



## JPR-Focus No. 02/24

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Dear Readers

A warm welcome to the second issue of JPR-Focus of the year 2024.

Hardly a day goes by without a mention of one of three topics: the shortage of skilled labour, saying goodbye to the baby boomers and the expectations of the younger generation. All three are often mentioned in completely different contexts. In addition, there are repeated complaints about price pressure, dwindling customer loyalty and a lack of support from the authorities. The situation is not getting any better, on the contrary. What is going wrong?

Quite a lot! The big problem is that these issues are being tackled separately, even though they have a common origin. Furthermore, they are also the result of many previous decisions that were based on the same cause. This common cause is the ethics that still prevail in many places.

As these dependencies are very often not recognised, all attempts at improvement remain ineffective. This report is intended to help shed light on these interrelationships and demonstrate the approach of a new ethic.

I hope you enjoy reading the report.

Kind Regards

Yours

Jean-Pierre Rickli

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## The Ethics

### 1. Introduction

If you look around, practically all sectors, both public and private, present the same picture: there is a shortage of new skilled workers, the existing ones, the so-called baby boomer generation, are retiring, mainly earlier than the statutory retirement age, and the young generation sets incredibly high requirements on work and employers.

They then talk about a lack of work ethic, poor future planning on the part of politicians, administrators, schools or professional training. The general view is that it is mainly the others who are to blame for this misery. A very simple and convenient attitude that is widespread today.

This is not the end of the lamentation of all these organisations. Various obligations are also being added, such as those for safety and sustainability, for environmental protection and nature conservation, as well as for the environmental compatibility of products and services. They all increase costs and competitive pressure. Not forgetting labour costs.

How to answer all these questions? The usual way is to take each issue on its own account, try first to find the supposed culprits and demand their job to be done. Where this is not possible, look at what others are doing and try to implement a similar solution: paint yourself a “green” image, use so-called “artificial intelligence” for definite tasks and, as the all-encompassing cudgel, keep turning the screw to reduce costs and increase efficiency. After all, this is what has been learnt at renowned management schools and seminars.

Nevertheless, there are no long-term success stories and everyone is in despair. No one realises that they have merely been fighting symptoms. Because everyone is doing the same thing and that cannot be wrong. Or perhaps it is!

This report is intended to help for an answer to this last question.

### 2. A few basic questions in life and in business

In today's life, both private and business, we see that some fundamental issues, if they have not been forgotten, at least play a subordinate role. It is important to remember them for a better understanding of the context.

#### 2.1 What is the purpose of a business?

The first spontaneous reaction to this question is: What is the point of this trivial question? It is quite clear: to bring a product or service needed to the people and to generate revenue from it.

That is basically correct. Reading the annual reports and the statements of the management gives a completely different picture. The aforementioned purpose is in fact present everywhere in the statutes. However, it does not always have the same priority or significance and can be achieved in very different ways. Here are a few examples in random order:

- We want to become number 1!  
If such a goal is considered too arrogant or unattainable, an addendum is placed on it. In the

past, safety or quality were still regarded as objectives to be pursued. Today, these are required of everyone by law. The various scandals provide information about how well these requirements are being met. On the other hand, any comparative and unsubstantiated statement about competition is punishable by law. Therefore, today, only quantitative and, above all, measurable targets apply, which primarily flatter the ego of top management.

- We want to achieve a return of x%!  
In this objective, the product or service is only a means to an end. Their usefulness and purpose make that the users and clients are only important in terms of the potential revenue. The only valuable thing is the return for shareholders and other financial backers. Such an objective is certainly also favourable to the careers of top management.
- Our primary goal is to reduce costs!  
If this goal is pursued consistently, it is a disregard for a law of nature which states that every real activity, regardless of which one, is associated with losses, i.e. costs. If one proceeds consistently, the ultimate goal can only be to go out of business. Various companies have had this goal and are, today, no longer on the market.
- The benefits of the product, service or innovation are justified by elaborate advertising campaigns or proven by scientific studies.  
In most cases, when this happens, the benefit is not obvious and has to be created. The advantage of the novelty is practically nil for the customer and only lies in an increase in consumption and price. Often, such innovations worsen the basic environmental balance and often also the product.

