CREATE MORE VALUE FOR ALL: A HUMAN DIGNITY ORIENTED

APPROACH TO CONSULTING

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Abstract

This chapter explores how consultants may address societal and business challenges which have become increasingly more manifest since the economic crisis of 2008. These issues range from bankruptcies and corporate scandals to increased burnout amongst employees. We argue that in contrast to the contemporary utilitarian approach of perceiving people as instrumental to company goals and of focusing on the maximum amount of short-term profit for a select few, consultancy can be designed on the philosophy of humanism and human dignity so that it provides more value to all stakeholders. First, the concept of human dignity is introduced and we highlight that people should not be treated as means to an end, but rather as ends in themselves. Then, we argue that one practical way of achieving human dignity is to increase organizational democracy. Subsequently, the concepts of human dignity and organizational democracy are applied to three main phases of the consulting process, namely 1) entry, diagnosis, and planning 2) action, engagement, and delivery), and 3) evaluation and termination. The chapter ends by concluding that an inclusive, democratic way of running consultancy projects is likely to pay off in the long run, not only for employees and society, but also for companies and shareholders as well as consultants themselves, as it strengthens human and organizational capabilities to effectively manage the uncertain circumstances which characterize contemporary businesses and societies.

Keywords

Consulting, Human Dignity, Work Place Democracy, Utilitarianism, Consulting process.

Introduction

Since the financial crisis, it has become increasingly clear that there are fundamental problems underlying contemporary societies, our economic systems, and our business practices (Seymour, 2014). Key indicators for this are that inequality and poverty have increased as have unemployment and underemployment (George, 2014). Additionally, health problems such as higher employee burnout (Leiter, Bakker, and Maslach, 2014) and worker abuse (Lucas, Kang, and Li, 2013) have gone up, as have depressions and suicides (Kentikelenis et al., 2014; Seymour, 2014). Some commentators have attempted to whisk these facts away, by arguing that this is a necessary evil of doing business and that this is the only way to create value (which is then often narrowly defined as company or shareholder value or profit). However, a quick glance at the news shows that many organizations are facing financial, innovational, and/or reputational challenges. For example, organizations which were once common household names have recently gone into bankruptcy, such as BHS in the UK, Radioshack in the US, or V&D in The Netherlands. Additionally, as Lazonick has shown in his 2014 Harvard Business Review article, many CEO's are now taking out so much money from their organizations (e.g., via stock buy backs) that innovation and long-term sustainability are put at risk. Lastly, once reputable organizations such as global banks or car manufacturers have been plagued by scandals, government bailouts, and enormous fines (Rhodes, 2016). The issues have now become so apparent that even established pro-business news outlets, such as Bloomberg, are asking for a rethink of how we conduct business as well as contemplate what governments should, and should not, do (e.g., Bloomberg Editorial Letter, March 12, 2013). All these facts indicate that there is something fundamentally wrong with how we have come to

think about business and management. This conclusion is further reinforced if we take into account the current unsustainable use of planetary resources (Klein, 2014).

Luckily our societies contain various institutions and organizations which might contribute to solving these problems. Invaluable societal assets, such as a free press and independent universities contribute to this, as well as various NGO's who attempt to represent society at large. However, we will argue in this chapter that one sector appears to be overlooked when it concerns potential solutions to societal problems, namely (internal and external) business and management consulting. In our opinion, the consulting sector might play an important parts as consultants are asked when companies do not have the time or expertise to deal with complex topics. Additionally, due to their relatively high fees, consultants tend to be used for projects which have substantial impact, such as strategic (re-)designs or change management programs. Moreover, consultants tend to consult at various organizations, sometimes at the same time, sometimes in rapid succession. The key is thus that consultants are often in unique positions of influence and can also 'cross-pollinate' ideas by facilitating the transfer and adoption of 'best practices' across organizations and industries as well as between science and practice. Hence, we argue that if our societies could change the way we engage in consulting, there might be substantial benefits to everyone and such change might occur quite rapidly due to the nature of consulting.

