

Chapter 2

Leadership from the Perspective of a Commercial Executive

Martin Reich

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This chapter includes four components that need to be taken care of. The starting point is the point of view of a controller of a health institution, who is directly assigned to the management due to his function as a department head. The first component is leadership. Anglicisms have to be understood, and therefore, the term is to be defined. The second component is vision, because the roles and responsibilities directly determine the orientation of the point of view. The “vision” has two dimensions, as it follows commercial management. The commercial aspects form their own system, with business literature applying to it. Here the view of the executive is shown. The commercial component is visualized by the controlling process. The fourth component—and that is the most important—is the executive as this is the person that has to bring together all parts. The main focus is on the personal aspect, dealing with changes, strain and the energy balance that has to be controlled. It starts with the component of leadership.

M. Reich (✉)
Lacknergasse 106/1/2, Vienna 1180, Austria
e-mail: martin.reich@a1.net

2.1 Leadership

Leadership no longer essentially consists of the distribution of work and coordination of daily operations but has as the core task to “create conditions, which enable average intelligent staff to complete their tasks independently and efficiently.”

(Doppler and Lauterburg 1994, p. 54). The previous boss or dynamic leader and top manager does not only have to get used to the role of the trainer, coach or highly qualified service provider, but also master and fulfill this role.

The traditional concept of leadership (attempt to control the employees, regulations and detailed instructions as to what has to be done by whom and when) is management under false pretenses. It is about giving freedom and space to act to teams and individuals (Pfläging 2009, p. 64). In addition to comprehensive expertise in the respective field (i.e. in-depth business management knowledge, detailed knowledge of the controlling tools) also not so easily measurable factors are required, which I would like to describe as “instinct/gut feeling”. Gut feeling and experience bring security and calm, even in turbulent times when it comes to change and its management. Being calm and having the courage to listen to your gut feeling or allow it to exist are an art that must be learned. What is more, the individual has to want it and allow it. Then, a path evolves, which is marked by consistency and continuity, which is very significant not only for the respective person, but also for the employees. However, the employees in this environment must also meet certain characteristics, which are marked by natural curiosity, a spirit of independence and the perception regarding the delegated competence and responsibility. The relatively old Harzburger model (Hoehn and Böhne 1969) appears again here and is integrated. Employees, who do job-oriented work and need instructions for individual steps, must be regarded as a chance for further development on the part of the executive—provided that the potential exists. According to Malik (2000, p. 171–264) the prevalent tasks are:

Ensure goals:

- organize,
- decide
- control.

Tools used (Malik 2000, S. 277–373), are:

- sessions,
- reports,
- job design,
- budgets
- and performance reviews, but also systematic garbage disposal.

The latter is a difficult discipline. Only systematic releasing permits selective access. A timely withdrawal creates the opportunity for a new beginning. Simply adding projects with the target of growth are not conducive to the development.

It is a great skill to master the sequence of letting go, opening options, focusing, accessing, letting go, etc. (Risak 2003, p. 89).

Special attention has to be given to behaviour patterns that seem to contradict the change process. In *The Robber Hotzenplotz* Ottfried Preußler describes Kasperl's behavior, who—dressed up as “Seppi”—makes the great magician Petrusilius Zwackelmann let him off of numerous tasks “due to inanity”. (Preußler 2012, p. 56). The great magician being glad to have a stupid service messenger, who does not figure out his spells, at best fits into the ancient definition of management, but not at all into any modern requirements. However, such statements clearly shape from childhood on. In organizations it is the executives' task to recognize these patterns and change them. This requires calm and a lot of endurance; it is often faster to complete tasks (seen in the short term) instead of delegating them to others, which prevents learning. Following key issues are central (Doppler and Lauterbourg, 1994, p. 54 f.):

- What qualifications do the employees need?
- Who needs to learn what, so that the required performance level is achieved and can also be kept in the long run?
- What information, resources and personal support do the employees need so that the pending tasks can be tackled independently and successfully?
- What can/must be changed in terms of optimization of costs and benefits in the operation?

