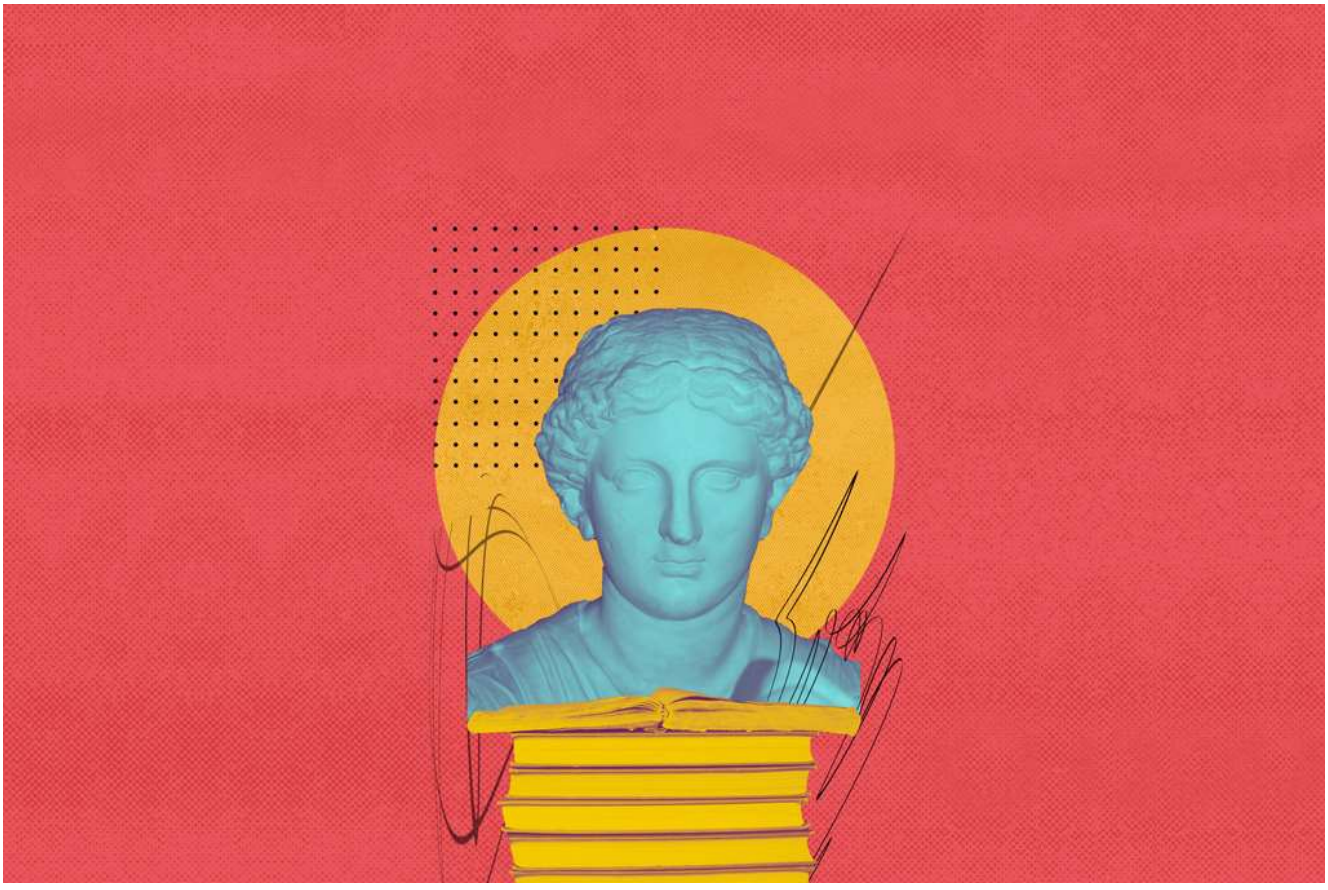
How the humanities can enrich your management

Humanities broaden one’s perspective and can help leaders think more critically and creatively in today’s complex world.



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The beauty of humanities

By Marc Badia & Júlia Gifra

At IESE, ethics and a human-centric approach to business have been integral to our founding mission of developing leaders with professional excellence, integrity and a spirit of service. As such, we recognize the need to foster a deeper understanding of the world and human nature by incorporating more humanities content in our MBA program. We aim to create more spaces for contemplating enduring questions related to life-purpose and societal justice as part of our management education.

In a polarized and fragmented world, we need to educate wise leaders with the ability to bridge divides and foster a common understanding. The study of humanities contributes to this education, leading our students to the discovery of universal human values, the appreciation of human dignity and the nobility of spirit.

As digital technologies and artificial intelligence pervade every area of our modern world, the prevailing trend in higher education has been toward more technical specializations. Yet we run the risk of limiting our perspectives by succumbing to pragmatism and scientism. The answers to contemporary concerns aren't only to be found in data-based science and technology. Moreover, existential questions about human identity, human aspirations and human flourishing cannot be answered by science alone but require more human thought and reflection.

Management is about bringing different people together to achieve a common goal. Science and technology may offer answers to the *what* and *how* but not to the *why*, which ultimately is the source of meaning and inspiration for people. Any attempt to reduce human nature and relationships to a deterministic materialism is bound to fail. It is precisely for this reason that the humanities become more relevant than ever. The humanities enrich management education, broadening one's perspective and helping leaders to think more critically, creatively and comprehensively in today's increasingly complex, ever-changing world.

