

The Trouble With People

This is not a romcom.

A Series On The Future Of People (at work)

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Drawing on experiences and insights

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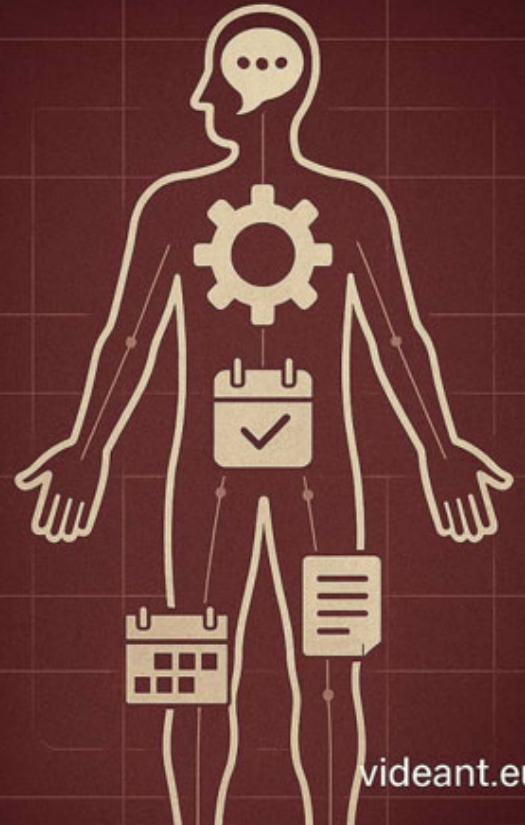
This is not a romcom although corporate life is not short of comedians – just not the sort that would make you laugh out loud.

„There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition

there.” - Advice from Motilal Nehru to his granddaughter Indira Gandhi née Nehru

The Trouble With People

The Anatomy of Corporate Dysfunction



The Trouble With People, Article 1: The Anatomy of Corporate Dysfunction

What Really Defines Us At Work

Working with other people is complicated. We occasionally hear stories about cozy „Volksheim“ atmospheres in teams (to borrow from Sweden’s past), but these often turn out to be civil service offices or holed-up teams. In most cases, cooperation remains trickier.

What defines us as parts of an organization? I’d argue the first-order criteria are character and personality, education and experience – all measured by relevance and depth. These are genuine attributes. Hierarchical standing and compensation are proxies at best, often unreliable indicators. They’re transitory, loaned to individuals by organizations like military uniforms and rank. It always helps to picture people without their hallmarks of power.

The Fading Value Myth

Some say education and experience fade over time, becoming less relevant. That’s like saying an old hammer becomes less useful just because time passes. Education and experience are tools for new thoughts and actions. They don’t dull or become obsolete but simply more elaborate – fertile grounds for an adapting mind.

Friedrich Engels once wrote that the human hand was not only the tool for work but also its product. The same applies to the human mind, where wrinkles are actually coveted. Unlike inanimate things, the mind constantly renews and doesn’t really decay before late in life – even if we all seem to know exceptions in our family or work environments.

The Three Pillars of Value

If we consider organizational value-added as a product of three main factors:

1. **Formal knowledge** - the foundation
2. **Ingenuity or creativity** - to apply, develop and re-apply knowledge
3. **Attitude** - in doing work and interacting with others

These ought to be the building blocks for valuing people and evaluating contribution. The hardest to assess is the softest to measure: attitude. Read more about this in article 2.