More specifically, we argue that the current challenges mentioned in the opening paragraph could be resolved or significantly reduced via consultancy work. Consultants play an important role in the shaping of contemporary organizations, for example via strategy or organizational design or process consulting, yet with this role also comes an inherent responsibility to the (societal) systems and the organizations

which provide the ecosystem for consultancies to flourish in. This responsibility is thus actually in line with consultants own interests. But as indicated in the introduction, the current systems show many symptoms of illness and solving these issues might be beneficial for all stakeholders, including the consultants themselves. For example, the costs in Europe of employee burnout have been calculated to be over £77 billion (Evans-Lacko and Knapp, 2014) and estimates for the damages caused by global warming and the unsustainable use of resources range even higher (Klein, 2014). Hence, there is plenty of work available and consultants may actually fulfill a societally crucial role in alleviating societal problems whilst at the same time help their clients and themselves.

However, to alleviate such problems, it is essential to analyze the underlying causes of the flaws in the economic system and increasing social injustice (George, 2014; Harvey, 2005; Seymour, 2014). If not addressed at the core, superficial 'improvements' might be implemented or, even worse, CSR 'greenwashing' might be used to give an aura of sustainability without any actual real change (cf. Porter and Kramer, 2011). Hence, we need to look more deeply at the current neoliberal capitalist society and acknowledge that it has been focusing too much on (short-term) profit maximization for individual firms and individual actors (e.g., the enormous bonuses of individual top managers: Lazonick, 2014), and has done so through a dominant approach which views labor as purely instrumental. For example, often at the advice of consultants, organizations have adopted management practices which focus on short-term gains and narrow the employee relationships towards a pure transactional-relationships by making jobs more insecure (Thompson, 2013). However, this transaction-relationship has not really benefitted most workers, as most workers get little to no bonus, while executive pay

and bonuses have rapidly increased since the 1980, in line with the increasing inequality in society (Desai, 2012). This instrumentality has undermined employee commitment, engagement, and trust (CIPD, 2012) and put employee, team, and organizational learning, development, and growth at risk (Lazonick, 2014). The question is thus, how consultants may address the inherent problems of the current form of capitalism; problems which have become increasingly more manifest since the economic crisis of 2008. We argue that in contrast to the contemporary utilitarian approach of perceiving people as instrumental, or as resources to be used and to be expended, consultancy can be designed based on the philosophical alternative of humanism and human dignity (Kant, 1785).

Human dignity, according to Immanuel Kant, postulates that people can never be treated as means to an end, but rather should be treated as ends in themselves. When human dignity is introduced as an alternative paradigm for consultancy, all aspects of the consulting process should be changed and updated. We argue there are two main roles for 'human dignity' consultants: 1) through their work consultants can contribute to greater dignity in the workplace and thus dignity should become a clear outcome of any project, but 2) beyond dignity as an outcome, it may also sit at the heart of the work of a consultant, especially when a consultant takes on the synergist or champion role (Caldwell, 2001). As such, in offering organizations advice, consultants could focus on taking a less instrumental and transactional approach (e.g., focus less on maximizing shareholder interests), and more in dignified way and via a more dignified process (i.e., focusing on protecting and promoting all stakeholder interests).

The current chapter will explain both ways in greater detail, and we will discuss how human dignity can be applied to the different phases of a consulting project. We

will first give an overview of Human Dignity, followed by a section on why Human

Dignity could provide a suitable foundation for consulting activities. This is followed

by a section on workplace and organizational democracy, which we will argue can be

a valuable tool for bringing more dignity into the consulting process. We then apply

these theories and concepts to the established consulting model of Kolb and

Frohman (1970) by focusing on three main phases of the consulting process, namely

1) entry, diagnosis, and planning 2) action, engagement, and delivery), and 3)

evaluation and termination. The chapter ends with overall conclusions.

Overview of and the importance of Human Dignity

Human dignity has not been used widely in the field of management. This is

surprising given that it has a long tradition in philosophy, and has also been used in

law, as indicated for instance by the inclusion of human dignity in Article 1 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hence, human dignity has a global

relevance, and it is only recently that management studies have started to explore

the role of human dignity at work (Pirson & Lawrence, 2010). Philosopher Immanuel

Kant, in the 18th century, postulated the dignity of the human being as central to life.

This contrasts the utilitarian perspective which strives for the greatest benefit for the

largest number of people, which has been used to defend an instrumental approach

to people in organizations. In a utilitarian view, it could be 'logical' to allow a few

people to suffer, so that the majority can achieve greater benefits. Human dignity,

however, places the individual human being central in the organizing principle.