It needs not be explained here that these are long-term, multi-year processes. It is about “step for step thinking” and actually taking the steps; just like Nordic walking. The poles only help when they are properly used with the right technique.

- It is about step-for-step thinking and actually taking the steps.

In the change process the executive is mentally a few steps ahead, but must not lose the reference to reality and to the employees. The magic words are communication and targeted consistent information. This is easier said than done. It is an art to find the right balance between too much and too little. Too much creates “over-filling”, too little creates uncertainty. In any case, it takes time to prepare information and time again to give information. Here, the executive is greatly challenged. Not every single person can be informed.

The art is to bring the team consistently and transparently on the right level of information and to keep it. The time required for this has to be planned. The basis for a functioning process is trust, which is formed through feedback loops incorporated in decision-making processes. This must be addressed in communication at eye-level with employees (Henckel von Donnersmarck 2014, p. 63). The controlled handling of important information is one of the taboos. There must not be a circle of “better informed”. Information cascades distort messages. Stakeholders and involved parties should obtain all information directly (Lenz 1998, p. 142).

Tips¹

- ask yourself and also your manager the key issues.
- delegate skills and responsibility and thus create trust.
- take time for feedback and in turn demand feedback.

2.2 Commercial Component

The classical controlling process that is usually the central process of management begins with the target agreement/planning. Based on that the degree of target achievement is measured during the year (quarterly/monthly) by means of a planned/actual or plan/projection comparison. The first shows a snapshot for example of the last day of the month; the second shows the expected result involving measures taken (implemented) and thus evaluated up to the end of the year. Depending on how projection is defined, the effect on all those involved in the process is different. If, for example, by the end of June of the current budget year overruns are determined and the projection assumes reaching the targets in compliance with specifications, massive pressure to implement the measures results. The time frame for countermeasures is shrinking. The process is completed with the result of the year (Fig. 2.1).

A fund-financed hospital in Austria (BMG 2014) faces the challenge to run three controlling processes parallel, because settlement through the provincial fund will only be completed in October of the following year. One controlling process is in the planning stages, one in the control phase, and one in the settlement phase. The executive faces multiple challenges at the same time. In the planning phase, the plans of the departments have to be integrated into an overall plan taking the objectives of the owner into account. This requires skills such as scheduling and adherence to schedules, stress management, reporting, as well as stamina and especially trustworthiness.

The controller team stands for values (not only budgeted figures in euro) and reliability. Only in this way, can the responsible profession be exercised. The management of amounts in euro, the booking of plans on cost centres and cost categories is the result of agreements that are comprehensibly documented with the accounting document in the planned cost calculation. Business expertise is assumed; living through trustworthiness is the style. This, and only this, creates a positive image towards customers and attracts people who also possess this virtue (Henckel von Donnersmarck 2014, p. 45).

¹Regarding the tips I give at the end of each section, one should be aware that the implementation must be matched to the respective person and situation. Also experiences both in dealing with signals of the body and from the professional environment play a large role.

