

A return to humanism in general management

It's time for a refresher on our ideas of what a CEO can and should be. A 2019 book from strategic management scholars at IESE and affiliated schools explores humanistic leadership with a focus on Latin and Ibero-American organizations.



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We have divided management into so many sub-categories — the Chief Innovation Officer, Chief Technology Officer, Chief Financial Officer — that at times we neglect the idea of the general manager, who takes the reins and aims to navigate the company strategically through the ups and downs of business.

IESE's [Adrián Caldart](#) and [Joan Enric Ricart](#), with Alejandro Carrera of IAE Business School, strive to redirect the focus to general management in a new book, which highlights Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American business contexts. Also central is the promotion of a humanistic management approach — which they assert is not only ethical but the most likely

approach to guarantee long-term prosperity in any region.

Uniting research from select contributors at business schools in Spain, Portugal and Latin America — including IESE's [Rafael Andreu](#), [Africa Ariño](#), [Pascual Berrone](#), [Luis Manuel Calleja](#), [Jordi Canals](#), [Marta Elvira](#), [Jaume Llopis](#), [Mike Rosenberg](#), and [Josep Tàpies](#) — the book covers topics from business model innovation to sustainability, and from institutional leadership to emerging markets strategies, with case studies demonstrating the practical applications of many ideas. Intended for both practitioners and students of business, the book is organized into five parts:

1. The anthropological foundations of humanist management (Chapters 1-3)

Setting the scene, three early chapters focus on understanding the real priorities of good general managers and then following the evolution of the academic field of business policy and its implications for management education, as well as the rise of the people-centered organization. In sum, the general manager is not just someone "who decisively contributes to the efficient and innovative management of scarce social resources. Instead, CEOs are deemed as leaders responsible for creating organizations committed to the personal development of everyone in the company, as well as ethical business conduct," the co-editors explain.

2. Strategic management and organizing practices (Chapters 4-9)

The second section of the book focuses on the current business realities in Latin America, Spain and Portugal in terms of strategy-making as well as designing organizational practices, though with many lessons that are applicable more generally. Contributions include work on topics such as business model renewal, competitive strategy in emerging markets, digital entrepreneurship in emerging markets, sustainability without greenwashing, Latin American "unicorns," spontaneous learning in organizations, and strategic alliances.

3. Corporate governance (Chapters 10-14)

"Importantly," write Caldart, Ricart and Carrera, "we do not isolate corporate governance from ongoing management. We emphasize the need for harmony among strategy, organizing and governance." These chapters deal with topics such as optimal board design, risk management, the influence of ownership on the CEO, stakeholder management in Latin America, and special governance considerations for family-owned businesses.

4. An integrative look at the CEO agenda (Chapter 15)

From Henry Mintzberg to John Kotter, this section looks at the definition and perceptions of a general manager and considers data from Latin America on how CEOs conceive and execute their agendas. In an interesting takeaway, they find there is general consensus among CEOs on which tasks make up their job, but less overlap in which tasks are actually executed, with the latter depending on a range of company and industry specifics.

5. Case studies (Chapter 16)

The book concludes with summaries of a dozen case studies cited throughout, also written by professors from IESE and its affiliated schools in Portugal and Latin America.

"If we understand the role of the CEO as the custodian and shaper of organizational values," Caldart, Ricart and Carrera write, "the need for new perspectives becomes evident." They rue the corporate failures, malpractice scandals and cynical PR ethics that have damaged the very concept of management in recent years.

That said, it's not too late to reverse the damage. In this human-centered view, today's general managers should lead by example, commit to the personal development of everyone in the company, and do well by doing right.

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