In addition to the Christian humanism that underpins our teaching and coursework, our academic programs are enhanced with a variety of electives and extracurricular activities designed to expand the human and intellectual capacities of our students. A recent example is a series on "The Appreciation of Beauty," considering beauty as a transcendent, motivating force capable of inspiring ideals and positively shaping the world for the better.

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In the postmodern era, truth and goodness are at a low ebb. The transcendence of beauty offers a glimmer of hope to comprehend reality. Beauty — whether the inner radiance that emanates from our souls or outward expressions through art, literature, music and architecture — is a universal longing that resides within each and every human being. It's a lens through which we perceive reality; it's a means of expression, a conversation we have with ourselves and the world. And those messages convey values that can uplift and inspire people, providing meaning and purpose, and overcoming the pragmatic spirit that judges others based on their utility to us. The dynamic city of Barcelona, with its diverse cultural tapestry, serves as the stage for this exploration, with visits to the Sagrada Familia, the Gran Teatre del Liceu, the National Museum of Art of Catalonia (MNAC) and the luxury fashion house of Santa Eulalia.

Our holistic program is oriented toward building greater self-awareness, preparing leaders for the challenges they will face, not only out in the business world, but also deep within themselves as they assume responsible roles in society. Let your own journey into the humanities begin.

Marc Badia is Associate Dean of the MBA and MiM programs, and Júlia Gifra is Associate Director of the MBA program, both at IESE.

Humanize your management

There are few better ways of getting liberal arts majors up to speed on matters of business and finance than an MBA, wrote IESE's Mike Rosenberg in a 2017 article on preparing people for geopolitical realities.

But he was quick to add that the flip side is also true: There are few better ways of preparing MBAs for the complexities of running an international business than exposing them to liberal arts, including history and philosophy.

Some might contend that the issues we face today differ significantly from those confronted by the likes of Plato or Aristotle. Or maybe not.

Humanity faces the same fundamental questions that philosophers and artists have struggled with throughout history. We can learn a lot from the humanities: art and design; language and literature; and music, whether opera, classical or jazz, has "charms to soothe a savage

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breast."

In a world where it can sometimes feel like we are at risk of losing our humanity, now is the time to complement your management with the humanities. Let these resources inspire reflection and enrich your view of the world.

Listen to classical music and elevate your spirit — and your management

Sampsa Samila, IESE Professor of Strategic Management

If I had to choose, it would be Beethoven's Symphonies #5 & #7 by Carlos Kleiber and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, as proof of how listening to classical music can elevate the human spirit.

Current music production is filled with a lot of noise, making it hard to separate out what is really good and valuable. Music that is listened to after decades or centuries is truly exceptional — so exceptional, in fact, that it's worth learning to appreciate it, even if it appears alien at first. The same applies to other art forms like literature, paintings and architecture: these can be appreciated for the rest of your life. The expected lifetime of a work of art is proportional to its age — i.e., artworks that have been appreciated for a long time are more likely to be appreciated in the future than more recent works. Time is a filter for noise.

Classical music contains the entire world of human experience — from intimate solo works to large orchestral pieces; from the sacred to the profane; from great sadness (Mahler's Kindertotenlieder or Songs on the Death of Children) to great joy (Beethoven's #9).

Visit the IESE Spotify playlist for more classical music recommendations. It's important to pay attention not only to the work itself but also to the specific performance.

The extravagance of opera

Javier Zamora, IESE Professor of the Practice of Management of Operations, Information & Technology

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Managing requires a holistic conception. Today there is super specialization, which provides focus but distances us from contextualization. We need perspective, and the humanities provide it.

In this sense, opera is the most complete and enriching art: it amalgamates music, theater and dance. It is a unique experience that touches the soul, an extravagant art that combines different elements to achieve a unique objective: the sublimation of the viewer.

Listening to The Ring of the Nibelung by Richard Wagner — four operas that delve into the human condition, power, sacrifice and redemption — will help you reflect on the exercise of power and the consequences of not making good use of it.

Upcoming Wagner performances in Europe:

- Three Ring Cycles at the Deutsche Oper Berlin between May 11 and June 2, 2024
- The Valkyrie Concert at the Grand Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona on June 27, 2024

Lessons from the Sagrada Familia

Barcelona's emblematic basilica, under construction since 1882, is due to become the world's tallest church with the completion of the Jesus Christ tower in 2026. It is the perfect example of the realization of a long-term vision — in this case, that of the humble Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí, who drew inspiration from his everyday surroundings and nature for his innovative designs.

The Sagrada Familia demonstrates how visionary leadership can find the extraordinary in the ordinary, inspiring new generations to accomplish feats they never thought possible before. Read "Innovative spirit: lessons in leadership from the Sagrada Familia."

Read people like a book

"Fiction and the humanities are absolutely relevant to business," insists the British/Canadian author and professor Keith Oatley, who has studied the effects of reading fiction on cognitive processes.

In an evergreen article from *IESE Insight* magazine, Oatley cites research supporting the

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reading of literature as a means of helping you become a better person and a better leader. “If it’s important for you to understand other people and yourself as part of your job in business, then (reading literary fiction) is actually a very good way of doing it.”

Read “The reality of fiction.” Or better yet, read a (non-management) book.

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