Human dignity indicates that all individuals are equal and dignity represents an

existential value (Kateb, 2011). This means that every human being has a dignity

which does not have to be earned. While there is no prevailing definition of human

dignity, in the current chapter we define human dignity as the unalienable right of each individual human being to self-respect and get respect from others, to set one's own standards and principles of living, and to live accordingly (Bal, 2015; Bal and Lub, 2015).

Human dignity does not only entail *the right* for people to be treated with dignity, but also *the duty* of people to behave dignified and treat others with dignity (Rosen, 2012). Dignity is therefore essentially relational, and it binds people together in exchange relationships, where people commit to each other by treating others in a dignified manner, while themselves behaving in a dignified way. More specifically, dignified treatment means that people respect themselves and are free to set their own standards, but at the same time respect others who are also free to set their standards. In reciprocal exchange relationships, people can only live and work together when they respect each other's dignity. Therefore, dignity should be respected, protected, and promoted (Pirson and Dierksmeier, 2014). People should respect dignity of others, which means they provide other people the freedom to set their own standards. Moreover, people should protect the dignity of others, which means that they strive not to violate the dignity of other people (or allow or encourage others to do so). Finally, people should promote the dignity of others, which means that people actively contribute to upholding dignity standards within and across organizations and social life. Hence, human dignity contains both rights and duties and focuses on respecting, protecting, and promoting the dignity of all.

Using Human Dignity as a Basis for Consulting

Human dignity can inform the way organizations are founded and managed (Pirson and Dierksmeier, 2014) and thus also be a basis on which consultancy can

take place. This replaces the current instrumentalist, individualistic, and short-term profit focused approach stemming from contemporary capitalist and investor-centric approaches for doing business (cf. Lazonick, 2014; Porter and Kramer, 2011). As a fundamental principle it should be publically acknowledged that all stakeholders will be treated in a dignified way during the consulting process itself as well as in the actual final end product (cf. Bridoux and Stoelhorst, 2014). This includes all those people involved, such as sellers, buyers, governmental institutions, investors, future generations, and so forth. As these relationships become at the center of consulting, the aim becomes how these parties can engage in a meaningful exchange which is focused on respect, protection, and promotion of human dignity for all. This does *not* suggest that business concerns, such as for instance profits, are no longer relevant; organizations can only be sustainable when they retain a (long-term) positive balance sheet and create some surplus for investments and unforeseen circumstances.

However, the current practice of myopically focusing on short-term profits and transferring profits to top managers and shareholders (Lazonick, 2014), without acknowledging the dignity of all the other stakeholders, has been shown to have such adverse outcomes such as (semi-)slavery, inequality, and other forms of dignity violations (Kaufmann et al., 2011). Moreover, this 'value extraction' is likely to undermine the long-term viability of the organization by hindering 'value creation; as well as by negatively affecting the relationship with key stakeholders. For example, utilitarian and neoliberal business strategies can encourage offshoring profits to tax havens, cheating customers, misleading investors, or creating environmental pollution (Rhodes, 2016). In contrast, with a human dignity approach the aim of organizing, and thus also of consulting, becomes the art of retaining a balance

between the (long-term) interests of various stakeholders, while acknowledging that each of these parties have their dignity which should not be violated by overly satisfying one stakeholder above the others (e.g., giving investors some quick dividend). Balance, therefore, is of crucial importance for successful 'dignified' consulting (Bal, 2015; Pirson and Lawrence, 2010).

The implication of having human dignity underlying business and consulting, is that it changes the meaning people attribute towards their jobs as well as the meaning which organizations have in society. Human dignity acknowledges that people become part of organizations to create and produce, and to be a member of a group, and through being part give meaning to their lives (Bal, 2015). Reasons of existence for organizations therefore need to be redefined to enhance the potential to this 'meaning making' for employees, as well as other stakeholders. Hence, organizations have to become more than just simple money-making machines for a select few (cf. Lazonick, 2014), and become drivers for the promotion of human dignity and progress across the world. Some companies already aim to do so, for example, the German outdoor equipment producer Vaude claims to be "dedicated to making (y)our world a better place" (Vaude, 2015). Through an inclusive approach (e.g., investment in the local community) and sustainability (e.g., production under ethical standards) this company strives for a more dignified process of organizing. Other examples include Semco in Brazil, Sekem in Egypt, Happy Computers in the UK, Mondragon in Spain, Buurtzorg in The Netherlands, and SMUD in the US. Through putting values such as economical, ecological, and social sustainability and responsibility forward, these companies aim to be more than profit-making organizations and they strive to find a 'dignified' balance. Hence, various business cases can be found where a more dignified approach to business has paid large

