a world-coalition the values in such a manner that a claim may be placed on every value; any value can be represented and questioned and redefined by any living person, anytime, anywhere. (Rest assured, I am as well thinking on my sisters in the suburb of Calcutta.) This leaves neither room nor need for polarizing opposites on either side of a boundary. We, the living, are left to our own devices. Separation and connection break down at the border.

Unity of Differentness

Unity of Diversity

"What remains of us, in this total customer orientation?" and "How do we reach our customers while being totally preoccupied with ourselves ?" were questions from the era of separating borders and linear communication. When boundaries connect as well as separate, then it is not a matter of here and there, not of we and you, but rather a matter of the distinction within the unit, it is a matter of unity in the network of complex structures.

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As a metaphor for this understanding of the unity of we/they, I propose creating a word as a brand:

Wey. The wey, to wey, weying, weyable.

The wey company, the wey administration/management, the wey schooling, the weying college, the wey campaign, weying principles, weying personal development, weyable thinking.

This means, depending on the time and those involved, allowing the concept to develop, to transform, to be shown. There is no recipe. But there are examples. And there are occasions.

By the way, as long as a person talks about himself, naturally, there will always be a response from the other side, about itself, equally naturally.

"We are never satisfied."

"Oh my god, what a stress !"

"We always want to be better."

"You'll never be good."

"We never stand still."

"You're always searching, and never find anything."

"Where on earth are you ?"

"Good service – our advantage."

"What about my advantage ?"

"Our service – our future."

"Yeah, but you're missing the present."

About the author: Florian Fischer, Berlin, co-founder and past managing partner of "MetaDesign" and "Fischer & Scholz, Corporate Communication" is working today independent as consultant to innovation and transformation processes. E-mail: florianfischer@ff-wey.com

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Karlfried Graf Dürckheim

Sumi -e

Black & white picture from the world of Zen

(Taken from Karlfried Graf Dürckheim: Ton der Stille

N. F. Weitz Verlag, 1986, pg 47)

On a limb sits a bird; hanging in nothingness.

The shape of the bird and the limb

Determine the shape of the nothingness, the counter-form.

The life comes from their form,

Which the bird and the limb, that hang in nothingness

have at the moment.

It is always this counter-form which surrounds us,

That determines our form,

And this in turn gives our form life.

With our shape we are responsible for the counter-form

And the harmony or disharmony

Which it has with us.

From our way, of being

Stems the way,

In which everything which surrounds us,

The waylessness enters into us or,

Because an opposing awareness seeks,

To remain hidden.