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Domestic Work Holds Significance for Business Schools

The profession to which Dora del Hoyo dedicated her entire life is now the topic of an international study involving 94 countries. The Global Home Index seeks to measure the value and repercussion of domestic work.

07/26/2017

We interviewed Patricia Debeljuh, director of the Walmart Center for

Family and Work Balance at IAE
Business School, who presented an initial round of results from a global study that is evaluating the repercussion of domestic work worldwide as well as general attitudes towards it.

So why is a business school launching a study on domestic work?

When we think about sustainability in a country or a business, we know that we have to work toward strengthening the social capital that families represent.

When the family is not cared for, society begins to fall apart. So it's part of the social responsibility of business people that their employees, who might be working eight or nine hours a day, also have lives outside of work; and for many of these people, that life outside of work is dedicated to raising a family.

In Argentina, we have seen that regardless of social class, the primary motivation that gets people out to work in the morning is their family. So it's paradoxical that at the end of the day, it ends up being the family who receives that person in their worse state, because the work day is overly exhausting or because problems at work are brought home, and this often has a negative impact on the family.

Business schools are beginning to adopt a mentality whereby it's part of their responsibility to educate their students—future business managers and leaders in their countries—so that they can make the cultural changes needed to understand that their role is not simply to earn money, but above all, to work towards an authentic sustainable development that will prioritize the real human good of people above economic growth.

According to your study, what do you mean by "domestic work" or "work in the home"?

Domestic work is often identified with the specific tasks that are needed in order to run a household. For example, cleaning, maintenance, grocery shopping, cooking. But while it means all these tasks, in the end domestic work is primarily a question of caring for people, for specific persons: this is its aim.

As persons, we have physical needs that are met with a healthy diet or with hours of sleep, etc. But we also have emotional needs that are connected to the physical ones. For example, setting the table, making the meal... these things are not limited to their material aspect; they are also actions that show affection and love and service, needs that every person has.

Home-making is somewhat similar to air: we realize how important it is only when it is lacking. When no one has bothered to cook the meal, or to do the shopping, or clean up a room, one begins to realize: something is wrong here... something is missing.

If something gets done everyday, it's taken for granted that that thing will be done automatically. But beyond the material side of these tasks, which can seem to be quite routine, or even monotonous, one can discover values that are united to this work and that express affection, service, dedication, self-giving and generosity. Values that follow a totally different logic from that usually found in the world of business, and in social life.

At work, each person is valued for what they do. If someone does a good job, at the end of the month, they get paid a salary, or earn a bonus, and

win prestige among their colleagues. All of this as a result of one's work, which enables you to live well and is closely tied to "having." The more recognition, prizes, or salary you receive, the more things you can have because you are able to acquire them materially. This is the logic of the market, of the economy, of social life: value people for what they do and as a consequence, for what they have as well.

However, the logic of the home is completely different; it is the logic of being. Because at home, each person is loved for who they *are*, not for what they do or what they have; they are loved in an unconditional way, forever. In the world of work, no employer loves you forever. But in the family, we are loved for who we are. This is the ideal of the home.

As part of the Global Home Index, we asked people whether they

considered professional success more important than household tasks. The fact that we give more importance to professional success is directly related to the fact that socially, more importance is given to doing and having, than to being.

By addressing these questions at our business schools, we want to encourage a change of culture and help people discover the real need for this in our society. With this objective, we are working together with the Home Renaissance Foundation to renew the culture of the home, showing that it corresponds to what is most valuable for the person.

You mentioned that this work lacks social prestige and recognition. Do you think it needs to be promoted in some way?

Without a doubt, and this kind of study also has that in mind. The facts

can be the foundation for launching new policies that affect work, finances, and family, and that will take into consideration those who dedicate themselves to domestic tasks, caring for the people at home: children, the elderly, the sick... all those living in a more vulnerable situation.

Nowadays the State tends to substitute the family, but this is an error and unsustainable in the long run. At the same time, the State should ensure that the family feels secure and able to assume its responsibilities, without creating needless obstacles.

What about professional training in this area? Not to mention the issue of economic compensation...

Huge steps are needed in order to take full advantage of all the knowledge we have in the area of domestic work, all of which can

contribute to better care of the person: including technology, nutrition, and psychological aspects.

The question of compensation is something to be dealt with according to the specific circumstances of each country. Based on my recent travels, some places are already approaching it in a good way.

How does the work in the home contribute to sustainable development or the fight against poverty?

These issues are directly related to human ecology. Our society is aware that we have not adequately cared for nature, and , now we are more aware of the need to care for the environment. Now we also feel the effects of another kind of pollution, one that affects this natural habitat that people need as the place to be born, to grow and develop. The future of each person depends upon

what they receive above all in those early years of life... Every human being that is born today will be in need of someone who will take them in, feed them, warm them when they are cold, etc. The human being is a being in need of others.

Thinking of countries with high poverty indexes, we need to be aware of the urgent need to care for human ecology, above all in families where lack of economic resources means not being able to give each child even the minimum of conditions they need to be able to grow and develop physically and emotionally.

Often it's not just material poverty, but also a poverty of affection. Sometimes material poverty seems more urgent, and we do need to address it because we know that a child that is malnourished in their first years of life will never

experience proper brain development later on... But we also have to consider this other kind of poverty, which is generally found in more developed countries. This lack of affection is what causes many children and elderly to go unattended, even though they might live in nice places.

In some first-world countries, there is the phenomenon of "latchkey" children: children who commute to and from school with the keys to their house hanging from their belt. They go to and from school alone. In cities that have security cameras everywhere, where everything is very safe, the child leaves home, walks to school, attends school and comes home. He opens the door to his house, and on the other side, a television screen awaits him, or maybe two or three. We know what this poverty of emotional bonds eventually leads to...

When speaking of care of the home and human ecology, we should think about how to work towards strengthening what is most valuable in a person, which includes their affections and their interpersonal relationships, which are also what makes us better people. Having a better cellphone doesn't make me a better person. Being able to interact with others, learn from others, be enriched by others: these are the things capable of making us continually better. Working towards these goals, we find ourselves within the logic of *being*.