This list can be continued indefinitely. The creativity in this area is very high and becomes even greater the further away one is from the basic purpose of a business. This is usually still laid down in the statutes. But who still knows these and sticks to them? Perhaps some small shareholders who speak up at the Annual General Meeting for the entertainment of all.

With increasing detachment from their basic purpose, from their DNA so to speak, companies increasingly lose sight of their moral or spiritual purpose and thus also lose their footing. They then wander around disorientated and follow each new material goal brought by the wind, like a wind vane. The next storm will then blow them away.

## 2.2 What is the purpose of a business relationship?

We can answer this question in a general way as follows:

A business relationship is entered into for the purpose of addressing a need or requirement to the satisfaction of all parties.

However, what constitutes a business relationship is very diverse and is often not consciously recognised as such. We do not have to deliberately confirm everywhere that we have read the General Terms and Conditions (GTC). Here are a few examples:

- Buying a general consumption product. Very often, one knows the products, the shop, the staff and feels a familiar atmosphere. That is why this shop was chosen. Sometimes one goes to another shop because it has a better offer than the usual shop, either in terms of quality or price or both. New experiences can then be made there. Satisfaction results not only from the fulfilment of needs, but also from the flawless use or enjoyment of the product.

- Non-everyday purchase of a product - appliance, device, service, etc. - for which there is a long-term need. In the case of appliances and devices, there can be two types of business relationships. One is with the manufacturer of the appliance and the other is with the retailer. The first relationship is about the characteristics of the product and the reputation of the manufacturing company. The second is about the conditions of sale and the feeling of being in good hands, even if problems could arise. When it comes to services, the same applies as for retailers. Here, too, people want to be happy, even proud, when using the product.
- Sale of services, machines and goods for the completion of an organisation's tasks. On the one hand, it is about satisfactorily covering the needs of the organisation. On the other hand, the supplier expects not only payment for the service provided, but also recognition, respect and that he can proudly point out his contribution to the success of the organisation.
- Mutual exchange between the organisation and the authorities, associations, other local businesses and shops and the population. Such relationships are not primarily about monetary benefits, but more about goodwill, co-operation and support. Mutual respect, recognition and the mutual satisfaction of being part of the community are encouraged.
- Mutual exchange of information and documents with the various public offices responsible for the organisation's affairs. This type of connection is often neglected or ignored, as it does not have a direct impact on the usual performance figures. However, if they are cultivated with respect, recognition and decency, this type of business - obtaining authorisations, cooperating on environmental issues, handling tax issues, clarifying health or social matters, traffic, transport, construction, etc. - runs smoothly. Otherwise, there is often sand in the gears. This also has an impact on the balance sheet performance figures.

As we can see, business relationships are more diverse than what we usually realise. For some, it is not the financial aspect that takes centre stage, but the collaboration and cooperation. That doesn't make them any less valuable.

Let us now turn our attention to a special business relationship, that of hiring and employing people in a company or organisation.

### **2.3 What is the purpose of a work position?**

A work position actually serves two purposes. The first, obvious one, is a workplace in a company, occupied by a person, where certain tasks are carried out to fulfil the company's purpose.

The requirements for filling a particular position certainly depend on the tasks to be performed, but also on the purpose of the company or organisation.

The second purpose of a work position is just as important, although it is rarely formulated explicitly. A workplace serves as a means to fulfil the life purpose of the person occupying the position. This person has more or less clear ideas about how the position can or could help fulfilling that purpose.

The position can only be successfully filled if there is a certain degree of agreement between the requirements defined by the company and the expectations of the person intended to fill the position. Achieving this is the challenge of the recruitment process.