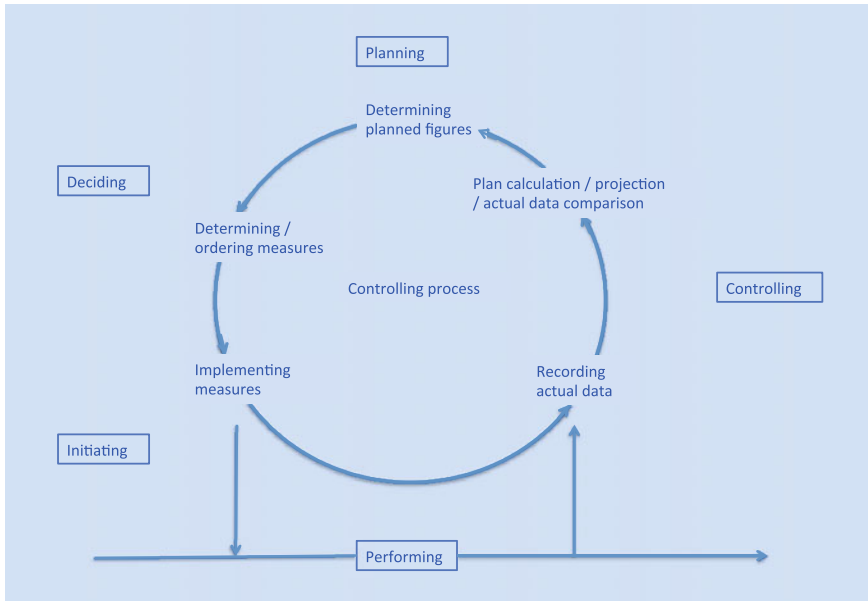


Fig. 2.1 Controlling process. Modified according to Eisl et al. (2008, p. 779)

The controller section has a difficult task to tackle—representing and communicating corporate goals to the departments (in the hospital these are the clinical areas as well as the specialist directorates) as well as the consolidation of the departmental plans but also a comprehensive coaching function. This is to set out the planning method, but also to explain the planning premises together with the corporate management and to ensure that no pure requirement plans are submitted. Planning has to be in line with the corporate management. Receiving only requirement plans means substantial additional effort for the controller section. Each department must be streamlined (=additional effort in times of tight schedules).

A compensation of the activities of the departments through the central controller-section must not happen, because otherwise no learning effect is obtained and the identification with the plans is not given (see Petrusilius Zwackelmann). For the controller and therefore, the executive, the main task is to keep the process going.

This requires much endurance, experience and the correct tempo (Sect. 2.4.1 energy usage).

Tips

- the accounting homework must be done.
- cost and performance accounting is the basis; forms of cost category and cost center accounting as actual and planned cost system.

2.3 Vision

The commercial component focuses on the controlling process, the indicators and measures for achieving the goals. The goals need to be achieved despite interim deviations. This point is not the subject of these explanations, but rather the perspective of the executive who controls the process and who has to make sure that the tasks are fulfilled. Such task completion has to be carried out by the responsible people. The executive and the controller section cannot compensate it.

Key issues of workload, scheduling and ensuring the transparency of information characterize this view. There are different perspectives depending on the role. As a controller, the sandwich position between controller section, the departments within the company (such as hospitals) and the company management is pre-programmed. The business management literature describes controlling as an activity at the intersection between management and controller section (Fig. 2.2).

Figure 2.2 clearly represents the intersection. In practice, the situation looks different. For the controllers as the providers of this service function, the roles in the

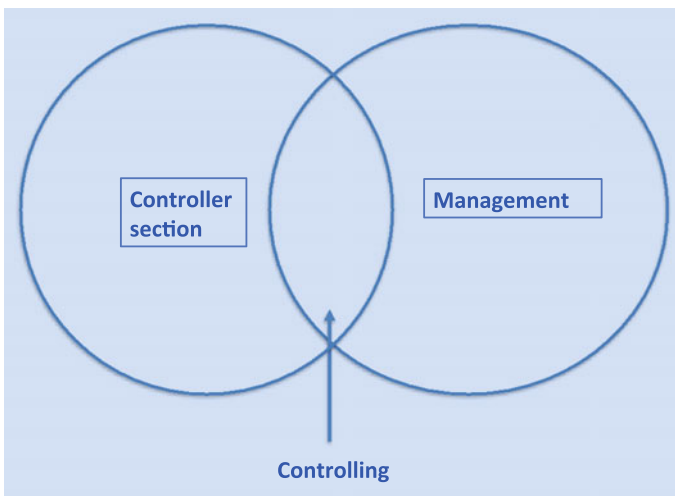


Fig. 2.2 Controlling as intersection. Modified according to Dehyle (1996), p. 177

controlling process, the management position in their division, and the coordination with corporate management converge. The tasks and views are different depending on the role and not easy to juggle. Regarding coordination with management, there are again two dimensions—management and the departments (i.e. clinical areas) that need to be brought together. Taking into account the own management function, this means first and foremost, to cope with the complexity, to structure and go a consistent way. The prerequisites are only partly inherited or can only be learnt to some extent during university education.

