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Spiritual Turn in Business Management (conducted with Laszlo Zsolnai)

Abstract

The paper argues that a spiritual turn in business management is needed. With its instrumental rationality and extreme materialistic orientation today's business management produces large scale ecological, social and ethical „ills“.

We believe that business management needs a more spiritual foundation to solve the failure of rational and materialistic management. Why? Because spirituality – as an inner experience of deep interconnectedness with all living beings – opens a space of distance from the pressures of the market and the routines of business as usual. This distance is a necessary condition for developing innovative ethical and sustainability ideas and practices. It restores intrinsic motivation and provides a long time horizon. In the academia and the business world, instrumental and utilitarian rationality is still the dominant perspective, whereas spirituality is anchored in a deeper, noninstrumental and nonutilitarian experience of life.

The paper explores new values for the spiritually-inspired business management: frugality, deep ecology, trust, reciprocity, responsibility for future generations, and authenticity. Within this framework profit and growth are no longer ultimate aims but elements in a wider set of values. In a similar way cost-benefit calculations are no longer the essence of business management but are part of a broader concept of wisdom in leadership. Spirit-driven businesses require intrinsic motivation for serving the common good and using holistic evaluation schemes for measuring success.

The paper presents real-world examples which show the feasibility of spiritually inspired business models. These include organic agriculture, slow food, ethical fashion and sustainability banking. Our main conclusion is that spirituality and rationality are not antagonists in good management, but materialism and rationality are.

Basic reference:

Bouckaert, L. and Zsolnai, L. (eds.) 2012: *The Palgrave Handbook of Spirituality and Business*. 2012. Palgrave-MacMillan.