(societal) dividends, and consulting can use those cases as a starting point and convince companies for the need to take this approach. However, once companies have been convinced and will strive to put human dignity at the heart of their business, a new question arises, namely; _how_ _to use the principles of human dignity during a consulting project?_ We explain how the concepts of workplace democracy and representation provide useful tools to integrate human dignity throughout the key phases of a consulting project (Kolb and Frohman, 1970).

The Importance of Democracy and Representation

Workplace democracy can be one practical way by which organizations can achieve the respect, protection, and promotion of human dignity for all stakeholders (Sauser Jr, 2009; Van Witteloostuijn and De Jong, 2004). Applied to consultancy, the idea of workplace democracy may indicate the ways in which consultants deliver advice to clients. As a central notion of human dignity pertains to the equality of people within the organization, it should be realized that the product of a consultant for an organization is not a neutral or 'objective' one; it is always embedded within the relationships existing within an organization (as well as outside the organization). In other words, the consultant's product interacts with the ways of organization in a company. If the advice of a (team of) consultant(-s) is enforced top-down through the hierarchy of an organization, it is more likely to neglect the role of human beings in the organization, than when all stakeholders in the organization are represented and involved in the process. Research has shown that such 'voice' is very important, for example, in 2010 the CIPD reported that it was the 3rd most important aspect for creating engagement in a company after 'meaning full work' and 'leadership' (both of which should be improved as well via a dignified and human-oriented approach to

consulting). Hence, a democratic way of consulting, through the inclusion of all stakeholders based on the idea of equality of everyone, will be more likely to deliver a product that respects the dignity of the people involved.

The reason why democracy is important here, is that it indicates that power is redistributed across the organization, from managers to workers, and this contributes to more equitable relationships. Research support this notion, as it has been shown that when people within the organization trust each other due to strong relational ties, employees will be more committed to the organization, and more willing to contribute in a positive way (Rousseau, 2012). A way to commit employees to an organization or a consulting project is ownership (Rousseau and Shperling, 2003). When employees feel ownership for a project, they are likely to be more committed to the long-term viability and performance of the organization. Thus, democracy aligns with human dignity not only because of its respect for fair and equal relationships, but also as democracy protects and promotes the responsibility of each individual as member of the organization.

In conclusion, taking the above reasons together, consultancy projects which take into account human dignity of all stakeholders, will not only increase organizational functioning (e.g., growth, learning, innovation), but also positively contribute to society and thus increase the company brand in the eyes of customers and potential employees, but also reduce risks of being fined by governments or being the target of campaigns by NGO's. To achieve all these benefits, we must resolve how consulting projects could be adapted to be more aligned with dignity and democracy principles. In the next section we discuss how this can be done across the main phases of consulting (Kolb and Frohman, 1970).

Human Dignity and Democracy across the Main Phases of Consulting

Consulting firms use many tailor-made frameworks to capture the key phases of a consulting project (e.g., Werr, Stjernberg, and Docherty, 1997). We choose to keep things simple and simplify the well-known model of Kolb and Frohman (1970) into 3 main phases, namely phase 1 when there is still no concrete project, and as such the entry strategy, problem diagnosis and project planning all need to be established. We then focus on phase 2 where actions are undertaken in the project and where the constultant(s) are engaging with the client and stakeholders to deliver results. Lastly, we focus on phase 3 where the project has been delivered and it is time to evaluate. The sections below are meant as illustrations of how the principles of human dignity and democracy could be implemented from start to finish of a consulting project, and can thus be adapted to any framework. Naturally, the specific details will have to be custom-made for each specific consulting project.