## 2.4 What is the purpose of a life?

This brings us to an important but also very complex topic.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the match between the purpose of the position and the person's ideas about how they can fulfil their purpose in life through this workplace is decisive for the long-term success of the employment. There are often two hurdles to overcome:

- On the one hand, the purpose of the position must be clear. This also includes a clear and, above all, up-to-date description of the organisation's actual purpose. This is important because the organisation does not know in advance what the other side expects.
- On the other hand, the person who is to fill the position must also clearly know what his or her true purpose in life is and what this position can contribute to the fulfilment of it. This is where the big hurdle lies, because often the life purpose is not known or something else is in its place, perhaps because of its urgency.

For a very long time, the purpose of a job, from the worker's point of view, was to earn the money necessary for life. In modern times (keyword 1968), new ideas emerged about what the purpose of work could be. As the wall of the old understanding did not break through, but merely cracked, a decision had to be made about priorities. Most surrendered to circumstances and compromised on their desires, entered the economy and tried to live their dreams in their free time. A few refused to compromise and became hippies. From then on, they lived off the abundant surpluses of the growing consumer society.

Today, what is promised to young people is in many cases just empty promises. This means that the motivation to make compromises is quite low. Furthermore, the pressure to live one's life purpose is much stronger, even if it is still rather unclear.

Life purpose is therefore, as we can see, a central point in life, especially in professional life. But what does it really involve? How can it be defined? A precise definition that applies to everyone is impossible, because everyone has his or her own version. There are certainly many similarities, but these disappear as soon as we go deeper. We can only try to describe what such a definition might include. These are the following four characteristics:

- There is a great deal of enthusiasm for a particular professional activity, a professional group, a person or a community endeavour. Often, this enthusiasm is already present at a young age.
- Certain moral virtues, values and attitudes to life are strongly present, such as honesty, sincerity, care, respect and justice.
- Certain gifts, interests and talents are present, such as music, painting, drawing, speaking, writing, the ability to analyse, machines and many more.
- Special individual skills and abilities are present. While the three previously mentioned characteristics have a more general character, the characteristics in this group are those that characterise the person as unique. This is their way of bringing the previously mentioned characteristics, interests, role models and values to a common denominator.

We can therefore define the purpose of life as a combination of these four elements. The first two are rather framework conditions or requirements - the what - and the other two, especially the last one, are the way - the how - to achieve it.

The interesting thing about this definition is that it assumes that our lives have a purpose and do not simply follow the rules of chance. This means that our brain is already a written page at birth and a certain predetermination is present. Modern neuroscience has provided evidence for both conclusions.

It is also interesting that even atheists and people who believe in the creation of life by chance have these elements within them and struggle with the idea that their lives are purposeless. These four elements can also be found in every person everywhere in the world.

So, the only unanswered question remains: Who wrote on the page and how was the purpose of life determined? What is he, she or it called? An exact answer to this question may not even be necessary. It is enough to know that there is something above us.

We also see that the purpose of life is a spiritual, moral and not a selfish matter. Material aspects are possible. They serve to fulfil the purpose of life. They are, so to speak, milestones. They are only a means to an end and not the end goal.

It is also interesting to note that the above also applies to companies and organisations. The purpose of a company is set out in its statutes and, as far as I remember, always includes a moral and sometimes also a spiritual aspect. I never came across the sole purpose of making money. However, if these higher values are forgotten or simply neglected, life for people, companies and organisations becomes a struggle for survival. The only motto that then applies is: all against all.

## **2.5 What is the purpose of a profession?**

This term has also undergone major changes, not least because of the many new professions. In the process, many things have been lost or are no longer needed.

We have all experienced that even the most talented layman cannot repair or install everything himself. Sometimes, or very often, it takes a so-called specialist, or professional for short. With the professional title, you know who to turn to and can trust his or her expertise.

