

Cosmopolitanism and values for humanistic leaders

IESE's Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma and Marta Elvira argue for two important concepts: cosmopolitanism and the ability to talk about values.

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Humanism recognizes the common core and value of all human beings.

Humanistic management is people-centered and works to protect human dignity. Amid increasing levels of globalization, today's humanistic leaders must be global citizens, engaged with local and international concerns.

In the book [*Humanistic Perspectives on International Business and Management*](#), [Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma](#), Anabella Dávila and [Marta Elvira](#) contribute a chapter on humanistic leadership. They look at how business leaders and stakeholders can mutually flourish by learning about each other's values.

The co-authors propose that "value generalization" -- i.e., the process of redefining values at a higher level of abstraction -- is a useful tool for global leaders engaging with local stakeholders.

The other key concept is cosmopolitanism, understood as openness to the world and to others. With cosmopolitanism and values, crossing borders offers opportunities for discovery and positive transformation.

Why humanistic leadership?

Treating people as an end rather than a means is one hallmark of humanistic leadership.

If humanistic leaders see themselves as global citizens bound to their stakeholders by the moral imperative of respecting one another as fellow human beings, they negotiate with them without commoditizing them.

In other words, instead of seeing their interests as divergent and financial profit as the ultimate goal, humanistic leaders negotiate with stakeholders to reach a common good that benefits all involved.

Connecting global and local

In today's context of transnationalization and globalization, there is no simple relationship between the local and the global. Naturally, this has implications for management.

Cosmopolitanism implies dialogue between cultures that questions taken-for-granted economic and cultural "truths" and requires openness to "the other." This cosmopolitanism involves critical thinking and conversation rather than establishing a society based on a set of universal norms.

But what does opening oneself up to "the other" and to the world really entail? How are differences in cultures and norms managed?

This is where "value generalization" comes in.

A useful example of value generalization is the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The actors engaged in a dialogue about respective value traditions, looking for a higher-order narrative of values in which all would recognize themselves. The exercise was recognized as a success. One of the drafters, French lawyer René Cassin, later won a Nobel Prize for his role in creating the Declaration.

The aim of value generalization is to understand shared characteristics without negating specific cultural experiences or traditions. "We need roots, but not borders," the co-authors quote from Mexican director Guillermo del Toro.

Global citizens and stakeholders

Humanistic leaders serve as a bridge across cultures without ignoring the differences between them. They open up a dialogue between themselves and their local stakeholders in which mutual learning occurs, the co-authors say.

On a practical note, managers aspiring to be global citizens might mentally rehearse their responses to situations in which their values, cultural position or identity are questioned. Through rehearsals, but especially through actual conversations, leaders can make decisions about which values to privilege. By doing so, they redefine what matters in leadership and in business. The process is transformative.

"We propose humanism in leadership as a learning lens that allows global leaders and local stakeholders to enhance mutual growth by understanding each other's values," the co-authors conclude.

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