

THORKILD OLSEN

BOOK  
EXCERPT

# Recognition

- get your head  
in the game!

 GYLDENDAL

Recognition - get your head in the game!

By Thorkild Olsen

© 2009 Gyldendalske Boghandel,  
Nordisk Forlag A/S, Copenhagen

Editor: Frederikke Larsen

Illustrations: Katharina Havig Solnørdal

Redesign of this edition: Jonas Raagaard, Edvard/Emil Grafisk Design

Set in: Lino Letter & Josefin Sans

ISBN: 978-87-93543-03-4

1st edition, 1st impression. Printed in Denmark

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To Allan

# Foreword

**Let me say it right from the start:** There are many who are tired of the word recognition. They're tired of not being able to speak frankly, of having to phrase things politely and considerately. They are managers, who've tried to get an unstable employee to do their job by giving them continued praise and appreciation – only to experience that the employee actually became more hostile and colleagues annoyed at the situation. I'm aware of the paradoxes. There are countless examples that have led to a steady flow of op-eds and articles criticising recognition for being a soft-hearted, misunderstood therapeutisation of the workplace. With this book, I go against the flow. There is nothing wrong with the concept or the methods themselves. Rather than offering cheap criticism, this book sends out a challenge to us all: Get your head in the game!

Recognition is about existence. Recognition is necessary in order for each of us to be able to stand firmly on two feet in a life characterised by resilience and a feeling of who we are. A closer look at the word recognition reminds us of this: that each acquisition, each personal learning and development attaches itself to recognition. Recognition is a prerequisite. The stories and examinations of these used in this book build upon the existential meaning of recognition: Recognition must be present in every human relationship. This also applies to a workplace where well-being, self-esteem, learning and development are promoted. There's no way around it!

What's great about acknowledging methods is that they are generally very easy to understand. They manifest themselves as common sense and reflect ways of interacting that most people can agree upon. This makes it all the more frustrating when these methods seem difficult to put into practice.

How can common sense ideas be so hard to put into practice? Sometimes, this is because recognition is applied as if it was a miracle cure. Other times, it's because we overlook the fundamental fact that we can't all agree on what constitutes common sense. Acknowledging methods become nothing but candy floss, which we simply gobble up. Even stretching them out into the same size and shape, despite our wish for something different.

So why not make it 'easier' to put into practice? There are special opportunities hidden in the methods that can actually magnify what we already know as acknowledgement. As soon as we

recognise it, then it will become much easier for us to grab hold of it and do so much more with it. This desire to do much more with it and ensure this way of collaborating in the future will instantly become clear. Acknowledgement and recognition can be used actively by managers. When you try to initiate a change of approach using a specific tool or a specific method, you can also try making it part of the exercise to consider the way this tool/method magnifies what we recognise as acknowledgement. Or not, as the case may be. The door will then be open for the all-important dialogue: "What can we do to magnify what we know as acknowledgement?" and "How can we continue to focus on keeping our endeavours alive?" The point is that we never reach our goal. So let's be content with always doing our best and moving in the right direction.

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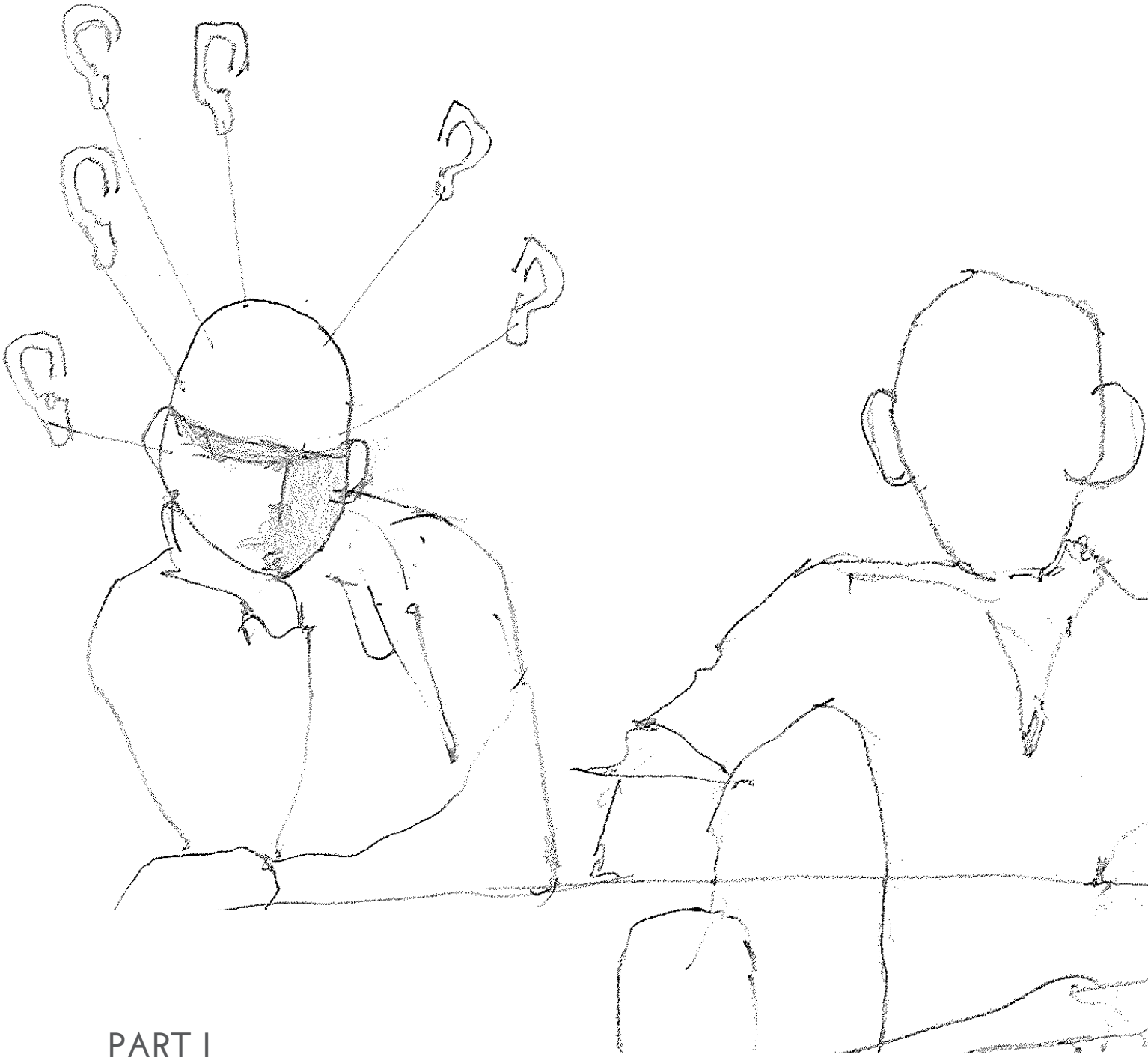
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PART I

# My path to acknowledging methods

There's too much recognition in the workplace. At least, that's what you can read in various op-eds and newspaper columns. Employees have become hooked on getting their recognition

fix. Whereas before there was not enough recognition, now there's too much. If it was right before, now it's being used incorrectly. The current 'hot' topic in communication and management is about the harmful effects of acknowledging methods, which, it should be noted, are simply 'too much' or frankly 'unhealthy'.

And I'm sitting here, stretched to breaking point. What actually kick-started this book was observing how everything that should have been so good simply soured and got so bad. But I still don't see 'too much recognition', but rather recognition that becomes invalidated in the form of indifferent praise and 'nicely packaged' bullying. For me, two offences in particular have necessitated this book:

- I mean, seriously. Recognition can do so much yet is rarely properly used.
- Ouch. People settle for being invisible with no acknowledgement.

Necessity consists of life and soul being at stake. That our positive working culture is at stake. We simply cannot cope without recognition. Necessity also means insisting that it is a mistake to divide recognition up into too much or too little and into right or wrong. For me, there is no such thing as too much recognition. Trying to make recognition into something tangible is part of the problem – as if recognition is out there, able to be caught, measured and weighed.