The old profession profile included three main focus aspects:

- The apprenticeship with a recognised master craftsman. During this phase, not only was the current knowledge of the trade learnt, but also, as far as the master was able, the old knowledge from experience, the tricks and twists of the ancestors were explained and transferred. This was important, as there were hardly any specialised books and knowledge was primarily passed on by word of mouth. This phase ended after a joint assessment of what had been achieved. This was the crossroads between a life as an employee or as a journeyman and as a future master.
- The journeyman's path meant that one was able to continue learning the trade on one's own. It was also about broadening one's own horizon, both professionally and personally. It was

further training in the truest sense of the word. Later, this further training continued with the welcoming of foreign journeymen and the intensive discussions with them.

- During the training - the first phase - it was not just about passing on technical knowledge, but also about what we could call a code of conduct. This was very important because it was actually about the reputation of the entire professional guild.
- The academic careers were very similar. There, the master was called “professor”.

The choice of profession was made on the basis of special talents - technical talent, interest in the topic, social interest, reference person - and formed the basis for the master craftsman's decision to accept the applicant as a pupil.

This not only brought in professionals, but also people who helped to support society, both as individuals and as a professional group with their communal and social attitude. Several purposes were thus fulfilled. Firstly, the economic purpose of the organisation with the correct completion of specific tasks. In the professional title, people then not only found a means to secure their livelihood, but also a means of identification to fulfil their purpose in life as a service to society. Finally, the professional group fulfilled the purpose of being a supporting group for the community.

These three focal points in vocational training can only be found together in a few traditional professions today. In most professions, on the other hand, they are the responsibility of various bodies: the teacher for the current knowledge, the technical college for the basic knowledge and part of the previous experience and the legislation for the code of conduct. The knowledge of both the specialist and the master craftsman is standardised. Independent learning and independent further training are hardly encouraged any more. The organisations no longer feel responsible for this and only expect high work efficiency. Their purpose is also essentially an economic one.

As a result, the profession today practically only fulfils an economic purpose for the organisation as well as for the professional. All other factors that justify the choice of profession from the vocation must be practically forgotten when a job is taken on. Today, the fulfilment of these factors is sought in freelance, non-standardised activities and professions. Those, where the outcome is not predetermined or where the practice can be organised freely or according to the old patterns. If this is not possible, all that remains is a professional activity with a purely material purpose and, sooner or later, frustration.

## **2.6 What is professional knowledge?**

Here, too, the understanding of this term is very broad.

For a large majority in the business world, professional knowledge is what you need to be allowed to use the profession's title. For others, this level is merely a free pass to continue learning on their own. In this case, specialised knowledge is what one would have accumulated in the field after many years of professional practice.

For more and more, expertise is not limited to what has been accumulated after a few years of professional experience. For them, expertise is what enables them to fulfil their purpose in life, makes them unique and at the same time enables them to live their lives according to their aspirations, i.e. to follow their vocation.

But what does professional knowledge consist of?

After the basic school education and possibly a level of specialisation depending on the career choice, the professional knowledge consists of various elements, some of which are individually designed in terms of time and sequence.

- The first element is basic professional training with its theoretical and practical components. It covers the knowledge required to fulfil current professional tasks. The theoretical foundations and methods are often acquired in a vocational school and the practical part in an organisation. Home study is mainly required for the theoretical part. This training is certified with a diploma and enables to practice the profession learned where it is required.
- The basic vocational training can be deepened. This would provide the opportunity to solve more demanding tasks or to take on the supervision of pupils. With this specialisation, students can also aim to specialise in order to better showcase their own inclinations, skills and interests.
- The old knowledge of our predecessors. Very often this knowledge is not directly apparent. It is very often implicitly contained in many rules of thumb, safety factors or reserves. Very often today, this knowledge is programmed directly into the computer codes. There is no corresponding documentation that is understandable for posterity. The code is the documentation. But appearances are deceptive. The operating functionality has been continually improved and updated. Many core tasks have not changed and are still integrated in their original state, i.e. in the programming language of the time, perhaps 50 or 60 years ago and completely unknown today. As the programmers of that time were primarily experts who were also interested in IT, they also programmed in their implicit knowledge. That's why young people don't dare to touch such things. That is reserved for a few survivors from that time. They can use it to boost their pensions in old age. The only question is: when will the bubble burst?