Phase1: Entry, Diagnosis, and Planning

Often a single stakeholder (or its representative) contacts the consulting firm regarding a potential project, yet this person might (inadvertently) not represent the interest and dignity of all stakeholders involved. This could, for example simply be because the client has not yet thought about the broader impact. Hence, at the very start of the project, the consultant should actively collect the views of *all* stakeholders (thus not only internal stakeholders at the client's office or factory), because only this way the full impacts can be assessed and proactively managed. For example, the project could be notified via internal messaging boards, so that people can declare an interest by responding with a given time frame and select any representatives if desired or ask for periodic updates. Externally, local communities can be contacted

via councils or representatives and customers can be asked via CRM activities, whilst representation of others can be achieved via discussions with NGO's. By truly incorporating all stakeholders at the very start, the project plan can pro-actively incorporate all stakeholders in its work flows. In contrast to a *'max. profit'* analysis for a small group of stakeholders, the analysis should (also) include a *'min. hurt'* analysis for all stakeholders. In other words, it needs to be assessed who is to gain from the project and who is going to lose and if that lose is acceptable. This might also help with the ultimate role of a consultant, namely to assess the 'real' problem underlying those that manifest themselves for management. For instance, management might have asked a consultant to increase motivation as there is high (short-term) sickness absence in the company, yet this absence may be resulting from a company culture that pressurizes people and violates dignity of the workers and/or customers (e.g., aggressive phone sales techniques). It is the role of the consultant to assess and address these 'real' causes, not only to help the workers (e.g., less sickness), but also to help the company (e.g., retaining talent and customers) as well as society (e.g., less workers who are (partially) disabled due to burnout and need to claim benefits). By involving all stakeholders early in the process, and taking all of their dignity in serious consideration, a consultant is much more likely to find the real problem facing the organization and to find a balanced and long-term solution.

From a (short-term) utilitarian perspective this might seem to be cumbersome and time consuming. Yet from a broader and longer-term perspective, the time spent on getting broader buy-in at the start will smoothen the work in other phases. For example, obstacles are then earlier noted, more ideas are generated from internal stakeholders, but importantly also from other stakeholders who are (or might

become) customers or employees, or conversely might become vocal activist against the new changes once they are communicated to the outside world (e.g., when plans have unforeseen societal or environmental impacts). By guarding the human dignity of all in the beginning, by giving all some democratic representation, these issues can be avoided or reduced.

For instance, if customers would have had more insight into `exotic` financial products, it could be argued that banks would not have needed government bailouts, fewer companies would have gone bankrupt, fewer customers would be in debt, and fewer banking employees would now be made redundant. Or, if regulators would have had more insight into the 'fuel efficiency' procedures at Volkswagen, billion dollar claims could have been avoided, the environment could have been spared, and the reputation of car makers and Germany as a country could have been preserved (Rhodes, 2016). In the long-term it has now become apparent that what was needed was a culture where cheating was disapproved, and where employees has more options to `whistle blow` about potential morally questionable practices, yet the short-term focus prevailing in many companies underestimates (or even completely ignores) the benefits of such cultures. Lastly, to make it even more concrete, the Mexican Gulf oil spill of BP has been so costly (e.g., $50+ billion), that _only_ preventing this accident (and there have been many more…) could have enabled the company to spent _more than 500 million (in 2016 terms) a year_ extra on human dignity, democracy, and sustainability during its _entire 100+ year existence_ and still be better off financially as well as reputational and workers would have worked in saver conditions and the environment would not have be polluted. Surely, with numbers and outcomes such as these it should not be too hard to make a sound business case to challenge contemporary assumptions underlying business

and consulting. One difficulty in making these business cases is that it is often overlooked that even shareholders are made up of quite different groups, such as the very long-term view of government and pensions funds versus the very short-term view of some private equity firms. As such, a business or a consulting project might explicitly exclude some forms of capital as their short-term focus makes them prone to violate human dignity of other stakeholders. Excluding these 'non-dignified' sources of capital can enable companies to (re)gain economic, reputational, worker-related, environmental, and societal benefits.