There are management practices that we can recognise as acknowledgement, just as there are management practices where acknowledgement is not present. You can say that we recognise acknowledgement best in its absence. We are together in a situation, and what we experience as acknowledgement or the lack of it depends upon the situation we find ourselves in. This section reflects what you could call a new start. We have learned a great deal about acknowledging methods over the past 10 to 15 years. The time is ripe to bring all this knowledge into the Danish workplaces with a particular aim of making it effective – to let the methods work for the companies and not the other way around.

The following chapters reflect my own path to acknowledging methods. It has been marked by many experiences as a manager and external consultant as well as experiences of what works well in practice; I've also studied a great deal along the way. My path is also best understood when you as a reader know that I have worked extremely hard at these things, and that this on its own has been no guarantee of success. Fortunately, I have qualified my experiences over the years, and, in short, I have become more assured – which means that I don't confuse critique with declarations of war, but try to maintain the ability to lead according to my intention. The acknowledging approach brings patience, trust in and respect for each other. In this safe atmosphere a conflict can be reduced to a disagreement, which can be worked on as



such – without jeopardising the relationship between those involved. On the contrary, it will allow the relationship to grow stronger and more robust, when recognition shows itself to be something more than just a declaration of intent.

Chapter 1 is a review of the most important terms and concepts, while chapter 2 describes how you can get started. Note however that none of the chapters will hand you a solution on a plate. One of the book's tasks is to do away with the idea of toolboxes. On the other hand, there is an abundance of thinking tools. If these tools make it possible for you and others to understand the basic mechanisms regarding acknowledging methods, then it will be easy to use a variety of methods in all sorts of contexts.

This book aims at making you a recognition baker rather than simply handing you a piping bag full of whipped cream, which can easily end up being far too sweet and cloying. If, on the other hand we can master the craft, then so much becomes possible. This is what the next chapters are about.

The order of sections I, II and III is well considered, to the extent that this is how I prefer it myself. Start by looking at concepts and methods, then at the management task and finally allow me to inspire you with the various experiences of others. I can't be the judge of what extent this order is also optimal for you as a reader. The individual chapters are thus written in such a way as to enable them to be read separately. The book is considered however as a whole work, which must by necessity comprise these elements.

## CHAPTER 1

# Three sources of recognition

It's rather paradoxical. I have communicated on the topic of recognition, trained and educated managers, consultants and numerous employee groups in its use for more than 10 years, on the basis of an understanding of the concept's range and necessity. On the one hand. However, on the other hand I have had to learn that often, and in so many areas, it has not gone as I dictated. The methods develop in many places into pure candy floss, where recognition is distorted and becomes invalidated.

The intention of focusing on the positive rather than mistakes and omissions can unfortunately develop into a linguistic tyranny, one based on the misunderstanding that recognition is primarily about agreeing with each other and talking nicely: the result being that managers and employees learn a form of double communication. Workplace cultures develop where people talk badly to each other in a 'nice' manner.

There can be several reasons why it's apparently so easy to get lost in the recognition jungle; that otherwise good intentions have unfortunate consequences. One of the reasons is that the reading of the concept and its use in some places is too superficial. The idea of introducing acknowledging methods into management and organisational work is fundamentally sympathetic and also linked to a good helping of common sense. In this regard they are easy to begin using and, under all circumstances, are difficult to disagree on in terms of one's aim. This leads to a lack of thoroughness in the specific use of the methods, and also that it becomes easy to overlook the complexity that is also linked to recognition in practice.

Another reason is that the word recognition exists in generally used language and in all kinds of ordinary contexts – and in this respect is not tied to management and organisational relationships. Recognition is closely connected to such words and concepts as a pat on the back, praise when a person agrees with you or thinks something is nice/good, and speaking well of things – all of which are completely fine and usable. Unfortunately it can also lead to a great many misunderstandings, when the concept of recognition is placed into a professional context. First and foremost there is the simple misunderstanding that we should apparently praise, pat each other on the back and talk nicely about everything constantly. Right up until the organisation and its employees are nauseous from the thought of it, meaning that each time a manager or cheery consultant shows up everyone's eyes begin to roll and they jump quickly to judgement.

But recognition is a prerequisite for creating trusting, learning and innovative environments in workplaces. This makes it unfortunate and frustrating to witness how such weariness and irritation arises around so much talk about recognition. A desire to be able to speak directly and call a spade a spade begins to emerge. This desire is, unfortunately, seen as being the opposite of recognition. And this is where we stand. The reactions are understandable, but the medicine is wrong. It's not feasible to abandon the idea of recognition in the workplace. If you're sitting with this book in your hand, you're more than likely in agreement with this point of view. So let's get started on addressing the concept and its usage. Let's bring recognition into our daily lives.

The ambition with this chapter is to give a breath of fresh air to recognition as a concept used in professional contexts:

to *boost* the original ideas and give access to a fresh understanding of what the concept can and will, and why, ultimately, we cannot manage without recognition.

## Understanding acknowledging methods - three sources

In the actual use of acknowledging methods it can be helpful to imagine three sources, from where the water runs together in the flow we here call acknowledging methods. In our daily lives, it is not possible to separate the three water sources from each other. They run together when we communicate with each other. In an attempt however to understand the depth and potential uses of the concept, it can be a good idea to find the different sources. The three sources described here show different, important facets of the concept of recognition and act as *thinking tools* that can guide you in the actual translation of the concept from the ivory towers of philosophy and theory into the everyday challenge of doing something with it. As recognition always acts differently in different situations and relationships, the method never takes a final or fixed form. The 'water' can help to remind us of this. It's like a flow of water running in a number of specific directions.

### 1. Appreciation

The first source is called *appreciation*. The source of appreciation derives from what has become an extremely widespread practice known as *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI). This perspective on recognition deals in particular with focusing on what works. AI has given us a far greater understanding of how to create organisational learning and how it is possible, in an effective and playful way, to connect individual learning with organisational learning: to put it succinctly, to create learning environments.

AI contains a very optimistic message and often generates quick results and fantastic experiences. There is no doubt that it has contributed, see this chapter's introduction, towards a superficiality in the understanding of appreciative studies and thus unfortunately to a decline in the methodology. Indulgence took over and equipped many managers and organisations with a (completely understandable) optimism over having found a method that was not just effective, but perhaps even definitive.

Two relationships in particular can help to revive the appreciative methodology:

1. Our ability to focus on and work with what is successful rather than what isn't;
2. Our ability to focus on and work with the organisation's linguistic condition.

## Focus on what works

If you let two bowling teams bowl for an extended period, you will notice that both systems and individuals begin to learn from their mistakes. You will also notice a much steeper learning curve if you focus on what is successful. Attempts that are carried out use the simple design of pointing at one team's mistakes and, on this basis, discussing corrections and ways of "doing it better", while the other team focuses on what it did to achieve a strike. That is to say, it focuses on what works and how to facilitate more of those things. The learning curve is much steeper with the latter approach.

These kinds of results cause quite a stir and have piqued the interest of many organisations and managers; as is to be expected. Unfortunately, it has lost its momentum in many places. The stand-out results have too often been lacking. There are presumably many reasons for this, but for me the most important are those I have opted to call the 'cultural barriers'. The cultural barriers do not only arise from the modesty that can manifest itself when we focus on success and best practice. They also occur when we (in Denmark) consider this way of speaking and studying things to be more or less superficial – like it doesn't really count. It's a kind of sugar coating, sweet and colourful, but underneath is where the real problems are hiding.

This does not explain however how it has actually managed to succeed in some places – in both smaller contexts with teams and departments and in larger contexts, where large companies and group concerns have integrated appreciative methods into their overall strategy. It can work, and the effect can be huge, when efforts are streamlined and coherent. Sickness absences drop, productivity rises, and the whole way of thinking about cooperation and knowledge sharing undergoes a transformation from 'what I know' to 'the organisation's shared wisdom'. To sum up, these transformations are best described as a confrontation with classic problem-solving and an introduction of methods of inquiry that focus on resources and language.