Tips

- When at the intersection do not allow being crushed!
- Remain true to yourself!

2.4 Executive

In the sections leadership, commercial component and vision the subject matter and the complexity that has to be coped with were explained. This section is about the executive, about dealing with pressure, emotions, peak workloads, different interests, but also compensation and prevention.

2.4.1 *Use of Energy*

In the section commercial component the controlling process was represented, which must be kept running. It is clear that this energy is necessary, but also the correct gear ratio if one imagines the moving (rotating) process as the rear wheel of a bicycle.

This ratio must not be too large, because otherwise the energy is not sufficient to cope with the long haul. It shouldn't be too small either, as then sprinting may be possible, but the pace for an endurance track is far too high. The example of the bicycle has specifically been chosen as the overall ratio determines the pace or the resistance, which have to be overcome, as well as the expected performance. Grade, headwind and road conditions are excluded from the model. Also that in practice it is never just one person who provides the energy, and thereby keeps the process running, must be clear.

- The executives are in the unique position to be able to integrate the theme of energy management in their own target agreement, and in those of the employees. Thus, it is subject to corporate planning.

The art to manage this energy management is sophisticated, but it is hardly the subject of management literature or of controlling curricula. My extensive experience and intensive dealing with both subjects have shown that energy management is essential. It is the executive's responsibility but also that of every individual.

Tips

- Accept that energy is not freely available and therefore the control of the energy balance is an important task.
- Endurance gets you further than a succession of sprints.

2.4.2 Schedule and Task Planning

Day-to-day operations concern the integration of schedule and task planning in the processes. If correctly applied, computer programs such as Outlook can help to create work appointments, and thus scheduled times for activities in the office (such as cost category and cost centre planning), and thereby to incorporate that as well as meeting dates in the organization of work.

Meeting deadlines should also carefully be dealt with. It is essential to decide who attends what appointments, or whether the meetings are necessary at all. The meeting itself has to be planned and the agenda has to be set up. The literature in this respect (Malik 2000, p. 280 ff.) is impressive, but practical application often greatly differs. Here it depends on the self-discipline and the learning performance of the executives (I include myself here), but also on all stakeholders whether improvements are achieved.

The main function of executives is to be a role model, and to go all the way.

This way is by no means even. Interim uphill and downhill passages may happen, but should not discourage you. Exact ideas and goals help here quite a bit. For the employees, the executive should schedule as much time as for sessions and work schedules. It does not only include a monthly jour-fixe, but the planned possibility to talk to each other during the week without having to check if this is even time even allows it.

- Good scheduling becomes evident when unforeseen tasks come up.

The implementation of this scheduling is the duty of the administration and must be closely coordinated. The administrative staff must support the schedule and communicate it in a suitable form. Otherwise conflicts arise quickly, as appointments arrive at administration first. "No" must be said here; this is where priorities are communicated. The executive has to coordinate these priorities with the general management. Saying no supports organized working. It is clear, however, that this is not always possible in the case of deadlines. Good scheduling becomes evident

only when unplanned tasks come up. Here, also, the step-for-step process and consistent implementation is coupled with communication for best practice.

Tips

- all appointments have to be put into a calendar.
- defend your appointment and task plans.
- set your priorities and coordinate them with superiors and co-workers.

2.4.3 Dealing with Signals

This topic is discussed in the business literature, but rather in terms of the signals from the environment of the company, i.e. regarding the signals concerning the market (Ansoff 1976, p. 129–152). Due to the financial crisis the market signals are also evident in the Austrian healthcare system. In the health sector, the market does not collapse; the patient volume rather continues to grow. The revenue side, which is provided by the public budgets and provincial funds (linked to the VAT tax revenue), will become lower. Hence, company management is under considerable pressure to reduce costs.