Overall, these high-profile incidences show that it pays of *in the long-term* to get it right the first time and a human dignified approach to business and consulting can more easily achieve this as it has a much longer and broader perspective than the current narrowly focused utilitarian view of neoliberal capitalism, which ignores many stakeholders and therefore has a high risk of violating the dignity of others and thus, ultimately and ironically, undermine the sustainability of its own practices (as indicated in our introduction and, for example, in the editorial articles in Bloomberg in 2013). Concretely, in the very first phase of consulting the benefits (and risks) the project brings to all stakeholders should be clearly acknowledged, whilst ensuring that everybody's dignity is maintained (even if this means lower max. profit for some shareholders). To do so adequately, mostly likely an iterative process is needed to incorporate all the views into the final document.

Phase 2: Action, Engagement, and Delivery

In the first phase all stakeholders are identified and their views have been heard and balanced via a democratic process, yet this is not a guarantee that their dignity will also be protected, promoted, and developed during the project. To safeguard this, a

clear 'voicing' or feedback mechanism is needed (e.g., CIPD, 2010, 2012), so that key stages of the project are not just signed off by the client, but also by (the representatives) of key stakeholders. For small projects, this could imply that one person is chosen to perform a 'devil's advocate' role and s/he voices the concerns of minority or vulnerable stakeholders. This could, for example, be an internal manager, but could also be an external and independent party, such as a lawyer, union member, or an academic who specialized in the particular field. Another way to safe guard the human dignity is by truly acknowledging the possible impacts on others, by being as transparent and open as possible during the engagement and delivery phase. Crowd sourcing and open source projects are now increasingly common for technological, scientific, and environmental projects and these ideas could be translated into business consulting projects as well. For example, instead of having focus group sessions only for consumer products, it would be possible to get similar feedback on key consulting projects as well. This could be facilitated and anonymized via online survey providers, such that the specific trade secrets of the client company and consulting firm are protected.

The above ideas can be implemented in a staged approach throughout the project engagement phase and can be tailor-made to each group of stakeholders. For example, vulnerable or minority groups might require full anonymity (e.g., via online surveys or a representative), yet customers' opinions might be less sensitive and can be obtained via face-to-face meetings. The voice of some other groups (e.g., short-term focused private equity) might need to be lowered and put into perspective (e.g., long-term focused pension funds). The timing of when to ask certain stakeholders is also dictated by the concern for their dignity, with those who will have the most negative (long-term) impact needing to be prioritized. This is the

reverse of many current practices where those with the most (short-term) benefits are giving the most attention. The later groups will make their views known quite easily and vocally, and the difficulty is thus in getting the other views and then accounting for them in a balanced way. Without explicit democratic representation early on in the project, and without some form of regular and iterative feedback during the project and its delivery, the strong voice of the few who benefit in the short-term will be heard, putting other stakeholders at risk. Yet, it is because of the long-term stakeholders that the company will thrive in the future (e.g., employees or funders who are willing to stick with the company in difficult times, instead of taking their capital and labor to the competitors). To emphasize, there is an increasing mountain of evidence that the instrumental and short-term way of working is no longer viable (Klein, 2014). Thus, a more fundamental change might be needed to stop the scandals and bailouts of the financial sector, the safety violations of oil companies, and the cheating by large car manufactures as well as the current practice of ignoring the 'social dilemma's' underling the unsustainable use of resources to the short-term benefit of a few, but to the long-term detriment of us all.

Phase 3: Evaluation and Termination

As many text books (e.g., Armstrong, 2012) and professional reports (e.g., CIPD, 2007) will state, evaluation is imperative for effective decision making and for truly learning from consulting and change management activities. However, a clear evaluation plan (or an overall exit strategy) is often lacking in consulting projects, resulting that lessons learned are not transferred to other projects, key knowledge is not retained in the company, and companies are then doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. A key driver causing this, seems to be the neoliberal

and utilitarian belief that the next project is more important as it brings in short-term resources, yet this viewpoint ignores that for the long-term sustainability of both the client and consulting company it is important to truly reflect and learn from each project and to adequately document this for future use. For example, by doing so the client could learn how to avoid these problem, lowering the need to call in expensive consultants. The consultancy could learn how to more effectively deliver a project reducing burdens on staff (and thus lower burnout and turnover rates) and increasing viability. It should be realized that there is an underlying asymmetry, as a consulting firm might use the new knowledge soon and thus retain some (implicit) insights, yet the client might only use this knowledge many years from now (e.g., normally one does not do a fundamental strategic change or a complete overhaul of ICT systems each year). Hence, the utility for the consultancy firm and the client firm are not in sync, and the same occurs between the consultancy firm and the consulting team who did the actual work. It would be in the consultants' long-term interest to truly learn from the project and thus increase their competencies. This would increase the human resources available to the consultancy firm and thus also increase their long-term viability. Yet current performance management practices are heavily biased towards short-term profit for shareholders (cf. Desai, 2012), not to long-term learning, growth, and development and this puts consultants as well as their consulting companies at risk.