In other words, from the appreciative source there flows a zealous attentiveness to how we can work specifically with what works. It requires the same degree of detail and inquiry that we normally implement when we investigate serious errors. It deals with becoming familiar with descriptions of the specific behaviour connected to what works and is successful. We generally have easy access to the details when something goes wrong; when we have experienced complete failure. If, on the other hand, we experience a particularly positive meeting, a well-written presentation, an innovative product design or a fabulous personnel management, then we naturally note this with pleasure and connect it with the people in question doing their job well. This is a crucial point: best practice doesn't simply fall from the heavens. It's a practice. It's an action. And it's possible to study this action carefully and thereby create learning environments. Note that AI includes both the word appreciative and the word inquiry. The method of inquiring is critical to the matter and has proven to be difficult to implement, at least in Danish contexts.

It requires a readiness to challenge the typical fault-finding culture and the general perception that focusing on success and what works is more superficial or not to be taken seriously.

## The organisation's linguistic condition

The other relationship which the appreciative source showers us with is attention to what we call the 'linguistic condition' of a department or company. Language creates conditions. The way we talk to each other in a workplace has an impact on the here and now. It develops with the same opportunities and limitations based on our management of the language. In other words: if a linguistic culture is created out of mistakes, omissions, pessimism and 'we've already tried that'-style statements, then this will start taking effect immediately. Workplace satisfaction plummets, and the ability to cooperate in a forward-looking manner becomes harder. In this way, we build linguistic barriers for ourselves. The appreciative method guides us without the barriers and reminds us of the power of language; that we need to ensure we generate language and forms of interaction that support the dreams, hopes, optimism and a shared wish to create something substantial together. Language does not mirror reality, but shapes our understanding of reality and thus also what is possible. It's possible to use language to set the bar high while also ensuring that the employees and collaborative partners involved both understand what this bar implies and have the will to reach up for it.

But be careful! Creating linguistic conditions is not the same as talking nicely and politely at all times and places. Language is connected with culture and identity. If you disconnect the normal linguistic mechanisms entirely, then you can easily start to alienate people and fall into double communication. Working with linguistic conditions is an expression for the aim and a deep understanding of the function of language. After a tough firing round it's pointless asking those affected to talk about their hopes and dreams. There should also be room for frustration and cursing. Then when, at some point, the sentence is uttered: "You can never trust management," then it should be possible to look deeper into the word 'never'. It's also possible to delicately look into what needs to happen for 'trust' to become a possibility again.

One of Denmark's largest governing boards has implemented a comprehensive strategy process, which looks three to four years ahead, and where acknowledging methods are a key element. The board has got off to a good start with this process, which can be attributed to several things: Firstly, it is concerned with involving as many people as possible in the process from the word go, with more critical voices and other positions in the organisation also represented. In this alone it makes a crucial point.

Secondly, the board has focused on how appreciative inquiries work – on how they are done – rather than talking and writing extensively about the method. In other words, it has focused on what the organisation’s members can do with their experiences with AI, and, as an extension to this, where AI is already present, so to speak. Which elements of the organisation’s culture and daily operations already reflect these principles? And where should efforts be concentrated with a view to changes? As they have only just begun the process it’s still too early to say whether they will end up in the sugar-coated ditch like so many before them, or whether they will experience some of the aforementioned effects. The board has implemented things from the very start that increase the chances of success, including not naively suggesting that everything is simple and straightforward. They are very aware of the various requirements and conditions that apply, depending on whether the task at hand is a mandatory regulatory function or an internal cooperation as part of a project team.

It’s not difficult to find literature and ‘recipes’ on how to use AI. A couple of these have been added to this book’s list of references, but there are many more out there. Despite efforts having been made over the years to vary the field, AI has been linked extremely closely to the 4-D method, which has more or less become the manual for AI work in Denmark. The method deals with working with appreciation in four phases: discovery, dream, design and destiny. There’s nothing wrong with this method in itself – nothing whatsoever. There are obvious reasons why it has become a global phenomenon. It’s just that when you try to encapsulate language and culture in a single model, then the nuances and flexibility are easily lost. In addition, the use of 4-D has led in most cases to appreciation being in the spotlight, while ‘inquiry’ has been pushed out into the wings. Awareness of this has grown steadily in recent years, which is a very positive development. I believe that the increased attention on involved methods of inquiry with rich learning potential will have a positive impact in many areas and contribute to appreciative inquiry gaining new ground, because it works on so many parameters.

## The ability to see and invisibility

The other two sources are closely linked, yet still equip us with significantly different points of attention. We’re still dealing with necessary and effective tools, but these sources also contain reminders of the complexity of acknowledging organisational and management work.

## 2. Re-cognition

The second source is called re-cognition. Recognition with a hyphen is moulded from the 200-year-old legacy of Hegel's re-cognition philosophy: an idealistic philosophy that ascribes recognition with an existential meaning. Recognition as a condition for each of us being able to stand firmly on our own two feet in lives characterised by robustness and a sense of who we are. The breakdown of the word points to two things: one, that each cognitive action, each personal act of learning and development attaches itself to recognition. The water that runs to here reminds us of the existential meaning of recognition and testifies to the fact that recognition must be present in every interpersonal relationship – including in the workplace, if it wishes to be a place of well-being, self-esteem, learning and development. There's no way around it!

In its fullest extent, the legacy from Hegel is almost a message of love: a religious (or at least idealistic) reminder that we hold each other's lives in our hands. That we all hold the key to other people's lives, whereby we can choose whether or not to be altruistic towards them, thereby contributing to 'sealing' another person's course and opportunities in life. Translated into the language of re-cognition, this deals with our ability to see others as worthwhile individuals. That is to say, our ability to *see*.

Experience-wise, this demand for recognition is one of the most difficult ideas to translate into organisational and management practice, because it's difficult to understand what is meant by *seeing* each other. Furthermore, wherein does one find the worthwhile? The entire understanding of altruism also tends to bother many people when placed in the context of management and cooperation, understandably enough. Let's look closer at these methodological difficulties.

*To see.* To see another person is a forward movement. An empathetic movement, which builds upon an understanding of bearing witness to phenomena in the world (behaviour, language, opinions), which you might not necessarily understand or care about, but that you strive to assign a place for in the world. To see is a lifelong endeavour that deals with expanding our field of vision so that it becomes possible to look at a wide range of phenomena in order to understand their logic. That is to say, a conviction of being witness to something logical. That there are many forms of logic out there in the world, all of which have their place, is something to reflect upon. To be seen is therefore to be assigned a place in the world.

*As a worthwhile individual.* To be assigned a place in the world as a worthwhile individual immediately introduces a state of tension. This tension arises from the fact that we must master a forward-looking empathetic movement on the one hand, and, on the other, that we must leave behind the other as *another*. That is to say, not to treat all others as the same. The source of recognition's mission is to enable us to become much better at navigating this: to ensure that we

constantly work at improving our ability to *see*, while also not allowing this to become possessive. Recognition is not a socialisation project intended to make us all identical or to remove the distinct. On the contrary, it can be asserted that the project is not successful until we are able to allow all possible peculiarities to walk around side by side, and also manage to create connections and collaborations between them.

Another state of tension that appears, and which Hegel also wrestled with, is that recognition ('to see') is both in-situ and relational, i.e. *who* sees you is also relevant. It's also relevant where, when and how they see you. Recognition is therefore brought into our lives as an endeavour. We can never completely know when and how it works in relation to others. What we do know is that it works differently for different people, and differently in relation to the situation surrounding the endeavour. Recognition is a flow of water, which never finds its final form. To put it more bluntly, recognition, when bottled into more refined doses of methodology, can have the opposite effect, or in any case a different one from that which we imagined. If you stick to one fixed method then the whole point becomes lost and the method easily risks transforming recognition into indifference. Recognition exists in the relational, communicative field and does not function according to fixed forms or pretty, harmonious forms. To *see* requires intense responsiveness. To *see* the worthwhile requires movement.

*Altruism.* One place where it's natural for the façade to fall apart is in 'the promise': both the promise which the full extent of recognition makes to us of a fantastic life, and the assertion, where we bring it into a professional context.