In this context signals refer to the reactions of the body in relation to the energy management and how to manage it. “The body has a far better sense of time than the brain; it does not miscount and knows when to stop” (Tammet 2014, p. 294 ff.).

- The body has a far better sense of time than the brain; it does not miscount and knows when to stop.

It is a must for every person, not only to be informed, but also have a targeted personal strategy to see the signals, so as not to succumb to the phenomenon of rushing permanently. (Seiwert 2005, p. 23–29). It is caused by the mistaken belief that, if we do everything faster, we can achieve everything. What is missing out in this case is our personal rhythm, which is derived from our physical, mental and emotional condition and is crucial for our wellbeing.

If we do not listen to our body and ignore the personal rhythm, we cannot tackle our tasks in the long term. Here, the “step-for-step method” is expedient. Should this not suffice, the body shows very clearly what is not good for it. What lessons are learnt from these experiences and whether there is the opportunity to make and utilize any changes, remains to be considered in each individual case. The personal willingness to deal with the issue and to learn how to handle the signals, as well as their assessment is vital for steps toward energy management and dealing with stressful situations. There is no general recipe.

I must listen to the signals and practice what I have learned, which assists and helps in stress situations. These tools (e.g. relaxation techniques, specific regeneration,

learned breathing techniques while maintaining the body tension) should be integrated into everyday life.

A measure for me was, for example, selling my moped and replacing the drive to work with a daily walk to and from work. This allows for plenty of air and helps get your head free, which should not be underestimated. Also, realizing that there are many books apart from the business literature can be valuable. People, who like to read, can integrate their own preferences.

People should not strive for complete relaxation everyday. This goal should not be set, as otherwise it generates reverse pressure. But the tools help to achieve a never previously thought of sustainability, which maintains the energy balance. The art is to integrate downtime even in times of heavy workload. In times of change, the executive is particularly challenged. Nevertheless, it is rarely discussed that the executives also undergo the process of change, which means that they have to deal with their own emotions as well. It is a fine art to direct the change, to think about the goals and to understand one's own signals that accompany this process. The executives must be alert and willing to learn. They must be grounded to be able to maintain the ground, because stability is essential for survival in uncertain times.

Tips

- Allow yourself to hear signals timely, so that they do not have to scream at you.
- Take time and space for processing and training.
- Find your own way.

2.4.4 The Role of Sports

Sport is essential in the field of energy management. People who are good with numbers should not do sports with objectives. There were times I did cycling with an annual total kilometer goal. That matched my job beautifully, but not the human body. Now I have a new goal, which is called wellbeing, where conditions are determined by medical examinations. The optimal training area was set. Only by doing so could I succeed in bringing together training and recreation.

- Sport in the nature has many advantages. It helps to get the head free and ground yourself.

Also an important experience for me was that with sport, Nordic walking sticks can be used and that nature can be experienced. By walking—also on paths without concrete—it is possible to experience the nature more intensively, to feel the bumps, to smell, to see. As I can very easily remember images, I can again take the impressions from nature as relaxing images. Especially in times of intense

preoccupation with numbers and in the course of the change processes, this option is very helpful—in the sense of clearing one’s head. Nature also greatly helps with grounding. Ultimately, work benefits from this time and again. Leisure is never unproductive but reproductive and equally important for success as working time (Henckel von Donnersmarck 2014, p. 15).

Tips

- Sport is important, but please do not rate it with numbers and targets.
- Step by step has great effect and leads to sustainable success.
- The nature experience is fun. It helps when dealing with emotions.

2.4.5 Handling Emotions

Never forget, “The controller is a person!” The experiences on a daily basis do not leave you indifferent. They touch; they affect you in various degrees. Here, the personal value system plays a big role. Whenever this is affected, the energy balance is involved as well.

