

New Education Perspective: the Humanistic Management Paradigm

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Abstract

Over the last several decades, the world has been affected by continuous and unpredictable changes, producing uncertainty that has meaningfully influenced both the social life and economic activities of individuals, groups, and especially firms. The implication of this “storm” affecting the business world is that managers must be able to make their strategies and firms more flexible; be aware that success is dependent on human beings more than ever before, and emphasize the creation and dissemination of knowledge. In other words, managers have to take the way of a humanistic perspective based on the awareness that organizations are first of all a “community of persons”.

With this phenomenon in mind, one critical question is how management education can shift from the classical paradigm based on the homo economicus concept, that means based on the rationality, to a paradigm based on the values of human beings and the necessity to adopt the humanistic management perspective. It is not an easy problem to solve and, in fact, it often remains unresolved: for this reason, it is one of the most significant, most pressing challenges for business schools and especially for teachers.

Due to this state of affairs, teachers face a significant challenge to overcome their teaching design and craft a process that more accurately provides students with knowledge that can help them become managers well-equipped to address the needs of present and future firms and lead them to success. It means that teachers have to take a new approach and, more specifically, they must be actively engaged to include new teaching areas in business schools (e.g., sustainability, ethical management, social responsibility, etc.).

Furthermore, to favoring the acquisition by students of the elements that characterize the humanistic paradigm, it is essential also to innovate the teaching style to better interact with the increasingly “digital” students. These are challenges that cannot be lost: in which way business schools and teachers are preparing to win this challenge?

Keywords: Education, humanistic management, management paradigms, digital students

1. Introduction

The contribution of Lawrence and Lorsch [1] introduced the concept of “turbulent environment” in 1967. Their intuition proved to be able to focus attention on a phenomenon that was emerging in those years and has now become disruptive and widespread in all activities. The present millennium is characterized by a change that for some decades has taken on an unprecedented acceleration and breadth, which leads to the generation of considerable uncertainty. The latter is particularly problematic for companies because it highlights the need to be managed in a way to interact with change and able to reduce uncertainty based on adequate knowledge, skills, and values. In other words, today's managers are asked not only to have knowledge and professional skills but also to have characteristics that allow them to act with the flexibility that derives from the enhancement of human beings of the company. Bearing in mind the company is, first of all, a “community of persons” [2] and, therefore, avoiding the adoption of so-called rational behaviors typical of the classical management paradigm (homo economicus) and adopting the paradigm of humanistic management (homo sapiens).

If it is true that managers must possess the abilities mentioned above, the questions that emerge are: how are universities and business schools working to change their training offer? Are the teachers aware that it is indispensable and indivisible to change the style of teaching? Which teaching tools must take into account that they interact with “digital students”?

The following point highlights the need for a new management paradigm. Then the focus is on the training offer and later recall some innovative teaching techniques. Finally, some considerations are presented.

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2. The need for a new paradigm

Focusing on the recent financial crisis and the numerous scandals involving managers and companies, one wonders if the unethical behaviors, disrespectful of the need to achieve sustainable development and realized in disregard of damage to society, are somehow the result of ineffective university education.

In fact, it is proper to reflect on the fact that the training projects of business schools, programs of the managerial disciplines, content of books and management manuals have remained anchored, except for some valuable exceptions, to the economic paradigm based on rationality and emphasis on orientation to maximum profit as the primary objective of the company. Is this paradigm able to meet the needs of the current historical period? [3] Certainly not if we consider the current turbulent and complex scenarios.

In other words, it indicates the indispensability of moving from the classical economic paradigm, based on rationality (*homo economicus*) to a paradigm based on the recognition of human virtues (*homo sapiens*). This is not a naive approach or an approach devoid of realism: on the contrary, it is an approach that allows acting in a context in which success is not pursued with the exclusive use of mathematical models or advanced technologies, but with the adequate exploitation of human beings, with attention to their needs and with the development of human virtues in all forms.

