

Which management for tomorrow's society?

Executive Summary of Philosophie & Management's cycle of seminars 2009-2010

Management will have to evolve in order to contribute to better to value creation in tomorrow's society. For the last year, through a cycle of seminars and conferences, a group of philosophers and managers discussed how this could happen. Their preliminary conclusions are that management in tomorrow's society should focus on four key areas: management of "limits", of "links", of "ends" and "transitions".

Should management concentrate on the questions of "limits", of "links", of "finalities" and "transitions"? Without pretending to be exhaustive, these four priority areas are the ones that came out of Philosophie & Management's seminars. Let us briefly detail them.

1. **Management of "Limits"**: This deals primarily with reducing, limiting our excess in terms of material growth and the related destruction of limited natural resources that go with it. It deals also with promoting the development of human well-beings, which can be pursued infinitely without endangering their environment. Finally, the management of "limits" can also be understood as the management of "perimeters". Our system goes currently through a crisis of "perimeters" at various levels. For example, in the currently unfolding cognitive capitalism, the perimeter of companies is more blurred than ever. Take Google: its market value is greatly the result of its billions unpaid users like you and me. So depends our agriculture on trillions unpaid workers: bees, insects of all kinds, snails... Where does one therefore draw the line regarding the "inputs" of a company? At a broader economic level, we also need to reflect upon the limits of competition, as an organizational principle: can this principle be extended to all human activities? What are the dangers associated with more and more widespread view of human beings as small enterprises, with a set of capabilities, competing with other human-enterprises? What are the limits of our more and more dominant instrumental rationality?
2. **Management of "Links"**: The above questions related to the management of "Limits" leads to questions related at how we should manage the articulation between different rationalities or principles (e.g. competition and co-operation, without falling in the "co-opetition" reductionism). We should also reflect upon how to manage better the different "stakeholders" of any organizations, how to manage positive and negative externalities, how to stimulate and to tap into networks that creates value and innovates... To come back to our agriculture example, honey bees have been dying at a worrying lately (their number has fallen with more than 70% during the last 4 years). How should we change our agricultural production practices in order to nurture good "relationships" with vital allies such as bees, although they were not until today viewed and accounted for as crucial "inputs" for agricultural production?
3. **Management of "finalities"**: Inevitably our questioning of the "limits" and "links" led us to question the "finalities" of enterprises. Isn't it time to abandon Milton Friedman's reductionary vision? Friedman famously formulated a manager's sole objective as "maximising shareholders' value under the constraint of the respect of the law (and common decency)". A manager who would not pursue strictly this objective should be considered a thief. Isn't it time to turn Friedman's imperative upon its head? Couldn't the following imperative become the guideline for tomorrow's managers: "Maximize the value for society as a whole under the constraint of an adequate, minimal, return for shareholders"?
4. **Management of "Transitions"**: The last big question is how best to address the managerial challenges evoked so far. How can we promote and support the "experiments" and projects, within and outside companies, which will enable a good transition to another society? Several priority actions have been discussed in that regard, the most fundamental one being the necessary changes we need to bring in the ways we measure wealth or a company's value. Could the introduction of complementary currencies also help bring more resilience in our system and allow taking into account other dimensions than the sole commercial ones in our exchanges? How could we introduce and finance "transition revenues" for individuals, communities or cities willing to experiment alternative ways of living? Could the introduction, within companies, of a "Work Chamber" alongside the current "Capital Chamber" (the board representing the shareholders) bring a new and positive dynamism in companies, just like the democratic bi-cameral system at the political level accompanied unprecedented economic growth? These and many others proposals were discussed as ways to facilitate the transition to a new system that remains to be invented.

As mentioned above, these conclusions are the result from Philosophie & Management latest cycle of seminars, called: "Question Time: Which management for tomorrow's society?" Created in 2000, this is already Philosophy & Management 9th cycle of seminars. It boasted 12 top level French and Belgian philosophers (who are also often sociologists, economists...) as speakers. The program has been structured around the key ideas of philosopher Christian Arnsperger's latest book: "*L'éthique de l'existence capitaliste*" (*Ethics of the capitalist existence*), published in September 2009 at Les Editions du Cerf. In this book, Arnsperger investigates how we could transform the axioms (key principles) of our current capitalist system, which alienate us all or maintain us alienated, into new axioms that would herald a new "post-capitalist" society.

To make it more concrete, Arnsperger argues that today's capitalist system rests, among others, on the following axioms, principles or beliefs:

- competition is the only driver for efficiency and generation of wealth;
- our consumer needs are infinite;
- private ownership is necessary to stimulate creativity;
- "salvation" and social recognition are solely generated through work.

Are these axioms "natural" for humankind? Or are they "temporary", the result of our recent history and battle of ideas (the last 300 years or so)? If we believe these axioms are not "natural" but "temporary", can we free ourselves from them? How? How can we then "tune" society on other organizing principles? Arnsperger writes that freedom from these axioms requires a form of detachment (aloofness) from deep, inner fears: fear of death, of failure, of exploitation, among others.

Existential freedom, "existential liberalism" as he calls it, requires accepting our dependence and our finiteness as a human being. Dependence and finiteness which we share with all our peers. This detachment and this acceptance are for him the expression of multiple freedoms at the very bottom of our existence. This should allow us, for example, to move from the principle of capitalistic consumption to the principle of voluntary sobriety: a deliberate simplicity which advocates widening and deepening consumption rather than endless growth. It should also allow us to move from the principle of domination to that of mutual care or from the principle of propriety to the one of mutuality, commonness.

But one may say: how can we stimulate the advent of these freedoms? How can we facilitate or trigger this awakening at the level of each individual? Can we reconcile this awakening, these freedoms with the current management of companies? Should we change our way of managing them to? If so, how should we try to do that? All these questions were finally crystallized into the following seminars:

16/09: Public opening session, with a debate between the philosopher Christian Arnsperger, Eric Domb (CEO Paradisio) & Pierre Gurdjian (Managing Partner at Mc Kinsey)

26/09: Competition: the sole drive towards efficiency and wealth? by Pierre Dardot & Christian Laval

24/10: New local currencies for new local relationships? by Bernard Lietaer

21/11: Is democracy in companies possible? by Isabelle Ferraras

12/12: Is it rational to work in order to develop oneself? by Pierre-Michel Menger

16/01: Always more? Always better? Which future for growth, consumption and their management? by Patrick Viveret

27/02: Innovation, what for? by Luc de Brabandere

20/03: Which 'business models' in an economy without scarcity? by Yann Moulier-Boutang & Antoine Rebiscoul

24/04: Accountability or assistance: which balance? by Christian Léonard

06/05: Public closing session with a debate between Christian Arnsperger, Bruno Van Lierde (BCG) et Charles de Liedekerke (Joris Ide)

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