Chapter 51

The Employee as a Human Resource:
Advice for Business Faculty From CST and Management Theory

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors offer advice to business faculty at Catholic colleges and universities about how a robust and realistic conception of the human person can inform their teaching. This research can support faculty of mission-driven schools of business as they seek to operationalize the implications of the religious affiliation of their institutions. The authors begin by sketching the evolution of management theory over the last century and how theory has changed to represent a fuller and more accurate account of the nature of persons in organizations. They show how the consistent prescriptions of more than a century of Catholic social thought (CST) parallel those now offered by management scholarship. The authors note, however, that though the content of the advice coming from these respective traditions of thought has converged, the grounds of that advice continue to differ in important ways. They conclude by recommending that business faculty embrace and adopt the conception of the person now largely shared between CST and contemporary management theory.

INTRODUCTION: THE NORMATIVE NATURE OF MANAGEMENT

The academic discipline of management is an inherently normative practice. One of its central purposes is to offer advice about how organizations can best achieve their goals and objectives. The discipline is complex, with many sub-disciplines, as reflected in the many divisions and interest groups of the Academy of Management, the field's professional association. However, underlying this complexity there is

a common thread – a focus on deploying resources for organizational success. Since any organization's success depends crucially on its human resources, management has perennially offered recommendations about how to recruit, motivate, engage and retain employees. All of those recommendations rely, either implicitly or explicitly, on conceptions of the human person.

In this paper, we intend to offer our own advice to business faculty at Catholic colleges and universities about how a robust and realistic conception of the human person can inform their teaching. This research can support faculty of mission-driven schools of business as they grapple with and seek to operationalize the implications of the religious affiliation of their institutions. In Section II, below, we sketch the changes in the advice of management theory over the last century and we highlight how those changes represent a fuller and more accurate account of the nature of persons in organizations. In Section III, we show how the consistent prescriptions of more than a century of Catholic Social Thought (CST) parallel those now offered by management scholarship. We note, however, that though the content of the advice coming from these respective traditions of thought has converged, the grounds of that advice continue to differ in critically important ways. In Section IV, we conclude by recommending that business faculty embrace the inherently normative nature of their disciplines, that they adopt the conception of the person now largely shared between CST and contemporary management theory, and that they self-consciously reframe their understanding of organizational success to include consistency with basic ethical norms and principles.

THE EVOLUTION OF MANAGEMENT THOUGHT

The Great Wall of China and the castles of Ireland are a just a few examples of the enduring evidence of the long-standing practice of management. After all, a castle cannot be built without planning, procuring materials, organizing workers and coordinating their efforts. So the practice of management is ancient but the theory of management is novel. Historians claim that it wasn't until the early 1900s that the theories and principles of management were first developed and codified:

Starting in the late 18th century (and the Industrial Revolution) when machine power was substituted for human power, it became more economical to manufacture goods in factories rather than homes. These large, efficient factories needed someone to forecast demand, ensure that enough material was on hand to make products, assign tasks to people, direct daily activities, and so forth. The "someone" was managers, and these managers would need formal theories to guide them in running these large organizations (Robbins and Coulter, 2009, p. 25).

Thus began our modern development and understanding of the theories of management. Since its inception the focus of management theories – on people, resources and achieving organizational goals – has not wavered. What has changed, however, are social and economic conditions in which management is practiced and the field's understandings and assumptions about employees and organizations. As the field has evolved and matured, so too has its understanding of human nature and how to effectively manage people in organizations, as well as the nature of the firm and the keys to competitive advantage. These changes are summarized in Table 1 and discussed briefly below.

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