The afterthought, which the second source can prompt in us, is: Should a workplace be able to make promises of a great life? Should a manager make displays of altruism? My personal opinion is that, in a workplace, one must be extremely conscious of being a workplace – and that the primary function is not to create a good life for personnel but to complete a number of specific tasks. Another important point here is that the workplace must also do its utmost not to stand in the way of a good life; that one, as a workplace, is ambitious about life, which for me means making room for enthusiasm, uniqueness and desires. The manager, in particular, must perform a delicate balancing act: a balancing act between recognising the other as a worthwhile individual on the one hand, and in recognising themselves and the job they have committed to carrying out as manager on the other. Like rowing a kayak, it demands constant readjustments and movements to maintain this balance – once in a while, you might fall in and get wet. That's just how it is. Put another way, recognition as a management method is not something you can conclusively achieve your goals with. The endeavour is a constant gamble, which comprises not just the ability to *see* the other, but also the ability to *see* oneself as well as the ability to *see* the organisation's needs, demands and positions. To fire. To set limits. To control or to set strict requirements is not necessarily at odds with acknowledging methods. Recognition in a workplace



is not sugar-coated niceties or the absence of disagreement and power. It is the allocation of space and room to manoeuvre. It is creating the conditions for robustness and well-being. Room to manoeuvre and a capacity for action play out in an organisational context that has typically set out some pointers for what is workable, in terms of both behaviour, task completion and one's inclination towards cooperation.

At one point I found myself at a family therapy institution just outside Copenhagen where these endeavours had gone sour and where everything that could be considered a balance regarding tasks and recognition had vanished. The manager was on sick leave and the staff were confused. Motivation and production fell, as staff slowly but surely lost the ability to communicate honestly and willingly about the day's tasks and the dilemmas that can always be found in a professional workplace. Seen from the outside, it was easy enough to see and hear what was wrong: everyone always spoke nicely and considerately to each other. Agreement was either a virtue or something you pretended that you had. Visible criticism or disagreement was no longer an explicit option. That is to say, disagreement or criticism had to find other, more subtle, forms of expression. It was instantly harder to do something about these things, which demanded time and effort. This was because the entire process had been started with the very best of intentions. It was established with caring hearts and deep-rooted values relating to care, respect and trust. Treating the problem thus became linked to abandoning what one believed in and experienced as essential. To get away from the clammy feeling of double communication and hidden intentions became linked to getting away from the whole idea of recognition. Which wasn't what was wanted – on the contrary. In other words, we had to start over. In this regard you can define four focus areas to work on in the first period: 1) What are our key tasks? 2) What have we already succeeded in achieving in our task and our cooperation? 3) What dilemmas can arise in the meeting between personal values and the organisation's success criteria? And 4) Which ghosts need exorcising from the workplace? A lot has happened since then, and what remains is that recognition has been established as part of the working routine – as a part of what needs doing. Not as some additional window dressing, but as a part of the relationships and episodes that characterise the place. Or to put it another way, the institution has moved away from honouring the intention of "Look what a fantastic, acknowledging place we are" to focusing on the effects to a much greater extent: "Do we create well-being, cooperation and good results in the way we deal with things?"

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If we were to take a moment to use the 'I' form for a manager, the essence of the second source might sound something like this:

*In my endeavours to understand the logic that I am met with, I try to meet each individual employee according to the best of their abilities and assign them a place. I have a responsibility*

*for ensuring this is done within the framework of our goals and tasks. I monitor the effectiveness of what myself and others do. I do this because I am aware that the intention does not speak for itself. And I try to assign myself tolerance and understanding, when the process falters every now and again and everything starts to boil over. The intention is not that I need to figure it all out myself - which is why dialogue is so crucial for me and my employees.*

### 3. Invisibility

The work and the theories of the German sociologist and professor Axel Honneth have taken on a classic status, both in their home country and in Denmark. Axel Honneth's work is based on the simple idea that if recognition is connected to our ability to *see*, then there must also exist a risk of *not* being seen: the risk of *invisibility*. The argument builds upon Hegel's ideas in the sense that if one is 'hit' by invisibility, then this will have serious consequences which, ultimately, are life-threatening. Despite that being a little over the top, there is so much insight in Axel Honneth's research that it makes a great deal of sense to base the third source on invisibility.

From here, the management methods are supplemented with a deeper understanding of why recognition is worth fighting for; why it's actually necessary to fight for. A snappy summary of Honneth's research is: if we are hit by invisibility and not assigned a place in life, then our existence becomes so threatened that to fight it is our only option. The problem with fighting is a paradoxical one however, in that it removes us from what we wish for, which is recognition. Honneth talks about a reverse or negative moral procedure. One example is a gang of immigrants who clench their fists and yell "respect!" in order to make everyone aware that they do not feel themselves to be full members of society. With their fists clenched and their voices raised, they smash all the cars on the street - not only to express their anger and frustration, but also as an expression of the particular moral imperatives that can rise up in the shadows: a sort of moral necessity. Not because it's necessarily fun to smash cars, but because it is necessary. The drama simmers away as the dilemmas grow bigger and bigger. A society cannot accept that property is smashed, and the troublemakers must therefore be punished and sent away. The invisibility increases, and the fight becomes even more necessary. Recognition, and the fight for recognition, each point towards the muddy waters of invisibility.

The third source helps us to see those battles that must be fought: to see the intentions behind the ugly, the absurd or the immoral. Note that battles fought from a muddy ditch of disqualification and invisibility are not necessarily pretty to look at. The crucial question is: How can one even be capable of seeing something that is unacceptable or offensive behaviour as anything other than something to distance oneself from? How do we take one step forward and not turn

our backs on the problem, thereby reinforcing the invisibility? This is what this source can help us to understand. In our lives, we meet in the arenas of recognition and non-recognition. This starting point is neither pretty nor ugly, it's simply existence. Any method is thus a necessary simplification that enables us to move forward in a relevant manner. We must just remember that this is a simplification – that method is method and not recognition. The simplification allows us to do something, however; to do something, despite being fully aware that we have not necessarily figured everything out.

A lot of things became much easier for me to understand after I discovered Honneth's ideas and work on the fight for recognition. At this time, I was coaching a female manager who had built up a municipal special needs institution over 22 years. It was an institution with an excellent reputation. In connection with municipal reforms, her institution was merged together with a bigger institution in the larger, merged municipality. The female manager was appointed as second in command at the new institution, but reported directly to City Hall, as she had been used to, rather than reporting to the institution's head. She had one experience of feeling invisible after the next: her institution disappeared; her manager at the new place was not her formal manager; City Hall had all kinds of other things to deal with, and her access to her formal manager was limited; the teaching methods she had established were no longer being used, and contact with residents and parents was no longer her responsibility. When I met her, she was suffering badly from stress. She had a serious outbreak of eczema and could barely manage to form three coherent sentences. She jumped from one sentence to the next, spoke too quickly and was extremely uneasy about meeting an external coach. She told people serious stories about what she had experienced, and not least what she was involved in herself. She spread awful rumours around the town about the head of the institution. She became friends with a couple of the residents. She turned up at all the council meetings and complained loudly. She constantly attempted to change the agenda in internal staff meetings. In short she was unpleasant to be around, and at the start I found it hard to understand her. Everything she did seemed offensive and short-sighted – until I gained access to the *fight*. She had developed paradoxical strategies in her battle for visibility, and made these strategies appear reasonable and 'natural' from her own perspective. But to no avail. At the same time, she lost herself in this battle. She became ill and could no longer recognise herself. The guilty conscience filled the air when we were together, but the second she said something about it, necessity was summoned: "I can't find myself in anything else. If they treat me like dirt, then they should get a dose of their own medicine. What else can I do? Now at least they're taking notice of me." It's precisely this last premise, "Now at least they're taking notice of me," which is incorrect. They see nothing but noise, immoral behaviour and poor colleague behaviour. What it becomes possible to see becomes a part of the invisibility: one big dramatic performance.

Redemption was hidden in the question: “What are you fighting for?” Both for her, who had the chance to talk about 22 brave years, as well as for me, who could move away from being morally offended and show both responsiveness and movement. We both agreed that the battle should be moved out of the mire. She needed to establish another moral platform if the battle for visibility was to be possible.