- The controller is a person! Work experiences leave no one indifferent.

The personal handling of attacks on the value system also has to be learned. It does not have to happen every day, but a personal calendar with entries based on demand helps here. For sport there should be a personal booklet, in which beautiful tours should be entered. Dealing with emotions is always a matter of personal concern and dissociation. The numbers person tries to reach a factual level by communication through and about numbers, where emotions are largely avoided. Each number, especially in a comparison of planned/actual data, is pure emotion.

Self-image and external image come together, trustworthiness is evident or dissolves into nothing, and measures are effective or are counteracted by effects. Here it becomes evident whether values are lived or are mere lip service (Hlinka 2014, p. 2 f.). These phenomena need to be processed and a way, which is comprehensible, and also documented, should be found. This way decisions are made transparent and differences are explained. The controller must be able to realize that the deviation is the rule, not the exception. Of course, the private environment that acts as a backbone in all situations and is irreplaceable helps when dealing with emotions.

Tips

- Do not take everything personally.
- Emotions are allowed and should be felt.
- Take time for and space for processing and training.

2.4.6 *Consequence*

The “step-for-step method” means that a continuous development takes place - such as when going on a Nordic walking tour. If you proceed like this, the 4-h tour is not the goal, but each step, and at the end comes the surprise about how far the way was. Working life is, of course, not so haphazard, but knowing the target should facilitate proceeding in manageable portions with a sense of achievement built into the process. With a walking tour planning and also realizing it is one’s own responsibility—except depending on weather conditions. In the controlling process step 1 is done, but at the same time three more steps are required. The art is to stop and briefly review a completed task item (such as planning). Also, the emptiness, which is formed emotionally, must be felt and processed before proceeding. Consequence allows such moments and is equally necessary when dealing with employees. Thereby, it is important to note the following points (Mesnaric 2010, pp. 72–74):

- Support your employees to feel their inner impulses. This requires relaxation instead of great pressure, and silence instead of perpetual background noise and meeting marathons, as well as listening to the inner voice.
- Train their capacity of reason.
- Analyze the skills and abilities of your employees before determining their fields of activity.
- Give real, serious appreciation and recognition.
- If potential and talents show, which do not match with the corporate goals, check whether the company can be changed as a living system.

Then there is the chance to associate positive feelings with work and to achieve job satisfaction on the way to target completion. (Camelli and Rosenstiel 2009, p. 63) Only then do “whiners, distrust monster, know-it-all villain, leviathan impatience, abstract rip-off, digital idiot and routine grubber—all the good mood thieves” not have a chance anymore. (Püttjer and Schnierda 2009, pp. 24 ff.)

- The art is to stop and briefly review a completed task item. Also, the emptiness, which is formed emotionally, must be felt and processed before proceeding.

Tip

- You should walk step by step, and continue walking.

2.4.7 *Meaning*

“The job has to be fun”, is a popular saying—in my opinion, it must be **meaningful**.

The meaning of the tasks of the controller in a hospital ranges from cost transparency to support in achieving the company’s goals, but ultimately it is always for the benefit of the patient. Everyday life is often dry and sometimes the question of meaning arises. Particularly in this role, this question must be permitted, even wanted; however it must not permanently become a topic.

The tightrope walk between reflecting one’s doing, making sure to be in the present moment and being able to look into the future, is the main point of the controller profession. From this, you can develop an inner drive, which should be used to continue in a focused manner. The same applies to your own work, whose place in society and its mission must be clearly defined, to exactly create this meaning. The self broadcast stand with the talents and interests accordingly. Only then do you achieve the lightness (Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2014, p. 25 ff.) for your head to be clear and thinking freely. “Dream your goal before you realize it!” (Maxwald 2002, p. 70).

Tips

- Dare to ask the question of meaning, and take time to answer.
- As an executive, convey meaning and also demand it.

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