

## **Axiology, Leadership and Management Ethics**

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### **Abstract**

The Nietzschean principle of all values' reevaluation turns fertile in postmodernity on the grounds of axiological pluralism. It works as a catalyst to solve the crises experienced by postmodern humans. Denouncing hierarchies of absolute values (may they be metaphysical or religious) opens the way to asserting a particular ethics generally meant for business environment and organizations. In this context, philosophy is bestowed the essential role to create and impart the necessary instruments for an axiological and ethical reconstruction. Philosophers have to create and impart such instruments. In using them, companies become the cores coagulating individual and community values according to ethical responsibility. Developing leadership qualities in managers contributes in a decisive way to the built of an organization with an ethical culture aimed to increase efficiency and quality of life in various public categories.

**Keywords:** values, management ethics, leadership, axiology, sacred, ethical counseling, philosophical expertise, Nietzsche

### **1. The need to revalorize all values**

Increasingly winning ground is the idea that our time is one of value crisis, of relativization and disappearance of any value hierarchy. Widely spread is also the idea that humanity is at crossroads. We live in a time of erosion in religious faith and trust, of ethics repudiation, traditional value collapse, tradition dilution, and of one's separation from oneself. We live a sense of loss that cannot be well delineated or yet identified more adequately than as a generalized crisis. Against the background of such generalization, there is a strong aspiration to restore values, to recover authenticity and rediscover the human being's self.

However, nothing is taking us unaware. We seem to live in a time of needed renewal similar to the one in which Friedrich Nietzsche lived with passion and hope when he claimed it was necessary to rediscuss and renew all values. For the postmodern perspective, Nietzsche remains always up-to-date, even if not for the content of his work but rather for his thinking, interpretation and representation patterns. Although there had been prior endeavors in the philosophy of values – and here the list is very long, from the way Plato understood Good to Brentano’s axiological reflections – nobody expressed with more prophetic conviction the fact that “all sciences must, from now on, prepare the way for the future work of the philosopher: this work being understood to mean that the philosopher has to solve the problem of values and that he has to decide on the rank order of values” (Nietzsche 2006, 34). Without diminishing the importance of philosophy as an academic subject and practice, I think it is important to note that not only is the need for a new philosophy of life asserted but also for applied philosophy, making possible a philosophical practice, in the sense of philosophy as a way of life. There are thinkers who submit that we have experienced such ways of philosophizing in the history of the subject (Hadot 1995; Iftode 2010). Now more than never, we sense this need for a philosophical practice to develop as a trend for those with a philosophical training adequate in philosophical counseling (Lobonț 2010) and first of all in ethical counseling, from a lot of perspectives.

This request may be explained in the context of an ascending industry of personal development, management ethics and leadership-related qualities. Unfortunately, professionals in the philosophy field in Romania do not participate consistently to the development and practice of individuals’ legitimate aspirations. They have not learnt enough yet the importance of practical philosophy and of practicing philosophy, even if they have all the competence to respond to present needs on the market using at least instruments such as: reality interpretation, ethical expertise, philosophical counseling, existential counseling, social responsibility counseling, ethical coding or the axiological

shaping of the managerial function practice. Philosophy is a source of meaning, action strategies and institutional construction.

A philosophical perspective like Nietzsche's is important today not only for the influence it held upon thinkers of various outlooks, such as Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Albert Camus or Jean-Paul Sartre, but also for his effort to reconstruct values, his refusal to accept traditional ways of understanding and explaining values' transcendence. Quite significant is Nietzsche's endeavor to turn the world of values into a pattern of our world's reinterpretation. He shows that our world may be better understood if conceived either as a part of an axiological universe or as identical – meaning coextensive – with the world of values. It is the daily life that sets and showcases values. The philosopher says that "When we speak of values, we speak under the inspiration, under the optics of life: life itself is forcing us to posit values, life itself is valuing by means of us, when we posit values" (Nietzsche 1994, 28). From this standpoint, not only value emergence is important but also the decision to have a vision regarding values, to set an action strategy in the spirit of values and their application in the morality field. Therefore, "we need a critique of moral values, the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined" (Nietzsche 2006, 7). We shall not detail now the way in which Nietzsche interrogates the European civilization's system of values, nor the critique of values created by the European Christian civilization. It is important to note that although he rejects Christian values, Nietzsche opines that "the whole of morality is a brave and lengthy falsification that makes it possible to look at the soul with anything like pleasure" (Nietzsche 2002, 173).

