

# CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

"The 's' is the most important letter in the word 'ethics,'" says Professor Thierry C. Pauchant, holder of the Chair in Ethical Management. "Very often ethics is confused with morality or dogmatism, but these two have a singular, not a plural, connotation. Many people confound the two concepts in their search for the right answer."



THIERRY C. PAUCHANT

BY KATHLYN HORIBE

The professor of management has had lots of chances to see ethics from different cultural viewpoints. He was born in France and earned a master's from the Sorbonne, then continued his studies toward a PhD at VCLA and worked in New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 1988, he moved to Quebec and became a Canadian citizen. "When you live in different countries, you get the opportunity to compare and contrast, to become global in your outlook. Then you start to understand the disparity in ethics, because ethics is culturally bound."

In today's organizations, ethics is also being confused with deontology or values, says the founding president of the Research Ethics Committee at HEC Montréal and the co-founder of five other organizations, including the Group on Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility. "If you enforce morality, you're imposing required or like behaviours, the same cultural behaviours. If you enforce values such as equity or equality, you're imposing one conceptual way of seeing things.

"A third method of looking at ethics, the method I prefer, is dialoguing with stakeholders in order to understand their point of view. The fourth method is to dialogue with yourself, to become self-aware. People who are not conscious of their own attitudes and behaviours are not hearing others."

Research indicates that 80 per cent of Canadian and American firms address ethical issues only through a code of ethics, i.e. a deontological code that tries to enforce behaviours. "The rest, like Anita Roddick and the Body Shop, for example, are definitely dialoguing with others and with themselves. This allows them to develop paradoxical thinking, because most of the challenges in organizations are not black and white," says the author and co-author of more than 100 publications, who sits on the editing committee of six international scientific journals. He has also served as consultant to such organizations as AT&T, the CBC, the House of Commons and IBM.

"As the Chair, I'm trying to explain to CEOs that ethics is a quest, an inquiry," says Pauchant. Ethics is a way to consider different answers, of having choices. A healthy bottom line is just one criterion, and when only that criterion is used in making decisions, this is akin to dogmatism. "Some CEOs are already financing some of our projects, as they realize that this type of work is both very practical and inspiring."

"I also urge them to develop the ability to be anxious, without becoming anguished. The right degree of anxiety allows an individual to develop paradoxes and yet make decisions. They understand what I'm talking about, yet many managers who want to become executives don't want to deal with anxiety. They want certainty; they want to achieve control."

A year ago, Pauchant initiated a project called Great Consciousness Leadership, which will examine 100 outstanding leaders who tried to improve the world. The object is to "study the best individuals on the planet and try to understand their behaviours, organizational skills, abilities, competencies, culture, values and habits and then publish both the individual results and an overall synthesis. It's a very interesting way to approach ethics, and different from traditional leadership studies, because we're not looking at different theories. We're examining the concrete life of mature, sophisticated people who operate at a higher level of consciousness.

"Many of today's business leaders unfortunately cannot be considered mature, because they confuse leadership with a title. Leadership has nothing to do with status and titles. You can be a leader without any status and people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama prove it ».