This knowledge is specific to each company or organisation. It is what distinguishes the organisation and its products from the other ones.

- The knowledge gained from a person's own experiences with the characteristics and products of the organisation. This knowledge is also deepened and differentiated if the person is familiar with different organisations. This knowledge is usually implicit and if the person leaves the job, it is lost to the organisation. Unless an active knowledge management system is implemented. This knowledge, as well as the knowledge from the next two facets, is what makes the organisation unique and non-comparable with others.
- The knowledge gained from the exchange with other professionals from the same and other organisations at internal and external events such as congresses, conferences or exhibitions.
- The knowledge gained from targeted training programmes, and not just those that focus on work efficiency. It is, maybe above all, about new theoretical knowledge, new processes or knowledge that broadens people's horizons.
- The personal continuing education of the person, based on her desire to fulfil her purpose in life. If the job fulfils more than just a material purpose, this knowledge can also benefit the organisation.

As we can see, expertise has many facets and, unfortunately, is often reduced to just the first two and also remunerated. These are also the ones that are available outside the organisations. All others are a matter of the organisations.

### 3. How are these aspects interrelated?

We have seen that when entering into a business relationship with an organisation - company, authority, association, institution - various aspects are involved, often unconsciously or in the background. In practice, they are treated very differently, but usually individually, separately from the others. This overlooks the fact that there is a common thread, a common factor behind them that helps determine them: we call this factor "the values".

This is also something that is understood very differently. Basically, values can be defined like this: They are what a person considers important in his or her life and what he or she believes in.

For some, these are more material values such as work, diligence, money, reputation, fame, salary, leadership position, house, education. Others would rather name moral qualities as values such as honesty, generosity, faithfulness, righteousness, loyalty. Others have things that we could describe as spiritual, such as love, peacefulness, mercy, kindness, justice and gratitude.

This categorisation primarily serves to understand what values are. There are no fixed or clearly defined boundaries. This classification also applies to organisations of all kinds. Companies and organisations are primarily representatives of material and possibly moral values, which are usually mentioned in their statutes. Spiritual values are included by some organisations in their resolutions, but are only partially lived out. In my view, the actual living out of spiritual values is more a matter of individuals.

A combination of material, moral or spiritual values is quite common, but not mandatory. There can also only be values from one category, regardless of which one. If there is a combination, the material values are often the means to an end and the moral values are the clear guard rails.

It is therefore easy to understand that a good match of values between the business partners is beneficial for a good and long-lasting collaboration. Such partners are actually all parties involved with the organisation: Employees, suppliers, authorities, customers and also anyone who is or feels directly or indirectly affected.

Many people summarise this as ethics.

That is correct, but not quite. Something else is needed, namely the consistent living of one's values. This is called «being authentic».

Ethics are also valued differently. Not necessarily as such, but in connection with the organisation and its purpose. Ethical behaviour - loyalty, discretion, fidelity - can be highly valued within an organisation. On the other hand, for the general society and its code of law, it may well be considered unethical if it is a criminal organisation. Ethics is therefore also a question of reference, which should be mentioned as a general principle.

At the beginning, the topic of skilled labour and the generation change was mentioned. Let's take a look at the current situation based on the above.

Our society is committed to money as the highest value. All others come later. The only restrictions are laid down in the legal code. Everything that is not explicitly forbidden is legal and therefore permitted. Moral, cultural or rules of decency are always appreciated and praised. But if they stand in

the way of making money and, above all, making it quickly, they are at best labelled as “nice to have” and put to the side.

This is what happened to the in-house expertise that people have. It was no longer recognised and appreciated. A little bit of it was lost with every staff departure. Each time, a piece of the uniqueness of the company and its products was also lost. Everything became more and more interchangeable: Companies, products, brands, jobs. The only thing that remained was differentiation through price.

