

Humanistic leaders: Their time has come

IESE's Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma and Marta Elvira, writing with Anabella Dávila, call for a new generation of leaders who see themselves as global citizens with moral duties.

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Not that long ago, a leader was portrayed as a heroic figure; a man — and it was usually a man — who gave commands.

Thankfully, a leader these days is seen more as a builder of teams and alliances.

However, as IESE's [Carlos Rodríguez-Lluesma](#) and [Marta Elvira](#), writing with Anabella Dávila of Mexico's EGADE Business School, argue in their paper, the concept of leadership needs to evolve further.

All too often, leadership is still seen in purely economic terms: to maximize profit. There is still far too little focus on the moral character of managerial action.

What is needed is a type of leadership that is motivated by the moral imperative of respecting fellow human beings and seeing people, not as means, but as ends in themselves.

Leaders should aim not to maximize utility, but to reach a common good that goes beyond the particular goods of the parties involved. This, they say, constitutes humanistic leadership.

Two central concepts: Citizens & stakeholders

Two concepts are central to this new vision of leadership: a citizenship approach that perceives individuals not only as members of society, but also as active members of the community; and a stakeholder approach that recognizes individuals' legitimate needs and demands.

The focus on stakeholders is why humanistic leadership has to be hyper-local. There is no universal and abstract method for dealing with stakeholders.

Humanistic leaders know that good leadership is not merely a technique. Instead, they see management as an art form. Truly global leaders need to be artists, because they stand at the junction of social relationships that must be constantly legitimized, promoted and put into practice.

If they are going to address stakeholder needs, these leaders have to be sensitive to the particular problems of each local context, and resourceful enough to find solutions.

Examples from Latin America

Using case studies of Latin American businesses, the authors show how institutional shortcomings, unstable governments and deficient safety nets became an occasion for these companies to adopt humanistic strategies toward labor relations, specifically in relation to health care and education.

One example is the steel manufacturer, Ternium, which gives all its Mexican employees free health checks, as well as advice on diet and exercise. Given that Mexico spends the least on health care compared with any other OECD country, this demonstrates humanistic leadership, both morally and practically.

The confectioner, Arcor, runs a foundation that promotes equal educational opportunities for children. By contributing to communities in this way, they can start to become more autonomous and self-sufficient.

Following a merger, Banco Real, now part of Banco Santander, decided to revise its purpose, putting customers first. This move earned greater loyalty and trust from clients and employees alike, and also boosted profit.

The leaders of the future will be those who are able to see both the global and the local points of view, and adopt humanistic leadership strategies like these, conclude the authors.

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