

Interim management: authentic leadership

Lenzburg, 2014, Heinz Sommer¹

Authentic leadership is the greatest challenge facing management

By virtue of their function, managers, whether interim managers or permanent employees, are necessarily embedded in a company's structures and often lack the freedom to develop their own personalities. They are obliged to align themselves with the company's system and organism. And the longer their tenure the greater the similarities with other managers in terms of leadership behaviour. Interim managers are subject to this same risk, but on a lesser scale due to the temporary nature of their roles. For a manager to be as independent as is necessary, they must work constantly to develop their own personality. However, the aforementioned development should not be confused with the required and completely natural process of embedding in the corporate culture. And whilst there is absolutely no doubt that personal integration into the corporate culture and its corresponding values is important, achieving this does not involve surrendering the individual's personality.

Congruent thinking-speaking-action

Maintaining the necessary independence as a person and as a manager requires absolutely solid congruence. "Congruence" is synonymous with similarity or equivalence. A manager is only credible and authentic when they are congruent in how they think, speak and act. Developing this congruence requires continuous and consistent work on one's own personality at all three levels. Many managers believe that they can acquire said congruence through management training, or even that they are natural born managers. Regular self-reflection would help highlight existing gaps and create space for development. All those who interact with other people, especially managers, must be conscious of the fact that what they think and say, as well as how they act, heavily influences people management and development.

Thinking

As regards the first level – thinking – people are exposed to many external influences and factors in their daily lives. Thanks to modern means of communication, we are all confronted with a massive, constant flood of information. This has a considerable impact on how we think and how we form personal opinions. Which thoughts are truly our own, and which are the result of external influences? This question is the starting point for change and the

correct approach to developing your personal congruence. Conscious, independent thought can only occur when you are aware of and make a deliberate effort to differentiate within the relationship to your own observations. This must be in place prior to actual thought and the arrival of external influencing factors. This applies to everything to which people are exposed externally. Individual thought can, therefore, only develop when a situation or fact is translated into a personal observation. Observation focuses your thoughts on the fact or situation, and induces conscious analysis. This is especially true for managers when making business decisions, and even more so if these decisions affect employees. After making a decision, the manager can address the resulting consequences in a completely different way if they have approached it with conscious, uninfluenced thinking regarding the fact or situation.

Speaking

The second level – speaking – is where the observation or analysis of a fact or situation and the resulting thoughts are put into the appropriate words and communicated. When it comes to speaking, everyone should ask themselves: does what I'm saying still align with my own thoughts? Managers are often swayed by external factors in a company, such as their managers' or colleagues' opinions, and feel compelled to subordinate themselves to a specific fact or situation. People look for the optimum response rather than trying to express their own thoughts. They do so either to avoid harming their careers or so as not to hurt anyone. Of course, some believe that thoughts are free, so it makes no difference whatsoever how you think, speak and act. This is untrue and prompts a sudden break in congruence for the personality in question. Although the impact may not be immediately apparent, sooner or later it will be noticed by third parties and will thus lead to a breach of trust among the respective employees. One example of this would be subsequent statements such as "I would never support this decision personally, but at the time I wasn't in a position to express my personal opinion". If we give in to the latent human fear of making a mistake and perhaps damaging our career, or if we shy away from confrontation with employees, our personality will remain unchanged. It takes an enormous amount of self-discipline to express your own thoughts using the right words so as to remain congruent and thus authentic. Surely no easy task, but an absolutely essential one if there is to be any change in your own personality and role as manager.

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Action

The logical next step after thinking and speaking, sooner or later, is some form of corresponding action. From an external perspective (employees, line managers etc.), the implementation of this step is the only measure of whether the manager is congruent in their thinking and speaking, at least from the perspective of those affected. What those external parties cannot see is the congruence between thinking, speaking and action. This is a matter for the manager alone. If there is any discord between thinking and speaking then there can be no question of the manager's congruence and authenticity, at least from the point of view of the person affected. Generally speaking, everyone has a personal sense of this congruence, but this is not sufficient for the purposes of further development and consolidation. To determine whether you are congruent as a person or as a manager, you need to consistently analyse your prior observations and subsequent thoughts regarding a fact or situation. Unlike other analyses, this assessment takes place at meta-level. This means that the person must analyse the entire process from the perspective of a neutral third party in order to reach an impartial conclusion. Simply running through this analysis demands discipline and regular practice, so that not everything ends in criticism or self-praise. The insights acquired through this analysis should be consolidated in the form of good intentions for the future. One good method to achieve this is to carry out a *review*² at the end of each day. In your head, run over the entire day again in reverse (takes around 4 to 5 minutes) and closely scrutinise your own thinking, speaking and actions. The idea is not to criticise yourself but to reflect on your own thinking, speaking and actions. Identify points where you were not successful and determine to do better next time. Your goal should be a continuous learning process that allows you to further develop your personality – wanting to work on yourself becomes second nature.

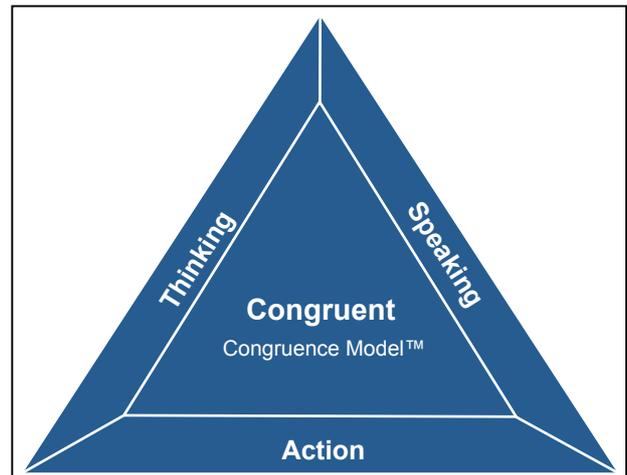
Conclusions

Congruence cannot be achieved through the mastery and application of learned methods or standards, such as those offered by today's management schools; it is based instead directly on individual personalities. Congruence becomes a personal yardstick for measuring your own thinking, speaking and actions, as well as how each person deals with themselves and with their direct environment. Developing your own congruence in thinking, speaking and action demands a high level of discipline and self-control. The personal rewards for this are

strength in thought and will, inner peace, serenity, stability, balance, purity and clarity within yourself and in your interactions with other people. Credibility and authenticity emerge both internally and externally.

Congruence Model™

As a manager, consciously working on your own congruence and authenticity is a life-long process.



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1) *Heinz Sommer is long-standing interim manager and CEO at companytransfer AG. Founded in 2008, the company specialises in life science interim management services. For more information visit the company website www.companytransfer.ch.*

2) *Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Ein Weg zur Selbsterkenntnis des Menschen [A Road to Self Knowledge,], complete edition no. 16, 2004 edition*