At a stage in which various vulnerabilities experienced by postmodern man are largely connected to communication, authenticity and pluralism of interpretations, perhaps it is a good reminder that Nietzsche's man is one of total crisis, living in a world with no saviour capable to act. Not even man can save himself except by overcoming his own condition through an anthropological leap made possible by an upturn and rethinking of the value system. The philosopher feels justified

to urge us in a joint effort to find the resources for the human being to find itself and redress. In this respect, I find relevant George Bondor's position according to which "Nietzsche investigates man's dependence, the patterns limiting and predetermining man, the totality in which man enrolls and throws others. Man is subject to the tyranny of crowd and species, of states and society, of culture and history, of reason and values" (Bondor 2015). In the spirit of liberation from the tyranny of such authorities, the philosopher calls for relativizing all traditional values and for establishing some values to be set to motion by life itself. The freedom from the pressure of any limitation means to escape from the uniqueness of absolute authority and to join the world full of plural values of existence as such. A refusal of "slave morality" does not imply only negation of tradition, hierarchies and community limitations. It also implies a freeing gesture by which the wise man understands that he may write his own life story, that in shaping his own evolution there is no other force than the inner one, and that happiness is one step away in the immanence order inadvertently releasing a joy for living. We should keep in mind, among other things, that the philosopher is given the important task of writing this scenario in which the red tape of action revolves around all values' reevaluation.

## **2. Religion after religion**

Keeping close to Nietzsche's reflections, we cannot but note that few thinkers have his explosive force to claim the need for change, self-overcoming and human renewal. Beyond the elements he projects on the superman, he proposes man's emancipation from his mode of understanding the world, as related to himself, to nature, to love religion, by setting in motion the very values concerning man, life and eros. Starting from this, his up-to-date thinking may be relevant for personal development, leadership and even for management ethics, as "Nietzsche wanted to assert the dignity of human life against the impotence of modern man" (Arendt 1997, 30-31). We should not be prevented by the image of the superman from accepting that the need for man's restoration, the aspiration to find and

overcome oneself, the will to rediscover the zest of living in the light of life values are useful tools that the philosopher may propose in personal development and leadership. Man's higher dignity is in this case an intrinsic value. In Hannah Arendt's view, value devaluation is for Nietzsche a process negating the traditional substratum at the foundation of Western modernity. On the other hand, he is aware of the power and charge of the term "value" and critiques the traditional socializing of values that he finds lacking in any sense of transcendence to beneficially influence human life. Also, the philosopher states he discovered a new science of values, which implies a call for action to valorize "power and life and man's love of his earthly existence" (Arendt 1997, 35). It is true that to Arendt the force-life-love triad contradicts Nietzsche's whole deconstruction initiative and establishes a structure similar to the tradition instituting values by transcendent elements, which he criticized. But who may be surprised at the presence of such possible contradiction in Nietzsche's approach, as his work is so full of paradoxes in thinking, living and evaluating.

Such a paradox seems to be the presence in an arduous critic of religion of an alternative view that instead of rationalizing the world, emptying it of transcendence (in the sense of a disenchantment) does nothing but make it ferment in sacredness (in the sense of a re-enchantment of the whole existence).

Valorizing the tradition in interpretation already enunciated in the 20th century, Aurel Codoban submits that to the German philosopher, the Abrahamic monotheist religion is removed from the morality sphere with the sole purpose of setting a new way of understanding the world under the sacred. Nietzsche's return to sacredness, typical of the classical age prior to Christianity, is indicative of the move to a mundane form of transcendence in which life sacredness influences man and brings to life the new man (Codoban 2000). The new sacredness type corresponds to a form of polytheism found in experiences of the sacred often associated, in the spirit of traditional religion, to idolatry (Codoban 2000; Klossowski 2004).