My assertion is that modern workplaces create more moments of invisibility and a greater risk than previously of losing a feeling of who one is and what one’s place is. It is my experience that many managers and other professionals are constantly fighting a battle that doesn’t help them, but which is experienced as both necessary and reasonable. In these situations recognition is pushed to the edge and constitutes a litmus test of how far we have managed to stretch ourselves in our social interactions. Invisibility has many, diffuse faces. We can also see bullying and closed institutions. It immediately becomes harder to focus on insecure references, a feeling for how far one’s professionalism is promoted in the new organisation, on organisational affiliations in a matrix of lines and projects, on the scope of the team’s responsibilities set against other lines of responsibility, on how far ambition should extend, when no one talks about what it means to succeed, about the idea of balance when everything seems to be spinning, and so on. The battle lines are drawn. All of it is upsetting and hurtful. Given the rapid pace and the obvious open wounds, it seems like hurt people hurt more than they help. So perhaps the whole recognition wave is an expression of hope.

Giving acknowledging methods a breath of fresh air could consist of recreating this hope. To remind each other of what it was and is that we wish to create together in the organisations by getting to grips with the concept of recognition. With the three sources, hope is given a methodological “due diligence”.

If we are to avoid frustration and fatigue and “oh no, not again”-type reactions, then we need to stop for a second. Read a little of the lesson and help each other to look deeper into the matter, and thereby enable ourselves to navigate the contextual and relational office landscapes.

## CHAPTER 2

# How do you get started?

You may not be used to optimistic instructions in management and organisational reading matter: Do this, do that. Often, it can seem artificial and awkward to squeeze new leadership tools into a complex working day. The methods can stand in the way of a more natural approach, so to speak, and can also hinder a manager from appearing competent. When recognition is thus symbolically applied in small 'bottles' in this chapter, then this is not done with an understanding that if you take a sip of a magic potion you can then succeed with recognition in management. The bottles are *not* filled with a miracle potion. The bottles' contents are selected and measured to make it possible to *see*.

The main question this chapter puts forward is: "How do you get started?" How is it possible to *see* each other? To be aware of the possibilities. And ultimately, to recognise recognition when it appears. You can take small bottles of acknowledging methods with you into different situations. Take a sip and focus on what it becomes possible to *see*. Take the recognition philosophy in small doses and bring forth the leadership.

The bottles have two goals, both *to be able to do* and also *to make it possible*. To set the stage so to speak, so you can begin experimenting. The guidelines are divided into 5 sections:

1. Seeing yourself
2. Seeing the potential in the interview
3. Breathing life into meetings
4. Pay attention to the organisation
5. Keep an eye on yourself

After each chapter is a list of the basic principles, all of which are intended to help the manager and those involved in *seeing*: to *see* the opportunities and to *see* each other.

## 1. Seeing yourself

### You're already on your way

The starting point is that there is always something that works. Even in situations where everything seems doomed, where cooperation has failed or the working environment is collapsing, there are still customers to serve, cases to be dealt with and products to pack. The starting point is also that you are a manager because you understand the basic mechanisms of a workplace: that we meet up to do a job together; that we assign tasks in relation to our various competences; that we attempt to complete the tasks together. Our basis is here, where we show each other mutual respect and believe that the other person is competent and can contribute towards completing the task. The starting point is therefore positive.

A sip of the appreciative bottle equips us with the following tools: pause the film here. Pause the film at those places where something is working well. Carefully study what is present, what can make this possible on a typical stressful Tuesday. Go into the same degree of detail you would use if you were investigating a serious error, or if you were processing a customer complaint or a regulatory error. Who does what to contribute to the solution? Which situations in particular generate the potential for a positive dialogue or cooperation? At which point does work on the task gain momentum? What does each person thrive in doing in the individual situations?

This is far from being an easy exercise. It often requires a little getting used to, and it's not certain that everyone is prepared for the task. This way of working regularly generates a great deal of scepticism: many people are worried that it shifts the focus away from the 'real' problems, while many also see it as a superficial and overly optimistic approach to the world. The key to getting past this scepticism is not to call it negative or to ignore it. The basis for pointing out the seriousness and continuing to insist upon tackling those areas where the problems are experienced as particularly bad is often a mix of concern and responsibility – both the concern and the responsibility are a good starting point to work with.

As manager, you must also insist on a change. "Shall we continue to do more of what isn't working? Or should we try doing something else?" Insist on trying it in small doses and work together to monitor the effect. What can we see now? What can be hard to get used to with this management approach is that the solution doesn't necessarily have much to do with the problem: if we focus on what works, then we push the problem to one side, so to speak. A different 'reality' is generated by projecting the small successes up onto the big screen and constantly trying to make more out of what works and avoid doing more of the same; that, which doesn't work. As

the saying goes: 'There's no point flogging a dead horse.'

As previously indicated, many people have gone to a lot of trouble to write books, articles and pamphlets to facilitate these kinds of initiatives for managers, development consultants and others. Some of what has been written is good, while other material is not so good. One of the places that has succeeded in writing an application-oriented text and also to look critically at AI's potential and pitfalls is the consultancy firm MacMann Berg. Visiting its website is a good place to start when basing one's efforts on the sentence: "You're already well on your way!"

### Basic principles

- Pause the film and watch the scene together. What works, despite everything? Where are dreams and hopes present? Make specific agreements to do more of what works.
- Keep an eye out for the words 'always' and 'never'. When things are talked about definitively like this, then jump in: add nuance to the language, for example when you say: "We never exceed the budget" or "our cases are never acknowledged."
- Mental attitude: There is always something that works. The starting point is positive.

## You can't be a leader if you don't acknowledge each other

Taken to its logical conclusion: if you don't acknowledge each other in a workplace, then it's not possible to be a leader. If one, as a leader, does not respect one's employees, then one loses the ability to be a relevant leader. And if the leadership is not appreciated, or if a disqualification of particular leaders occurs among the employees, then this will stand in the way of cooperation and well-being. Recognition is not a joke. It's an obligation – a mutual obligation.

When you find yourself in a professional context, then it's often hard to honour this obligation. The dilemma is that the leader must deal with many things simultaneously: to acknowledge a specific employee on the one hand, and to deliver on time and within the set guidelines on the other. Once in a while the leader will encounter an employee, where, for inexplicable reasons, it's not possible to build up any respect. Something stands in the way, and, as leader, you have to force the task to completion. When this is the case, then two things must be made clear: firstly,

that you do your job as a manager, and, secondly, that you cannot be a good leader (in a good way) to this particular employee. To put it bluntly, if you can't find anything in another person that can be linked to respect or trust, even after trying your best, then this will not fix itself. Something must be done about it, either by arranging things differently or through assistance from another source.

Recognition, in its fullest sense, can be interpreted as an assertion of altruism – the extent to which you wish to connect to an idea on its own, or to a personal matter. It's another matter entirely in a workplace: naturally, recognition cannot be opted out of. But it's just as natural for recognition of the other to be constantly held up against the completion of the task. The budget must be met and the project completed on time and more or less in the right spirit. It's also taken for granted that if recognition is not fundamentally in place in the workplace, then you're going to have big problems. These problems manifest themselves as sickness absence, disgruntled employees and under-performance. The effects of invisibility and lack of appreciation can never be completely eradicated. Despite this it is rarely the case for things to get so serious, as most places have established a culture and a form of cooperation where staff have faith in each other and in working together. You could almost describe it as the professional version of altruism: the version where each of us trusts the other person and believes they also wish to make a real effort and a difference – the version where each of us trusts that very few people consciously wish to make their working day difficult for themselves and for others. Despite the fact that it can sometimes seem like that.

For me, the management task is to ensure one reaches far; to know that, as a leader, you have particular responsibility for creating recognition in the workplace. Despite recognition being mutual, as the leader, you have a particular responsibility. It's worth reminding yourself here that it is almost always possible to find something worth acknowledging in another person. Almost always. This is something you need to work on as a leader, the way I see it. Naturally this can be a demanding task, but experience shows that it pays off: the aforementioned concern simply reminds us that, now and again, it doesn't succeed. Maybe the time wasn't right, the chemistry had completely vanished, or skeletons were hiding in the cupboard that were impossible to get rid of or ignore. That's life – also in management. As I have said, it demands some kind of action.