Now the baby boomers are retiring in droves. Companies and organisations are left without knowledge and believe they can get it from the labour market. However, they do not yet realise that the company's own expertise cannot be brought in from outside, not even with the help of artificial intelligence, but that it must be built up and fostered internally.

The attempt to motivate people who are departing to stay is not very successful. They have not forgotten the values they had as young people. In view of the difficult environment at the time, they merely put them on the back burner and lived them out in side activities. Now, they want to live them to the full. Compromises would be possible if the boundary conditions were right. But these are unthinkable for most companies.

The younger generations mainly bring good school and general professional knowledge. They do not have the experience that characterises specialist knowledge in the first place. In addition, like every young generation, they have values and a strong desire to make something out of their lives.

Furthermore, they are facing an uncertain future and their prospects are rather bleak. As a result, they can no longer be motivated to make compromises in order to perhaps have a better future. They want to have it now and live it up while they still can. As companies have become interchangeable for them, the young people simply and ruthlessly follow the better material offers. They do not get anything else offered.

The climate is also becoming harsher for companies at their premises. All the things that have been lost with the one-sided focus on monetary value are being required through legislation: Environmental regulations, social plans, labour legislation, tax legislation, etc.

#### **4. What is needed?**

We have seen that we have reached a kind of dead end, through our own fault. The sidelining of moral and spiritual values in favour of purely material ones has led to this situation.

Attempts to apply corrective measures are also hardly successful. On the one hand, they do not change the course taken, but only affect the speed or reduce the side swings. On the other hand, they only have a reactive effect, as they only target the symptoms and not the causes.

We therefore need something else. We need to come to the following two insights:

- People need the community to survive and the community needs individuals fulfilling their purpose in life so that it can develop.

- Humans are part of nature and not separate from it. They are only viable to the extent that nature is.

When we are guided by these insights, other values automatically come to the top of our priority list and redefine our ethical behaviour in a sustainable way.

This is actually a simple thing, but admittedly, it may not be so easy to realise.

Then we will understand that other goals should apply to school than getting a well-paid job if possible.

Our attitude towards all other beings on earth will also change and will no longer be determined by their profitability for private interests.

We will also realise that the soil is as unique as every human being and requires appropriate treatment.

The earth's natural resources should also be used sustainably for the development of the society and not for individual financial interests.

This list can be extended to all areas of human activity, including transport, medicine and energy.

Another realisation is that knowledge cannot be transferred. Knowledge is the sum of the experiences that a person or a company has made and from which they have learnt a lesson. Without processing, everything remains information at best. Internal company knowledge can therefore not be obtained from the market, not even with artificial intelligence.

## 5. Conclusions

The activities of every person, group of people or organisation are shaped by a unique set of values. This combination is also called ethics. The ethics define the way in which the purpose of the activities is fulfilled.

When it comes to the life purpose of people, companies or organisations, material values are certainly fine as a temporary means to an end. As in the long term, they lead to self-centred behaviour, moral or spiritual values must take the lead. Only then is sustainable economic activity possible.

Knowledge is processed information. The company's internal knowledge consists of the processed experience of the staff and what has been recorded in company documents. This knowledge is what distinguishes the company from the competition and makes it incomparable. If it is not or no longer available, the only remaining comparison is via price. Building up and maintaining this knowledge is one of the company's very own tasks and cannot be delegated. Only tools and methods can be obtained externally.

Only when all values, the ethics, are clearly defined, clearly visible and clearly lived, is it possible to establish clear and lasting business relationships with others. Then individuals, groups, companies and organisations feel supported by the society.

I realise that all of this sounds like lofty principles and almost impossible to implement. We have destroyed so much in the last few decades that it all looks like a utopia. That may well be true for large companies and organisations. However, where the individual is still decisive, at local level, much is possible and is already being implemented. It is then up to everyone to support this development. Join in!

Yours

Jean-Pierre Rickli

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