What we should keep in mind is that sacredness is intrinsic to mundane values. It is attached to man's daily

action, it is part of life as such, of the inhabited world, including the world of things. We see today how the world of things is attributed dimensions that, before postmodernity, were reserved for human beings. They may be even included in a mythology of pleasure in which sacredness is manifested in the mechanisms of desire, seduction and quest for authenticity (Baudrillard 1998).

We notice that values' dynamics is similar to Mircea Eliade's dialectic of the sacred and the profane. Values metamorphose, camouflage, may be forgotten, but they may always be brought back to the present life by the one interested in positing them at the core of one's existence.

Although a great part of Nietzsche's exegetes are generally in agreement on the idea of human life resacralization, the views on the significance of such a world reconstruction mode are widely diverse. To understand the genealogy of the Nietzschean criticism we deal with here, we should know that the entire criticism starts from two significant views: the attitude toward traditional metaphysics and the rapport to the moral God in Christian tradition (Sabău 2016). Indeed, Nietzsche highlights the features that are typical to the way of thinking in a certain Christian form of expression. His Christianity is the Western one. Perhaps his attitude would have been nuanced had he had in view the Eastern Christianity too, with its mystic dimension and the option for living under a cosmic liturgy.

However, in what is left from Nietzsche, his critique of the Christian religion and his anti-Christianity are not important. Significant is his pattern of reality interpretation resulting from this negation of Christianity. If we stop to his anti-Christianity, all his move for an apology of the death of God is in vain. Anyhow, this critique of Christianity led to an upturn of the sacred that we can see both at the limit of philosophy and ideology (Frunză et al. 2009), and at the junction of religion with ideology (Tismăneanu 1995; Stoica 2017), with negative consequences rendering the phenomenon meaningless in terms of the democratic society construction.

We are at a moment in history when it is too late to be concerned with things that do not make sense for our times. To be stuck in defining Nietzsche as anti-Christian is like holding

on to this Amos Oz anecdote: “I will tell you an anecdote: I was in Paris during student movements. On the wall facing my hotel someone wrote: ‘God is dead. Signed: Nietzsche’. The next day, a writing had appeared underneath: ‘Nietzsche is dead. Signed: God’” (Oz 2004, 17). This fits so well the philosopher’s ludic spirit. But, to come out of this captivity, we need to understand that the interpretation of his critique of the traditional values at the base of Western civilization may no longer be done in atheism and anti-Christianity keys. What is important, in fact, is the escape from religion to exalt the values of life and the happiness of being alive, to have access to life resources and consume the joy of living to the end. This is the meaning of nihilism that we can recover today from Nietzsche’s thinking. George Bondor showcased very well this mode of reading when he said that to Nietzsche, the death of God “is the most important event of modern times, with important consequences on our way of being. It brings with it the complete nihilism, experimented by man as total absence of all meaning that was already formed. Thus, it opens up a space free of already fixed meanings and prejudices, a space in which new experiences become possible. For this reason, nihilism must not be seen as a negative occurrence. On the contrary, according to Nietzsche, it brings with itself a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, relief, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn” (Bondor 2007, 131). His critical attitude should be read today in terms of positive thinking, of action for personal achievement, of ethical vocation and inclination to assume the values meant to secure the authenticity of our daily existence. I do not expect to see Nietzsche’s portrait hung in multinational companies’ halls, but his nihilism may be recovered in line of a rethinking of values, in view of the work we perform upon ourselves, encouraged by the organizational spirit in which we operate.

In the contemporary philosophical consciousness it is clear that nihilism represents only a transitory stage from the forms consecrated by tradition or by trends in fashion in the past to a renewal of structures making possible private life or public life. Our philosophic optimism always reminds us that postmodernity cannot remain in nihilism (Weischedel 1999,

234), even if it was part of the essential creativity mechanisms of this cultural stage in Western man's existence.

What we should keep in mind for the contemporary man is the lesson of values' pluralism within which man and the world may always start afresh. The axiological pluralism is an inexhaustible resource of creativity for contemporary man, including value revalorization or value creation.

