

Hans-Peter Hummel

Social responsibility

We need more and realize less

Introduction

We are social beings. We work together and spend a lot of our leisure time with other people. We need the contact and the interaction with other people.

We need each other. We are not a lot of “lone wolfs”¹, we need solidarity.

Today - and considerably more in the future - it is hardly possible to develop a major or even a brilliant invention alone without others.

We need a high degree of collaboration and the trend is rising. This is justified by the increase of complexity.

Collaboration helps to manage complexity and the greater the complexity the more necessary the collaboration. We have to “move closer together”. A “lone wolf” is going to be quickly overwhelmed.

The growing dependency goes hand in hand with a higher reciprocal influence; and influence has a strong positive correlation with power. Both - influence and power - are social phenomena.

Within a distinctly social context we cannot increase these social phenomena absolutely. We can only change the ratio - the gain of one side is the loss of the other.

This relative variability needs social responsibility. The use of power and influence without social responsibility damage or destroy a social context. Social responsibility without power and influence is not possible.

In a world of growing complexity we will be needing a higher degree of social responsibility, but instead we have realized - and we are going to find - an increasing degree of egoistical individuality. Attack and defense are going to show a strong growth trend, while collaboration is going to shrink.

There are a lot of singles, a lot of people who are lonely in the collective. There are a lot of reservations regarding dissidents, people of other religions, etc. There are a lot of companies which try to survive in a "hypercompetition". There are a lot of people who act according to the motto: "There can only be one!" And all of these continue.

A waxing isolation and egocentrism will be coming to the fore without specific interventions, whereas social responsibility will be taking a back seat. Here, too, there are no signs of change.

A strong manifestation of egocentrism infiltrates social solidarity, and it will be destroying - in the final analysis - our social system.

We have the chance to prevent this destructive process. For this purpose we require social responsibility. In everyday life decision makers certainly go another way. They think that more and more detailed laws, voluntary agreements, etc. ensure a fair and social cooperation. We try to replace social solidarity and responsibility by explicit rules (e.g. laws).

This replacement is not helpful. It is shaping up a tougher conflict between new laws and other rules on one hand as well as more and more egoistical people who try to get around the rules, try to bend the law, etc. In this conflict we will be losing all in the end.

It shows that more and more sophisticated rules cannot substitute social responsibility. We need laws, voluntary agreements, etc., but only in a context of social responsibility.

We need a close interaction between responsibility and solidarity on one hand and explicit “guidelines” on the other hand. In the current process we “suffocate” social responsibility.

Let us realize what we need – today and much more in the future.

Normally the people who damage our social coexistence are not malicious – most people are not aware of this development.

Furthermore, none of us can stop this process within an evolution development. But we can put off the evil hour. We can ensure – today and in the future – that we and the next generations can live appropriately during a longer period of time.

We can ensure that enough of us will be able to act socially responsible on an acceptable scale in a growing complexity and will also be able to remain socially responsible. Each of us is called upon to foster important parts of the foundation for our coexistence – as far as it is possible.

Beyond individual activities we have to implement systematic interventions on a social level, which are able to reach millions of people. Social responsibility has to be a bulk project; individual activities alone are not enough.

A lot of systematic interventions must be implemented in pre-schools and schools. Both must attach great importance

to social responsibility. (Pre-)Schools influence a lot of or all people in a society. They are the greatest multipliers. They are responsible to foster the most or all children and adolescents to manage their life, to be able to act appropriately in a complex world, to support the social development.

The support contains the demand to develop the children and the adolescents towards an entrepreneur, because entrepreneurs have all requirements to act socially responsible over the long term.

From my point of view, time is of the essence to deal with social responsibility in a world of increasing complexity. If we fail, our society cannot be survived in a long term.

If we fail, we will be destroying our social structure and our society.

Let's wake up now. We have no time to lose.

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¹ In the whole text the masculine form is used for persons of both genders.


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Comprehension Questions

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1 Social responsibility as a rising challenge



Social responsibility is becoming increasingly important and more difficult to realize.

Social responsibility means to assume responsibility for our own activities, attitudes, thoughts, etc. and partly the responsibility for other people. The responsibility for ourselves is important to take over responsibility for others.

The responsibility for others appears when our influence on them in a specific sub-area is greater than their influence on us. We have a (determining) influence on what the others plan, what they decide, how they act, etc. We reduce their freedom with our influence, with our power, and we have to assume the responsibility for this influence, for this power².

Our responsibility for others has always to do with our power and freedom, and - as a consequence - with our possibilities to reduce the freedom and the power of other people. In every social context an extension of power and freedom on the one hand reduces the power and freedom on the other hand. Power and freedom are only shifted from one system to another - the total quantity remains the same.

Freedom and power interact positively - the greater our freedom, all the more power we can realize and vice versa.

We as powerful people should answer questions such as: Which effects have my decision and my behavior on other actors? Are negative consequences for some people or other systems appropriate in a general view? Can I compensate negative effects during the time? Do I take advantage of some people or target groups?

We take over power and freedom from others and "fill the gap" with responsibility.