

CEO Tip: “That sounds pretty complex, boss”– So What?

by Guido Quelle

How often do we hear that something is “pretty complex” or “too complex?” That certain things aren’t “simple,” but are instead “complex” and difficult to solve?

Here’s the news flash: today, most business processes *are* complex. But, even if the distinction sounds academic, things that are complex don’t have to be complicated. I’ve looked at this difference a bit more closely, because it wasn’t immediately obvious to me. Nevertheless, the distinction is both logical and sound.

Complex things are characterized by a large number of interdependencies. Since today we almost always have an interaction between various fields, departments, processes, systems, companies, and involved parties, business connections are almost always complex.

But these connections don’t necessarily have to be complicated; complicated means “difficult.”

Though the relationships in the world are complex, they are not always complicated. As CEO your priority must be to persuade your employees to warm up to these complexities, because things aren’t going to get any simpler. On the contrary; increasing interactions in all areas of life mean that things are only going to get more complex. Of course it makes sense to live by the “keep it simple” motto and always look for simpler ways of doing things. Matrix organization, for example, can usually be replaced by more effective linear organization, or the number of interfaces in a network of relationships can be reduced. However, the statement that complexity tends to increase remains unchanged.

Employees’ reluctance to face complexity and to take on complex topics is often due to the fact that they don’t want to make mistakes. These looming mistakes are thought to be obvious, since the effects of our own actions are not always predictable.

Dealing with complexity is not just about techniques (concrete facts); it’s also about attitudes (emotions). We know that we first have to overcome emotional obstacles before we can tackle the objective obstacles, so we are wise to persuade our employees to take a positive attitude towards complexity. After all, it can be fun to master complex issues, ideally so that they don’t become complicated.

Which complex tasks can you tackle with your employees so that they run more smoothly? And where in your company do you hear – maybe between the lines – that things are too complex? Deal with these topics together with your team, and when you do, try and figure out if instead of complex they really mean complicated.

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