### **3. Values as an interpretation grid of organizational reality and as instruments for management action**

Nietzsche went so far in his wish to establish value pluralism, free from any authority of a unique transcendence that he got to declare that God had died. Today we no longer need the argument of such a terrifying moment in the history and evolution of revelation. Actually, as we said, Nietzsche's thinking patterns are more useful to us than the actual content of his work. After total nihilism, there could only be the new stage in which negation of the great diversity of existence significances can no longer be eluded. In this way, values' pluralism is no longer subject to any major ordeal.

Postmodern sacredness may bring about the most diverse combinations of religion, ethics and science (Frunză et al. 2010; Vlăduțescu 2014). Secularization influences morality and the individual's rapport to values (Inglehart et al. 2004). We cannot establish a direct conditioning relationship between religion and morality. But we can accept a series of conclusions based on previous research of religion and values in Europe, such as the ones proposed by Ingrid Storm. She shows that the more we have a cultural space in which a high level of religious practice can be measured, the more are moral practices a part of community life. At the same time, a value impregnated environment reveals correlations that may be established between religion and the low economic, social and political development. A close relationship between the religious context and the morality-religion rapport denote firstly the extent to which the religious type of moral authority may be perceived as an alternative to state authority, and secondly it shows that secularization caused autonomy of values and legitimacy manifesting inclusively under the form of a separation of ethics

from religion (Storm 2016, 111-138). This desacralization does not impact at all the presence of the religious and does not imply a diminution of the spiritual life. It may mean investing the relationship with the sacred in other forms but the ones pertaining to the religious tradition. Or it may be placed under the sign of action in response to different exigencies in the public and private spheres. Likewise, it may mean a call on competing or alternative forms under the sign of axiological pluralism.

One of the most important ideas to note is that with postmodernity, we see a process that we can call values' relativization. This does not mean falling into relativism, but rather asserting the inadequacy of any absolute system of values' hierarchy. It is values' relativization that allows us to state the existence of multiple hierarchies or to even state that we may create new value hierarchies according to the needs for individual, organizational or community shaping.

Significant in this respect is the idea of minimal ethics based on the personal assertion of ethical values. It supposes a reconstruction of individual and community ethics starting from the individual, from the individual's needs and wish to build a better world for himself/herself and for the community he/she is part of (Adorno 1999; Pleșu 1994). It is about, among others, the possibility for the moral subject to delineate values in their sphere and based on them to build action strategies, interventions in organizations and moral ideals. Minimal ethics is not the dream that man may live since the end of postmodernity. It springs from the very logic of our times in the quest for the human subject. Under the threat that "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (Foucault 1996, 422), we are seeking solutions to retrace the lines of man's image in sand, drawn at the edge of the sea and fallen prey to waves hitting it to erase in calm violence.

Of extreme importance in this context it seems to be the action of those having a philosophical, professionalized background (or other experts with good training in applied ethics or deontology) in the public space through various consulting forms they may provide: from existential and ethical

consulting to the consulting on value based image construction. Such an intervention might lead to diminishing violence in society and to setting a dialogue atmosphere, starting from a pluralist vision of life, of public action and of a quest for authenticity at the personal level.

A proper space to develop axiological pluralism is organizational life. Under pressure from business ethics brought over by multinational companies, there is a practical assertion of the minimal ethics as a mechanism to institute and participate in the values of the organization. Minimal ethics is a beneficial support to institute a deontological code as an instrument to exercise the axiological principles of the organization. In this framework it becomes quite evident that an ethical conduct is first of all a conduct based on values. The organization is no longer the place in which the individual carries out the obligatory work schedule. It becomes the place in which a part of employees' development and personal achievement occurs. For this very reason, the managerial function, in addition to management activities, should show openness and assume leadership qualities. Companies bring the need for developing managers as leaders practicing ethical management modes. John Mackey and Raj Sisodia distinguish between the manager and the leader starting from the premise that managers are in charge with decision making and efficient application of decision, while leaders leave their mark on the system through the managerial intelligence and management art (Mackey & Sisodia 2013).

