When Sociopaths Speak of Love. The Riddle of Values in Management Theory and Management Practice.

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Values are on everyone's lips. But nobody seems to understand what they are if we talk about values by taking them at face value. This is due to the fact that all values and thus the term ›value‹ too are a fluid construct. Not only are values time and space bound, but worse, even within a specific time and space frame they take on many shades, forms, and meanings. Everybody has different values, and even those who believe they share values with others can be shocked to discover, in real-world encounters, that their interlocutor means something completely different and unexpected with a word such as 'love'. If we pinpoint these experiences of bewilderment, they take us directly to the core of problems we face when we talk about values. Among these, on the most basic level, are epistemic and language-philosophical questions regarding the meaning and reference of values and of the term 'value'. For example: if a sociopath is regarded as a "person with a personality disorder manifesting itself in extreme antisocial attitudes and behavior" (the Oxford Dictionary definition), isn't it then a contradiction in terms if we ascribe to her the caring attitude and ability of love? But then again, why might it still be true in terms of semantics that a sociopath could truly claim to be in love? And how then would this change the meaning of love?

Even if we can solve such semantic problems when talking about values, we have not won the game. The riddle of values repeats itself at the normative level. If we follow

the vast and highly differentiated literature on values[1], it seems that most of us are inclined to analyze values in terms of good and bad, preferable or not. Thus it seems that all values have a core which links them to our understanding of right and wrong. Values, therefore, seem to be the material expression of what we could call the normative categories by which we judge human behavior. But how is this normativity linked to the subject itself, or to the question of how to run a firm? Taking up David Hume's claim that we cannot derive an 'ought' (the normative) from an 'is' (the factual), we must solve the problem of how to interpret the normative force we ascribe to our values. Where does this force come from? And what are the arguments and the conceptual and cultural frameworks by which we legitimate this normative force in the first place? What might be regarded as a perverse and appalling culinary 'No Go' in one culture might be a precious delicacy to one's dearly esteemed foreign guest in others.

This ambiguity and bias in talking about values in normative terms opens up a series of problems addressed in turn in this paper. How can we establish a concise theory

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[1] Four basic realms of discourse regarding the topic of values must be distinguished if we want to categorize the literature.

The first is sociological. Initiated by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, the sociological view analyzes values as expressions of social and cultural identity (Clifford Geertz, George Herbert Mead) or as the codes and drivers around which dynamics of social processes and social systems evolve (Talcot Parsons). To Pierre Bourdieu, meanwhile, values are the expressions of class distinction. Leaving the class perspective aside, Niklas Luhmann interprets values in cybernetic terms as the core drivers by which societal differentiation takes on its form in as far as values are the dynamic locus where the material takes on its concrete form and vice versa (Luhmann 1973). Seen in the latter perspective, all legal, political and cultural discussions of values should be understood as special cases of this process of social differentiation.

The second basic discourse on values we find in psychology. Here among others we can distinguish four lines of argumentation and research that are relevant to the topic if seen from a managerial point of view: the approaches of developmental, humanistic, motivational, and of positive psychology respectively (Viktor Frankl, Clare W. Graves, Lawrence Kohlberg Abraham Maslow, David McClelland, Jean Piaget, Martin Seligman, Lev Vygotzky).

A third distinct realm of discourse regarding the topic of values is the ongoing ethical and religious discussion on how to define the Human Good. Starting from the early Greeks in Europe and from Laozi in China, this discussion turns away from external commands delivered by God or other divine creatures, to the responsibility of the individual to become virtuous (Aristotle), dutiful (Kant), just (Rawls) or, in pragmatic terms, at least beneficial to the greatest good for the greatest number (Bentham).

Finally, a fourth realm of discourse ought to be distinguished. This is the discourse on how values apply in real world encounters driving human and institutional actions. This discourse entails social-psychological approaches regarding the organization of our daily practices and life (Badura et. al 2013, Witte 2008)) as well as approaches which discuss the role of specific values in specific realms like that of leadership, business management and other for a, where people engage with one another to serve a specific purpose. Such discourse focuses either on ethically motivated approaches that, for example, stress the role of dignity, trust and other virtues in economic and organisational life (Dierksmeier 2016; Gillespie/Mann 2004, Hicks 2011, McGregor 2006, Küng 2012, Pirson 2017; Schaubroeck/Lam/Cha 2007, Sen 2009) or on analytical and functional approaches which regard values in the realm of business management from a cultural, a systemic, or a social capital oriented point of view (Dasgupta/Serageldin 2000, Drucker 1977, Glauner 2017 a, b; Senge 1990, Sennett 2007)

with which we could describe the grammar and semantics of normativity? How do we code the normative realm? And what role are values playing in this process of coding?

What is meant by the term 'value' in the first place, and how does it shape our real-world habits and actions?

To understand the role normative values play in both, management theory and management practice, the paper briefly outlines why we need to distinguish normative from functional speech when talking about values. In view of this functional/normative divide within the semantics of values, the paper then addresses the fact that all our talk about values rests on assumptions which are not governed by these values. By following truly functional values that fulfill their purpose, we can lead corporations to forms of conduct which, to our understanding, would be justified from an ethical point too. By doing so, we avoid the various riddles and dilemmas we face when we insist on talking about values in normative terms.

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