

Introduction (Béatrice Bellini)

To create the basis for responsible consumption, it is necessary to reconsider the company itself. We will now hear the perspective of Edward Freeman, an American philosopher, which will talk about why it is interesting to see the company as a human organisation. The idea is to highlight the potential of humanities to make the organisation more effective by focussing on people again. Now, let's give the floor to Edward Freeman, American philosopher and professor of business administration at the Darden School of the University of Virginia.

Edward Freeman's présentation

Years ago, Thomas Donaldson, at Wharton, and I edited a book called Business as a Humanity, the result of a conference that we had here in West Virginia. We had some leading scholars together to think about what was the right background disciplines of business and the argument of the book is: we need to see business as situated in the humanities, a broad idea the humanity which includes social sciences.

Traditionally, the background disciplines of business have been social sciences and primarily economics, to some extent psychology but not so much, primarily the economic disciplines. Missing, for the most part, have been history, literature, law, philosophy. There had been some sociology but not too much. Fine art, language, cultural studies, religious studies. Those things have not been traditionally a part of the business education. An argument is that the world we live in the day, business is fundamentally a human institution and therefore all of the ways that we study human institutions turn out to be relevant and it would be a richer better world, richer better business world if we could bring to bear the insight of a broader sense of the humanities on to business. Now there is nothing wrong with economics and finance and disciplines like operations and marketing based on those, those disciplines are necessary as well but we need to broaden the idea of what counts as the background disciplines to business.

Ironically when the Wharton School was first founded in the 1881, I believe it was, Joseph Wharton's idea was to have humanities professors teach and educate people who were going into commerce. And so he tried that and as I understand it, it was a complete and dismal failure, it was the humanities professors that went into the business and the business pupils that went into the humanities in a sense that business and ethics divide had already been created by 1880. And so, the humanities go one way and a lot of the professors in the humanities, even today, think that businesses are morally questionable. And a lot of the professors in business think that the people in the humanities are not in the real world and that's foolish, it seems to me. We need to figure out how to bring those things together. Much of the current criticism of business schools, criticisms by Henry Mintzberg that we get management wrong, criticisms by Sumantra Ghoshal that we get the theory of business wrong, criticisms by Pfeffer and Fong that we get research wrong in business schools.

All of those are interesting critiques, they miss one thing: we get business wrong. And because we get business wrong, we see it as something that doesn't have anything to do with ethics and

humanities and that's what needs to change. Get business right, fully situate business in the broader human context. And now, the background disciplines of business and what's available to teach courses like business ethics and new courses turn out to be very rich. I teach a course called Business ethics through literature in which I use fiction, short stories in literature from all over the world. The kinds of conversations we have about that and the kinds of things we talk about what's relevant to business leaders is really incredible and I sort of stumbled into doing this. I do a second course on business and theater in which we use the fine art, the dramatic art to try and deal with some of the issues that are in business. These are courses not just about ethics, these are courses about how to be an effective business leader and how to use a much broader range of ideas and thinking that's been done for generations than just a rather narrow set of economics and marketing operations, as necessary as those things are.

Conclusion

Business is a human institution: new courses in business ethics have a great role.