From the last century to the present millennium, the world and its economic systems have wholly changed: predictable events have become unpredictable, turbulent, subject to constant changes at unknown speeds in the past. The borders of the world have lost part of their barrier function, and the distinctions have been transformed, increasingly, into open connection points. This new physiognomy of the world dramatically influences every organization asking for current and future managers to operate in a world where knowledge is needed to be flexible and creative.

It is time to create a break with the past conceptions that hindered management and organizational theories to the incessant and obsessive search for efficiency [4].

In the new perspective, it is essential that managers learn the necessary skills during universities studies. This perspective implies that, on one side, business schools give their curricula a less technical and more social orientation. On the other side, that teachers will adopt more effective teaching styles that can excite and motivate students, and more suitable tools for interacting with current "digital students".

3. Towards the change in the training offered

Numerous universities and business schools [5] are committed to changing their educational offer and programs to provide training that takes into account the principles of ethics, sustainable development and social responsibility in order to create a significant experience for students [6], that is, learning that includes not only knowledge and skills but also values and attitudes.

In reality, structural changes do not ensure a shift in people's attitudes and mentality. In other words, it is not enough to include courses on ethics, sustainability and social responsibility without the full and conscious involvement of teachers and, above all, students. The real problem is to create emotion and passion for making people understand that the business activity is a problem of respect of human beings. This awareness can also be achieved with the help of appropriate teaching techniques that take into account the digital-community connotation of the students of the third millennium.

A proper help can result from the adoption of the system thinking approach that possesses the elements capable of creating a flexible and dynamic mind: in other words, by adopting this approach, students, from the university years, practice to consider the range of possible alternatives for problem-solving. It is about acquiring a decision/action methodology that differs significantly from the rationality of *homo economicus* and positions itself in the perspective of the humanistic management paradigm [7] which, placing human subjects at the center, highlights the need for creativity, flexibility and relational skills to avoid determinism.

Universities, as leading "education suppliers" have the responsibility to integrate their curricula to offer students knowledge and skills that make them able to interact with change and to become managers able win the challenges of the third millennium.

4. What teaching tools?

Teaching tools play an essential role to involve students actively and in this way, creating a keen awareness of the human beings central role. Experimenting how important is the human beings creativity, and the relationship with others can be easier to shift from the organization-centered orientation to the human beings-centered orientation.

The implication is that we must use teaching tools able to excite, to create experiences, to involve students by making them love what they study. Indeed, learning, in all its forms, is an emotional process, strictly connected with passion. Furthermore, it was observed that “in such an era, actively instructing or guiding students “learning how to learn” and “cooperating with others” is inevitable” [8].

Below we try to identify a set of teaching tools that may help professors in their huge challenge: the aim of this point is not to present a complete analysis, but only to provide “food for thought”. To begin can be useful to observe that if it is necessary to discover new tools, it is also worthwhile to use the traditional tools differently.

For examples, tell stories is a traditional method which can become an innovative approach if adopted in the form of digital storytelling [9] that manages to “dialogue” with the students in the digital language that is familiar to them. Similar consideration can be made for case studies: some authors argue in favor of “student-developed” case studies because students have to build the case study after carrying out appropriate research, interviews, etc. In this way, students are actively involved in their learning process. Among the less traditional approaches can be indicated full-length films, cartoons, shots, videos, music [10].

In the perspective of involving students, it is useful to apply the theoretical concepts to real-life situations, as well as concrete experiences and experiments active in the enterprise.

Finally, it can be observed that the lack of connection between what is taught in the classroom and the operational reality of business can limit the effectiveness of the courses, especially if related to ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can only formulate an auspice: we hope that in a short time universities, business schools, and teachers decide to modify their curricula and their teaching approach.

What is needed is not a formal or structural change, necessary but not sufficient, for the adoption of an essential cultural change with the adoption of a humanistic orientation, that is, to shift from rationality and obsession to sustainability, creativity, emotions, trust and wisdom.

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