The optimistic message is that, the more often you try to see the other person as a worthwhile individual, the more you make recognition into a daily management discipline and the easier it becomes to notice these qualities in others. In other words, you can train your ability to see. We become better and better at monitoring the intentions, and end up almost insisting upon finding the logic in everything that occurs. When this happens, most managers experience that the employees want to get involved. The employees begin to imitate this behaviour themselves and



become aware of the logic in asking what they are working on and how they can understand it. When these sentences are being constantly aired then it becomes possible to find the meaning in the madness.

### Basic principles

- Make it clear as the manager that you have a particular responsibility for creating recognition.
- Ask people what their intentions are.
- Keep an eye on the logic behind the actions. Make a real effort to see - there is generally some meaning in the madness.
- Tell someone when the dilemmas start to grow; when the balance between your management task and your 'concern' for a particular employee becomes hard to maintain.
- Make recognition an endeavour in your management efforts rather than something to be figured out.

## 2. See the potential in the interview

When we talk about the *interview* here, this does not solely concern the multitude of formal interviews that characterise the Danish workplaces today, e.g. performance appraisal interviews, status interviews and so on. Equally, it refers to the many informal ad hoc discussions that are always taking place between managers, collaborative partners and employees. Based on a communication theory that refers to systematic and narrative method, the understanding is that the interview is the glue that keeps an organisation together – that an organisation is best understood as a system where opinions and meanings are constantly being generated through the use of language. The manager's potential for pushing the organisation forward is therefore generally released more through interviews and discussions than by moving around the structural boxes. This is described theoretically as the manager's potential for creating strong narratives in the organisation, narratives that reflect the manager's visions and values. The manager can work consciously with the linguistic condition of the organisation, so to speak. He or she can work on establishing a linguistic culture based on resources and trust

rather than dealing with omissions or assigning blame; establishing a linguistic culture that also supports the manager's wishes.

Seeing the potential in the interview is thus a general attitude towards how one generally views management and leadership. The message is that a manager is measured by how good they are at handling the multitude of 'here and now' situations. It's also a technical discipline: there are technical bottles regarding questioning and interviews that can be drunk from, thereby gaining a glimpse of new possibilities in management.

### Pin down some keywords and ask questions

It sounds banal, and yet it is crucial: The most significant way to move your management style in the direction of recognition is to start by asking more questions and offering less answers. Or, to put it more succinctly, starting every answer by asking a question. The question is the path to the other person. The good questions offer the potential to *see* the other person and catch a glimpse of their logic. The ability to ask good questions is partly a matter of training, and partly an attitude – an inquisitive attitude. Inside this inquisitiveness lives the assertion that you pack away your own opinions and preconceptions for a moment. That you give up taking on too many projects on another's behalf and try asking about the other person's perspective.

An effective way to facilitate this is by pinning down some keywords. Keywords are linked to active listening, where as a manager you listen closely to the *words* that the other person says – rather than what you *think* the other person says. When a person speaks, there will be some words in each sentence that stand out. These words are especially loaded and create the specific meaning of what is said. Working with keywords is about catching these loaded words and seeing the word as the key to a deeper understanding of the other person. For example, an employee says: "It was such a tough blow to get that message, and then right now..." In this sentence two sets of keywords stand out in particular, namely 'tough blow' and 'right now'. To enquire about the keywords is to ask questions that are closely linked to precisely what the employee has said. For example: "You experienced it as a *tough blow*. Could you tell me what you mean by this, exactly?" And: "You said *right now*. What do you think it would have meant if you had got the message at a different time?"

If you try to stick closely to what has been said in an interview, stay in that moment and ask enquiringly, then this is generally experienced positively. As a manager, one should just be careful not to hide behind the questions. An employee usually needs to hear the manager's assessment of the matter. Under all circumstances it becomes more accessible for most people when they experience being seen, heard and understood. Furthermore, the manager's assess-

ment is qualified by involving the other person's perspectives. It will also be possible to create a better connection between the assessment and the employee's situation and thoughts. The acknowledging interview technique usually creates better connections and makes it easier for the parties involved to make sense of what is going on.

## Problems hide in secrets

Behind every problem hides a hope. When someone feels like complaining, then this only occurs because they have a sense that it could be different. Hope is present, just implicitly. It's hiding and must be found *between the lines*. This technique is thus a kind of reverse keyword technique – what's known as *double listening*. If one side of the coin shows frustration, complaints, trouble and problems, then the flip side shows hope, wishes, experience with things that work, and *exceptions*. Double listening ensures that you don't stray too far into every omission and problem but succeed in pushing the discussion in the direction of wishes and hopes. That you manage to work with what is hiding between the lines.

You can take different paths in your double listening: one of the paths is to focus on the hope. When something is regarded as a problem, then this is because it stands in the way of something you want. So the question might be: If the problem suddenly disappeared, what would then be possible for you? Another route is to focus on the intentions. If complaints and negativity take over, then stand firm in ensuring that something important is also communicated. What is it, that has not been heard, since it is apparently imperative to say it over and over in an increasingly shrill tone? The task here is to stress the difficulty in enquiring when the tone is so shrill, while also ensuring that you diligently attempt to understand what it is that's going on. That you experience 'it' as a mixture of responsibility and concern, and that there is apparently something you have overlooked. That you help in bringing 'it' out into the open, so that we can move forward. A third path to take is to work with exceptions. Exceptions are good to be aware of if the narratives that arise around a given situation are very 'heavy' or extremely 'thin' in the sense that they are not especially nuanced, let alone promising. Here, double listening deals with enquiring about situations which, despite everything, were different. These could be small situations or a point in time when things weren't quite so heavy or so hopeless. Important variations will arise here in the 'linguistic conditions', just as it provides the opportunity to work with something that is effective rather than sinking down into fault-finding quicksand.

## Basic principles

- Make the interview the most important management tool.
- Ask more questions and give fewer answers.
- Pin down some keywords and enquire about them to the other person.
- Put your own preconceptions and opinions on standby for a moment.
- Look for the secrets each problem is hiding (double listening).

### 3. Life in meetings

It's a tough machine in many ways that operates out in the Danish workplaces. It's immediately evident that staff are busy, and many experience an almost constant pressure. The machine beats its hard, cogent rhythm, and it becomes harder for managers, HR consultants and others to implement the necessary change in beat. This applies no less to the many meetings which everyone runs in and out of. The meetings all end up resembling each other, and there is too little attention in regard to what the success criteria are for the individual meeting. And here is where a rather noteworthy invisibility arises, namely the one where everything comes to resemble everything else. When there is no change in the rhythm or in the way the work is tackled generally, then it becomes harder to separate the individual elements from each other. Recognition is about making something visible. A fresh look at the organisation's many meetings makes it possible to notice the differences and thus also possible to take decisions on who should do what, when and together with whom.

### Alter the rhythm and change positions

There are some simple and, for most people, well-known tricks to generating livelier meetings. One of them is to set the rhythm and the mood of the meeting according to its success criteria. All too often a decision-taking meeting, an orientation meeting, a vision meeting, a brainstorming meeting, etc., all end up looking the same as each other. Make some changes to

the rhythm, including over the course of the meetings. It will bring a great deal to the surface that had been lying there the whole time. Equally effective is to regularly make some considerations as a manager about positions. These could be very simple: Who should sit at the end of the table? Why does it often end up being the same person? It could also be a little more advanced, for example taking turns to take on different positions, from where you can take note of different things. For example: take on the position of a customer; take on the position or attitude of 'this project is already a success'. Take on the position or attitude of 'keep an eye on the opportunities or perhaps even the dreams'. Take on the position or attitude of 'which tripwires can I see from here?' Take on the position of the broader horizon or of the quickest shortcut. Take on an economic position, take on a professional position, etc. What occurs through these changes is that you think and speak differently, depending on which position you take on. It thus becomes possible to notice new aspects of a particular case.

