

A humanistic approach to leadership creates an ecosystem in which all can thrive

Pressure for results and inflexible schedules degrade the human ecosystem. A leadership of care is necessary.



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Just as natural ecosystems can be degraded by toxic elements, the human ecosystem can also suffer setbacks that affect all spheres of a person's life — from business, family and

society, to a sense of self.

IESE Prof. [Nuria Chinchilla](#) and researcher Pilar Garcia-Lombardia look at what ails the “fundamentals of human ecology” in a new book titled [Fundamentals of Human Ecology as a Paradigm for a More Sustainable Economy](#). They argue that the pressure to deliver results, poor flexibility in working hours and the scaling back of remote working are all pain points in our aim to create a more sustainable economy.

Stress is to the human ecosystem what CO2 is to the natural world: a polluter. But we don't need to take it as a given, the authors suggest. Business leaders are in a unique position to drive societal change — the change we need to achieve sustainability that is financial and social, but also human. To this end, they defend a humanistic vision of business, one premised on a paradigm of care — which is, after all, a profoundly human trait.

These are the three elements necessary to create positive change in the human-business ecosystem:

1. Transcendent leadership

The [transcendent leader](#) is able to generate a sense of mission in others, inspiring employees to assume their own leadership. Transcendent leadership is driven by values-based or mission-led motivation, so that all employees' achievements contribute to the company's mission and purpose.

This type of leadership promotes flexibility, incorporates female perspectives and works to reconcile work and family life. The authors emphasize that leadership based on caring for and serving others is essential for creating business environments that allow people to develop their full potential — and, in turn, positively influence society.

2. Corporate culture

An organization's culture is a reflection of the values of its top management. Therefore, improving corporate culture means developing values, styles and systems that foster unity between employees and the company. The authors advocate a culture that enables employees to care for their families and fulfill other commitments outside of work.

3. Corporate social responsibility, internally and externally

We need to adopt socially responsible practices, prioritizing ethical values that consider [human and social capital](#) in a holistic manner. If this approach becomes standard, say the authors, we will have a much better chance of eradicating the effects of unethical companies and abusive business practices.

Emphasizing responsibility can make good business sense and also be reputation building. Consider the Spanish energy company Iberdrola, which introduced a continuous working day, with shifts between 7 a.m. and 3 p.m., in contrast with the typical long workdays common in Spain. This change led to a 20% reduction in absenteeism, a 90% reduction in overtime and a drastic decrease in workplace accidents. There was also an uptick in employee motivation and productivity.

As a concluding message for managers and entrepreneurs, the authors underline that any actions taken to make life easier for employees have scope far beyond the company: they affect individuals, their families and society more broadly.

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