Not surprisingly, if the key stakeholders involved with a consultancy project already have so many problems with evaluating and getting the most out of a consulting project, a neoliberal and utilitarian perspective is even worse for other stakeholders. Many of the 'lean' and 'efficiency' programs have traded short-term gains, for long-term costs, resulting in lower average pay, higher stress, less free

time, less creativity and development, etcetera (Bal, 2015). When all firms take similar actions the total 'societal pie' available to all shrinks, as the lower-payed or stressed-out employees from one firm do not have the money or energy to invest in other activities provided by other organizations. This leads the latter firms to lower their employee offerings and investments (Lazonick, 2014), putting more stress on workers, who then can spend even less and so forth. This spills over beyond the business world, as depleted people cannot engage in learning and development activities, or engage in societal activities, such as raising the next generation or being well-informed democratic citizens. Ultimately and ironically, even the goals of the ones the neoliberal/utilitarian viewpoint is supposed to promote (e.g., shareholders) are put a risk, as shareholders will see ever diminishing returns if societies do not have the ability, motivation, or opportunity to explore new opportunities (cf. Bloomberg, 2013). Hence, a sound 'post-project' strategy and a true evaluation involving all stakeholders are needed for the long-term benefit of us all, yet this is very difficult to argue for in the current utilitarian, neoliberal, and max-profit philosophy. However, if businesses and consultancies change their underlying paradigm to a humanistic approach which takes into account the human dignity of all the above suddenly starts to make a lot of sense.

Conclusion

The current chapter investigated the role of dignity in consulting projects. Contemporary organizations are in a state of uncertainty, as current 'neoliberal' and utilitarian capitalist practices have run out of their relevance for society, making it increasingly clear that they are not an optimal way of societal functioning (cf. Porter and Kramer, 2011). Consultancy may play a very important role in alleviating these

problems and changing the rules of the game, and we have introduced human

dignity (Kant, 1785) as a key paradigm to build a new way of doing consultancy

projects. Dignity may not only inform the outcomes of a consulting project (i.e., a

more dignified organization that contributes not only to its own viability, but also to

societal functioning), but also the ways in which consulting projects are executed.

We have described three key steps of the consultancy project and how dignity may

inform these steps (Kolb and Frohman, 1970). In general, we propose an inclusive,

democratic way of running consultancy projects, which includes the views and

interests of all stakeholders to arrive at balanced solutions where the minimum

amount of hurt is taken into consideration, not only the maximum amount of profit for

a select few (cf. Lazonick, 2014). This approach is likely to pay off in the long run,

not only for employees and society, but also for companies and shareholders, by

strengthening organizational capabilities to effectively manage the uncertain

circumstances which characterize the contemporary workplace. A key reason for this

is that democracy empowers employees across the organization, enhances

commitment, and identifies risks (CIPD, 2010, 2012).

In sum, a focus on human dignity allows companies to be organized in a

different, more humane, way and to be better able to create spaces where people

flourish rather than where they are forced to conduct work in an ever more intense

and `soulless` way. An easy reminder might be to remind the old saying *'do unto

others as you would have them do unto you'* when engaging in consulting work. At

each stage of the consulting project, consultants (and other stakeholders) could ask

themselves: would *I* want to work in this job/team/organization after they followed my

advice? Perhaps even more insightful, one could even ask; would I want m*y children

and grandchildren* to work in this job/team/organization after they followed my

advice? It is important that consultants keep asking questions such as these (and change their behaviors accordingly), as they can (or perhaps even should) play a crucial role in bridging societal, company, and employee interests and aligning these different needs for a more future-oriented workplace that respects the dignity of all of its stakeholders.

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