The advantage of this way of arranging meetings is that it can be done quickly, and that it generally makes the meetings more fun to attend. As a supplement to this, you can open up to different paths of communication at a meeting table, which do not always go from the person at the end of the table and out to the individual participants of the meeting. For example, try talking to the person next to you for three minutes. Split up into groups and discuss the topic. Talk with each other about the topic, while the boss listens from a position of reflection. Pass around the baton or talking stick – one person talks while everyone else listens.

## Make context a shared concept

Language gets its meaning in context. The 'text' can only be understood in relation to the 'context'. In other words, creating clarity around the contexts we find ourselves in is also about creating clarity in our communication. Setting out a clear context ensures that everyone understands much better what is happening in a particular situation and why it is happening in a particular way at a particular time. There is often a disparity between a manager's training and his or her point of focus, which means that a manager focuses more on content (i.e. the text) than on the framework (i.e. the context). "When the matter is so well-illuminated, and the arguments so clear-cut, then it's obvious that this is what we must do. So why is it that the employees are so against it?" "When I clearly described in the email what the task involved, how is it that they still turn up at my office with one question after the next?" The point here is that, apparently, the problem is not hiding in the content. It cannot be fixed by writing a new email. The problem lies in the context, which is not clear enough.

In what context should the message be understood? Is it being given as information, an order or an invitation for discussion? What does this have to do with me? And so on.

Context is a multifaceted concept, so it helps to make it a shared one. A shared understanding of how it might be possible to focus on each other, on the communication and on

the context of the task. In its most succinct form, the questions from the manager could sound like this:

- The episode: What is your understanding of the situation? How should we tackle the task?
- The relationship: Which relationships and positions are relevant to this case? How do we ensure that we have covered all the bases?
- Identity: What is particularly at stake for you in this case? Which elements of your professional and personal skills set do you especially hope to bring into play in this case?
- Culture: Which habits and values are present in starting work on this project? What is it in the culture that provides the most momentum if we are to get this to succeed?

### Basic principles

- Push the focus away from 'text' and onto 'context'.
- Work with rhythm and changing positions at meetings.
- Make sure it's possible to notice something new. Go to war with old habits.
- Don't blame everything on being too busy. Do what's possible when it's possible.
- Make sure everyone is heard.

## 4. Pay attention to the organisation

Involvement is spoken and written about almost so often that, as a reader, we hardly even notice it. It is described in leadership literature on a par with implementation, innovation, motivation, etc., while here it pops up in connection with recognition. Understanding it is easy enough: to be seen, heard and understood requires, at minimum, that one is involved in cases that have something to do with one's work. When, despite this, it goes wrong – as it does all too often – then this is not due to a lack of understanding of its importance, but rather to a fear of the process being too slow. "There isn't time" has become the modern mantra, while the consultant's irritating counter-mantra is: "You can't afford not to!" A pragmatic suggestion

is: involvement is necessary. It is recognition at an organisational level. Involvement doesn't need to take a long time. It's about staging a process so it is adapted to the specific situation. Added to this, naturally, is the experience all managers have acquired. A lack of involvement can cost a great deal of time afterwards. To get people involved after the fact is difficult, and the price to pay for the manager themselves can be high. The manager will be regarded as someone who does not practice recognition: as someone, who is oblivious to others and trusts solely in their own judgement.

Despite it being a few years ago now, I'll never forget a sentence that I heard at the end of an otherwise pleasant day. I had been asked to assist with a process for a project team in a large IT company. The team was facing its biggest development project to date, which, if it succeeded, would give the company wholly new marketing opportunities. They wanted to get off to a good start, and my instructions were to assist in ensuring the project design comprised a high level of involvement and knowledge sharing throughout the entire process, which was expected to be last around one-and-a-half years. The day was positive, cheerful and effective. Different open space methods were used, as well as interview processes and funnel models, as they are called, in an effort to formulate the principles for cooperation, communication and management and also to draw up the first project diagrams. Everything was going fine right up until the end of the day, when the project manager took over with a view to summing things up. He said something like this: "Thank you for a great day. It has been very inspiring. Now I think that we need to place the real terms on the table, including the allocation of tasks and leadership responsibility." After which he presented three slides showing the project organisation and various descriptions of functions and areas of responsibility. When, four months later, I was invited to a new day together with the project team, this was because three of the key individuals had left the project, which had been given a message from senior management that it was under enhanced supervision. In regard to recognition, then it was an eye-opener to have an open and direct conversation with the project manager in a plenary session on the second day. When he had to describe why he ended the first day in what, seen through other people's eyes was a rather unattractive and misconceived manner, he spoke of responsibility and duties. He also talked about 15 years spent developing projects in manufacturing companies, about how he had thus been both overwhelmed by how much the team managed on the first day, and also (honestly, as he objectively expressed it) had been worried and frightened by its importance: Is this all under control...?

## **Involvement in many different ways**

Processes don't need to take a long time. Some processes benefit from lofty ambitions and plenty of time, while other processes benefit more from wrapping it all up quickly. The crucial conditions are that every single employee has a fundamental experience of being involved in

and/or witness to the things that are relevant to their own field of work. The bottom line with involvement is that the manager makes themselves competent. There are two crucial ways of tackling this. Firstly, that you make everything known as soon as you're ready to talk about it. Secondly, that you set time aside for involvement; that you make yourself available in regard to ongoing cases. As a manager, this provides you with a lot of relevant information, as there will quickly start to form wishes and needs from the employees, the unions, user groups, etc. Listening to these wishes and needs is a key element of recognition.

## Keep an eye out for invisibility

A serious issue in all modern organisations is that people can become invisible. Invisibility is normally not intentional (unlike bullying or discrimination), although this can also be the case. Invisibility appears momentarily in people's lives because careers have become much more fluid. The organisational boxes are continuously being moved around, points of reference change quickly, staff must report to line managers, project managers and team managers, it's not clear what success criteria apply, heavy cost savings make it difficult to complete tasks satisfactorily, many evaluation and documentation requirements create distance to one's own specialist field, and it has generally become harder to find time to make one's own voice heard.

Even people with many years of experience and numerous success stories can quickly lose sense of themselves if they are hit by these kinds of invisibility. Self-esteem, well-being and health can quickly become compromised in these stressful situations. A lack of recognition is not concerned here with the manager's or the colleague's unwillingness. It is the organisational conditions which can get in the way of the experience of being seen. When this happens, it can feel like one's whole existence has been threatened. It is described elsewhere in this book how the battle for recognition can end in the paradox that one gets further and further away from recognition. This is because the battle equips you with a specific set of morals, whereby aggression, passivity, complaining, negativity, the forming of cliques, etc., suddenly appear not only as acceptable, but almost necessary.

Once the fight for recognition has begun then the consequences can be very serious. These battlegrounds can be hard to eradicate because they are woven into our existence and our moral imperatives. Once things have gone wrong then the tolerance margin is very low, and those parties involved find it notoriously hard to meet and understand each other. In other words, it's about prevention. And this is not at all easy. The manager is not in control of many conditions.

As manager, you can try to make a kind of invisibility check, each time changes are made to the organisation; when the operating portfolio again changes hands; when reference terms, values, customer demands, quality models and so on are implemented. When things go ex-



traordinarily fast, or when the conditions are particularly stringent, try creating an overview of who is particularly at risk of being affected. Consider everyone in the organisation. Experiences have shown that anyone can be affected – even those who generally seem to be extremely resourceful and stable. Remember as well to keep an eye on yourself. As a manager, one can just as easily be affected by these conditions and shake-ups. The check should also show you whether you can still make your voice heard. If not, then the alarm bells should start ringing.

### Basic principles

- Become competent at making your employees into co-managers.
- Make cases known as soon as you are ready to talk about them.
- Ensure that everyone, yourself included, can find a space where they can have a voice.
- Perform an invisibility check if there is extraordinary pressure on the workplace.
- Get help quickly if someone feels that their existence is being threatened.

