



34. Working with fewer rules

Challenge

After a serious incident in the organization, the reflex often arises to issue more rules, to prevent the incident from repeating itself. More rules generally lead to more procedures and control. Through more rules, procedures and control, the ability to think independently decreases and thus the chance of an integrity-conscious culture is reduced. The risk also arises that employees feel less involved in the organization as a result.

The challenge is not to issue new rules after incidents and even to abolish existing rules where possible. This moment offers an opportunity to increase the self-learning capacity and to put what has been learned and best practices into practice, in order to prevent future incidents. For learning after incidents or near misses, see also the tool 18 'Create an open culture of mistakes'.

Solution

Verify, for example during a workshop, whether rules still serve the usefulness they were once conceived for. And verify whether certain rules have added value, or perhaps offer false certainty or increase the risk of 'tick the box behaviour'.

Preparation in advance:

Prepare a presentation on the agency theory versus the stewardship theory (information about available on the internet). Or if you think that fits better, a presentation about working from the intention versus working 'from the outside in' (analogous to the books of Wouter Hart). You can also show a video or photo of the concept of "shared space" by the Dutch traffic engineer Hans Monderman. The idea behind Monderman's idea is that road users will pay more attention if there are suddenly no traffic rules. People become alert, take responsibility and give each other priority more quickly.

Make sure you have an example of a rule that can be adjusted.



For example:

Many organizations have a code of conduct that states that a promotional gift of more than € 50 may not be accepted. This rule causes people to focus on the threshold amount and easily forget the underlying idea of this rule. A second disadvantage is that in some cases accepting a gift of € 100 is easy to explain, while in some cases accepting a gift of € 10 is unacceptable. What would happen if you abolished this rule? And only work with the principle: do not accept gifts when the appearance of undesirable conflicts of interest arises. Where the employee is expected to be able to explain why he feels he could accept that gift. Organizations that choose to work with the underlying principles increase the chance that employees themselves think about whether or not to accept gifts. And with that you give employees the opportunity to make their own moral compass stronger.

During the meeting:

Using the theory, explain why many organizations make rules. And then explain, among other things on the basis of the example, why it can be of added value to work with fewer rules and procedures. The goal is to increase personal responsibility and thus increase the chance of realizing an honest organizational culture.

Perhaps also an idea to show the different policies on screen or print them out to show how many policies there are and how they relate to each other. Is there overlap, are there blind spots?

Then ask the participants the following questions:

- Think of an example of a rule or procedure within your own organization or department that unnecessarily hinders independent thinking. Requests for help can be:
 - What rules are imposed out of distrust?
 - Which rules have been set up internally due to external pressure from legislation or external supervisors?
- Try to adjust this rule or procedure so that we work from the intention of the organization, or when value management is well established, from the values of the organization. Sometimes simply abolishing a rule is also possible.
- A variant of this method: Print out a policy for participants and mark the most important rules from the policy per participant or in small groups with a highlighter and stick them together to see if a short policy can be made or perhaps even summarized in 1 sentence.



After the meeting:

Make sure that after the meeting sufficient attention is paid to perpetuating the new rules or policy. Does it actually replace the current version? How are others informed about this? Are there any rules or policies that can be reviewed in the same way? At the same time: continue to pay attention to the independent thinking of employees. Trigger with critical questions, so that the rule spiral is also broken for the long term.

Actors

- Compliance professional
- Executives
- All employees

Techniques

Leading a workshop on the basis of presentation and a work assignment.

Role Compliance Professional

- Facilitating in leading the conversation and explaining the theory.

A second variant is that you teach managers how to carry out these types of workshops, so that they can take this further.