In this respect, the new management philosophy should propose not only the general frameworks of theorizing and practice of the organization's management, but also a managerial leadership mode. Institutionalized leadership through the managerial function – without ignoring the importance of informal leadership – has a special value in stimulating both personal and institutional development.

In such a context, managerial responsibility is a key issue. Its model is one's responsibility to one's own personal development, as compared to the others, to the environment, to divinity, etc. The importance of an ethical leadership is overwhelming. Christian Voegtlin provides some starting points

for a relevant analysis in this sense as he explores the practical dimensions of responsibility. This study is significant as regards the extension of corporate social responsibility to the social responsibility of organizations in general and further on to the social responsibility of every individual involved in the organization life. This way, a responsible leader should multiply his/her ethical model to various decision levels in the organization up to the level of individual appropriation of leadership principles by the organization's members. A responsible leader is concerned with the issues of the work environment, of the organizational life's impact upon various public categories and upon the community. Also, a responsible leader pays attention to ethical rules and norms, to the way responsibilities are shared and carried out, to critical investigations, evaluations, and value judgments, to encouraging participation in decision making and finding solutions to all organization's members (Voegtlin, 2016; Dima et al. 2014).

The leader should act in an ethical manner, irrespective of the activity place, whether in a restricted work group, at the level of the economic organization he/she is part of, or of the community or society in which he/she is a leader. This supposes an improvement of work relationships and of implies the permanent presence of another person, of the other as a beneficiary of the ethical action and as an ethical evaluation instance. It is respect that shifts the weight from simple action for higher profit to a more complex finality, including profit, work satisfaction, institutional development, personal fulfillment and development, ethical and efficient communication, etc. (Grad 2015; Kwak 2016). An organization in which managerial activity is based on values, stimulates the "transformational leadership behavior – which translates into encouraging employees to go put in extra effort for increased performance, by inspiring them through high levels of passion and commitment towards the common goals and by being open and encouraging experimentation" (Hințea 2015, 120). Considering the potential for change that an organization's leader has, when the organization is in full image reconstruction, a good starting point may be an ethical evaluation of the way the manager chooses among various value types (Sandu 2017).

Besides the capacity to make things work, the manager with leader qualities also has the ability for good change both in the business and in the persons and the community. Managers should be aware that, in addition to their mission to administrate the organization's activity, they have the power get involved in developing an ethical culture, beneficial to the organization. When Donald C. Menzel speaks about an *ethical illiteracy* in managers, he means that sometimes, there is a lack of attraction to ethics and to the complexity of ethics accompanying the act of ruling or the managerial activity (Menzel 2010, 4). Ethical responsibility, both as an internal communication method and as an external communication way, is first of all a manager's responsibility. This is why, assuming the manager's leadership quality supposes providing a strong support for an ethical climate, based on law and ethical regulations' observance (Lewis & Gilman 2005, 114; Frunză 2017, 3). In an organization, one should always encourage various manifestations of informal leadership. However, the manager should be the institutional leader. The manager should guard the implementation of the organization's value system. At the same time, the manager should permanently care for the correlation between these values and the values of the community, of the society in which the organization operates, including the social responsibility to his/her own employees and to various interacting public categories (McFarland 1982, 183).

#### **4. Instead of conclusions: the role of value reevaluation in the life of organizations**

Following Nietzsche's footsteps and legacy, we note that in his personal life and in the organizational life, values have the power to guide action and to be a good resource to change situations and de facto states for the good. In a world in crisis, the tendency to reevaluate values is beneficial, especially as regards their position at the foundation of various types of organizations' values, in which individuals are recruited more or less accidentally. Of the various types of values that postmodern man may appropriate, the ones with the highest potential to be applied in the daily activity are the values

governing ethical conducts, may it be individuals or organizations. An important role in the creation of an ethical culture of organizations belongs to managers who cultivate their leadership quality. Considering that in existing analyses in the organizational ethics, some talk about a lack of attraction in managers to cultivate values and to institutionalize ethics, it is important for specialized persons, having a philosophical background, to take initiative and provide ethical counseling as well as counseling on the construction of an institutionalized culture based on values. Managerial leadership supposes not only implementing values, especially on business ethics grounds, but also, an opening to ethical leadership construction strategies.

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