## 5. Keep an eye on yourself

All the obligations of a modern, professional manager – how will it ever be possible? I talk sometimes about a meta-glance: the two eyes in one's head are for seeing with and for creating depth. A third hangs over the head and looks down as we go about the day's activities. A meta-glance, which attempts to monitor everything we do as we do it. To monitor what effect it has while we are still in the process of doing something. It is one's own reflection, which can be described as the ability to make small time-outs in one's internal system and thereby work with the present and with the bigger picture in one and the same moment. Such a meta-glance is helpful when you begin to experiment. In general what happens when you experiment with new methods is that, for a while, you become less competent – or somewhat less natural. You can choose to say that out loud. Similarly, you can assign yourself a little patience in relation to how quickly and how well things will turn out.

Most important of all on an acknowledging management track however is the premise: acknowledging oneself. You are involved in something that is important and logical. Something you consider to be necessary or correct to do. As you know, this is not the same as everything being a success at all times. Recognition is not measured in how much one succeeds or does not succeed. Recognition is measured in terms of the intention. Most employees are actually able to recognise their manager's intentions. A good supplement to this might be that the manager explains his or her intentions before, during and after a process. It should thus also be possible for the employees to break free of an over-simplified success/failure axis in regard to the manager's capability.

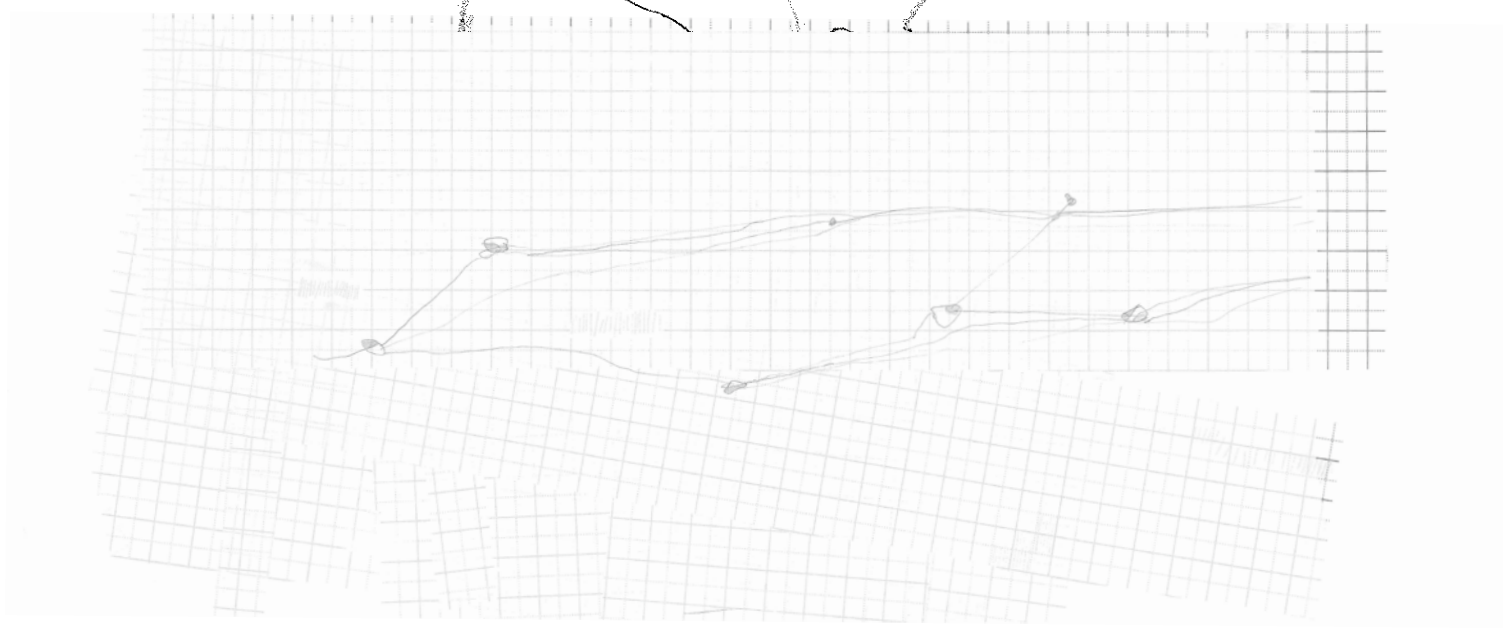
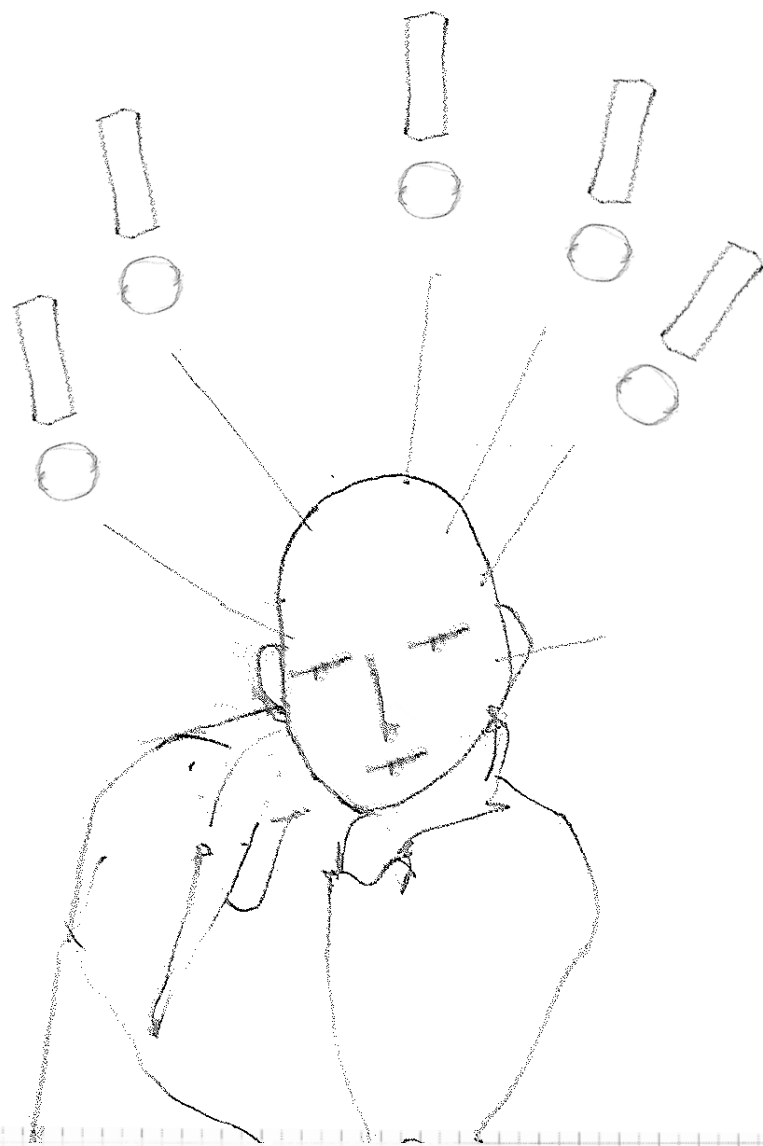
Recognition is an assertion. Pushed to its extreme, it is a demand on modern management. Recognition can also be an endeavour. It doesn't present itself as a figure one can work on and then be done with. It presents itself as a concept, from where we can better understand the conditions in the workplace.

### Basic principles

- Take the recognition 'bottles' in small doses.
- Keep yourself updated on all things recognition-related.
- Work with intention and effect rather than right and wrong.
- Trust in the conviction that everyone wants to do their best.

Allow me here to repeat one of the basic principles: Strive to make recognition an endeavour in your leadership role and not something you have to figure out!

It's clear at this point in the book that I am fond of this way of being ambitious: well removed from the classic understanding of a decisive leader as someone who can figure it all out and always has their answers ready, and over to where leading becomes leadership. Where you make it clear which fantastic task each person has been assigned, and that one should make an effort with this. When employees and collaborative partners experience what they have set out to do they move away from the succeeding/not succeeding and right/wrong axes and over towards an attitude of "good work, boss" and "how can I help?"



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